

Youth Pathways

Evaluation of the Youth Pathways pilot program | September 2023

Prepared for: Burnie Works

Acknowledgement

SVA would like to acknowledge the participation of [client's name] employees who took time to provide thoughtful and thorough input, contributing to the strong evidence base that is critical to this analysis.

Project acknowledgement

SVA would like to acknowledge the participation of Burnie Works and Youth, Family and Community Connections, and the young people and employers who participated in the Youth Pathways program, who took time to provide thoughtful and thorough input, contributing to the evidence presented in this evaluation.

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Our team is passionate about what they do and use their diverse experience to work together to solve Australia's most pressing challenges.

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Executive summary

Burnie Works engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA Consulting) to undertake an evaluation of their Youth Pathways pilot program. The evaluation sought to understand the effectiveness of implementation of Youth Pathways, the outcomes for young people and businesses, and key lessons that have emerged from the pilot.

About Youth Pathways

Youth Pathways is a 24-month pilot program led by Burnie Works, in partnership with Youth, Family and Community Connections (YFCC). The program aims to help young people aged 17-25 in the North-West region of Tasmania to overcome challenges to successfully remaining in employment. The program uses a voluntary youth coaching approach, working directly with young people to build their capacity to identify and navigate challenges that may be affecting them in the workplace and in their lives more broadly. The program also works with businesses that refer their young people to the program, to build their capacity to support young employees.

Key findings

Consultations with young people, businesses and program staff highlighted that Youth Pathways is a highly valued program. Over the pilot period, the program demonstrated an ability to adapt to external changes and respond to the needs of young people and businesses.

Several challenges impacted the ability to recruit and work with businesses, however through program iteration and the building of relationships and trust in the program over time, referral numbers for young people participating in the program grew, particularly in the second (and final) year of the pilot.

18 businesses in the North-West
have worked with Youth Pathways.

111 young people have participated
in Youth Pathways since it
commenced in 2021.

A key success factor of the program was the coaching model, delivered by skilled coaches through a youth-focused, holistic lens.

The program developed core 'soft skills' in young people that were seen as important elements of improving engagement and success in the workplace. Young people and employers spoke of the growth of young people over the course of the Youth Pathways coaching sessions, with increases in confidence and improved mental wellbeing, both within the workplace and in life.

These improvements in 'soft skills' - confidence, engagement and mental wellbeing - were identified as factors that contributed to stronger foundations for the future in young people. Businesses spoke of the positive impact that Youth Pathways can have on retaining young people in the workplace and building capacity in workplaces to better support young employees.

Young people and employers highly value the Youth Pathways program.

Youth Pathways develops 'soft skills' and life skills, and improves confidence in young people to succeed in the workplace.

Youth Pathways supports young people and businesses to improve retention of young employees in the workplace.

Introduction and Context

About this evaluation

Burnie Works commissioned Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to undertake an evaluation of their Youth Pathways to Employment pilot program (Youth Pathways).

The challenges for young people

Young people in the North-West region of Tasmania face significant challenges with entrenched disadvantage, poor educational outcomes and high unemployment. In the West and North-West region, the youth unemployment rate was 15% in 2018.¹ Many young people in the region do not have access to the support required from families, social networks and educational institutions to develop crucial skills and traits for 'employability'. This represents a challenge for young people entering the workforce and meeting the expectations of employers.

The challenges for businesses

Many businesses in the North-West region experience workforce shortages, and face challenges attracting employees with the right skills. Employers often indicate that new recruits are lacking in the core employability skills,² as has been reported anecdotally in the North-West region. To illustrate workforce shortage issues, in the Burnie region, 41% of employers in 2021 reported difficulty in filling vacancies.³ Employers are motivated to support and retain staff through apprenticeships or full-time employment but lack the appropriate support. Anecdotally the costs of employing and onboarding a new staff member for businesses in the North-West region are significant, between \$20,000-\$50,000, a figure that is in line with the Australian average to hire a new employee of \$23,800.⁴

About Youth Pathways

Youth Pathways is a pilot program led by Burnie Works, in partnership with Youth, Family and Community Connections (YFCC). The program aims to improve retention of young people in employment, recognising that many young people face challenges and barriers that impact their ability to remain in employment. The core activity of Youth Pathways is a voluntary youth coaching program for young people aged 17-25, delivered through a YFCC youth coach. In parallel, the program also works with local businesses to build capacity in employers to support young people within their workplace.

Youth Pathways commenced in late 2021 through funding from the Tasmanian Community Fund. The concept for the program was initiated through a Burnie Works' led committee: the Employment Partnerships Group (EPG). EPG is a collective of employment service providers from the Burnie

¹ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Australia's youth unemployment hotspots – snapshot March 2019.

² L Brewer, Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? And How? Guide to core work skills, 2013, International Labour Organisation.

³ Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey (REOS) for August 2020 to April 2021, conducted by the National Skills Commission.

⁴ HR Industry Benchmark Survey 2021: Australia and New Zealand. ELMO and Australian HR Institute.

region, formed to understand what the pressing issues are for young people and employment in the region. The EPG initially identified a gap where young people could benefit from additional assistance in the form of coaching within their internship placement support. This concept eventually became the Youth Pathways program, a 24 month pilot project.

A changing landscape

Since the pilot's inception in 2021, Youth Pathways has encountered a rapidly evolving employment landscape with significant changes impacting the implementation of the program. Youth Pathways initially received referrals through Workforce Australia's PaTH Internship program, for young people considered 'job ready'. A significant challenge encountered at this time was the lack of definition more broadly of what constituted 'job ready', and many young people referred were not suited to the coaching model, requiring much more intensive support such as case management.

The PaTH Internship program was then discontinued in July 2022, prompting a redesign of Youth Pathways to focus on working with and receiving referrals directly from local businesses for young people aged 17-25, to support retention of young people in their workplace. Youth Pathways now receives referrals for young people aged 17-25 from businesses across the North-West region, from Latrobe to Wynyard. Further details of changes in the employment landscape and resulting changes in the pilot are outlined in Appendix 1.

Investment in the Youth Pathways pilot

The Youth Pathways pilot program is funded through the Tasmanian Community Fund, with an annual investment of approximately \$250,000. The investment covers staffing costs for a Youth Pathways business coordinator, a Youth Pathways youth coach, and other program and operational costs.

Method for this Evaluation

This evaluation used a theory-based mixed methods approach to answer the following key evaluation questions:

- 1. Implementation:** How is the Youth Pathways program implemented and to what extent is this implementation effective?
- 2. Enablers:** What's working well about the program?
- 3. Barriers and challenges:** What barriers and challenges impact on the effectiveness of the program?
- 4. Outcomes:** What are the outcomes of the Youth Pathways program for young people and for businesses?
- 5. Lessons and opportunities:** What can we learn from the Youth Pathways pilot? What should be considered in the future in the way the program is implemented?

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed with program staff as part of the evaluation, to help answer the evaluation questions. The ToC served as the initial framework for subsequent phases of the evaluation, including data collection, to understand and 'test' whether outcomes were achieved for young people and businesses, and to what degree. The ToC was refined iteratively based on insights from the data collection phase.

Data Collection

Primary data sources involved interviews with key stakeholders, including young people (n=2), businesses (n=3), program staff (n=3) and members of the Employment Partnership Group (n=1). Secondary data collection involved review of program data, reports, case studies and data from post-program 'exit' surveys of young people.

Interview data was analysed thematically using a deductive approach, drawing on the ToC developed for Youth Pathways. Findings were considered in the context of relevant broader Australian and international research.

Limitations

Youth Pathways has undergone significant change in implementation throughout the pilot period of 2021 to today (September 2023). These changes were required due to a change in the funding landscape of employment services, namely the defunding of the PaTH Internship program in the middle of 2022, requiring the pilot to evolve to work with a different cohort of young people and a different referral source.

Whilst this evaluation has captured and documented the changes in implementation across the pilot period, the evaluation focused on capturing the experiences of young people and businesses who participated in the program in 2023, representative of the 'current state' of the pilot. These experiences may therefore not be representative of program participant experiences from earlier iterations of the program.

Youth Pathways' Theory of Change

About the Theory of Change (ToC)

The ToC for Youth Pathways demonstrates the logical connection between Youth Pathways' activities, and the intended outcomes as a result of these activities. The ToC describes key issues facing young people and businesses in the North-West region of Tasmania, the unique response of Youth Pathways and the broader 'backbone' lead of Burnie Works, and the inputs and activities required to achieve the intended outcomes (see figure 1). Activities of both Youth Pathways and the lead backbone of Burnie Works are included, given the mutually reinforcing nature of these activities to achieve the desired outcomes.



Figure 1 - Key elements of the Theory of Change

Outcomes for key stakeholder groups experiencing change (young people and businesses) are represented along a continuum ranging from changes in *connections and mindset*, leading to changes in *actions and behaviours*, and finally to changes in the *foundations for the future* (see figure 2).

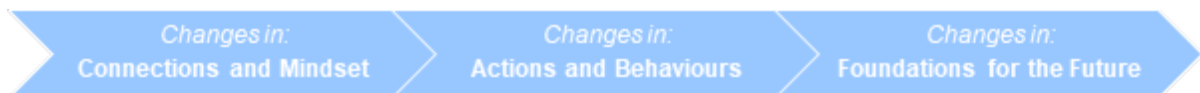


Figure 2 - Key elements of outcomes in the Theory of Change

The ToC should be read from left to right (see figures 3 and 4).

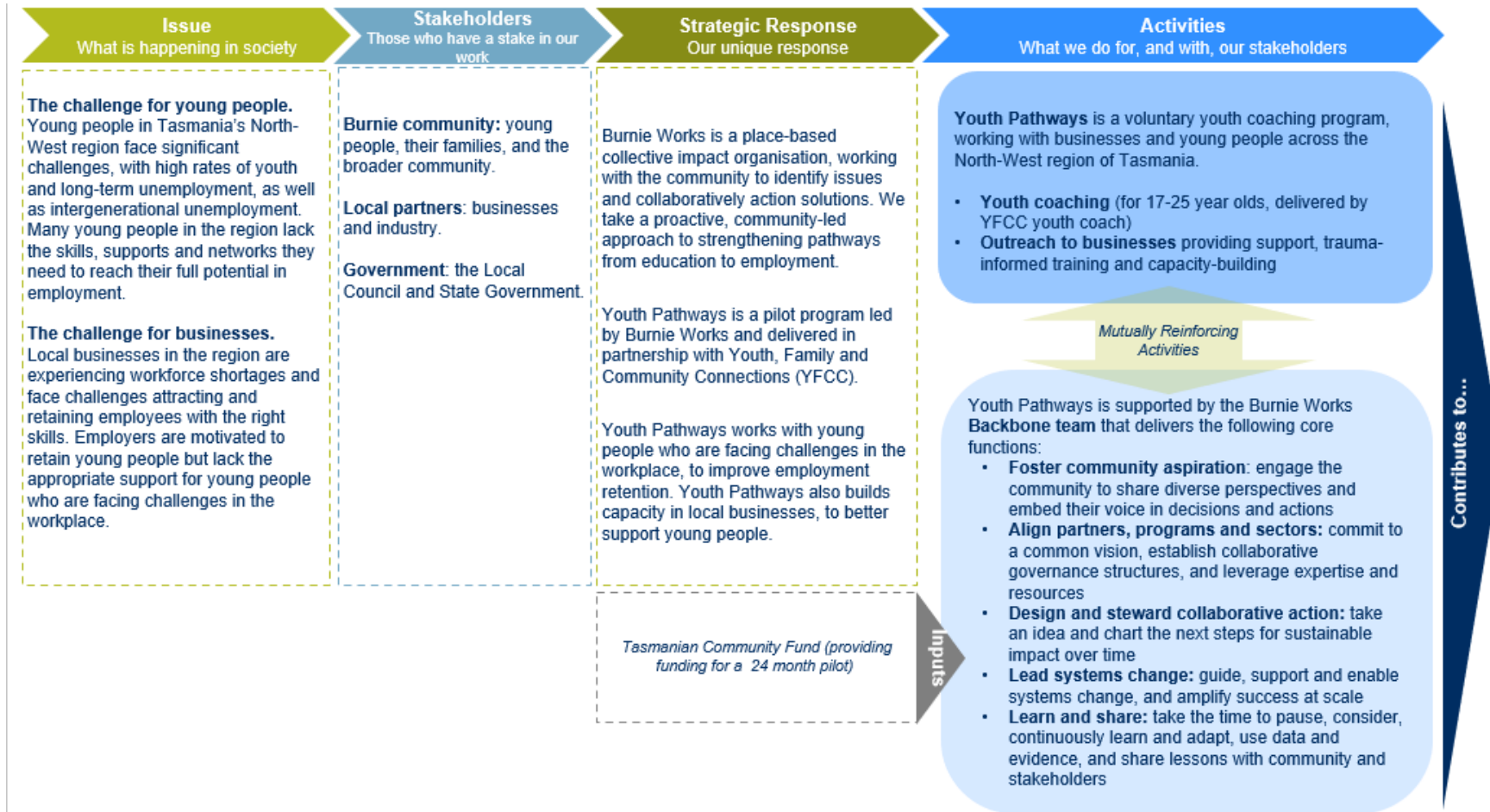


Figure 3 - the Theory of Change for Youth Pathways (page 1)

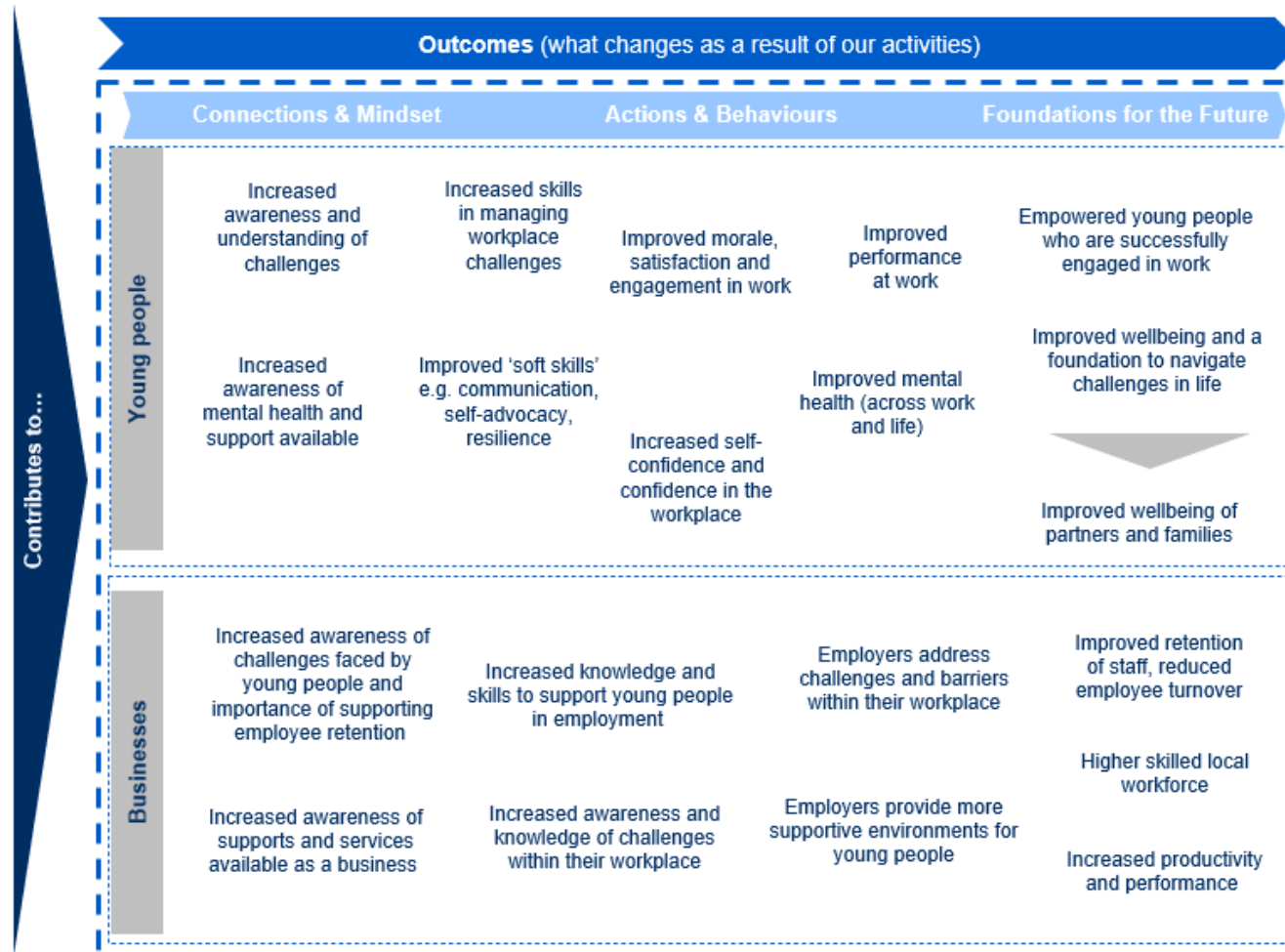


Figure 4 - the Theory of Change for Youth Pathways (page 2)

Youth Pathways' Activities

The following description of activities focuses on the implementation of the program in its current form, where Youth Pathways works directly with businesses to receive referrals for young people to participate in the program.

What is youth coaching?

Youth Pathways utilises a youth coaching model to work with young people. This model is distinct from mentoring that is commonly implemented in employment situations. Similarly, the model is distinct from counselling or case management. A youth coach helps young people understand their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and understand the actions that are necessary to achieve their end goal.

One program staff member shared an analogy to demonstrate the role of coaching:

“If you think of the role of a football coach, the role of a coach is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their players and then give them goals based on their abilities. Coaches don't DO things for you. They give you the skills and teach you how to do the thing, but it's ultimately on the individual to 'play the game'.”

Building capacity and core skills in young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, is recognised as a critical element of enhancing youth employability. These skills, such as listening and communicating effectively, solving problems and teamwork are important to enhance an individual's ability to secure a job, stay in work, move flexibly in the labour market, and engage in lifelong learning. Coaching in the workplace has been highlighted as a practice to enhance these skills.⁵

A number of programs across Australia utilise a coaching model however they are generally focused on coaching for unemployed job seekers rather than post-employment support that focuses on retention. Workplace or employment coaching has shown positive results across the evidence base, and has been linked to improvements in short-term and long-term employment in a recent international evidence synthesis.⁶

Who is Youth Pathways for?

Youth Pathways works with any young person aged 17-25 that lives and works in the program delivery region. The program is deliberately designed to cater for all young people, rather than solely targeting 'at risk' or 'disadvantaged' young people. This delivery model recognises that many young people, without the right support, have challenges in work performance, difficulty meeting

⁵ L Brewer, Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? And How? Guide to core work skills, 2013, International Labour Organisation.

⁶ Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, [Evidence Snapshot – Employment Coaching](#), 2021, accessed 17 August 2023.

expectations and are ultimately at risk of leaving the workplace. Given these challenges, Youth Pathways works with these young people with the aim of supporting employment retention.

What does Youth Pathways do?

Through the youth coaching model, Youth Pathways gives young people the ability to understand goal setting and action planning, to give them the skills to succeed in future employment and life.

Youth Pathways recruits local businesses in the North-West region. The program accepts referrals for young people in these businesses who may be experiencing challenges. Over a 12 week period, the Youth Pathways coach works the young person, through weekly coaching sessions delivered at the workplace. Coaching sessions are highly individualised to meet the needs of the young person, identifying barriers and challenges to retention of employment and implementing a coaching plan for growth in these areas. The Youth Pathways team also works with employers to address challenges that may be impacting the young person in the workplace.

Appendix 2 outlines further detail regarding program activities of Youth Pathways and the components of the coaching model.

As well as promoting the program directly to businesses, Youth Pathways staff promote the program through other means e.g. local media, employer conferences and meetings, and to secondary school students who are nearing school completion.

Trauma-informed mental health training was also delivered in 2022 within the Youth Pathways program to businesses through an external training provider, Chess Connect. The training was available to employment services, business owners, community services workers and not for profits in the region.

Findings

Since the program commenced in 2021, it has undergone several changes in response to the external employment landscape, aiming to meet the needs of young people and businesses within the broader context.

This evaluation focused in greater depth on implementation and outcomes for young people and businesses participating in the program from the beginning of 2023 onwards, given the relative stability of the program over this time and the sentiment from stakeholders that the program is 'working as it should'.

Responding to challenges

The ability of the program to adapt swiftly to external changes outside the program's control, such as the abolition of the PaTH Internships program, and be agile in response to business feedback, should be highlighted. The broader support and 'way of working' of Burnie Works as the organisation leading Youth Pathways was regarded as an important factor, allowing the program to evolve and ultimately reach a state where impact could be maximised.

"There is no fear of failure...it allows for iteration and evolution of a program, and change will happen over time."

– Youth Pathways program staff member

This agile way of working was matched with flexibility from the funder, Tasmanian Community Fund, to allow changes to the program.

Recruitment of businesses and referral pathways

All program staff involved in past and current iterations of the program acknowledged the significant challenge of recruiting businesses. Over the course of the pilot to date, 386 businesses were engaged through a mixture of face to face meetings, email and phone calls, with 18 of these businesses progressing to participate in Youth Pathways and refer young people. Businesses were most likely to engage positively with the program when there was an existing connection through the networks of program staff.

Several factors impacted the ability to 'sell' the program to businesses and onboard them. Challenges were experienced through low awareness of the program and the broader 'Burnie Works brand', competing priorities for businesses, and an environment of reduced trust of general 'employment services'. This meant that trust and relationships needed to be built over time, requiring multiple engagements with businesses, and the need to extend the program's geographical reach beyond the Burnie region.

“Youth Pathways was seen as just another employment service, and businesses didn’t engage.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

The ability of Youth Pathways staff to proactively engage businesses and share the benefits of the program was valued. Employers recognised the need for services such as Youth Pathways to proactively seek businesses out, with employers finding it challenging to navigate services in the employment landscape for their young employees.

“We’ll pound the pavement to find those opportunities and then bring them forth.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

Employers also emphasised the way program staff understood the needs of businesses and young people and felt this was a facilitator to recruiting businesses.

Whilst this building of relationships and business networks has taken time, the program has more recently seen an increase in the number of businesses participating and the number of referrals within the region, with 62% of total program referrals occurring in 2023. Businesses are recommending Youth Pathways to other businesses, and likewise young people are referring other young people who could benefit from the program.

Coaching sessions

Sessions between the youth coach and the young person generally last half an hour on a weekly basis. These sessions are conducted at the young person’s workplace, during paid work time.

“I think it’s worked really well...the weekly or fortnightly catch-ups, it’s really healthy.”

– Employer

“They can come and meet our apprentice at the end of the day... for us as a business it’s worked well.”

– Employer

Both young people and businesses commented on the length of the sessions.

“We basically had just half an hour sessions for most of it, so that was a bit of a detractor...it would definitely be better if the sessions were longer.”

– Young person

“I think the half hour session could be a bit longer, to really unpack what they need to unpack...in my opinion, to get better bang for buck and better value out of the time spent together, it would be better off being a 45 minute or one hour session.”

– **Employer**

Other young people and employers however felt that the half hour sessions were the appropriate length, for several reasons.

“Honestly, they don’t have a longer attention span.... That’s pretty draining for them after 30 minutes. I’ve asked them [the young people], do you feel you’ve got enough time with the coach, is it too long or short? ‘Nope, half an hour is good.’”

– **Employer**

“I found the 30 minute sessions to be a perfect medium.”

– **Young person**

The understanding of what constituted coaching was not shared across all individuals interviewed. Program staff reported this was a challenge given the lack of understanding in employment circles of coaching. Some employers referred to coaching as counselling, and program staff reported stigma in some workplaces around the terminology used to describe the program young people were participating in.

The ‘fit’ of the coach with young people

The importance of the ‘fit’ of the coaching staff with young people was highlighted by employers and young people interviewed and was seen as an important enabler for success of the program. This enabled successful recruitment of businesses on to the program, as employers felt they could trust the coach to build rapport and work well with their employees.

“The coach has to be the right coach. The right person has to be in that role, which is going to be a pretty niche role. I think the coach we have comes across really well. That’s a key link in the chain....They’re establishing that rapport with the young person.”

– **Employer**

The 'fit' and skillset of the coach in working with young people within a coaching context was also viewed as a crucial driver of successful outcomes for young people participating in the program.

“What worked really well was [the young person] really got along with the coach.”

– **Employer**

“I've found it easier recognising my problems with myself. I've found [the coach] non-judgmental and easy to talk to.”

– **Young person**

“I found [the coach] so easy to talk to. I couldn't be happier with the improvement I have made within myself and that's thanks to [the coach].”

– **Young person**

Appropriate support for young people

Responses were mixed regarding who was best suited for the program. Some employers felt the program was only relevant in specific circumstances where young people were going through challenges, and would continue to refer on a 'case by case' basis.

“In terms of my other staff, I wouldn't put them through it...I offer a different counselling service to my staff from another entity...”

– **Employer**

Other employers felt it was useful for all new young employees and were seeking to encourage the uptake of Youth Pathways across all new young employees, viewing the 'soft skills' gained through the coaching as foundational for all young people.

“We want to...include Youth Pathways as part of that training approach [for all apprentices].”

– **Employer**

The importance of aligning young people and the coaching model was highlighted in previous iterations of the program, when the program was delivered through the PaTH Internship program. At this point in the implementation of Youth Pathways, many young people were referred to as 'job ready' when in fact they faced multiple challenges and barriers to employment that could not be

supported through a coaching model alone. This resulted in Youth Pathways staff needing to provide support to young people beyond the anticipated scope of the program, even at the 'screening' process prior to accepting referrals. It should be noted that this challenge subsided when Youth Pathways evolved to work directly with businesses, receiving referrals from a different cohort of young people already in employment.

Program delivery: across organisations and across regions

Youth Pathways has two organisations working in partnership for program delivery: Burnie Works and YFCC. This has at times presented challenges given the different approaches and frameworks of the two organisations, with staff needing to navigate around different policies and procedures, and different data management systems.

“It would flow better if we were in the same system, rule-wise.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

Similarly, the program spans a large geographical area, with the two organisations located in different cities (Burnie and Devonport) and the 'service area' covering from Latrobe to Wynyard. Over the course of the pilot, coverage has extended beyond the Burnie region to include businesses from across a broader area to increase referral numbers. Staff involved in the program recognised the need to strike a balance between the breadth of areas covered and the ability to service the number of incoming referrals. Nearly all coaching sessions are undertaken face to face at the young person's workplace, necessitating significant travel requirements for program staff. Whilst online or phone sessions are offered to all businesses, in nearly all circumstances the young people and businesses participating in the program preferred face to face sessions.

Trauma informed training delivered to businesses

Trauma informed training sessions were delivered to local businesses across two time periods in 2022. The training was delivered online in a workshop format by Chess Connect, an external provider that specialises in upskilling employers to recognise trauma and learn how to respond in an effective and person-centred way.

Businesses were asked at the time of the training to provide feedback through a post-workshop survey however no survey responses were received by the Youth Pathways team. Employers who undertook interviews as part of this evaluation were not involved in the trauma informed training. We were therefore unable to gather any external data about the effectiveness and impact of this training.

“Trauma informed training will take a long time to develop in businesses...they are still getting a handle on mental health issues.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

Youth Pathways moved towards broader activities with the aim of educating employers about being trauma aware and the importance of mental health amongst young employees. These activities

included presentations and discussions at jobs fairs and business events, and working with a larger employer to improve team leaders' understanding of working with young people in a trauma aware and mental health context.

Outcomes

The following section details outcomes that Youth Pathways has had on young people, employers and businesses. These findings are derived from the interviews conducted with young people, employers and program staff in the course of this evaluation, review of program data and reports, and review of 'exit' survey data completed by young people at the conclusion of the program. All employers and young people interviewed in this evaluation (five interviewees) participated in Youth Pathways in 2023 only.

Outcomes for young people and businesses are represented below in line with the Youth Pathways Theory of Change: changes in connections and mindset, leading to changes in actions and behaviours, and ultimately resulting in changes in the foundation for the future (see figure 5).

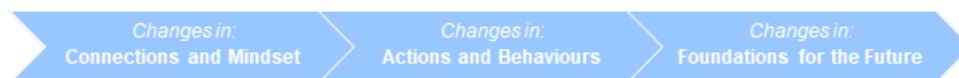


Figure 5 - Outcomes for young people and businesses across a continuum of change

Outcomes for young people

Youth Pathways contributes to several key outcomes for young people. The program supports young people to improve their life skills and set personal goals, as well as focusing on building skills to navigate challenges within the workplace.

111 young people have participated in Youth Pathways since it commenced in 2021

Connections and mindset

Valuing and engaging in the program

Young people remarked about how much they valued the program and its impact on them.

“I personally love [the program], I love meeting with the coach every week.”

– Young person

This is further evidenced in the fact that the program is now receiving other referrals through past and current participants, with young people believing their friends and family members may benefit from it.

“We’ve gotten several people on to the program simply through just coaching a young person who knows someone, whether it be their family or friendship group....they go, this is really helping me, and I think it could help someone else, and then they refer them.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

Developing ‘soft skills’ for work and life

Employers reported that many young people who begin at their businesses do not have the ‘soft skills’ required to succeed in the workplace. They felt this represented a fundamental gap between what an employer can offer a young person, and what the young person needed.

The development of ‘soft skills’ for young people was recognised as a significant and unique strength of the program to meet the needs of young people experiencing challenges in employment.

“The young person, they’re really just craving someone to teach them something that is not obviously taught in the curriculum at school...those soft skills and those life skills are highly valuable to them...often they’re coming from places where they’re not having those sorts of things instilled in them from their parents.”

– Youth Pathways program staff member

These skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, self-advocacy and planning were recognised as helping young people overcome barriers in the workplace.

“What I’ve found [after Youth Pathways], my relationships with other people, it just flows smoother...I’m not taking it out on others.”

– Young person

Research suggests that ‘soft skills’ are best learned in the context of the workplace rather than in isolation, alongside employment so learning can be contextualised, as is the case in the implementation of Youth Pathways.⁷

⁷ Social Ventures Australia, [Future Fair? Securing better quality jobs for young people in Australia](#), 2019, accessed 30 August 2023.

Actions and behaviours

Improving confidence through a holistic approach

Youth Pathways takes a holistic, youth-centred approach, recognising that challenges experienced by young people in work require a whole-of-person approach. The approach aims to build capacity broadly across multiple dimensions of a young person's life. Through the 12-week program, activities cover many aspects including identifying values, goal setting, and boundary setting, rather than being solely focused on the work environment.

During interviews, improved confidence in young people was commonly pointed to as evidence that the program is having an impact.

“It's helped me with confidence at work, but also just in general.”

– **Young person**

“My confidence at work...normally I'm quiet and reserved...so now I'm, you know, cracking more jokes and being more open.”

– **Young person**

“I've definitely [noticed changes in employees]. Especially two of them have become a lot more confident. To the point where last week, we had Beacon Foundation at Burnie High and we quite often go along. I went up to one of the apprentices...I think it'd be great if you would like to go and talk about what it's like to be an apprentice...And [the young person] went, yep I think I can now...[the coach] has been working with [the young person] around building confidence and how to have voice in the workplace, have a polite voice, but still, it's okay to be assertive sometimes and to help him push back.”

– **Employer**

Fostering mental wellbeing

A strong theme emerging from the consultations was the importance of recognising and managing mental wellbeing to support young people in employment. Businesses recognised mental health as a barrier for young people to succeed at work but did not feel they could fully support young people. Employers and young people were grateful for the focus on mental health through Youth Pathways.

“I’ve suffered with mental health for quite a while. I’ve never really found someone I’ve felt comfortable enough to tell, talk about myself to...but with [the youth coach] I was really comfortable. I think that’s what I’ve enjoyed about it the most, I’ve finally found someone I can actually talk to.”

– **Young person**

“I feel like I’m less grumpy, or less sad, because I’m getting whatever I’ve got on my mind off my chest, which in turn puts me in a better mood, and puts me in a mood to actually want to work. So, it sort of goes in turn with each other.”

– **Young person**

Youth Pathways refer on to other YFCC services or external services as needed. The uptake of mental health services as a result of referrals through Youth Pathways was noted by program staff members. These included referrals to headspace (a youth mental health service) and young people’s general practitioners.

“We can only go so far with [anxiety] in coaching. It’s good to be knowledgeable of it, and we can do worksheets around it. But when it comes to anything more than that...we use our referral channels and we refer on to the mental health practitioners...I would say 70% of participants have had mental health referrals...100% of the time referrals to other services are taken up by the young people.”

– **Youth Pathways program staff member**

Improving performance and engagement at work

Young people and employers spoke of the impact of Youth Pathways on their engagement and performance in the workplace.

“I have a clear mind, so I’m able to retain information, and remember things better because I’m not worried about whatever else is going on in my head. All that space that it’s taking up is now gone, because I’ve laid it all out. And then, when I’m at work, my mind is purely on work.”

– Young person

“I wouldn’t have thought that talking about things would help me improve my work...”

– Young person

All employers interviewed reported seeing positive impacts within the workplace of young people completing Youth Pathways.

“I can definitely see more of a focus in them.”

– Employer

“[The program] has definitely had an impact on [the young person’s] demeanour at work, their attitude, has been much more positive.”

– Employer

“It does improve performance generally...from an employer’s perspective, we’re more satisfied with their performance and with their overall demeanour and attitude.”

– Employer

Youth Pathways also connected young people with work-related training as needed, for example training to gain a forklift licence, cover letter workshops and resume workshops.

Foundations for the future

Whilst the program focuses on retention within current employment, there is also a broader view and importance placed on setting young people up for future successful employment.

“Trying to help them to stay within their role at their current employer... and if you go to move [to other employment], move with care. So go from this role to the next role, don't have that break and fall back into unemployment in between. Which is not something a young person tends to do that easily when they get pissed off... to move with care.”

– **Youth Pathways program staff member**

“The [young person]...what they've been able to work through with [the youth coach]...is really beneficial long term...make [the young person] aware of that at a young age so that it will prevent further headaches down the track.”

– **Employer**

“[The youth coach] has been teaching them how to have a bit of confidence in saying no, and that's what I hope that they'll get through this, that they'll learn what their rights are in the workplace, how to have respectful conversations, disagreements.”

– **Employer**

Through a youth-focused lens, the program also focuses on supporting young people in education alongside their employment, for example when people are attending TAFE.

“One of the young people was really struggling with their TAFE... their manager wasn't picking up on it. We've been able to negotiate time for that young person to go and do their TAFE, and they've been on top and in front of it ever since.”

– **Youth Pathways program staff member**

Findings from this evaluation are strengthened by a synthesis of international research finding improvements in short-term and long-term employment through interventions that included employment coaching.⁸ Coaching has been highlighted as good practice to improve young people's core employability skills and therefore enhance their ability to navigate in the labour market and engage in lifelong learning.⁹

Outcomes for businesses

Businesses from across the North-West Latrobe to Wynard region are eligible to participate in the Youth Pathways program to access youth coaching for their young employees. The types of businesses vary, but predominantly involve small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that are trades-based.

18 businesses have participated in Youth Pathways. The majority of businesses refer multiple young people.

Connections and mindset

The value employers place on Youth Pathways

Employers valued the program for the way it filled a gap in what they were able to provide for young people at their workplace, particularly young people who were struggling.

“The program seemed to offer something that we couldn't provide for some of our young people...it filled a void for something that we couldn't otherwise provide.”

– Employer

⁸ Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, [Evidence Snapshot – Employment Coaching](#), 2021, accessed 17 August 2023.

⁹ L Brewer, Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? And How? Guide to core work skills, 2013, International Labour Organisation.

“I was really concerned about these young men in the workplace and how they were... you know, we tell them how to put that bolt in there and do that... but were we actually looking after them as a new employee and as a young person in the workplace?”

– **Employer**

“If you want to invest in your people, this program is worthwhile.”

– **Employer**

Actions and behaviours

The impact on the workplace

Employers spoke of the way Youth Pathways has allowed them to address problems early in the workplace. With the young person’s permission, the Youth Pathways team is able to raise issues that are occurring in the workplace to enable quicker resolution.

“What Youth Pathways has done, the young people are able go in [with the youth coach] and talk about some of the issues and frustrations and challenges they’re facing, and then the coach straight away comes to me...I would never have known that this had been happening, so that meant I could go and have a conversation...”

– **Employer**

“[After Youth Pathways] we were able to provide feedback to TAFE that their onboarding process was really lacklustre. So [TAFE] actually sent somebody out that next week, and sat down, and sorted it all out. Everything’s under way now.”

– **Employer**

One employer reported the program has prompted and steered broader organisational changes to better support young employees.

“We’ve identified from [Youth Pathways]...that we have a gap with our team leaders...we need to train our team leaders to be team leaders and what that means. But we also need to focus on developing a better training package for new employees, especially for young employees...and we want to do that and include Youth Pathways as part of that training approach.”

– **Employer**

Foundations for the future

The impact on retention in the workplace

All businesses interviewed felt the program could positively influence retention of staff, for example through improved performance and improved satisfaction at work. Specific examples were provided where stakeholders felt the program had directly influenced retention.

“We had one young person that was third year apprentice that was going to quit over something minor, and then we’ve been able to work with them to help them realise this is just this person’s personality type, they’re an extrovert, you’re an introvert, let’s not run away from your apprenticeship when you’re one year from finishing.”

– **Youth Pathways program staff member**

“It was sort of my last-ditch effort [for the young person]. So, I’ve put the investment into [the young person] having twelve weeks of the mentoring and yeah, I can see a big improvement.”

– **Employer**

Employers talked about the program assisting to improve performance at work, support young people to succeed in their role and ultimately be more likely to complete an apprenticeship or remain in their employment.

“When we sign up an apprentice, we want to help them get through to the end of it. And it’s definitely helped them, to be able to keep their job, to finish the apprenticeship. Hopefully they’ll be a good tradesperson at the end of it.”

– Employer

“In turn, it makes them a more employable person....we’re more likely when they finish everything off in the apprenticeship to offer them a full time trade role...because they have performed to an acceptable standard.”

– Employer

“I’d definitely recommend [Youth Pathways] to other people...If the intention is from the employer to retain someone, and to work through, or help them get through some of the difficulties they may be going through...you’d want to engage someone like this [the youth coach]...to actually help them overcome these difficulties. So they can become the employee you expected them to be when you employ them.”

– Employer

Concluding remarks

This evaluation of the Youth Pathways pilot sought to understand the implementation of the program, implementation enablers and barriers, and outcomes for young people and businesses. By its very nature as a pilot, the program has evolved to respond to the core needs of young people and businesses. Recognising the evolution that has occurred since the commencement of the pilot, this evaluation focused on the implementation and outcomes of the program from the beginning of 2023.

Through this evaluation, several considerations should be highlighted.

Implementation considerations

Session length

One aspect raised during the consultations regarding ongoing implementation was the need to consider optimal session length of the coaching sessions. This may involve introducing flexibility into the session length based on preferences of both the employer and young people involved, noting that the sessions are delivered on 'paid' work time.

Delivery mode

Another consideration centres on delivery of face to face versus online sessions, particularly in terms of balancing increasing numbers of young people in the program across a wide geographical area. This balance is challenging, noting that there is a strong preference from young people and businesses for face to face coaching sessions, and developing trust and rapport is a critical enabler to outcomes of coaching.

Supporting businesses

Developing further clarity around the barriers to businesses engaging with the program and exploring the best way to support businesses is needed, whilst considering the need to balance confidentiality of young people disclosing workplace issues to the youth coach within the program.

Broader considerations

Beyond the implementation considerations, other insights and considerations emerged that are relevant for similar programs in the future.

Building momentum

Building trust and relationships with businesses takes time and effort, with the need to get 'runs on the board' to demonstrate to businesses the value of the program. This is evidenced by the growth of referral numbers over time throughout the course of this pilot. This also represents a significant challenge for pilots in general, given that the time it takes to build momentum is often at odds with the funding cycles of pilots.

The importance of flexibility

Pilots in their nature 'test' innovative approaches. The importance of flexibility from both the program and the funder was highlighted as an enabler through Youth Pathways, with the program continually reviewing what's working well and what can be changed to evolve iteratively.

Holistic, youth-focused approach

In Youth Pathways, skilled coaching was seen as a key enabler. This coaching was embedded in a broader suite of services through YFCC, with staff experienced in youth mental health and able to draw on organisational support and knowledge of external services. Implementation and outcomes are likely to be more challenging where programs are delivered with less experienced sole practitioners in the absence of strong frameworks and onward referral pathways.

As evidenced throughout the course of this pilot where the cohort of young people referred changed over time, some young people may not be suited to coaching alone and may require access to more intensive services.

Conclusion

Through this evaluation, Youth Pathways has demonstrated important outcomes for young people and businesses, both in the immediate term and laying the foundations for the future. The nature of the pilot to adapt and respond to the changing environment, and the way the pilot has implemented a youth-centred coaching approach, has contributed to a program that can work holistically to support and improve retention of young people in employment.

Appendix 1

The evolution of the pilot: responding to a changing employment landscape

The landscape of employment and employment services changed significantly since the creation of the Youth Pathways program in 2021. The program initially worked directly with Workforce Australia, receiving referrals under the PaTH Internship program. At that time, young people who were 'job-ready' were referred, and Youth Pathways was designed to provide a 12 week period of youth coaching. Significant challenges arose through this referral pathway however, in that there were no set guidelines regarding how young people were classified as 'job-ready'. The program received referrals for young people with complex needs and multiple barriers to entering the workforce, frequently requiring significant case management support beyond coaching.

In July 2022, with a change in federal government, the PaTH Internship program was discontinued. This change significantly affected the referral pathway and implementation of Youth Pathways. The challenge however, presented an opportunity for Burnie Works and the Youth Pathways team to redesign the program and harness learnings from earlier stages of the pilot.

At the same time, broader employment landscape changes were occurring, including the development of a local Jobs Hub (West North-West Working) and employment services through YFCC such as Fit For Work. Considering the network of existing services and gaps, alongside consultations with young people and local businesses, Burnie Works and the Youth Pathways team re-launched Youth Pathways with a focus on post-employment retention support, in the second half of 2022, seeking referrals directly from businesses. The program has since broadened from a focus on working with young people within the initial 'probation' period to working with young people aged 17-25 in any time period of their employment.

Similarly, the geographical location of businesses that are eligible has broadened, from the Burnie region to a larger geographical area of the North-West region including Devonport. The program has been implemented directly with businesses across this larger geographical area since the beginning of 2023 onwards.

In the broader context, the Tasmanian Government has recently announced the development of a Youth Employment Strategy. Anecdotal evidence from Jobs Hubs partners around the state indicates that young people are experiencing challenges in adapting to work environments and businesses are seeking assistance to meet these challenges. The development of the Youth Employment Strategy represents an opportunity to consider these challenges and potential solutions.

Appendix 2

Youth Pathways Activities

The following steps show how the program works with both businesses and young people to implement the Youth Pathways coaching model.

Local businesses are recruited to participate in Youth Pathways

Employers then refer young people in their business aged 17-25 to Youth Pathways. Referrals are accepted based on referral and program requirements.



Initial meeting to understand challenges

Youth Pathways meets with the employer and the young person to discuss work-related challenges and outcomes. This forms the basis of developing SMART goals that guide the youth coaching sessions.



Youth Pathways coaching sessions

The Youth Pathways coach meets with the young person at their workplace weekly. Coaching sessions last for approximately half an hour.

Coaching sessions involve identifying barriers and challenges the young person might be experiencing in a work context, also considering broader challenges outside of work through a holistic approach. A coaching plan is implemented for growth in these areas.

The coaching sessions are highly individualised and centre around the needs of the young person, often covering the development of a wellness vision and understanding key motivators for the young person. Sessions work to move forward week by week, to achieve steps towards the broader goals set.

Working with businesses

The Youth Pathways team also works concurrently with employers to address challenges that may be impacting the young person in the workplace. The Youth Pathways coach and business coordinator are able to work with employers to highlight workplace challenges that may have surfaced through conversations with the young person, following consent from the young person. Activities with employers also centre on capacity-building of businesses to better understand how to support young people in the workplace.



Coaching sessions continue for 12 weeks

Onward referrals to other services are made where required. The young person is given a plan for continuing to move forward beyond the Youth Pathways program. Advice and support is provided to employers regarding long-term supports that may be beneficial for the young person.

