



Finding that spark

What works to achieve effective employment services for young people?

Report from the evaluation of the Transition to Work Community of Practice

Sharon Bond and Deborah Keys

2020

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a non-government, community-based organisation concerned with social justice. Based in Melbourne, but with programs and services throughout Australia, the Brotherhood is working for a better deal for disadvantaged people. It undertakes research, service development and delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating learning into new policies, programs and practices for implementation by government and others. For more information visit <www.bsl.org.au>.

Sharon Bond is a Senior Research Officer and Deborah Keys is a Research Fellow in the Youth Opportunities team of the Research and Policy Centre.

Cover photo by Warren Wong on Unsplash

Published by

Brotherhood of St Laurence
67 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065
Australia

ABN 24 603 467 024

Ph: (03) 9483 1183

www.bsl.org.au

Suggested citation: Bond, S & Keys, D 2020, *Finding that spark: what works to achieve effective employment services for young people?*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the young people who participated in this project so willingly and enthusiastically. Special thanks to 'Liam' and 'Nick' who feature in the associated video.

This evaluation would not have been possible without the contribution of the 13 TtW services that belong to the Community of Practice. In particular, we thank the three services that were case study sites—VPG, Gen-Z Employment and Colony 47—whose staff assisted in coordinating our visits, made us feel welcome and generously provided thoughtful insights.

Thanks also go to BSL Youth Services team who convened the Community of Practice, for valuable feedback right through this project. Thanks to Tara Kortel for her assistance with data analysis. Special thanks go to Emma Cull and Nicky McColl-Jones for being responsive, authentic and generally amazing to work with!

Finally, thank you to our funders, the Prue Myer Foundation and the Warren Clark Bequest managed by Equity Trustees.

Acronyms & terms

BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Col47	Colony 47, TtW service in Hobart region. Case study site
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment (includes former DESSFB from February 2020)
DJSB	Department of Jobs and Small Business (2017 – May 2019)
DESSFB	Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business (May 2019 – January 2020)
EEO	Employment Engagement Officer
Gen-Z	Gen-Z Employment, TtW service in Gold Coast region, operated by Ohana for Youth. Case study site
Manager	(in this report) frontline service manager at a TtW service
NERG	National Employment Reference Group
NYEB	National Youth Employment Body
PPC	Programs and Participation Coordinator
PPS	Post Placement Support Officer
QA	Quality Assurance Officer
RPC	Research and Policy Centre
VPG	Vocational Partnerships Group, TtW service in Cairns region. Case study site
YDC	Youth Development Coach

Pseudonyms

All interview participants have been assigned a pseudonym. Quotes without a pseudonym are derived from focus groups and surveys.

Summary

'It's just our job to find their talent or that spark that they didn't even realise. Once we find that passion or that spark, you can't hold them back.'

(Manager of a TtW CoP service)

The Transition to Work (TtW) Community of Practice (CoP) is convened by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) with 11 members that collectively deliver TtW services for 15–24 year olds at 13 sites around Australia. The TtW CoP member organisations deliver a common, evidence-informed model that can be adapted in place to offer quality services for young people that improve their education, training and employment outcomes. The model seeks to empower and equip young people with the skills and opportunities to engage in work that they have reason to value. It also aligns these outcomes to business and local economic development needs.

The TtW CoP was established to drive and enhance outcomes by supporting the effective national implementation of an evolving fidelity model which is grounded in collaboration at local and national levels. The model is intended to have a multiplier effect over time—improving service performance and practice, so as to increase outcomes for young people beyond what member services could achieve alone.

This 2019 evaluation of the TtW CoP focuses on the sharing of innovation and iterative learning from research and practice to improve education and employment outcomes for young people through service delivery. The next stage of the evaluation will focus on the broader ambition of the model to effect systems change.

Key points

- **Services that followed the TtW CoP model closely were more likely to meet or surpass government target for 12-week education/employment outcomes** than services with less fidelity to the model.
- **Two core concepts stepped out in practice—Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment—drove successful outcomes.** Seven-components delivering these approaches were identified as key to effecting strong outcomes:
 - a convening component – BSL as an enabling organisation
 - model components – a four-phase model and activating employers
 - practice components – the Deal, exploration, inspiration and goal-setting, group work, and work skills and tasters.
- **An enabling organisation raises organisational quality and performance** while ensuring evidence-informed, ongoing development of the model; a focus on place; and fidelity to the core approaches and components of the model.

Background

The TtW CoP brings together TtW providers across Australia to drive the implementation and evolution of a fidelity service model for youth employment that achieves sustainable and meaningful employment outcomes for young people. The CoP provides a context to drive high performance in organisations. It was designed to address a key gap in existing government policy and interventions, notably in the way the problem of youth unemployment is framed, how the response is commissioned, and how service design and practice give effect to the framing of the problem.

The TtW CoP addresses this gap through an innovative model that is grounded in evidence-based practice.

Theory of change

This evaluation is informed by the theory of change shown in [Figure S1](#), which illustrates the intended impact of the service model on young people's outcomes.

Figure S1 TtW CoP theory of change



The research

This evaluation explores the value of the TtW CoP model for young people and the TtW service providers that co-produce the model with support from the TtW CoP convenor (BSL). It also outlines some broad implications for reform. Guided by the realist evaluation approach (Pawson & Tilley 1997) it seeks to identify not only which elements of the TtW CoP model work but also how they work and in what circumstances.

This is a mixed method evaluation that triangulates qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources. It includes case studies at three TtW CoP services: VPG in Far North Queensland, Gen-Z Employment on the Gold Coast and Colony 47 in southern Tasmania. These involved interviews and focus groups with young people, staff and local employers working with TtW. Scans were conducted to provide additional data on the demographics and training and employment opportunities in each area.

A partnerships and opportunities survey was conducted with all TtW CoP services. Additionally, bi-annual surveys were conducted with TtW participants to check what supports they had received and whether their experience of the program was consistent with the Advantaged Thinking approach. Outcomes data from the Employment Services System database was also analysed.

Fidelity to Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment produced better outcomes for young people

Capabilities approach theory informs the two core practice approaches of the TtW CoP model: Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment. The evaluation found that these two core practice approaches were critical to achieving good education and employment outcomes for young people.

Quantitative survey analysis indicated that there was a strong and statistically significant correlation (Pearson Correlation .597 significance .04 two-tailed test) between the degree to which services were faithful to the model and their outcomes.¹

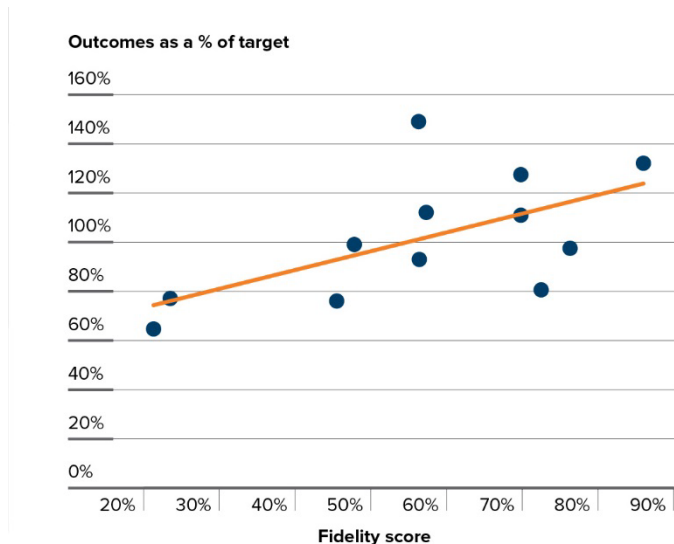
The fidelity measure was constructed by adding four equally weighted items for each service. These items recorded respectively the fraction of young participants who reported a strong experience of Advantaged Thinking (raw score up to 1); the fraction who received at least 8 of the 10 TtW core activities (raw score up to 1); the number of partnerships achieved expressed as a proportion of an urban or rural benchmark (with a maximum score of 1); and whether there was a Community Investment Committee (raw score 1) or not (raw score 0). The total out of 4 was then converted to a percentage.

Figure 2 shows the fidelity measure for each service plotted against that service's 12-week education and or employment outcomes as a percentage of the government

¹ Note that one service was an extreme outlier and omitted from this analysis

outcomes targets. The trend line (shown in orange) indicates the positive relationship between fidelity and outcomes.

Figure S2 Outcomes (as % of target) plotted against model fidelity



Advantaged Thinking

The Advantaged Thinking approach was developed by Colin Falconer in the United Kingdom in 2009. Rather than focusing on the problems faced by young people experiencing disadvantage, it uses individual young people’s skills and aspirations as the starting point for career goals; provides the structural opportunities and resources needed to achieve these goals; requires staff and young people to sign the Deal, which fosters a culture of reciprocity rather than obligation; and includes the Campaign, which promotes young people as valuable citizens who can contribute in their community.

BSL administers and analyses bi-annual voluntary surveys of participants at all TtW CoP sites. Each survey gathers young people’s views on their experience of the service. The survey includes a series of statements which describe the types of experiences expected when an Advantaged Thinking way of working is delivered. Young people are asked to respond on a five point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The survey also asks young people whether they have undertaken activities that are core to the model.

Some 673 young people who had been at a TtW CoP service for two months or more responded to the August 2019 survey. The vast majority of young people (84 per cent average over 19 questions) indicated they had experienced the Advantaged Thinking approach as outlined in the survey questions and almost all written comments were positive. This signals that most young people were experiencing Advantaged Thinking at their services.

Harnessing community investment

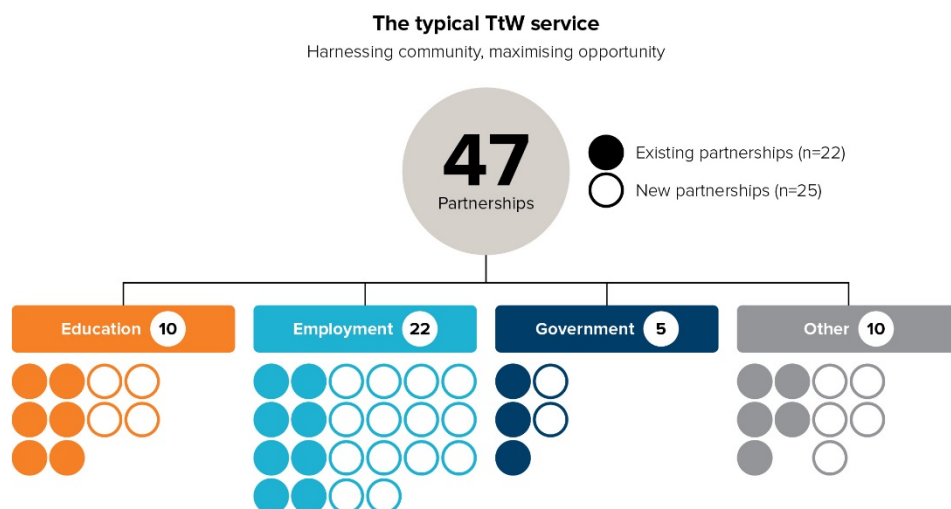
While this evaluation focuses on service delivery, it is clear that services alone cannot deliver solutions to youth unemployment. The TtW CoP response stems from the premise that society more broadly, especially business and industry, can play an important role in efforts to address the problem (Brown et al. 2017; BSL 2019). A whole of community effort is required to drive job opportunities and address community infrastructure needs and policy reform. A multisector response, whereby sectors share expertise and experience, is the most effective way to shape solutions to youth employment issues and build Australia's workforce and productivity.

The TtW CoP model includes the following elements to harness community investment:

- local Community Investment Committees (CICs) that provide a mechanism for key sectors in a community to leverage networks and collaborate to address youth unemployment. This links the 'supply-side' organisations supporting young people with employer-led, 'demand-side' interventions. They focus on systems change at the national level and access to opportunities at the local level
- activating employers to drive investment in the young people's skills and capabilities by co-designing entry-level work pathways that align young people's aspirations and interests with business needs, and transform the way that employment services and employers work together
- an enabling organisation (i.e. BSL), which provides leadership to build the capacity of local organisations and communities to collaborate and leverage the expertise of the providers
- governance and working groups such as the National Employer Reference Group that provide guidance, expertise and access to networks and opportunities that support CICs to deliver on community solutions, and draw local knowledge up and strengthen approaches at a national level
- youth participation platforms to enable young people to share their experiences in navigating employment systems and contribute to local and national decision-making to ensure actions and strategies are fit for purpose.

Eleven of the 13 TtW CoP services completed a survey in February 2019 to quantify the degree to which community investment was being harnessed through partnerships and the establishment of Community Investment Committees to improve service delivery.

Figure S3 TtW CoP partnerships



The survey found that the median number of partnerships across the TtW services was 47, comprising 22 existing prior to their delivery of TtW and 25 new partnerships. There were twice as many partnerships with employers as with any other sector (Figure 3).

In addition, as of November 2019, six of the services had an operational Community Investment Committee or equivalent, two were developing CICs, two previously operational CICs were in hiatus and a further three services had no CIC.

CICs met at least quarterly, with up to 22 members representing a broad range of stakeholders including employers. They discussed the issues affecting employment, acted as champions of youth unemployment in their communities, participated in advocacy and contributed to the National Youth Employment Reference Group.

Seven key components contributed to good outcomes

Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment approaches translate into seven key components that facilitate good outcomes.

Qualitative analysis of interviews and surveys conducted with providers and young people found these could be classed as one convening component, two model components and four practice components that were each key to achieving outcomes.

Convening component

- 1 BSL as an enabling organisation (not a 'prime provider')² convened the CoP which is an investment in collaborative innovation. It built trust and collaboration between services that have committed to a shared model, service improvement and context-specific 'good practice'. BSL brings a form of 'network capital', which is the ability to

² The role is quite distinct from a 'prime provider', which might involve managing sub-providers. Rather, BSL delivers a program while collaborating with other providers to build their capacity.

bring together and maximise the capital of other services.

BSL undertook the following important functions: multilevel training, from frontline staff to leaders; practice consultancy; trouble-shooting; resources for service delivery; opportunities for practice reflection; action research to inform program development; and joint advocacy.

Model components

- 2 A four-phase model provided a structure for the delivery of key components of the model while being sufficiently nimble to adapt to individual participants and place-specific contexts. This combination of flexibility and structure enabled services to work together towards effective practice and to evolve on the basis of collective learnings.
- 3 Using Advantaged Thinking, which promotes the benefits of employing young people, activated employers to join the campaign to address youth unemployment and offer employment opportunities.

Practice components

- 4 The Deal, as a non-punitive agreement between the service and young people, engendered reciprocity and mutual accountability and enabled young people to make progress with support from their coaches.
- 5 Exploration, inspiration and goal-setting empowered young people to take up appropriate study and employment opportunities aligned with their goals, supported by workers' belief in their ability to succeed.
- 6 Group work reduced young people's social anxiety, and built their confidence, engagement with the program and commitment to progress their career objectives.
- 7 Work skills and tasters provided young people with the 'know-how' and networks to seize career opportunities and navigate their learning and work lives.

Implications

Findings from this study point to the key shifts in the framing of ideas, assumptions and service model components necessary for effective youth employment policy and program delivery. They have implications for driving systemic change in the youth employment ecosystem.

Social change

- Activate employers in the campaign to address youth employment and promote young people as capable community assets and valuable employees.

Policy change

- Reframe mutual obligation as reciprocity, in which young people and service staff are of equal value and mutually accountable in the pursuit of jointly agreed career goals.

- Trial collaborative commissioning in other contexts to further test its potential in enabling traditionally competitive agencies to co-produce effective service responses while retaining autonomy.
- Promote the mutual advantage of Communities of Practice to services and governments. Collective and evidence-based advocacy gives services a strategic advantage over those working outside Communities of Practice; and liaising with a collective is more efficient for government.

Structural change

- Balance the policy and service delivery focus on the individual aspirations and responsibilities of young people with an equivalent focus on the external institutional and material conditions and experiences available to them. For example, training, group-based career development and real world opportunities.
- Harness local resources through cross-sectoral partnerships that maximise the opportunities for young people, for example, Community Investment Committees.

Practice reform





- Activate young people through trusting and supportive relationships with coaches and the pursuit of personally meaningful career goals, rather than negative, punitive approaches which are out of step with psychological theory.
- Maximise the capacity of service providers through communities of practice that pool their resources and collaborate to improve their practice.

Service delivery

- Equip young people to manage their employment and education paths throughout their working lives by providing substantive careers development in schools, and for those who miss out, a TtW-like service.

Figure S4 Components that make a difference: summary of evaluation findings

 Component	 Context	 Mechanism	 Outcome
Convening component			
<p>An enabling organisation convened the CoP as an investment in collaborative innovation</p>	<p>BSL as an enabling organisation (not a prime provider) convened the CoP with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — voluntary participation by members who have autonomy through individual contracts with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. — regular meetings of staff from all sites targeted to different roles, to share expertise and build service capacity. — sharing of commercial in-confidence data and monitoring and evaluation data among members for the purpose of collective practice improvement. — shared commitment to a common model whose fidelity is supported through regular training sessions, consultancy and trouble-shooting. <p>The CoP Convenor is seen by its members to be offering a valuable resource to support rather than police fidelity.</p>	<p>CoP members report they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — are inspired and energised through the sharing of experience as part of a larger Community of Practice. — develop a sense of collegiality, trust and shared commitment to improving services for young people. — feel supported and resourced to deliver the model. — experience an authorising environment that supports innovation. 	<p>New approaches are trialled and promoted, both in the community sector and to government.</p> <p>Service-to-service collaboration occurs independently of BSL.</p> <p>CoP members further develop their practice and the model to suit their local context.</p> <p>CoP members are equipped to undertake program and policy advocacy.</p>

 Component	 Context	 Mechanism	 Outcome
Model components			
An evidence-informed four-phase model	<p>A balance between the prescriptive nature of a phased approach and the flexibility to develop creative and context-appropriate ways to deliver the core activities of each phase.</p> <p>Processes and systems are designed around the phases and their core activities.</p>	<p>Structured phases can work as a check that all the core activities are being delivered and provide a framework to plan individually tailored pathways through the program. The phases provide a common language for knowledge sharing among services, and training purposes.</p>	<p>Core activities of each phase are delivered and young people receive a tailored response.</p> <p>TtW program is able to be delivered in various contexts.</p> <p>Services work together towards effective practice.</p>
Activating employers	<p>Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — have strong community connections. <p>Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — use Advantaged Thinking to promote young people’s potential. — focus on the benefits for employers. 	<p>Employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — recognise the benefits of working with young people. — develop confidence to provide opportunities. 	<p>Employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — offer opportunities. — further the campaign to address youth unemployment. <p>Young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — have increased access to networks and opportunities.
Practice components			
The Deal	<p>The Deal is understood as working together toward a common goal rather than as a tool for compliance, and is kept ‘live’ throughout the four phases.</p>	<p>A culture of reciprocity is formed in which young people feel accountable to themselves and staff, and know that the staff are accountable to them.</p>	<p>Young people make progress with their plans with sufficient support from their coaches.</p>
Exploration, inspiration & goalsetting (Phase 1)	<p>Coaches and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — develop caring, trusting relationships, within an Advantaged Thinking framework. — demonstrate the belief that young people can succeed, and have that expectation. 	<p>Young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — feel empowered and have a sense of agency or choice. — imagine possible futures of value to them and feel motivated to pursue them. 	<p>Young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — feel positive about their futures and step out of their comfort zones to pursue goals. — seek out and take up opportunities (social, training, work) aligned with their goals.
Group Work (Phase 1)	<p>Provision of a shared, welcoming space (e.g. with computers to encourage spending time at the service) and low-pressure interaction with coaches and peers.</p>	<p>Social anxiety is reduced and confidence builds.</p> <p>Young people feel connected to their peers.</p>	<p>Young people commit to attend and engage with TtW and exhibit greater readiness to progress their career objectives.</p>
Work skills and tasters/experiences (Phase 2 & 3)	<p>Coaching and group work.</p> <p>Established networks maximising learning and work opportunities.</p>	<p>Young people gain know-how (cultural capital).</p>	<p>Young people are better able to navigate their learning and work lives.</p>

1 Introduction

The Transition to Work (TtW) Community of Practice (CoP) brings together TtW providers across Australia to drive the implementation and evolution of a fidelity service model for youth employment that can achieve sustainable and meaningful employment outcomes for young people. The CoP provides a context to drive high performance in organisations. It was designed to address a key gap in existing government policy and interventions. The gap manifests in three ways: how the problem of youth unemployment is framed, how the program response is commissioned, and how service design and practice give effect to the framing of the problem.

The TtW CoP addresses this gap through an innovative model that is grounded in evidence-based practice.

Origins of the model

In 2014, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) in collaboration with other community organisations and the business sector launched a media campaign highlighting high youth unemployment and the lack of an adequate policy response (Brown et al. 2017). Contextual factors included the fragmented education and employment services system, poor outcomes for young jobseekers in mainstream unemployment services, a failure to address the demand side of youth unemployment, and the discontinuation of the federal Youth Connections program.

The Australian Government also recognised the service gap, announcing a Youth Employment Strategy as part of the 2015/16 Budget. This included \$212 million over four years to establish a national Transition to Work Service (TtW) for young unemployed people aged 15–21³ who were struggling to transition into sustainable employment or education. TtW targets those who have not completed Year 12 and are at risk of long-term unemployment. This includes those receiving Youth Allowance, whose payment depends on their participation in either TtW or mainstream employment services (jobactive).

In 2015, BSL contacted other youth service agencies including those in the former National Youth Connections Network (NYCN) to explore the possibilities for forming a network to deliver the TtW program in a collaborative way. A high level of credibility and trust between BSL and these organisations had developed through the NYCN. The concept of a network that would collaborate on a shared mission to address youth unemployment formed in large part as a response to the unintended consequences of the existing marketised employment services system. These issues included:

³ The age range was extended to 24 years from January 2020.

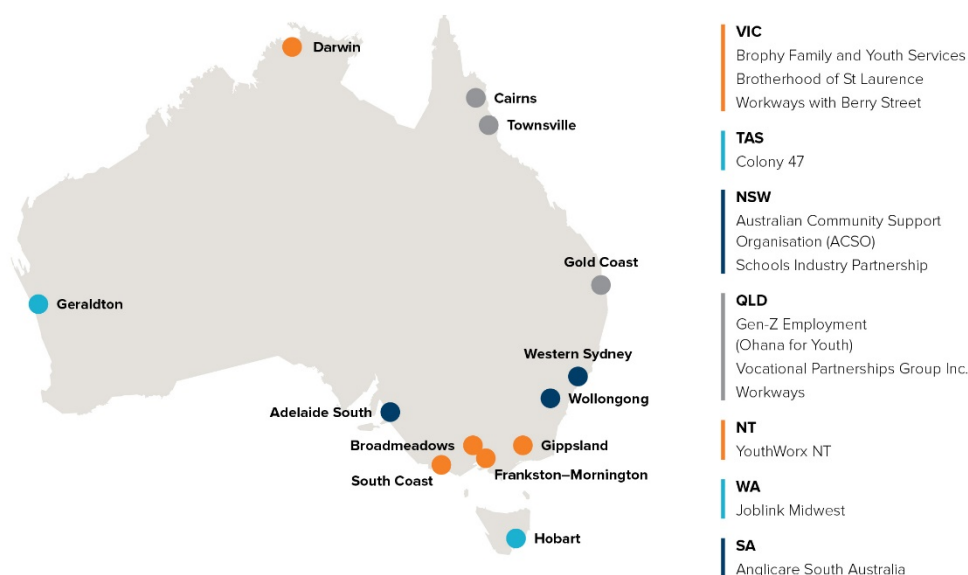
- the erosion of trust between providers caused by competition, which had led to diminished collaboration and information sharing (and less innovation, cost-saving and streamlining)
- the loss of institutional knowledge due to smaller community organisations being absorbed into larger ones. This included a reduction in capacity for service development, evaluation and data collection among community organisations
- the impact on communities from multiple providers operating in a heavily compliance-based system. These include the added costs for smaller employers to engage with several providers (rather than having a single point of contact) and eroded community trust in short-lived service providers (owing largely to the unpredictability of government funding) (BSL 2017, p. 6).

The TtW Community of Practice

BSL proposed the formation of a TtW CoP based on a belief in the benefits of collaboration over competition and the recognition that local agencies are best placed to identify and harness local community resources to support young people’s transition into employment.

Eleven community service organisations with TtW services in 13 regions around Australia are members of the CoP (Figure 1). To reduce the risk of competition, CoP members do not deliver TtW in the same region.

Figure 1 Locations of the Transition to Work Community of Practice sites



Source: Brown et al. 2017, p. 7

The TtW CoP was established to drive the national implementation of a model that provides a common delivery structure that is also nimble and continually evolving through sharing of practice knowledge; ongoing monitoring and evaluation; tailoring to meet individual needs; and local adaptation to meet place-based needs.⁴

Maximising young people's capabilities through choice and opportunities

The TtW CoP model adheres to a theoretical framework called the capabilities approach. This theory has informed other BSL services prior to TtW, including the former Youth Transitions Program and the ongoing Education First Youth Foyers.

Amartya Sen (1999) developed the capabilities theory as a way of understanding people's ability to make choices among a range of opportunities. It focuses on what people can be rather than their limitations or problems. Capabilities are 'the substantive freedoms [a person] enjoys in order to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value' (p. 87). Martha Nussbaum (2011) adds that people's capacity to realise capabilities is affected by their life circumstances. She judges quality of life in terms of:

- functionings – states of being and doing (an analogy would be cycling as distinct from possessing a bicycle), and
- capabilities – the functionings a person can access (cycling, with access to a bicycle) (Kimberley, Gruhn & Huggins 2012).

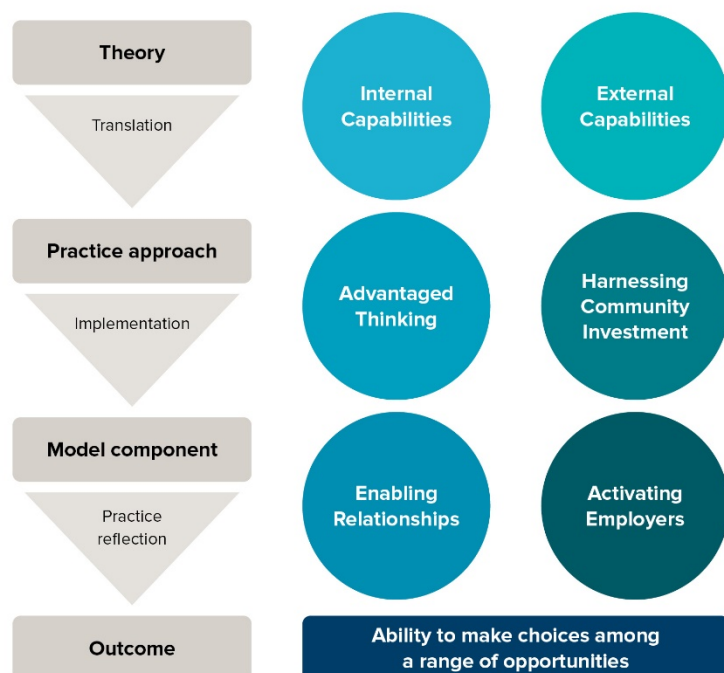
A person's capability represents their freedom to choose between different kinds of life. Thus, Nussbaum argues that public policy should have the dual aims of promoting internal capabilities (e.g. through education or training) and making available the external institutional and material conditions (i.e. providing opportunities and resources) (Kimberley, Gruhn & Huggins 2012).

The practical implementation of capabilities theory in the Tw CoP model is represented in [Figure 2](#).

Capabilities theory informs the model's two core practice approaches: harnessing community investment (an approach to address youth unemployment at a systems level) and Advantaged Thinking (an innovative approach to working with young people). Both are described below.

⁴ See Appendix for further details on TtW CoP purpose and governance

Figure 2 The practical implementation of capabilities theory



Harnessing community investment

A person’s capabilities are always embedded in place. Thus, youth transitions and employment require the harnessing of community investment across sectors to identify effective place-based solutions. Hart explains:

Place is important because it can enable economic security, belonging and freedom. Our desires and aspirations and capacities for creativity and agency are always mediated by place ... People can only be free to be and do the things that they value in places that afford a range of possibilities. (Hart, forthcoming)

Harnessing community investment is tied into the capabilities approach as it means ensuring that the ‘external institutional and material conditions’ young people need to use their skills and talents effectively are in place. This collaboration needs to occur at both national and local levels to address youth unemployment successfully.

BSL defines harnessing community investment as a way of working in partnership with government, business, community organisations, philanthropy and education providers to tackle unemployment. It is about valuing the community’s expertise, knowledge and existing networks, and building on, rather than duplicating, community assets. By working this way, the TtW CoP aims to foster a sense of community ownership, agency and accountability for youth unemployment and how it is addressed; shift views of young people as passive service recipients to valuable contributing members of the community; and build sustainable employment pathways by mobilising community to

enhance young people's opportunities, networks and supports (Brown et al. 2017, p. 26).

Consequently, harnessing community investment aims to drive local job opportunities, to maximise community support and to improve social and physical infrastructure so that it enables rather than hinders young people's education, training and employment.

CoP members develop partnerships with local government, local employers and employer bodies (e.g. Chamber of Commerce), education providers, service and sporting clubs and community organisations (e.g. Headspace). Community Investment Committees (CICs) are the mechanism for bringing together these stakeholders to leverage opportunities, networks and resources and drive systemic change at local and regional levels. TtW CoP service managers have a key initial role in convening and providing support to CICs. However, once established, CICs must be employer-led; have representation from key community players including council, education and community organisations; and be action-focused. Alternatively, if the region has an equivalent body concerned with youth employment, the TtW service manager has a role in connecting with—rather than duplicating—that body. (For more information on harnessing investment as a key part of the model, see Chapter 4.)

Partnerships established by TtW services and through CICs enable the TtW CoP services to link young people to relevant training and real world opportunities such as work tasters, work experience, volunteering and jobs that are aligned with their career interests and are needed to achieve their goals.

Advantaged Thinking

Advantaged Thinking can be understood as the translation of capabilities theory into practice. It is concerned with:

- providing access to the opportunities and resources young people need (targeting the structural/external)
- building agency and motivation through recognising young people's talents and aspirations (targeting the individual/internal).

Access to opportunities is delivered primarily through harnessing community investment, while agency and motivation are developed through enabling relationships.

The Advantaged Thinking practice approach was developed by Colin Falconer in 2009 (initially under the name Open Talent) for the Foyer Foundation in the United Kingdom (Falconer 2018). Advantaged Thinking is disruptive, seeking to shift the kinds of policy and programs targeting young people experiencing forms of disadvantage. Unlike deficits approaches which focus on fixing the problems that young people face, Advantaged Thinking seeks to identify and develop their talents and aspirations. It is broader in scope than strengths-based approaches that typically focus upon individual change. Advantaged Thinking pays equal attention to investing in young people through

brokering opportunities, networks and resources. Supporting young people is viewed as a positive investment because it recognises young people's ability to make a valuable contribution.

One of the ways in which Advantaged Thinking is operationalised is through regular (at least once a fortnight) meetings of young people with Youth Development Coaches (YDCs). Coaching meetings support young people to identify their skills, interests and aspirations; choose and explore career paths; build the skills needed to pursue training; and gain and retain employment. The coaching relationship is not directive but rather intended to guide, support and equip young people to choose and work towards their career goals, while at the same time building the career know-how and self-management skills they will require throughout their working lives. In its submission to the Future Employment Services Consultation, the TtW CoP described the importance of promoting agency and motivating young people by giving them choice and voice in employment services:

The most effective way to activate and incentivise young jobseekers to engage in education, training and work is to build their agency by providing them with the support to identify their aspirations and develop their capabilities. Young people want to work, and enabling them to have choice over their pathways into work, and facilitating access to meaningful opportunities is fundamentally motivating (BSL 2018, p. 24).

Advantaged Thinking in the TtW CoP

In the TtW CoP model, Advantaged Thinking is implemented in five key areas:

Place: Access to facilities that are welcoming and inspiring

People: Building young people's connections to staff, employers and community members who treat them as talented and valuable assets for the community

Opportunities and resources that young people need to achieve their goals (e.g. access to courses, work experience)

The Deal: the reciprocal agreement signed by the student and Youth Development Worker on starting the TtW program. It activates the rights and responsibilities of both participants and staff and seeks to reframe mutual obligation as mutual accountability and reciprocity. Young people receive the supports they need and staff hold high expectations because they view young people as equal partners capable of making a valuable contribution to society.

The Campaign which provides opportunities for young people to present themselves in a positive light and be regarded as valuable citizens in their local community. It focuses on: changing community perceptions; demonstrating that all people have abilities that can be nurtured; promoting young people's talents; and providing them with an opportunity to have a voice and influence. The Campaign ultimately aims to create structural pathways into mainstream business, education and community institutions. The means of developing and delivering on a Campaign

include mentoring young people to become advocates for change⁵ and advocacy by employer champions through CICs.

Service delivery

The TtW CoP has adopted a shared model⁶ for service delivery. TtW CoP services provide vocational guidance; co-designed planning in which young people identify and pursue their career path with support from their coach; skills and capabilities building with a focus on employability skills; and real world opportunities such as work tasters and site visits, work experience and the chance to build a network of contacts to support their career transition (Brown et al. 2017).

Each of these aspects of service delivery is informed by capabilities theory operationalised through Advantaged Thinking. For example, vocational guidance and co-designed planning are predicated on the assumptions that starting with exploring young people's interests and aspirations and seeking to inspire them with career possibilities supports choice, and information about options and processes is necessary for exercising choice (Baker & Perdevich 2017). The TtW CoP model enables young people to exercise their choices by developing agency through enabling relationships informed by Advantaged Thinking and real world opportunities provided by harnessing community investment. In line with the capabilities theory, BSL defines 'agency' as the freedom and capacity of empowered individuals 'to be and to do' in ways they have reason to value (BSL 2017).

The TtW CoP model is delivered in four 'phases'. While the phases provide structure to the model, the intent is that their delivery be adaptive to place, and flexible and tailored to the needs of each young person. For example, some young people do not need to complete every phase; and some need to spend more time on some phases than others. Progression through the phases need not be linear and it is appropriate to backtrack if young people's career aspirations and goals change. The phases are also intended to evolve over time with collective learning and experience. [Figure 3](#) outlines the four phases.

⁵ See the Appendix for information on the TtW CoP Youth Alliance

⁶ For more information about the model refer to the TtW CoP website <https://www.ttwcommunity.com.au/about-us/>

Figure 3 The four phases of the TtW CoP model



Source: Brown et al. 2017, p. 31

The evaluation

Background

Ongoing evaluation by the BSL Research and Policy Centre (RPC) has been integral to the TtW CoP model since its inception in 2016 (see Table 1). The overall aim of the evaluation is to identify ‘what works’ in assisting young people into work. The evaluation supports the ambitions of the TtW CoP, both as an effective service model for moving young people into work, and in achieving systemic change in the way we work with young people experiencing disadvantage (Brown et al. 2017, p. 7).

The RPC works closely with BSL’s Youth Programs team to develop the research, secure CoP buy-in and ensure timely feedback of evaluation findings to the TtW CoP services.

Table 1 Project stages and the evaluation

Year	TtW Operation	Stage	Evaluation
2015	Pre-commissioning of TtW	Stage 1: Formative	Support from RPC in concept development
2016	Year 1 of TtW operation	Stage 2: Development & establishment	Developmental evaluation methods embedded within service development Process evaluation
2017–18	Years 2 & 3 of TtW operation	Stage 3: Scaling up	Action research to support refinement of the model and CoP Focus on Community Investment Committees Quality assurance through feedback
2019	Year 4 of TtW operation	Stage 4: Consolidation	Realist evaluation with feedback loops
2020	Year 5 of TtW operation	Stage 5: Sustain and refine	The value of the TtW Community of Practice to effect systems change (Proposed)

Dissemination

Three reports have been produced prior to this one and have been published together as one comprehensive report (van Kooy et al. 2017). Report 1 sets out BSL’s understanding of youth unemployment as a multi-level problem and outlines what underpins an effective multi-level solution. Report 2 uses interview data and self-reported scorecards to provide insights into the implementation of the model and the CoP, while Report 3 presents data on young people participating in TtW in the first two quarters of operation.

In addition, the RPC delivers bi-annual presentations to the CoP in which research findings are fed back and where appropriate workshopped. It also consults directly with the TtW CoP members when developing data monitoring tools and processes. Other RPC outputs include survey reports to the CoP and in October 2019 a video of young people’s stories about their TtW experience (accessible on the [TtW CoP website](#)).

Aims of this report

This report presents findings from Stage 4 of the evaluation (model consolidation) and contains data collected between December 2018 and August 2019.

The ultimate purpose of the TtW CoP is to improve the nationwide education, training and employment outcomes of young people. The research questions for this stage of the evaluation were:

- What is the value of the TtW CoP model?
- How has the model been implemented?
- What are the broad implications of the model for policy reform?

To address these questions, this report explores whether the TtW CoP implementation is achieving positive education, training and employment outcomes and which elements

of the model are critical to achieving those outcomes. It also focuses on the delivery of the TtW CoP model, including the contribution of the CoP as a conduit of good practice and BSL's role as facilitator.

A theory of change informs our work (Figure 4). If TtW CoP services deliver the model with fidelity while adapting it to place, and they are supported by an enabling organisation, then a number of positive changes will occur. Community organisations will collaborate toward good practice and community investment will be harnessed. Young people will be supported to realise their capabilities through skill development and access to relevant learning opportunities. The end result will be that young people will achieve education, training and employment outcomes.

Our findings in relation to fidelity confirm this theory of change.

Figure 4 TtW CoP theory of change



It is proposed that the next stage of the evaluation (from June 2020) will focus on the broader ambition of the model to effect systems change.

2 Method

To identify the value of the TtW CoP model, we implemented a mixed method evaluation during 2018 and 2019, with most data collected between February and August 2019. To make best use of our limited resources we conducted case studies at three TtW CoP services to gather rich, detailed data and understand the components that were essential for success in that local context. This case study data was augmented with interviews with BSL staff, and the following data collection with the TtW CoP nationwide: focus groups with Youth Development Coaches, workshops with managers, surveys examining partnerships and surveys with young people. Thus, findings about key model components that deliver outcomes as outlined in chapters 5 to 11 draw on additional data sources which were triangulated and may be generalised beyond the three case study sites.

The importance of the concept of place will be evident throughout the method, from the case studies, the attention to context in our method of analysis, the local scans and the survey examining local partnerships. BSL argues:

[Place] must be at the centre of any effective service response because, like other social and economic issues, youth unemployment has a strong geographical dimension. Thus, the opportunities and networks that young people are provided with must be grounded in their local community context in order for them to be able to access them effectively. The necessity for local service implementation through partnerships at the community level, and the value of community embedded organisations in leveraging the trust and resources of a local area, is similarly underlined by research. (Brown et al. 2017)

Qualitative data

The TtW CoP services that participated in case studies were selected because they operated in a variety of contexts. One included a large Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander cohort; the services represented rural, regional and urban areas; and they provided examples of services doing well and services experiencing challenges, both of which could inform our understanding of the model.

The case study sites were VPG in Far North Queensland, Gen-Z Employment on the Gold Coast (also in Queensland) and Colony 47 in southern Tasmania. Researchers spent two to three days at each site conducting focus groups and interviews with young people, staff and (where possible) a representative from their Community Investment Committee or equivalent.

In addition, focus groups were undertaken at YDC forums August 2018 and May 2019 and interviews were conducted with BSL staff involved in convening the CoP. Like the case studies, these aimed to identify the components essential for success, but the participants came from across the entire TtW CoP.

TtW CoP staff interviews and focus group questions varied depending on research participants' roles. They explored the challenges and opportunities for young people in the local area and the organisation operating TtW: staff and their background; what they felt made their service distinctive; their implementation of the TtW CoP model of service delivery including what worked well; the value of the service for young people; the service's partnerships in the broader community including through CICs.

Interviews with BSL staff included similar foci but were also concerned with their establishment and coordination of the CoP, and the value they offered to services.

Interviews with young people asked about their experience before and during TtW and their hopes for the future, with a focus on their transition support needs and what the service had offered them.

In total 67 interviews and focus groups were conducted: 36 with young people; 24 with CoP members and 7 with the BSL staff convening the CoP. These were audio-recorded and transcribed. A preliminary thematic analysis was undertaken using QSR NVivo software.

To understand how the CoP functioned, the researchers participated in the following meetings:

- fortnightly BSL CoP Steering Committee meetings
- fortnightly BSL CoP Practice Development & Evaluation meetings
- annual TtW CoP Youth Development Coach forums
- bi-annual TtW CoP forums.

Quantitative data

An online partnerships and opportunities survey was conducted between December 2018 and February 2019 to identify how providers harnessed community partnerships and quantify the economic opportunities being developed by the CICs. Eleven of the 13 TtW CoP services responded.

Bi-annual monitoring is also supported by the researchers in collaboration with the BSL Youth Programs team. This includes:

- 1 An online survey with young people participating in TtW CoP services to check that their experience has been consistent with the Advantaged Thinking approach. Surveys in September 2018, February and August 2019 collected a total of 1720 returns⁷.

⁷ Additional information about the most recent survey can be found in The experience of Advantaged Thinking on p. 42.

- 2 Analysis of the government Employment Services System (ESS) data by the BSL Convenor. This service level analysis charts key performance indicators and outcomes, and compares these to the average performance for (a) the TtW CoP and (b) all TtW services.

Measuring fidelity to the model and outcomes

An important question in assessing the value of the model is: if services demonstrate fidelity to the core practice ‘approaches’ of the TtW CoP model, do they achieve better outcomes? To test the assumption that Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment would affect outcomes, we used the data from the online surveys with TtW participants to see whether they were experiencing Advantaged Thinking, and the online partnerships and opportunities survey with services to look at the degree to which they had harnessed community through partnerships and CICs. This survey data was used to measure the degree to which services had adopted the model. We called this a fidelity scale.

The fidelity scale was constructed by adding four equally weighted items for each service:

- the fraction of young people with a strong experience of the Advantaged Thinking approach (raw score up to 1). This was assessed by their agreement with a series of general statements about their experience of their TtW CoP service—for example, whether they had experienced positive and motivating relationships, felt empowered, equipped to pursue their career goals, assisted to access opportunities and networks of people relevant to their goals, and whether there had been opportunity to reflect and learn from their experience. Thus, if 80 per cent of young people at a service agreed with the statements, the fraction was 0.8.
- the fraction of young people who participated in at least 8 of the 10 activity categories considered core to the TtW CoP model (raw score up to 1). Each activity category represents a check of how closely a phase of the model is being delivered. Activity categories include coaching, career exploration, goal-setting/planning, group activities, job search skills, work preparation and industry-specific learning and work experience. Thus, if 60 per cent of young people at a service completed at least 8 activities, the fraction was 0.6.
- the number of external partnerships achieved with sectors that support young people’s career transition, expressed as a proportion of an urban or rural benchmark⁸ (with a maximum score of 1). Thus, if a service achieved three-quarters of the benchmark, their score would be 0.75.

⁸ Services that responded to this survey question reported between 24 and 716 external partnerships; the ‘middle’ service had 62. Many contextual factors determine the possible and desirable number of partnerships for a service. However, a proxy of ‘sufficient partnerships’ was

- whether the service had a Community Investment Committee or equivalent (raw score 1) or not (raw score 0).

The total score out of 4 was then converted to a percentage.

In chapter 4, we explore whether fidelity to the model leads to improved outcomes. To do this, the fidelity percentage score for each service is plotted against that service's 12-week education and or employment outcomes (October 2019) as a percentage of the government outcomes targets.

Scans

Youth employment programs have typically focused on 'supply' (i.e. the availability of workers with the requisite skills and attitudes) and paid too little attention to context including 'demand' (i.e. are there any jobs?). This is problematic as described below:

The economic, supply-driven approach of many programmes does not work because it is mainly structural problems, rather than individual shortcomings, that prevent young people from finding jobs. (Flynn & Mader 2017, p. 6)

Since the outcomes for programs such as TtW are likely to be affected by 'demand', the researchers conducted scans of the three case study regions to understand the contexts in which the services operated. Data included the unemployment rate, the availability of education and training, measures of socioeconomic disadvantage and key employing industries.

Methodology

This stage of the evaluation is guided by the realist evaluation approach developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). The approach arises out of the understanding that firstly, the gold standard of evaluation—randomised control trials—is neither affordable nor practical in many circumstances; and secondly, program success is highly dependent upon context. 'Successful' programs fail in other locations if the context [the particular social and cultural conditions supporting the 'successful' program] cannot be met. Realist evaluation is therefore concerned with identifying 'what works for whom in what circumstances' (Pawson & Tilley 1997, p. 85).

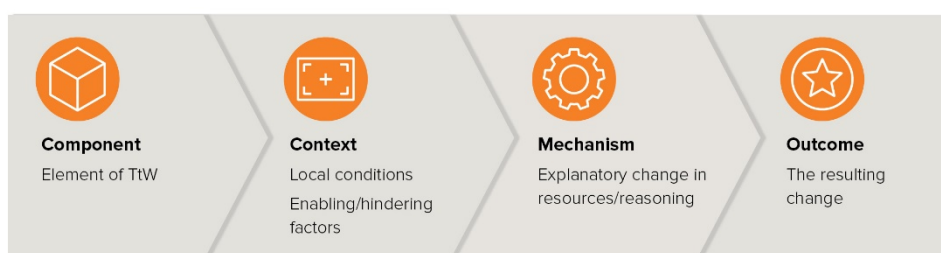
Consistent with realist evaluation, hypotheses were developed and tested using the formula: Context + Mechanism = Outcome (Pawson & Tilley 1997) (see [Figure 5](#)). The benefit of this approach is that it is theory-driven but has empirical rigour. In this evaluation qualitative data and quantitative data are brought together to test the strength of hypotheses. The realist evaluation method is concerned with identifying the

needed for our scale. Based on the range of survey responses, the researchers regarded 50 partnerships in urban areas or 40 in rural areas as benchmarks.

conditions that enable success (or partial success) as well as the counterfactual—that is, what was missing when a program didn't work.

The attraction of this approach lies in the fact that it notes real life programs are rarely entirely successful or entirely unsuccessful, but have patches of success and failure. Also, it is common to find that a program judged to have worked well in one place fails in another or in subsequent years. Realist Evaluation (RE) not only focuses on underlying factors behind outcomes but the various ways in which they can combine and recombine to cause outcomes. (Jolly & Jolly 2014, p. 29)

Figure 5 The realist method of analysis



Seven key findings

Seven hypotheses, each encompassing contexts (C), mechanisms (M) and outcomes (O) of particular model components, were developed. While these drew primarily on case study data and interviews with BSL staff, they also utilised the surveys, scans and data analyses that were conducted as part of the evaluation. Each 'CMO' describes how a TtW CoP model component works as supported by the evaluation evidence.

3 Context matters: our 3 case study locations

The TtW CoP model alone cannot solve youth unemployment; the capacity of the model to achieve outcomes is constrained or enhanced by the context—economic, social and demographic—in which it is delivered. In October 2019, 12 per cent of Australians aged 15–24 years were unemployed, which was almost three times the 3.9 per cent unemployment rate for workers 25 and over (BSL 2019b). Moreover, unemployment is not evenly distributed but concentrated in areas of disadvantage. In several regional ‘hotspots’ youth unemployment rates have been well over 20% (BSL 2019c). Hotspots are caused primarily by lack of physical infrastructure (e.g. transport), social infrastructure (e.g. access to education, services and networks) and decent, entry-level jobs. These issues are greater in regional and rural Australia.

Across TtW CoP services overall, the most common barriers to young people attending the program or participating in training, education or employment, were transport and mental health (BSL Advantaged Thinking survey results August 2019):

- 34 per cent missed out on opportunities due to lack of transport.
- 29 per cent missed out due to mental health issues.

Poor mental health is sometimes treated as a purely individual problem by employment services. However, it is also a social phenomenon that requires broader attention in social policy and programs. Similarly, lack of transport could be conceived as an individual problem (lack of a licence or car) but we contend it is a social problem requiring improved community infrastructure such as increased bus services.

Three services were chosen as case study sites through a process of self-nomination and nomination by the TtW CoP. Nomination criteria and final selection ensured that these services would provide insight into service delivery in a range of organisational and regional contexts, and with different cohorts. The three services were Colony 47 in Tasmania, VPG in Far North Queensland and Gen-Z on the Gold Coast. All three are in states with higher than average youth unemployment rates (Tasmania 14.5% and Queensland 14% in October 2019 (12 month averages, ABS 2019b)). In this section we look at the factors enabling or inhibiting outcomes at each service. These were identified through statistical data and interviews with TtW staff and stakeholders.

Far North Queensland: VPG

Figure 6 Cairns and surrounding area



Figure 7 Photos at and around VPG, Far North Queensland



Top row: 1. Cairns communal kitchen and 2. Computer room. 3. Road to Yarrabah, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community

Bottom row: 1. Atherton office and 2. Outdoor area.

VPG has the largest number of funded TtW places in the CoP and a very high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.⁹ It delivers the TtW CoP program in one provincial city (Cairns) and three regional areas: Tablelands (Atherton and Mareeba); Cassowary Coast (Innisfail); and Yarrabah (an Aboriginal community 52 km from Cairns). Manunda (Cairns) has the lowest percentage of population born in Australia (59.7%), and Yarrabah the highest at 99.3%. (ABS Census 2016). The four program sites are all classified as disadvantaged according to SEIFA, with Yarrabah rated at the highest level of disadvantage (ABS 2018); but there is great variation in demographics and opportunities.

In 2016 the percentage of 15–24 year olds who were employed ranged from 10.5% in Yarrabah to 39% in Cairns, with 16.9% of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Atherton, 20.6% in Cairns and 62% in Yarrabah (ABS 2016). More recent statistics (December 2019) show an all-age unemployment rate of 4.9% in

⁹ In the VPG case load at May 2020, 73.1% were Indigenous young people.

Atherton and 55.6% in Yarrabah with Manunda (Cairns) between the two at 11.2% (DESSFB 2019b). The youth unemployment rate in Cairns in October 2019 was 9.9 per cent (ABS 2019b).

The biggest employing industries for youth in Cairns are accommodation and food services. Other main employing industries for young people in Cairns are retail trade, and health care. Accommodation and food services, and retail trade, along with agriculture are also the top employing industries for youth in Atherton, Mareeba and Innisfail. In Yarrabah, a small and relatively isolated community run by the local Aboriginal Shire Council, employment opportunities for young people are very different: the three largest youth employing industries are public administration, health care and social assistance, and education and training (ABS Census 2016).

VPG staff told us that there are good entry-level jobs in hospitality and retail in Cairns, opportunities in health, and access to apprenticeships in construction, and traineeships in business and administration. However, these are only available to young people who have the necessary tickets, licences, skills and cars. After a low period since the global financial crisis, building is starting to boom again, with new hotels providing increased construction and hospitality positions.

Although there are very few positions, young people living in Yarrabah are more likely to get work there than in Cairns. The lack of public transport and private vehicles makes living in Yarrabah and studying or working out of the community untenable. A Yarrabah YDC told us:

There is no transport from here to there ... a lot of people haven't even got their own personal vehicles, nor do the youth have vehicles as well. So, that's a little bit of an issue to get into Cairns, so that's why we provide the transport ... we can only [take] seven people because that's the amount that can fit into our bus, seven people. I always believe it would be nice if we had like a kind of student house in town—and a caretaker in town—so that we can drop those kids there, they can go to their courses and we have that support for them to go to their RTO training. (YDC)

Young people in the other regional towns, including Innisfail, where VPG delivers the TtW program are usually limited to online courses due to distance and lack of transport.

By contrast, Cairns is well supplied with educational institutions, with two universities, several TAFE institutions and a range of RTOs, some of which deliver training at VPG. A YDC in Cairns listed low literacy and numeracy, lack of stable accommodation and transport gaps as key inhibitors of young people's participation in TtW and education, training and employment. She had also observed a pattern of reluctance to employ young Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people.

Gold Coast: Gen-Z

Figure 8 Gold Coast Region map



Figure 9 Photo of Mermaid Beach (location of Gen-Z head office), Gen-Z office



Gen-Z delivers the TtW CoP program at three suburban sites on the Gold Coast: Southport, Mermaid Beach and Varsity Lakes. On the SEIFA index, Mermaid Beach and Varsity Lakes have lower levels of disadvantage than the national average; but Southport has above-average disadvantage (ABS 2018). The percentage of the population born in Australia ranged between 49.8% and 59.7% with a lower than

national average Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander population and a large Chinese population in Southport and Varsity Lakes (ABS 2016).

The sites where Gen-Z delivers the TtW program have higher proportions of young people (15–24) in the population than all the sites serviced by VPG and Colony 47 (the other two case studies) except for Yarrabah where almost a quarter of the population is in this age range (ABS 2016).

Demographic differences between suburbs are more modest than in VPG's remit. However, the ABS Census 2016 showed only 44.5% of youth employed in Southport North, compared with 65.9% in Mermaid Beach; and 8.7% of young people as NEET in Southport South, but only 6.8% in Varsity Lakes (ABS Census 2016). December 2019 figures show all-age unemployment rates of 5.4% in Varsity Lakes and 3.5% in Mermaid Beach (DESSFB 2019b). The youth unemployment rate on the Gold Coast in October 2019 was 12.8% (ABS 2019b).

Among the unemployed young people in the Gold Coast case study areas, there are two groups with very different needs and approaches to the labour market—students and non-students. There is a large student population, in part due to the Griffith University Campus in Southport, and they make up the majority of unemployed youth in all of the areas except Mermaid Beach, where a slight majority of unemployed youth are non-students.

Like Cairns, the Gold Coast is a holiday destination offering employment in retail trade and accommodation and food services, highly casualised sectors with seasonal fluctuation. Health care and social assistance is the third largest employer of young people in Varsity Lakes and Southport, and the fourth after construction in Mermaid Beach (ABS 2016).

The Gen-Z CEO summed up the employment landscape as follows:

The Gold Coast is quite a unique environment ... unique in the fact that its pillars are very obvious industries, which do have an impact on opportunities for young people. We have five universities in this region, which is pretty impressive ... Education as an industry is probably one of the biggest industries on the Gold Coast, particularly international education. And then we've got the big ones like tourism and hospitality, construction and of course retail. A lot of growth in light commercial, so a lot of growth in logistics as the northern corridor opens up so big employers like Caterpillar [machinery manufacturer], Toll [freight transport service] are opening up big areas out at Helensvale, Ashmore way. So, they're presenting lots of opportunities. (CEO)

There has also been an increase in small businesses, including 'huge growth' in the prestige boat building industry (Gen-Z manager). In 2019, the job market, including entry-level jobs was strong on the Gold Coast. The challenges were the casual and seasonal nature of many jobs, which do not provide economic security.

Hobart region: Colony 47

Figure 10 Map of Hobart and surrounds



Figure 11 Photos 1. Hobart and 2. Colony 47 Hobart office and 3. Glenorchy office



Colony 47 delivers the TtW CoP program in Hobart and the South East region of Tasmania, an area with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Australia at 17.8 % in December 2018 (BSL 2019c). Colony 47 has offices in central Hobart and in Glenorchy, an outer suburb; Sorell; New Norfolk; and Huonville, a rural area. On the SEIFA index, New Norfolk and Glenorchy fall in the most disadvantaged 10% (decile 1), with Sorell and Huonville less disadvantaged (decile 4) and Hobart less again at decile 6 (ABS 2018). In the areas covered by Colony 47, the NEET rate was highest in New Norfolk (18.1%) followed by Glenorchy (15.5%) (ABS 2016). Overall unemployment rates in December 2019 ranged from 4.5% in Sorell to 13.6% in Glenorchy (DESSFB 2019b). The youth unemployment rate in Hobart in October 2019 was 15.7 per cent (ABS 2019b).

Accommodation and food services and retail trade are the largest youth employing industries in all the Colony 47 sites, with construction the third largest in Sorell, New Norfolk and Huonville, and health care and social assistance third in Hobart and Glenorchy (ABS 2016).

Education options are limited by access to transport at most sites other than central Hobart. In Glenorchy, for example, a YDC reported that there were few course options at the local Year 11–12 college, and lack of easy access to other colleges:

If they want to go on to Year 12, there's really only one option here, Claremont College. Everywhere else—public transport, we've just got the bus system, that's it ... The nearest colleges are Hobart College, which is the other side of the Hobart CBD, or Rosny College, which is across the river. So that's, like, two or three buses to get there, you'd have to get up really early to get all the connecting buses, and sometimes the connecting buses don't work, so say if they were enrolled at Rosny College, if there was a course there they want to do that wasn't offered over here, it's quite difficult for them to get to.
(YDC)

There are few TAFE options in the area; TAFEs offer a butchery training course in Glenorchy, metal engineering in Derwent Park and plumbing in Claremont. According to a Colony 47 manager there is a mismatch between the main job growth sector (health care and social assistance) and young people's awareness and interest:

Tassie has one of the highest ageing populations in Australia and that industry [aged care] is growing. And how we connect young people into that sector is probably the biggest challenge as working in aged care or disability care might not seem like a good career option for young people. So the challenge is how do we work together with their industry ... around how that could be a viable career option. (Manager)

A coordinator told us that the lack of transport was a major difficulty for young people outside Hobart.

The work at Sorell is more down the Tasman Peninsula, so the transport can be a barrier for young people. Up in the Derwent Valley, which is our New Norfolk office, employment is just really limited. It's really who you know. A lot of family businesses

and a lot of small businesses ... There's no opportunity with a big business up there to take on multiple people. Or even work experience or internships. (Coordinator)

Differences in infrastructure and opportunities between the 13 sites where VPG, Gen-Z and Colony 47 provide the program indicate the variety of locations in which the TtW CoP is delivered. A flexible response that adapts to place while maintaining fidelity to evidence-informed core approaches and components is key to obtaining the best outcomes for young people.

4 High fidelity to the model leads to high outcomes for young people

Interview data indicated that BSL staff and CoP members considered the core practice approaches of the model—Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment—to be critical to success.

An important evaluation task was thus to develop a measure of fidelity to these core practice approaches to test whether these were indeed associated with good outcomes for participants, specifically participation in education, attainment of new qualifications, employment for 12 weeks or a hybrid outcome (i.e. combination of education and employment).

Fidelity measure

The TtW CoP model and therefore the fidelity measure was concerned with both (1) the degree to which young people experienced Advantaged Thinking in the form of enabling relationships that supported their career aspirations, and opportunities in the form of activities, and (2) the degree to which services harnessed community investment.

The fidelity measure was constructed by adding four equally weighted items for each service. For details, refer to the Method chapter.

Good outcomes

Good outcomes were defined using DESE's 'outcomes to target measure'. The department sets a target which the service is expected to achieve over a 12-week period. The target is the combined total of four types of expected outcomes participation in education, educational attainment, participation in employment and hybrid outcomes (i.e. a combination of education and employment). The target does not include sustainability outcomes because these are achieved over 26 weeks. Outcomes to target is expressed as a percentage. For example, 75 per cent means a service has achieved only three-quarters of expected outcomes and over 100 per cent means it is exceeding the department's expectations.

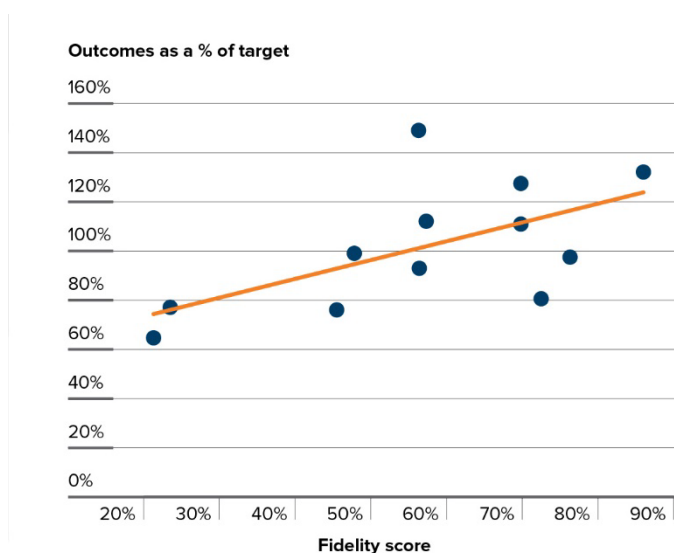
The relationship between model fidelity and good outcomes

We found a strong and statistically significant correlation (Pearson Correlation .597 significance .04 two-tailed test) between services that followed the core approaches of the model closely and their outcomes to target.

Only two organisations with high fidelity (i.e. over 70%) did not meet their outcomes target. One of these was at 91%. The other had lower utilisation rate (that is, fewer young people entered the program than anticipated when the government set outcomes targets) which may explain this anomaly. Only one organisation with low fidelity (i.e. under 50%) achieved high outcomes.

The positive correlation between model fidelity and achievement of outcomes targets is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Model fidelity



Each dot represents a TtW CoP service. The orange trend line shows that the higher the fidelity score, the higher the outcomes. Because some services exceeded their targets the graph shows outcome percentages of up to 160%. One service was omitted from the calculations (and the graph) because it was an extreme outlier, achieving 300% of its outcomes target.

Core practice approaches driving outcomes

Services with high fidelity to the core practice approaches of the TtW CoP model, Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment had the best outcomes to target. Participant survey results showed that overwhelmingly the young people nationwide rated the services very highly in regard to their experience of Advantaged Thinking. Core activities such as goal-setting and job search skills were received by a high percentage of young people, though there was room for improvement in some areas such as work experience. Services had developed a wide range of partnerships that delivered appropriate opportunities to young people. However, setting up a CIC remains a work in progress for just under half of the services. Detailed findings from the surveys are provided below.

The experience of Advantaged Thinking

An online survey is conducted bi-annually to measure young people’s experience of their TtW CoP service and check this is consistent with the Advantaged Thinking approach. In August 2019, 915 young people from the 13 TtW CoP services returned surveys, a return rate of 33 per cent of funded places. Three-quarters or 673 had been at the service for

at least two months, and so were able to reflect more meaningfully on their experience. This smaller group was used in the calculations of model fidelity and is the focus of the rest of this analysis. Respondents were fairly equally divided between men and women, and had a mean age of 19. Ninety-one per cent were Australian-born; 26 per cent identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁰

Participation in activities

The top five activities participants had completed were fortnightly coaching (90%); exploring strengths, talents and possible careers (93%); goal-setting and planning (93%); learning job search skills (87%); and work preparation (74%).

Less common were group activities to try new things (67%); support with personal issues (66%); learning about a workplace (55%); industry-specific training (42%); and work experience, volunteering or an internship (41%).

Advantaged Thinking

Young people were presented with a series of statements about their TtW service designed to measure their experience of Advantaged Thinking. Most young people agreed with the statements, suggesting that most are experiencing an Advantaged Thinking approach.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that staff treated them respectfully (96%); had high expectations of them and believed they could achieve their goals (88%); recognised they were the best person to plan their future and provided them with support to do that (88%). Eighty-three per cent said TtW inspired and motivated them to make plans for their life.

Ninety per cent said they were learning how to find out about employment opportunities and 85 per cent about training/education opportunities. Some 79 per cent said TtW connected them with people (e.g. teachers, employers, mentors) who can help them work towards their goals.

The survey comments were almost entirely positive:

The TtW program is good because it helps motivate young people to achieve their goals and helps with finding and keeping stable jobs while giving them a realistic view of industries. (19-year-old woman, NSW)

What is good about the TtW program is meeting other people like me and getting the chance to see what's out there and try new things that would normally be uncomfortable for me, really helping my confidence grow. (18-year-old woman, Victoria)

¹⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people formed a large group among the TtW CoP service participants, due in part to TtW eligibility criteria designed to improve the access of this group.

They have lovely people who support your choices and ideas. (19-year-old man, NSW)

TtW has been a stepping stone bringing me closer to my goals in life. (18-year-old man, NT)

Interviews provided elaboration. For example, a 15-year-old Queensland woman said:

When I stepped foot in here for the first day ever, I was nervous and by the end of that day I wanted to learn again ... I loved it. It was just such a better way for me to learn and talk and have my opinion in class ... [I] had the freedom and ... [was] spoken to as an adult not a child ... We had respect and we gave it back ... From there I just went up and I was participating in everything, coming here every day. (Ella, VPG)

Harnessing community investment

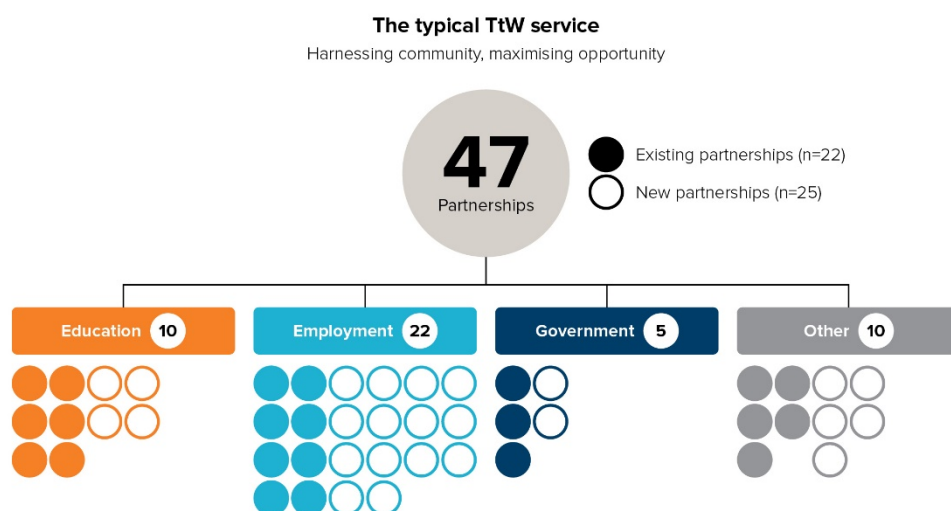
Harnessing community investment is the second core approach of the TtW CoP model and is also associated with achieving good outcomes. Between December 2018 and February 2019, 11 of the 13 TtW CoP services completed an online partnerships survey. The survey aimed to identify and quantify how providers enlist community through partnerships with education, employment, government and other sectors to support young people’s transition to work and maximise the opportunities open to them. Additionally, the second half of the survey asked about economic opportunities being developed by CICs.

Partnerships

For the purposes of the survey, ‘partnerships’ could be formal or informal; they could provide something that benefited the service and/or participants; they could take the form of shared protocols, projects, individual plans and referral agreements.

The typical TtW service had 47 partnerships: 22 existing prior to their delivery of TtW and 25 new partnerships. Figure 13 shows the pattern of partnerships.

Figure 13 TtW CoP partnerships



EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

The typical service had 22 employment partnerships (8 existing and 14 new). These were with employers, chambers of commerce, business networks, not-for-profits and employment services. These partners provided guest speakers, work tasters, workplace tours, volunteering, work experience, apprenticeships/traineeships and employment opportunities. In addition to providing direct opportunities for young people, they contributed to the Campaign to challenge deficit models and view young people as valuable citizens. Partnerships benefited employers by increasing their knowledge of government initiatives to support their take-up of young people, for example wage subsidies and PaTH internships.

EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

The typical service had 10 education partnerships: 6 existing and 4 new. Around one-quarter of services said the TtW CoP model had not extended or enhanced these partnerships as they already existed; this was particularly the case in regions with fewer education institutions.

Partners provided education site tours and opportunities to participate in community networks, share expertise and associate with providers. They provided programs and education or careers advice and plans for individuals. The benefits for TtW services included improved communication, information, resource sharing and collaboration. The partnerships also increased access to community activities for young people generally. For example, in some locations, some young people not signed up to TtW were invited to participate in TtW workshops and short courses.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The average TtW CoP service had 5 partnerships with government, of which 3 were existing. Six services said the model had enhanced or extended existing partnerships. The noted benefits were improved networks and collaboration, co-location, shared initiatives and the development of hybrid models of education and training. Such partnerships also opened the door to employers:

Federal government partnerships have facilitated higher level conversations with larger employers to be more open for entry-level positions. (YouthWorx NT, survey)

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

The typical service had 10 partnerships with other sectors, of which half were new. These included housing, general health, mental health, drug and alcohol services, family support and counselling services, sporting clubs and gyms. The benefits included improved community networks, advice and individual plans, programs, more successful referrals, specialist health and wellbeing support, co-delivery of workshops and guest speakers.

Community Investment Committees

In the TtW CoP model, another important dimension of harnessing community investment is the establishment of Community Investment Committees.

The National Youth Employment Body¹¹ in collaboration with the TtW CoP, developed a tool kit for CICs, defining them as follows:

A CIC is a local collaborative, multi-sectoral mechanism which brings together key local actors to create and strengthen pathways that intentionally support young people into meaningful jobs, now and into the future. The aim of the CIC is to share diverse local knowledge, leverage community support and partnerships to co-develop opportunities that add value to work already taking place in the community. A CIC hopes to achieve this through developing an understanding of barriers to youth employment pathways and identifying ways to overcome these. (BSL 2019c, p. 3)

CICs are not only multi-sectoral, they are also intentional, transactional and transformative. They mobilise ‘the right people’ to take action and add value from their area of expertise. Fully fledged CICs must be employer-led, with employer members recognised as champions of youth employment who promote good practice, invest in young people’s capabilities and increase the economic opportunities for young people in their region.

In their study of the wider issue of collaboration in Australia and New Zealand, Butcher et al. (2019) observed that collaborations involve long lead times for design and implementation. Collaborators need to develop legitimacy and trust, and agree on the framing of the problem and ways of working. Once established, the strength of collaboration is the ‘the crafting of fit-for-purpose local solutions addressing local priorities whilst allowing for local stewardship’ (p. 81). Moreover, these forms of collaboration require ‘... an acceptance of complexity, uncertainty, and diversity of approach. Consequently, it is not feasible to impose a standardised collaboration framework with little regard to local circumstances and local aspirations’ (p. 81).

These strengths and challenges are evident in the TtW CoP experience. From the model’s inception in 2016, Community Investment Committees were envisaged as critical mechanisms for harnessing community investment, leveraging opportunities—and furthering the Campaign—for young people and driving systemic change. However, by November 2019:

- only 6 services had an operational CIC (3) or equivalent regional committee (3) [CIC: BSL FMP; BSL Hume; Anglicare. Equivalent: YouthWorx, VPG, Gen-Z]
- two services were in the process of developing CICs [SIP, Brophy]
- two services had had operational CICs, which were now in hiatus [Joblink Midwest, Colony 47]

¹¹ See Appendix for more detail on the National Youth Employment Body

- three services had no CIC or equivalent [Workaways Qld & Workaways Gippsland, ACSO].

Since the survey, Joblink Midwest and Colony 47 have embarked on redeveloping CICs.

Scant early documentation on CICs meant that they were not recognised by all CoP members as an important element of the model and services without expertise in this area focused on their contractual obligations in delivering the TtW service to young people. Staffing issues such as understaffing and staff turnover were also hindering factors, as establishing a CIC requires considerable work.

Some reasons for TtW CoP services' slow establishment of CICs and difficulty in retaining them were identified by BSL staff. Ondine explained:

I think it took a while for the concept to be understood, it took a while for some confidence around how to do it ... There's just a lot of hesitation about 'What is this? What's the first conversation like?' You can see now it's starting to gather momentum—and also it takes a bit of resourcing.

The survey collected information about the CICs established by February 2019. At that time, these CICs had been operating up to three years, met between bi-monthly and quarterly and had between 6 and 22 members. Members included employers, government departments (Education, Industry & Skills, Human Services), local councils, TAFEs and training organisations, employment agencies, business groups and sporting bodies.

CICs had discussed barriers to youth employment, contributed to the National Employment Reference Group and acted as champions in the community, for example by encouraging their suppliers to work with TtW. Thus, CICs appear to be providing the types of opportunities that were envisaged, as well identifying and responding to employment issues, and engaging in advocacy to further the Campaign to promote young people and their potential contribution to employers and in the community. One survey response indicated the range of activities:

Members have differing capacities. Some members conduct tours, some employ our young people, some provide work experience, some provide their experiences to young people in our experiential learning groups. Currently the major activity of the CIC collective is to create and run a 'community careers fair' ... to introduce the community (young people and parents included) about the different work opportunities in our community that are more than just 'go to university'. Our CIC is pretty unique, in that many of them are, in some way, in competition with each other. At the moment they are trying to 'grow the pie' so that they all win, rather than competing [for jobs] for the same small number of young people. (Anglicare South Australia, survey)

This suggests that CICs can be critical mechanisms that address youth employment in their local context. This is also the case for similar pre-existing local networks in which TtW services have elected to participate.

Seven key components delivering outcomes

Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment are the practice approaches central to the achievement of good outcomes for TtW CoP participants. More specifically, through analysis of the qualitative data we have identified seven key components that contribute to good outcomes. These are:

- **Convening component**
 - BSL as an enabling organisation
- **Model components**
 - four-phase model
 - activating employers
- **Practice components**
 - the Deal
 - exploration, inspiration and goal-setting (Phase 1)
 - group work (Phase 1)
 - work skills, tasters and experiences (Phases 2 & 3)

These key components are understood to produce **outcomes** by generating **mechanisms**. Very simply, mechanisms are the change or process that leads to the outcomes. Mechanisms are triggered by delivery of the component, but only in certain **contexts**. Contexts can be macro or micro, internal or external to the model. For each of the key model components we asked:

- Is there evidence the component gets the outcome wanted? (Outcome)
- What is important about the way the component is delivered to getting the outcome—the enabling and hindering factors? (Context)
- What change occurs between the delivery of a component and an outcome—*how* it works? (Mechanism)

The findings in the following sections (5 to 11) of the report are presented in a format which highlights the reasoning that underpins realist methodology which considers context, mechanism and outcomes (Pawson & Tilley 1997).

5 BSL as an enabling organisation

Component

BSL has a long history of undertaking developmental work in the community sector to achieve service innovation. This innovation is coupled with action research that informs program development, and evaluation that identifies the broad outcomes achieved by interventions and provides an evidence base when advocating for policy reform, system reform and social change. However, while BSL undertakes developmental work by investing in—and operating—new programs and services, it also collaborates with like-minded organisations and invests resources to enable them to undertake service innovation.

The BSL initiated the TtW Community of Practice as a vehicle to equip and support TtW services and promote youth employment policy innovation. BSL's convenor role includes model documentation and tools for practice; communication within the CoP; professional consulting and trouble-shooting; mechanisms for the sharing of expertise; multi-level training (i.e. training for frontline staff to leaders); practice improvement; monitoring, action research and evaluation; and advocacy work. The following quote from a TtW manager sums up the resources and services BSL delivers and is representative of the high value accorded these benefits by CoP members in general:

What the Brotherhood does as the lead agency gives us [the TtW services] so much depth that we wouldn't have as a little not-for-profit. It gives us authenticity ... it gives us a bit of kudos and credential especially when you're talking to politicians. We can't guarantee we would have got the contract without the Community of Practice. And the resources and the research ... we didn't have the capacity to deliver those resources ... To actually have a best practice model hand delivered to us ... I know we paid a fee¹² but still, that's just worth volumes for us. And the professional development for us as a team is amazing. As far as the forums and coming together as a whole, the value of being able to share information across other organisations, I don't think you can put value on that.
(Stephanie, Manager)

Context

The context is that BSL has the capacity to invest resources in service innovation and evaluation, and it has the demonstrated ability to build relationships with like-minded

¹² Members pay 3% of the payment associated with their contracted caseload to BSL as the convenor of the CoP. A cap will be introduced in 2020 to keep the percentage payment reasonable for very large services with high caseloads and incomes.

community organisations that are willing to pilot new approaches. BSL assumed the role of an 'enabling organisation' (not a prime provider). The CoP is characterised by:

- voluntary participation by members which have autonomy through individual contracts with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. This means that if one organisation underperforms, it does not affect the contracts of the rest
- regular meetings with sessions relevant to executives, service managers and frontline staff. Meetings include input from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and an evaluation update from the BSL Research and Policy Centre
- sharing of commercial in-confidence data to facilitate collective practice improvement. Under current competitive tendering arrangements disclosure carries some risk from a business perspective so this sharing is a considerable achievement
- support to deliver the model through regular training sessions, consultancy and trouble-shooting. Key support personnel are funded and employed by BSL as the CoP convenor. A Practice Manager supports the Advantaged Thinking approach and a Service Development Coordinator focuses on the implementation of the model, identifying service strengths and areas for improvement. These staff noted that their starting point is not 'You need to fix this' but instead responding to members' requests for assistance. A BSL Senior Manager emphasised collaborating rather than being too prescriptive about the model:

The Brotherhood works in that collaborative way and we don't own IP and we're not too authoritative around it ... It can't just be us ... We drive it all behind the scenes ... but all the members of the CoP step up and keep each other accountable as well. (Ondine, BSL staff)

As a consequence of the collaborative way of working, the CoP convenor is seen by its members to be offering a valuable resource rather than policing fidelity.

Mechanism

CoP members are energised through sharing experience as part of a larger Community of Practice. Attendees say that CoP meetings provide a connection 'to something bigger' and reinforce the model. The opportunity to learn from each other is 'refreshing' and 'inspiring' and they return 'energised and invigorated'. As one CEO reported:

[On the YDC Forum] They love them ... that's the thing that reinforces the philosophy and the resources and the model ... [For newer staff that] we sent down last year, who hadn't been exposed to it, it just ignites a spark. (Elizabeth, CEO)

Members have developed a sense of collegiality, trust and commitment to improving services for young people. While this took some time to develop, it is regarded as a key factor in the CoP's success. The CoP and particularly BSL as its convenor built trust by listening, being inclusive and developing a shared agenda. This approach works. According to one manager:

I never feel like we're just little. I always feel at those meetings that they're very much invested in listening to what everyone has to say and taking that on board. They're not dictating what they want us to do. The Community of Practice is a very inclusive group of people and although they're the lead, it's not from them down. I feel that any message they would send—it's not their agenda, it's our agenda. (Stephanie, Manager)

Members feel supported and resourced by the CoP convenor to deliver the model. They share a commitment to service improvement and experience an authorising environment in relation to innovation. A BSL manager described how there was scope to deliver things in differing ways:

The key features of the model and the practice are broad enough to adapt ... and be implemented using different resources and tools. But there's always a balance between rigour and flexibility ... [For example] understanding how the Deal might bind different circumstances and when you do the Deal ... Also understanding the different structure of the model, not being too rigid around the different phases and being clear about where young people are ready for what, so we're not literal about that. (Ondine, BSL staff)

Outcomes

The outcomes of the enabling organisation model have been that new approaches to addressing youth unemployment are trialled and promoted, both within the community sector and to government, that service-to-service collaboration occurs independently of BSL, and that CoP members further develop their practice and the model to suit their local context, and are equipped to undertake program and policy advocacy.

Trialling new ways of addressing youth unemployment

The CoP has enabled the trialling of new approaches to youth employment service delivery by member agencies across Australia. The implementation of Advantaged Thinking is one example of this. The CEO of VPG said two of their staff visited the Education First Youth Foyer to learn about Advantaged Thinking and then worked to 'custom-design a centre completely flavoured by Advantaged-based Thinking'. While each location has to 'localise' the approach, she believes that the implementation of Advantaged Thinking 'shows in our outcomes ... the outcomes are achievable if the model is faithfully implemented' (Danielle, CEO).

A Youth Development Coach in a focus group said she had moved from a 'KPI-driven' background wherein 'you had 10 carpenters to "get out", that was your focus, they were like a number'. The shift to Advantaged Thinking was a 'huge learning curve' but she said: 'It's been a great change for me to learn from the youth as well ... I wish I had the Seven Tests¹³ in my previous role, and the structure.'

¹³ The Seven Tests of Advantaged Thinking (AT) is a checklist of seven areas where AT should be practised—for example, how you talk about people, how you involve people in their own solutions. Each area offers a way to explore, strengthen or transform the way current belief

The National Employment Reference Group (NERG) is a collaborative reference group of employers initiated by the TtW CoP.¹⁴ It represents a further example of the CoP facilitating a new way of working. While work with young people (supply) is key for employment services, an often neglected side of the equation is demand: the regional availability of employment, the key industries and employers. The NERG brings employers together to discuss the local context, their needs as employers and the skills required of young people. It also recruits employers to become champions for youth employment locally and nationally. It is breaking new ground:

This is very much a new space for us here at the Brotherhood, but also nationally, and somewhat internationally. This really intentional way of involving business to think through how they engage and how are they involved at a local level in shifting youth unemployment. What are those key features of this? What does an employer champion look like? And even that terminology, employer champion, we came up with that because there's nothing else to explain when an employer is involved in structures to actually shift youth unemployment rather than just giving jobs. (Neneh, BSL staff)

Service-to-service collaboration occurs independently of BSL

Over time the Community of Practice has matured. The collegiality that started in formal meetings brokered by BSL now occurs independently through service-to-service interaction and the cross-fertilisation of ideas. For example:

We were trying to get down our date between referral and commencement ... so I called the South Australian Anglicare and had a chat around what they do. That was really nice to have that support there. (Zoe, YDC)

Partners are flying out and spending days with each other. SIP has flown out and spent the day with Gen-Z. Vice versa with a couple of the other partners flying across country to spend a day or two days—or inviting partners that have specific skills in one area to come out. (Neneh, BSL staff)

A senior BSL staff member said 'the collaboration and the real partnerships between all of those organisations and the willingness to share expertise around practice' is one of the key achievements of the CoP. The development of a 'Talent Map' to identify the strengths of each service accompanied by a 'conceptual understanding of the model, practice and structure' means that CoP members can discover where they need to develop their practice, and seek assistance. This collaboration has led to improved outcomes for members:

[Service X] is starting to lift their performance, getting good outcomes because they're starting to intentionally deliver and implement the model because they are getting

systems, strategies, communications and practices operate to 'advantage' or 'disadvantage' people. The Seven Tests were developed by Colin Falconer and are part of the training BSL provides to TtW CoP staff.

¹⁴ See Appendix for more about the National Employment Reference Group (NERG)

support from the rest of the Community of Practice. So [we can] actually see what we thought would happen, that the Community of Practice will lift each other and get good outcomes. Because you're working to a model you can clearly see where you need to improve. (Ondine, BSL staff)

CoP members develop their practice and the model to suit their local context

CoP members have been supported to strengthen their practice and the model in a flexible manner. The CEO of a CoP member described this as the ability to 'collaborate and share expertise ... without having to lose our local identity'. Other CEOs also described the benefits:

The role of the Community of Practice has been ... understanding that everyone will be a little bit different at different stages. We've come [on] that journey now with the sharing of data and saying, 'This is working in this region really well, but not so well here. What's the difference? How do we do something that helps each other?' (Elizabeth, CEO)

I see it like a continuous improvement system ... We've got a framework that allows us to look at information, data, experiences from across the country to see how they can add value to your own design and development ... The fact that it's not prescriptive, [that] it's a broad framework in which local regional economies can be developed, is really critical. (Robert, CEO)

There is a recognition among CoP members that there is no single 'best practice' but instead 'good practices' that work in particular contexts:

With a contract like TtW, there's no uniform way it will work in all the eleven sites plus. So, you could have a best practice model but a better way to describe it is good practice that works in Cairns, good practice that works in Hobart ... I would always keep the conversation to what's your good practice in this area or this place or with this young person, because they're all different. (Jules, BSL staff)

However, there is some tension between fidelity to the model', and the need for flexibility. One CoP member thought that there should be a procedure with consequences for services that are not delivering the core approaches and key components:

[When people don't deliver the model] 'You're off the island! You've been voted out! Put the torch out.' And I can't even say who because sometimes you think they're doing it and then you find out later that they're not and it's like 'Be honest! Don't come down and say you're doing it if you're not!' (Stephanie, Manager)

This however was an extreme (and minority) view. Others such as Yumi at BSL held a more nuanced position both about what it meant to deliver the model well and how the CoP should respond. She felt consideration of whether services are delivering the model is complex because the model has many components; each service has a slightly different contract with the department; and each has translated the model to suit their local context. She also felt that services had to balance everyday demands that were

‘crisis or immediately focused’ with taking a ‘leap of faith’ to implement new approaches. Consequently she felt ‘you can’t force those sorts of things’ and that it was better to identify what aspects of the model were working well and producing outcomes for CoP members as this would be the most persuasive: ‘It’s really about people who are doing it really see the benefit of it and want to do more of it.’

CoP members are equipped to undertake program and policy advocacy

A further outcome is that the CoP has equipped members to undertake program and policy advocacy to achieve better transition supports for young people. Work by a senior BSL staff member and the formation of a working group to lead strategy in the lead-up to the 2019 federal election are cited as examples. The advocacy documents which drew on BSL’s expertise and resources, were highly valued by CoP members.

The advocacy documents that Yumi [BSL Youth Services team] put together before the federal election were very professional and slick. That was a real advantage for our providers to have when they were approaching [candidates] ... [It] gives them the confidence when they are speaking to council, to a local member ... And now the NYEB and the NERG that’s where the advocacy is funnelled. (Christina, BSL staff)

Table 2 The convening component

	Component	An enabling organisation convened the CoP as an investment in collaborative innovation
	Context	<p>BSL as an enabling organisation (not a prime provider) convened the CoP with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — voluntary participation by members who have autonomy through individual contracts with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. — regular meetings of staff from all sites targeted to different roles, to share expertise and build service capacity. — sharing of commercial in-confidence data and monitoring and evaluation data among members for the purpose of collective practice improvement. — shared commitment to a common model whose fidelity is supported through regular training sessions, consultancy and trouble-shooting. <p>The CoP Convenor is seen by its members to be offering a valuable resource to support rather than police fidelity.</p>
	Mechanism	<p>CoP members report they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — are inspired and energised through the sharing of experience as part of a larger Community of Practice. — develop a sense of collegiality, trust and shared commitment to improving services for young people. — feel supported and resourced to deliver the model. — experience an authorising environment that supports innovation.
	Outcome	<p>New approaches are trialled and promoted, both in the community sector and to government. Service-to-service collaboration occurs independently of BSL. CoP members further develop their practice and the model to suit their local context. CoP members are equipped to undertake program and policy advocacy.</p>

6 The four-phase model

Component

The TtW CoP model is structured around four phases of service delivery: 1. Guidance and exploration; 2. Work preparation; 3. Workplace opportunities; and 4. Post-placement support. While this provides a structured pathway, the intent is a flexible implementation that is appropriate for the local context and responsive to the needs of individual young people. Typically, TtW staff such as Youth Development Coaches are assigned a case load of young people to support. This usually includes all phases—from identifying career aspirations to support once they gain employment. Some aspects of the program such as résumé workshops may be delivered by other staff, with a YDC providing ongoing coaching, but this varies depending on the organisation's size, location and staffing.

Context

The context which supports this element of the model is characterised by:

- a structured model with processes and systems that are based on the phases and their core activities
- a balance being struck between the phased structure and the flexibility to develop creative, appropriate ways to deliver the core activities.

The structure and process of the TtW CoP model was valued by this Programs and Participation Coordinator (PPC) who compared it with the former Youth Connections program:

There's a bit more of a process in place, there's a timeline that you follow, there's points on the timeline that you should be making and should be marking off and you should be celebrating. (Ryan, PPC)

Services vary in the degree to which they deliver the TtW activities in discrete phases as described in the practice guide or adapt them to fit their external and cohort contexts:

Sixty per cent have well established processes and systems that are very clear around the phases. Some take it to the extreme, where everything is about the phases and they miss out on the creative developmental stuff ... Some are more flexible in their approach [to] the phases, but they still have them ... [BSL in its convening role has identified] ... the minimum activities that we need to deliver in each of the phases, the key [aspects of the program] and how does Advantaged Thinking permeate through those activities. (Neneh, BSL staff)

In a sense, this structure and core activities have provided tangible points at which to 'translate' the Advantaged Thinking approach into the support that is offered to young people. At the same time there was an acknowledgement that services are likely to

differ in how these key components were 'translated on the ground'. Speaking to the flexibility of the model overall, another BSL staff member said:

I think it is a flexible model. I think the key features of the model and the practice are broad enough to be able to adapt in that context and be implemented using different resources and tools to do it. But there's always a balance between rigour and flexibility. (Ondine, BSL staff)

The sole YDC in a small regional TtW office described how although she was delivering activities across the phases, young people may not be aware that they are working through phases. She contrasted this with the experience of young people at the service's larger offices where there were more defined shifts between phases (e.g. see Snapshot in Box 1) and so a greater sense of progression. In her words:

My young people might not see that that was a Phase 1 activity and now we're into a Phase 2 activity, so they've moved on. That could be just my practices as to how I deliver, but I think especially for Cairns, [for young people] to see that progression and to go, 'Wow, I've moved into something else, and I am progressing'. (April, YDC)

While the TtW CoP model allows for flexibility in the way the phases are delivered, there are eight core activities within it that the CoP convenor considers crucial for achieving employment or education outcomes:

- ongoing coaching (Phases 1–3)
- exploring strengths and talents (Phase 1)
- co-designed planning (Phase 1)
- employability skills development (Phases 2 & 3)
- industry-specific and accredited learning (Phase 2)
- job-seeking support (Phase 2)
- real world opportunities provision (Phases 2 & 3)
- tailored support for young person and employer/education provider post placement (Phase 4).

To assist delivery, BSL's Youth Services team provides tools and other resources which have been co-designed with the TtW CoP. However, to operationalise the phases and their activities, services need to design explicit systems and processes, rather than delivering their pre-TtW 'business as usual' with the language of the phases overlaid in a tokenistic manner.

For example, Phase 4 Post-placement support is an aspect of the model that has been described as 'underdone' and requiring further development. Several services have reported that they have not yet instituted effective ways to operationalise elements of this phase:

I think with Phase 4 for a lot of the providers it's just been getting the systems right. At that point you can have put in all this work and support with a young person but if you don't get the evidence [e.g. payslips confirming their employment], then you can't claim an outcome. (Christina, BSL staff)

Another BSL staff member also identified Phase 4 as an area needing further development because it demands a lot of the service:

That indicates to me that there's work to be done in that space, or we need to have more refined offer or phase that's spelled out a bit better ... so it's a lot for them to take on if they're thinking about doing all the follow-ups, and then chasing payslips [required by the Department to prove outcomes], and then working with employers, and mitigating the inevitable things that come up in terms of the young people not showing up and being fully prepared to transition into that space. There's a lot of damage control as part of that. And how do that in an Advantaged Thinking way? (Jules, BSL staff)

Mechanism

If staff use the phases to structure their service delivery, gaps or weak points in what is offered become clear. Structured phases can also serve as a framework for, and a check on, young people's progress. Having a structure was seen as helpful by many TtW staff.

I think the great thing about TtW and the Community of Practice is that there is a really structured framework that is flexible but has also got points along the way which you have to make and meet, and if you're not doing it, it's about evaluating and going, 'What are we doing, what do we need to change?' So that's been great. (Ryan, PPC)

An additional benefit of dividing the service offer into phases is a common language for CoP members to use within their service and the CoP about what they are offering to young people. This facilitates knowledge transfer between services and skill building through training. Note, however, that sharing a common language about phases does not imply that the services all deliver identical programs: As BSL staff member Jules observed, 'The way the phases are interpreted at the sites differs'.

Outcomes

When the phases are embedded in practice through systems and processes that support the core activities, and service delivery is adapted to local community context, the TtW CoP model can be delivered in widely differing situations.

For example, one organisation (VPG) delivers Phase 2 training differently in different locations. In Cairns, with many program participants, VPG can provide what they identify as the most effective mode of training: face-to-face.

We try to partner very closely with our RTOs ... We prefer face-to-face courses than online because we're dealing with young people. So, we're always having meetings to try and source that new provider who is used to dealing with our type of cohort of young

people, the challenges they may present and overcome, and how to train in a really effective way, and that's face-to-face training. (Manager)

However, VPG's TtW programs in Yarrabah, Innisfail and the Tablelands need to overcome the constraints of their small caseloads, distance from Cairns, and lack of public transport:

In order to get an RTO to come over here [Yarrabah] and deliver the training, I need at least 10 or 15 [young people] because otherwise it's going to be the trainer's waste of time coming out. So, that's why I need to either build up the numbers here so I can run a course down here, or break it down so that my vehicle can accommodate the participants. (YDC)

We sign them up through an RTO we've got a really good partnership with, and April [Innisfail YDC] gets them all to come in [to the Innisfail TtW office] three days a week and works with them towards completing their various certificates and gives them support ... she's a trainer and assessor as well. So that's how we try and support our young people in Innisfail because we don't have access to face-to-face [training from external trainers] so we thought a little bit outside the square. (Manager)

Box 1 Snapshot: Phases adaptation at VPG

Component: VPG personnel were assigned to deliver one specific phase of the model rather than all of them.

Context: The size of the TtW contract was a reason for VPG's adaptation. There was an economy of scale and efficiency in assigning staff to deliver individual stages. Phase specialisation works well if there is good teamwork and rapport has been established not only between young people and their YDC but also the other staff members. VPG uses case conferencing to identify solutions and strategies for individual young people. The team also meet to discuss phase transfers and do handovers:

Tuesday afternoon I have an engagement meeting. It's a big group meeting with all our coaches, and we discuss all the young people who are moving up. So, the staff are getting a little handover, like a heads-up, 'These young people are coming into your phase' and then they'll be booked in to undertake a handover meeting with their new coach. (Manager)





Staff also have processes to manage the initial interviews with young people joining their phase and the exit interviews when they leave. Young people's movement through the phases is recognised and celebrated by staff.

Mechanism: Completing clearly delineated phases provides young people with a sense of progression and achievement during their time in the service rather than at the end. The adaptation also allows young people to build connections with multiple staff.

Outcome: Through this adaptation young people gain the important soft skill of establishing rapport and building working relationships with professionals to achieve career goals. Another outcome of phase specialisation is that young people gain access to a broader range of experiences, expert knowledge, networks and opportunities by working with multiple staff.

I think that here at VPG everybody, everyone who comes into our centre gets to access all of the knowledge, all of the experience, all of the skills of all of our staff. That increases their networks. It increases, obviously, access to opportunities, which is another really big part of the model. It also really increases their confidence because they go, 'I've met all these cool people now who I know and feel comfortable with'—because a lot of our guys don't necessarily feel very comfortable [when they arrive]. And I think that people progressing through the phases and actually learning how to work with different people and have that adaptability to change is a really big driver for the success that we have here. (Amanda, EEO)

Table 3 An evidence-informed four-phase model

	Component	An evidence-informed four-phase model
	Context	<p>A balance between the prescriptive nature of a phased approach and the flexibility to develop creative and context-appropriate ways to deliver the core activities of each phase.</p> <p>Processes and systems are designed around the phases and their core activities.</p>
	Mechanism	<p>Structured phases can work as a check that all the core activities are being delivered and provide a framework to plan individually tailored pathways through the program.</p> <p>The phases provide a common language for knowledge sharing among services, and training purposes.</p>
	Outcome	<p>Core activities of each phase are delivered and young people receive a tailored response.</p> <p>TtW program is able to be delivered in various contexts.</p> <p>Services work together towards effective practice.</p>

7 Activating employers in the Campaign

Component

A vital component of the TtW CoP model is activating employers through a Community Investment Committee or equivalent. Activating employers facilitates the harnessing community investment dimension of the model.

Context

The key enablers for activating employers were strong community connections, and building employer engagement by using Advantaged Thinking and focusing on the benefits for them.

Strong community connections

The first context for activating employer support of TtW is the existence of strong community connections. This can be met through a CIC, or through an equivalent as two of our case study sites had done: in the Cairns region, VPG participated in Workforce North and on the Gold Coast, Gen-Z Employment participated in a Jobs Council.

Services that were already well known and embedded in a region had a head start in activating employer support.

We've been working down on the Gold Coast for so many years, we know employers, we've already engaged with them in the past. So we've been able to bring them across.
(PPS, focus group)

This was especially the case at two sites where the TtW staff were well connected through both work and personal contacts and were encouraged to develop new partnerships; existing networks were leveraged; and new contacts were nurtured. An Employment Engagement Officer (EEO) stressed the importance of being known in the community:

For me it's about just being in the community and having visibility. Everybody knows you, knows what you're about and I guess has you on their radar ... a lot of opportunities come. But it took quite a while to get that ball rolling. It's got a good momentum now.
(Amanda, EEO)

Where services had weaker connections—for example, when employment was a new program for them—a lot of work was needed to forge new relationships. Employing an EEO was important in these cases.

Using Advantaged Thinking to promote young people's potential

There were several ways in which services secured employer engagement and support. One approach was using Advantaged Thinking as a means of influencing negative mindsets when speaking to employers about young people.

Use Advantaged Thinking because it just works so well ... Go in thinking Advantaged Thinking and you go in with that mindset. We use it as a tool for our communication ... It's getting them to challenge their views on young people as well and that actually buys their input more than [simply] talking to them. (Kate, Manager)

Staff appealed to employers on the basis of young people's ability and value. They commented that employees responded well to this and it helped to secure short-term opportunities such as work experience, as well as jobs.

Many spoke of the aspect of Advantaged Thinking called the Campaign. This is the promotion of young people and their potential value as employees. Stephanie, a TtW manager, described how they and the young people promoted themselves at community events such as careers expos, at employer-hosted information sessions and through good news stories on social media. Jennifer, the chair of a Community Investment Committee in another community said: 'It's also campaigning on behalf of young people in the sense of the businesses coming away thinking wow these jobseekers are really good.'

This campaign, in tandem with the CICs, led to employers who became 'champions' of youth employment.

Having an employer who's so invested, that true employer champion—and now, our campaign is his campaign when it comes to young people and the work being so valued by him, I think is incredibly beneficial to have that in the community. (Karen, BSL staff)

The language of employer champions has also been taken up by the NERG, which Neneh (BSL staff) described as tapping into 'the passions they have for young people' and business thinking. A further aspect of Advantaged Thinking taken up by this group was including young people in all its meetings; the TtW CoP is also in the process of adopting this practice:

The other part of it too is making sure that whenever we're having any meetings from now on that we don't do anything without young people being there. And that was demonstrated at the National Employer Reference Group meeting, where we had young people talking about their experiences in employment and how workplace could better support them, which really just changed the whole dynamic. So we're making sure it's not tokenistic and how do you do it in an ongoing way where young people feel that they really are informing what's happening. (Ondine, BSL staff)

Focus on the benefits for employers

A second approach to engaging employers was focusing on their needs and alerting them to the benefits to their business of employing young people.

Several general benefits for employers were mentioned by interviewees, including the creation of a conduit for employing carefully matched young people who also had post-

placement support. Another benefit was receiving up-to-date knowledge on available subsidies and training opportunities for the employees.

Showing interested in hearing about an employer's particular needs was considered a good starting point, rather than beginning with young people's need for employment. One EEO, Amanda, described how she used this approach:

Instead of calling employers and asking, 'Do you have a position available?' I ring them and ask them, 'Can I ask some questions about your business?' They'll [think] 'Oh wow, this person's really trying to understand me and understand my business, and they're not asking me for anything'. And from there [the employer is] more receptive to actually coming and saying, 'Well, actually, I've been thinking of putting on ...' (Amanda, EEO)

Amanda noted that TtW staff can 'fall into their own welfare cycle' when approaching employers. Rather than going to employers seeking to understand their needs, and provide something that is of benefit to them, they can go with their hand out saying: 'Have you got any jobs for our poor little kids who need a job?' This approach runs counter to Advantaged Thinking.

Focusing on mutual benefits was regarded as key to gaining employer engagement. Working this way and following through on employer expectations developed trust. Amanda elaborated on how she saw employers responding:

And then they go, there's actually a relationship here. It's not this exchange where you're just expecting me [the employer] to donate my time or expecting me to hand out a job to someone. This person's actually trying to understand what's happening here and then seeing if they can provide something that might be a good fit and a mutually beneficial thing. (Amanda, EEO)

As one worker said to us, just as the model is respectful of young people, it must also respect employers and be alert to their needs:

The model is really respectful to the participants, but it's also respectful to our employers and their expectations because at the end of the day you have to marry those two together, otherwise it's not going to work. (Jodie, PPS)

This included being sensitive to past negative experiences and countering them by promoting the value of young people, being honest and providing opportunities to get to know young people.

I think coming from an Advantaged Thinking side is a big positive. I have come across some employers that have had some negative experiences with apprentices, so they may not want anything to do with young people. (PPS, focus group)

It also included acknowledging the problems for an employer when the employee is a poor fit and suggesting ways of working together to alleviate these risks, in order to allow employers to reconsider their views of young people as workers:

If they have that mindset, I just come back with total honesty about the person I may be putting forward ... 'If you're willing to give them a go for work experience that might be an ideal way to start'. So then they can get to know each other, this person gets the experience. So, it's sort of win-win for both of them. (PPS, focus group)

Mechanism

Staff identify a focus on employers' needs and countering negative views of young people using Advantaged Thinking as influential in securing employer engagement. Two mechanisms are triggered: first, a recognition by employers of the mutual benefit of employing young people; and second, development of employers' confidence that their needs will be considered and they and the young person they offer work or other opportunities to will be supported by TtW staff.

Focusing on benefits for employers using Advantaged Thinking can work differently for different employers. While for some it challenged negative beliefs, for others it tapped into existing passions about young people:

I've found that there's quite a few—I like to call them industry champions like those employers who are really cognisant of their place in the community and the fact that they can interact in that way. I think that a lot of those guys feel quite good about the idea of giving a young person a chance. (Amanda, EEO)

Linda, who worked for a large business that offered placements to young people, said of the partnership with Gen-Z: 'They support us and they give us a professionalism behind everything we're doing.' This included resources, referrals and additional support for young people on placement experiencing challenges in their lives.

Outcomes

Activating employers results in access to more networks and opportunities for individual young people. It also has outcomes through employers furthering the Campaign to address youth unemployment.

One example of these outcomes is that of the board member at a TtW service who engaged at a high level with a new large employer in town. She found out what they were looking for in their recruitment role by role, including the attitudes they were looking for in their employees. The company had intended to recruit from Melbourne but the board member pushed hard to have local Queensland jobseekers considered. She held an information evening and workshop for the TtW staff and other employment service providers with young people on their books. This enabled the TtW service (and other local employment services) to mentor and coach some young people about the required skills and attributes before the employer's own information night. The TtW service got great results:

I think there are six or seven of our participants who might already have a job there and a number going through training ... The end result of that of course is that young jobseekers feel they've had a real win and they're seen as valued workers and members of society. (Board member, VPG)





In a second example, a CIC chair who runs several businesses took part in a golf day. He invited his small business suppliers, as well as some young people from TtW. He used the occasion to talk about TtW, and how important it is to employ young people in their businesses. As a result, there were hard and soft outcomes for the young people:

I think there were eight young people, six of them have since gone on to gain employment. And some of that was ... some of the connections they made on the day. But also it just helps them open up their address book too and get out of their comfort zone and get used to talking to people from different backgrounds as well. So that was a good activity in terms of the broader campaign, and someone tapping into their networks, and talking about how they can think about giving opportunities to young people too. (Mary, BSL staff)

The event also furthered the Campaign to engage the community in addressing youth unemployment while promoting young people as valuable contributors to society. A BSL staff member described the recruitment of employers to become champions of youth employment:

We're not just simply engaging with employers around them opening up positions for young people. We're engaging employers in the co-design of advocacy for young people. (Neneh, BSL staff)

Table 4 Activating employers

	Component	Activating employers
	Context	Services: — have strong community connections. Staff: — use Advantaged Thinking to promote young people's potential. — focus on the benefits for employers.
	Mechanism	Employers: — recognise the benefits of working with young people. — develop confidence to provide opportunities.
	Outcome	Employers: — offer opportunities. — further the campaign to address youth unemployment. Young people: — have increased access to networks and opportunities.

8 The Deal

The service agreement between young people and staff is called the Deal. The Deal was developed for Education First Youth Foyers (Mallett et al. 2014; Coddou, Borlagdan & Mallett 2019) and adapted for Transition to Work.

Component

The Deal is a response and an alternative to mutual obligation. The latter is focused on the obligations of young people rather than of service providers or the state, with punitive measures for non-compliance that fail to recognise young people's value and potential contribution. By contrast, the Deal is underpinned by Nancy Fraser's theory of recognition, whereby recognition refers to the status of individuals as full partners in social interaction. As Fraser writes:

To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. (2000, p. 113)

The Deal seeks to restore parity to the relationship between young people and services through reframing mutual obligation as reciprocity and mutual accountability in which young people are accorded equal value as full partners.

The Deal does this through outlining the rights and responsibilities of both young people and staff. This includes young people's commitment to 25 hours participation per week, the co-development of a job plan and responsibility to work towards their chosen career goals. It also includes the staff commitment to provide support and relevant opportunities.

In this way the Deal aims to hold staff as well as young people accountable. It demonstrates to young people that staff hold high expectations of them and believe they can be valuable contributors to society.

Context

The Deal: a common goal not a tool for compliance

The first context enabling the Deal was that it was to be understood as working together for a common goal and not as a tool for compliance.

It's their take-home message, this is what we're going to do for you and this is what you're going to do for you. So this is my expectation, this is your expectation. (Kate, Manager)

Staff say that the Deal explains how the TtW approach is different to other employment service approaches. Some YDCs spoke about using it as a tool for feedback and re-engagement, for example reminding young people that they had agreed to step outside their comfort zones and try new things. As one YDC told us:

The way we approach it is: 'We're here to support you in your goals, why is it not working right now? What can we change to make it work for you?' (Erin, YDC)

According to staff, a culture of reciprocity relies upon the Deal being 'something young people really connect with' rather than 'just a set of rules'. Staff were clear that for the Deal to assist young people, it must not be a form of compliance because young people do not respond positively to a 'stick' approach. As one manager explained they didn't use it as 'disciplinary action' because young people 'did not respond' to that kind of 'authority'.

Instead of framing the requirement of 25 hours participation per week as an obligation, one YDC described it as the opportunity to focus on personal goals and benefit:

If you word it: 'We have 25 hours to spend together to work on these goals and achieve these things and part of that is the Deal' ... leaving [out] the compliance stuff. The model itself can overpower that compliance language'. (Zoe, YDC)

Young people did not regard the Deal as a tool for compliance; many described it as a reciprocal agreement that worked in their favour, with each side putting in work. One young woman described it as 'how we as a team can work together and work for me'. Another said:

They just nudge you in that right direction and let you do it yourself, and give you all the encouragement you need. It comes down to the individual, if they want to listen and take it in and get the best. They are not being forced to do it. (Young person, Gen-Z, focus group)

This is consistent with Nudge Theory developed by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), in which positive behavioural change is shaped through gentle nudges rather than punitive measures. As one young man said, 'You actually have to put in, you have to lift your weight when you're here, but they significantly help you lift your weight'. (Theo, Gen-Z)

The Deal kept 'live' through the phases

Despite the ways in which coaches try to engage young people with the Deal, many of the young people we interviewed did not remember what the Deal was or that they had signed a Deal. Some were unfamiliar even with the term 'the Deal'. Once prompted many were aware of an agreement about mutual expectations and they considered the expectations to be fair. For example:

I feel like the whole principle behind it—you get what you put in. So, if I'm willing to show up, if I'm willing to make an effort, they're going to do their best to do whatever

they can ... It helps you push yourself more with their help, and that's really beneficial for everyone. (Bianca, Gen-Z)

An EEO stressed that the Deal can be promulgated in informal ways:

So, I don't think that they necessarily know 100 per cent about the Deal but the whole purpose of the Deal is to drive a certain type of thinking and hopefully facilitate a certain kind of approach to things. So, it doesn't need to be super-duper formal necessarily. Just having that kind of vibe around us, let's help each other out, everyone's responsible, everyone contributes. (Amanda, EEO)

Services varied in how much they used the Deal. One site reported that due to staff shortages and turnover, the Deal is signed initially but not focused on throughout young people's time in the program. In contrast, staff at other sites stressed revisiting the Deal to increase understanding and commitment. One CEO described how the Deal was kept 'live' through the phases:

It's dealt with on just about every day of our Phase 1 program. They watch the video, they talk about the Deal. It's used as a working agreement with young people as to how they're here and what they're about. When necessary it's used within a coaching environment if young people need to reconsider taking some positive risks. (Danielle, CEO).

Some staff thought more could be done to keep the Deal 'live', revisiting it with young people at key points.

Mechanism

If discussions about the Deal occur in an engaging manner that doesn't focus on compliance and the Deal is kept live through the phases, the mechanism that leads to outcomes is the development of a culture of reciprocity. In this culture each party is clear on the expectations of the other. One YDC described how all parties are committed to a shared goal:

It really establishes expectations of each other, and also that if they feel I am not doing my part, then we can come back to that. Sometimes, at the end of a phase, I will just go: 'OK, let's review this. Are we meeting our parts, on both ends?' It is a good way to get feedback. (YDC, focus group)

While staff mentioned that the Deal spelled out expectations that participants should have of them and the service, they did not state that the Deal made them more accountable. When asked if the Deal increased staff accountability to participants one manager responded, 'I think our staff deliver anyway. So, if anything, we're probably too accountable' (Stephanie, Manager). A reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of shortcomings in service delivery may be one explanation for the general lack of support for the idea of the Deal increasing staff accountability.

When the Deal is delivered in a way that engenders reciprocity rather than being focused on compliance, some young people said they felt more accountable to themselves and staff. Two young women described the impact of the Deal:

I have a hard time holding myself to things, so it's kind of nice to make a deal with someone else knowing that there's someone there that I will be answerable to. Being accountable to someone else helps you take action. (Michaela, Col47)





It's a really great idea. Because it's not pressure ... it encourages me to get it done, reach my goals and prove to these guys that I can do what I promised and if they fulfil [their end of the Deal], it's not just them, it's both. [We] meet half way. (Ella, VPG)

Outcomes

The outcome is that young people make progress with their plans with sufficient support from their coaches. A young man told us how he thinks the Deal benefited him; now his future looks full of possibilities:

It's been a year since I signed that piece of paper, but I think it's definitely fair. It makes sense—the equal exchange. When I was doing work experience [in the TtW reception before I found work], I was helping them and that was also helping me. I'm at a point in my life where there's so many possibilities, it's exciting and it's daunting. Having the environment of work has made things infinitely better and I wouldn't have had that if it wasn't for TtW, and I'm so grateful. (Matt, Gen-Z)

Table 5 The Deal

	Component	The Deal
	Context	The Deal is understood as working together toward a common goal rather than as a tool for compliance, and is kept 'live' throughout the four phases.
	Mechanism	A culture of reciprocity is formed in which young people feel accountable to themselves and staff, and know that the staff are accountable to them.
	Outcome	Young people make progress with their plans with sufficient support from their coaches.

9 Exploration, inspiration & goal-setting (Phase 1)

Inspiration rather than problem-solving is the goal of Phase 1 of the model. The TtW CoP model represents a shift from a deficits approach in which young people are seen as a problem to be fixed, to an approach that views them as valuable assets who—with support—can achieve their potential. The founder of the Advantaged Thinking approach, Colin Falconer, argues:

... we need a 'shift' in our mindset: to challenge the 'disadvantaged thinking' of stereotypes, safety nets and short-term supports for young people's problems, and instead focus on the talent-building relationships that act as trampolines to personal transformation (Falconer 2014, p. 26).

Phase 1 of the TtW CoP program—'exploration, inspiration and goal-setting'—applies the Advantaged Thinking approach (described in more detail in the Introduction).

Component

In Phase 1, regular coaching sessions that are flexible in their focus and content allow YDCs to spend time with young people. Staff work intensively exploring young people's interests and aspirations and seek to inspire them with career possibilities, primarily in one-on-one sessions. Such scaffolding work helps young people progress out of Phase 1 and down their chosen career path. If they discover that path is not right for them, they are able to go back to the exploration phase.

Context

The way staff work with young people is the context for achieving outcomes in Phase 1. Consistent with the Advantaged Thinking approach, staff show that they believe in the young people, are focused on what the young people *can* do and their future:

We're not focusing on what everyone is telling them they need to sort out. We're more focusing on: 'Hey, where do you want to be?' so they can maybe see that light at the end of the tunnel. (Erin, YDC)

Staff have high expectations of young people. This is important because some young people may lack this encouragement at home or school.

It is also having expectations of them that we believe in them to be able to get to a certain point, where perhaps that hasn't been placed on them before. So they don't have faith in themselves. (YDC focus group).

A prerequisite for this context is the building of positive relationships with young people. This includes listening to them, showing genuine concern and gaining their trust. This often differed from their previous experience of adults and young people said it made

them feel 'comfortable here compared with other places'. One young man described the process and how he felt about it:

They build a relationship with you. They find out what you like, what your interests are ... It was a new thing. Having someone interested in me and helping me for my future was really good. It was refreshing. (Noah, VPG)

Mechanism

The genuine interest that YDCs show, coupled with the assumption that young people are best placed to make choices about their future, is empowering:

[TtW is] empowering young people who aren't sure about their future to take the first step. (Young person, Advantaged Thinking survey)

Staff remind young people 'they have the power of choice' and are 'a partner in the activities'. This provides a sense of what sociologists call agency, which is choice over their lives. A further mechanism is that young people's confidence and self-esteem grows. In the August 2019 Advantaged Thinking Survey, 85% young people agreed that TtW had given them confidence. Other research participants agreed:

It gradually builds up their confidence and helps them to understand that they can do it. They're actually able to come to these conclusions and have a bit of control over what's happening in their life. And it makes a big difference. (Amanda, EEO)

I had no self-confidence before. I was really insecure. Mostly about myself because of the way I was living and I didn't think I was good enough. They [TtW] made me be the best version of me. (Cameron, Gen-Z)

Yates (2018) identifies techniques to imagine possible selves as an evidence-based, career coaching technique. In the TtW CoP model, the realisation of choice coupled with increased confidence enables young people to imagine possible futures of value to them, and believe that they are achievable. This is the mechanism or driver for change.

Outcomes

This component of TtW produces both soft and hard outcomes. In terms of soft outcomes, young people describe a positive change in themselves and the belief that they can achieve a life they value:

I'm a whole new person ... I know who I am now, I'm a lot happier and a lot [more] confident, a lot more positive. (Maddison, Gen-Z)

I feel like every day I come here, I know I have a future. (Ella, VPG)

I'm a different person now ... It's helping other young people realise that there is help out there and that if you want to change you can ... You have to put the hard work in and there's people there to support you on the way. (Liam, Gen-Z)

The value of support from staff is evident from survey responses: 84 per cent of the young people felt pushed outside their comfort zone towards achieving goals. Likewise, in interviews young people said TtW helped them ‘shine’ and get out of their ‘comfort zone’. Importantly it helped them identify their ‘own path’ and provided them with support and opportunities:

They just wanted me to find my own path, in my own way, but they just helped me a little bit with all the harder steps. (Nick, Gen-Z)

Once I came here they got me on the right path and gave me a lot of chances and a lot of opportunities. (Cameron, Gen-Z)

These softer outcomes are sometimes lost in the concern with ‘hard’ job outcomes. Getting young people to this point can take a lot of time and scaffolding—but TtW staff say the model produces a change that lasts.

There is evidence that it also leads to hard outcomes such as embarking on further study, training or job-seeking. Taking the first step in looking for employment can be intimidating, especially when it includes cold-calling potential employers. TtW supports young people to take first steps and practise these activities in a non-threatening environment:

I didn’t know where I wanted to go, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I was lost and then I came to Gen-Z and I took my first step in finding a job. (Nick, Gen-Z)

Just ringing up a place and saying ‘Have you got a job?’ really breaks down the walls. (Will, VPG)

One young woman who found a retail assistant job described how TtW helped her ‘confidence to talk to people’. Another, reflecting on her training and the cleaning job TtW helped her obtain, said:

I just have a little bit more direction in my life now. And I just feel ready to grow up, you know? (Alison, Col47)





A YDC summed up the approach as modelling respect and belief, which in turn built the confidence and soft skills needed to succeed in the workplace:

It’s helping them see what respect looks like, and what trust and believing in them looks like. Then when they get into a job, they are confident, and they know [how] to confront if they have to, or just cope in a workplace. (Zoe, YDC)

Importantly, the TtW CoP model does more than support individuals to take responsibility for changing their lives. It recognises the importance of structure and seeks to ensure that young people are provided with the *opportunities* they need to succeed. This reflects capabilities theory advocated by Nussbaum (Kimberley, Gruhn & Huggins 2012) and is consistent with the capabilities approach to employment activation described by Edgell and Graham (2017). A CEO sums it up best:

Someone is listening to them. Someone is believing in them. Someone's asking them their opinion and talking about what their dreams are and, 'How do we do that together?' Someone's looking at them with a lens of talent and opportunity. Someone's saying, 'OK, there might be some challenges that you might be having but look at all these things that we can do'. Those things build a trust and rapport and for some young people that will immediately strike a chord. Sometimes, it takes a little bit longer but it does work. (Elizabeth, CEO)

Table 6 Exploration, inspiration & goal-setting (Phase 1)

	Component	Exploration, inspiration & goalsetting (Phase 1)
	Context	Coaches and young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — develop caring, trusting relationships, within an Advantaged Thinking framework. — demonstrate the belief that young people can succeed, and have that expectation.
	Mechanism	Young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — feel empowered and have a sense of agency or choice. — imagine possible futures of value to them and feel motivated to pursue them.
	Outcome	Young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — feel positive about their futures and step out of their comfort zones to pursue goals. — seek out and take up opportunities (social, training, work) aligned with their goals.

10 Group work (Phase 1)

Component

Group work occurs throughout Phases 1–3 of the TtW CoP model. In phase 1 its purpose is to build a relationship between the young person and the service, and engage—or for young people who have spent some time away from these kinds of social settings, re-engage—they with other young people. The group work in Phase 1 can include social or recreational activities to engage young people in the program, group workshops to get them thinking about and exploring career options, and sessions beginning to develop their employment and job-seeking skills and confidence. Group activities are explicitly recommended in the TtW CoP Practice Guide but in the August 2019 Advantaged Thinking Survey only 67% of young people said they had received these. Activities are run differently in each organisation according to local context and resources, and may include onsite or offsite activities delivered by TtW staff or leveraged community contacts. Rolling monthly activity calendars are common.

Context

The context which enables this work is the provision of a shared, welcoming space and low-pressure interaction with coaches and peers.

Social isolation is a common experience for early school leavers and young people experiencing mental health issues. TtW workers and young people identified poor mental health, particularly social anxiety, as a significant hurdle to participation. In the August 2019 Advantaged Thinking Survey, 29 per cent of respondents told us mental health issues had stopped them attending TtW activities, education or employment.

Phase 1 group work aims to make young people feel comfortable at the service premises and in their interactions with people there. It seeks to establish a rapport between young people, their peers and their workers as a basis for further participation:

It's about bringing them down [into the shared space], making the space a bit more casual so they have a bit of ownership around it and they're feeling comfortable. That hopefully opens the door to when they go into that next phase. This is a space they trust, that these people are here with the right intentions. (Ryan, PPC)

Creating a welcoming space, with little physical separation¹⁵ between workers and young people, and providing resources such as computers and food increases the likelihood of young people wanting to attend the service and can ease them into group work. One site sends text messages about their pizza days and 'they [the young people] all encourage each other to be here'. Other sites have open access to a kitchen with

¹⁵ Prior to COVID-19, this referred to open plan layout rather than counters and offices creating barriers.

breakfast food so young people can sit around a communal table with their peers and workers.

It's just a very sort of casual environment. I'm not sure that's quite the right word, but you don't really feel like you're in the system. You're just sort of hanging out with people. (Young person, Focus Group, Gen-Z)

Group activities enable low-pressure interaction with coaches and peers. Activities are tailored to each young person's comfort level, and can increase as this grows. As one worker said, 'You don't want to scare them off' (Brendan, YDC).

Mechanism

When group work is delivered in this welcoming context, two mechanisms are triggered for young people: 1) they can experience a reduction in social anxiety and an increase in self-confidence, and 2) they can feel connected to their peers which fosters a culture of warmth and acceptance among participants.

During group activities young people are challenged to take positive risks and step outside their comfort zones.

I'm really big about disrupting that cycle of sitting at home and not feeling like you've got somewhere to be. I really like them to be coming in at least a couple of times a week to come into the training, talk to people. I push them a bit outside their comfort zone. (Amanda, EEO)

For some, social anxiety remains high and they continue to attend only one-on-one coaching sessions. A young man told us he only attended one-on-one sessions 'because in groups, my anxiety hits me like a rock and then it really shows' (Thomas, Col47).

However, for many the gradual introduction to working with others led to a reduction in social anxiety.

I think it's good to just interact with each other and just have that one hour, two hours at the back, just do activities. We made pancakes one time ... We all had fun and we all got to interact and that was one of my favourite days because there was I think 12 of us and it was good. One of the main factors of this is getting young people to interact together and if you want to look for work it will help you. This program really helped with my anxiety ... really made me grow as a person. (Liam, Gen-Z)

A young man who said he had depression and anxiety attended similar groups and told us:

Over time I felt comfortable around them [peers]. Not all of them, but the ones who I'm friends with now. They were nice people and it was acceptance I've never really felt ... The [workers] just made me feel accepted. That means a lot, because I've never really felt accepted anywhere. (David, Gen-Z)

Getting to know others in the program contributed to a welcoming social space:

Yeah. Definitely [I'm more confident]. I was a lot more shy but VPG with the workshops make you—well not make you but they include the group and socialise a lot more. Bring down the walls and stuff. It's really good. (Will, VPG)

When young people associate the program with acceptance and fun activities they want to be there and they are more likely to continue to engage:

I have changed. I'm a whole new person ... I know who I am now, I'm a lot happier and a lot more confident, a lot more positive ... I came every day, I came here even when I was finished, I'd come here just to hang out with everyone and just stay engaged with the program. They got me a job in the process ... it's helped me with my confidence a lot to talk to people and stuff like that. (Maddison, Gen-Z)

Outcomes

When the group work is delivered during Phase 1 in a low-pressure style in a shared welcoming space with opportunities for casual interactions with coaches and peers, young people attend and engage with the program.

I was a bit of an antisocial bird for a bit, but I started hanging out with people, getting to know them, getting to hang out with the community. And so you learn—there's a lot of interesting people. And so I started attending activities. (Anthony, Col47)

In a voluntary program such as TtW, engaging young people is critical to keep them attending and completing the program. As a BSL worker said:

Because if you can really engage them in Phase 1, well then, they're going to want to stay around, because they've found a place, they've found somewhere that they're comfortable, they've found someone to work with that they're comfortable with. (Christina, BSL staff)

The other important outcome that results from group work delivered in the way described above is a stronger base to pursue career goals:

I've had really bad social anxiety problems for most of my life and before I started coming here I wouldn't even go and order a coffee for myself or anything like that. But now I'm out doing things on my own. Like, the cleaning course, I had to get to on my own ... and obviously the job interview. I never would have done that a couple of years ago. I would have been too scared. (Alison, Col47).

Box 2 Snapshot: Group work adaptation at Gen-Z

Context: Gen-Z management assigned an experienced staff member to the role of Programs Coordinator and formalised group programs in phases 1–3.

Phase 1: iActive (Weekly group fitness training); iConnect (Weekly sessions to challenge and engage); iExplore (career pathways, employment skills, Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways which focuses on literacy and numeracy).

Phases 2–3: iDrive (group-based driver preparation that also includes one lesson with a professional instructor); iStudy (Accredited training delivered by Registered Training Organisations); iWork 1 & 2 (Group sessions focused on job search skills).

Because some young people experience social isolation and anxiety, iActive, iConnect and iExplore offer a positive activity outside of their homes, building social skills and the routine needed to succeed in study or employment.





Mechanism: Programs create a positive energy and broad health benefits. Many young people additionally joined a gym, lost weight or gained confidence. When the researchers visited, Gen-Z was abuzz with young people meeting for iActive at the beach. Afterwards they returned to apply for jobs on the computers. The programs helped make the office welcoming, a gathering point and a place of friendship. One participant observed the change in attendees:

That's the biggest thing that I see. I'll see a kid come in and he'll just look extremely unmotivated, he doesn't even want to be here. And then after a month, they've had maybe four sessions of iActive, they've done a couple meetings with their mentors, and they've gotten to know the people here ... People are a lot happier. [When they first came] I would say: 'Hey man what's your name?' and they wouldn't reply. And then a month in they'd just be like: 'Hey dude'. Do you know what I mean? (Theo)

While some activities are specific to one office, others include participants from several office locations to move them out of their comfort zone and help them meet new people.

Outcome: Activities help young people imagine, explore and work towards positive futures. Staff identify opportunities and offer support. The outcome is the empowerment of young people in relation to pursuing career goals, e.g. lessons for the participant who wanted to learn to cook, inviting a participant with a Cert III in Fitness to run an iActive session. Activities also inspire new directions: Nick realised mechanics wasn't right for him but iActive helped him lose 30 kg and discover an interest in child-oriented fitness. Work-focused iExplore increased participants' confidence and led to study at a higher level; iWork provided job search skills with the added benefit of participants feeling encouraged and motivated by seeing their peers gain employment.

Table 7 Group Work (Phase 1)

 Component	Group Work (Phase 1)
 Context	Provision of a shared, welcoming space (e.g. with computers to encourage spending time at the service) and low-pressure interaction with coaches and peers.
 Mechanism	Social anxiety is reduced and confidence builds. Young people feel connected to their peers.
 Outcome	Young people commit to attend and engage with TtW and exhibit greater readiness to progress their career objectives.

11 Work skills, tasters & experiences (Phases 2 & 3)

While all young people need opportunities, it is not an equal starting line in the race to a job. The TtW CoP model offers young people experiencing various forms of disadvantage opportunities in the form of work tasters, training, work experience and the opening to build useful networks.

Component

Phases 2 and 3 of the TtW CoP model are designed to equip young people for the workplace. They do this through individual coaching with a focus on career goals; group sessions on preparation for work, job search and retention; and industry training (both pre-accredited & accredited). One EEO described the breadth of the content that is delivered in these phases:

Phase 2's pretty meaty. There's 11 workshops plus industry engagement, plus licensing support [for specific industries]. So it's actually a huge amount. I guess that I've thought about whether it needs to be cut down in the past. I don't think it does. (Amanda, EEO)

In addition, crucial to the model are opportunities to learn about occupations and workplaces, including through trade tasters and work experience:

Getting that real world experience, I think is really, really important. Especially for young people who've had no work experience, just getting something out of either a PaTH Internship, work experience, volunteering, something for their résumé is going to obviously hold them in good stead for ... being successful, getting a job, and it builds their skills and capabilities anyway. (Christina, BSL staff)

As the next two quotes demonstrate, 'real world' opportunities may be found in key local industries and—with some lateral thinking and the use of staff contacts—some unexpected places.

We work with local industry and employers for industry tours, site tours. So, we'll take groups of young people to [Aboriginal cultural centre] if they're interested in traditional dance. If they're interested in furnishing and cabinet-making we'll go to somewhere like CCW which is our largest cabinet-making employer ... [They] do really good tours at TAFE. They show them all the brick and block laying areas. We go to [the] hair and beauty [department] because they've got a salon [at the TAFE]. (Kate, Manager)

One of my friends, he's the coordinator of the cemeteries ... They can't afford to keep them maintained ... [The YDC said] 'We'll clean them up'. The kids loved it ... It's teaching them how to get up in the morning, how to do labouring work, because they're working with whipper snippers, brush cutters, lawnmowers and stuff like that. It's something for their résumé and it's getting them to meet other people. (Brendan, YDC).

A further aspect is supporting young people to go to places where they can build a network of contacts related to their study and career goals:

We have gone out to specific industry nights, or recruitment nights for them to be able to mingle ... It is going out as a group and showing that these young people are ready to work as well. They're all dressed in their hospitality blacks and they look great, they're ready for interviews and they're ready to hear about opportunities. (Erin, YDC)

We went out to Qantas and ... could ask questions ... I got to meet four of the managers there, for different spaces, that kind of puts a foot in the door and you meet people face to face, so they can remember you. (Jonathan, Col47)

Context

The context is the TtW CoP services building relationships with employers who can provide young people with experiences of specific jobs and industries. Young people can then try jobs to see if they suit their interests and abilities. One service had a strong mutually beneficial relationship with a major local employer willing to offer opportunities across a broad range of jobs:

Being such a large company, Sea Swift are really all about trying to invest in young people by showing them the different career opportunities that are available at Sea Swift because they might just think, 'Oh, you know, it's a marine industry', but there's just so many jobs here. (Ashleigh, NERG)

A crucial element of the model is having staff assigned the function of building relationships and a network of employers willing to provide these opportunities. Some services recruit Employment Engagement Officers (EEOs). Others require all Youth Development Coaches to allocate time to engagement. This depends on local contexts, the skills and networks of existing staff, and the service's capacity to recruit employment engagement specialists. Investment in this function, rather than whether services split it across staff or recruit an EEO, is the important context.

Services and staff have found that such investment creates valuable openings for young people:

I like to deal with the employers ... I may go out and see some as well, and so I try to develop that relationship. Like for example we've got a roof plumber that has put on two of our guys now. I sometimes send him a text because I know that's how he likes to communicate because he's busy. So, as I gauge [the best way to engage] our participants, I also gauge the employers that way so I'm always touching base. (Kylie, PPS)

Investment over time built trusting relationships that led to more opportunities for young people.

... we've got longstanding employers who have been on our database so we were quite lucky, and we maintain our partnerships very well ... We make sure we listen to what

they say and we send them young people who they want, and now they're at a point where we'll ring them, 'Can we send through a group of 10 next week?' and we'll come with them and do the whole tour. (Kate, Manager)

By contrast, where services have not had an Employment Engagement Officer and Youth Development Coaches lacked the time or ability to build relationships with employers, there have been fewer opportunities (e.g. tasters, work experience and jobs) for young people.

We've been lacking staff in the EEO side of it as well as in getting our name out there a little bit more, and making sure that we see as many employers as possible to get Transition to Work's name out there. (Carolyn, QA)

Mechanism

These key aspects of the model provide young people with know-how or cultural capital. This is the mechanism that enables their pursuit of career goals, and equips them to gain and retain employment. This is particularly important for young people who have not gained this knowledge in school and lack family or social networks that support this kind of informal learning. The TtW CoP model therefore provides crucial opportunities to those who may have missed out. One YDC outlined what he thought was of value to those young people, receiving a positive response:

For them to be able to come in here and be told, 'Yes, we can help you with that', 'Yes, we want to help you with that', 'I think you can do that', and have someone else believing in them. (Nathan, YDC)

Young people recognised that they were learning new things that would assist them to gain work:

In Phase 2 they helped me set up job interviews ... They teach you how to dress for an interview, what to wear, what to say, how to present yourself, setting up your own voicemail, so everything really that you need to do. They also help you find jobs ... (Noah, VPG)

We get interview practices here ... grooming, what to wear, what to say ... I didn't know to change my voicemail or to double-check my Facebook ... stuff from when I was last on there and I was like 'Aah, thank God I went through that'. (Ella, VPG)

Outcomes

The know-how gained through Phases 2 and 3 supports young people to achieve the outcome of being able to navigate their learning and work lives. In the August 2019 Advantaged Thinking Survey, high proportions agreed that TtW had helped them:

- learn about employment opportunities (90%) and training/education opportunities (85%)
- gain the confidence to work towards their education and career goals (85%)

- connect with people (e.g. teachers, employers, mentors) who can help them in working towards their goals (79%)

This is supported by the interviews and focus groups. For example:

We set a high standard for our guys ... 'I think you can do this because last week you were able to go and talk to an employer'. It gradually builds up their confidence and helps them to understand that they can do it. [A young person] was going for his very first job interview at Subway and he was freaking out ... I said to him, 'Hon, you're going to have a chat to a guy who runs a sandwich shop'. And he went, 'Yes, that's true' ... He felt empowered because he believed in himself and also understands his place in the world and that he's not some little insignificant speck, he's actually a perfectly capable person who's able to go out there and do a really good job. (Amanda, EEO)

Once I came here they got me on the right path and gave me a lot of chances and a lot of—what's the word—a lot of opportunities here. They helped me get my forklift licence, my Cert III in logistics, mostly just gave me more confidence about myself and I just needed that. I said I'd be able to tell myself that I'm better than what, I can be better than what I was doing, pick a better path and they all helped me. (Cameron, Gen-Z)

Even if the young person's current path (training or job) does not work out, they have the know-how and networks to identify and move on to the next opportunity. In the Advantaged Thinking survey, 83 per cent agreed that 'If I experience setbacks I have the skills to find a new way forward and people who can support me'. Youth Development Coaches said that staff working at jobactive commented on the greater work readiness of former TtW participants:

[jobactive staff] always say to us we know which ones have been through Transition to Work, we know which ones have been helped along the journey and they seem to quickly find work after that ... we just know which ones have been through because they've got the supports in place and they're almost ready for work. (YDC, focus group)





YDCs also reflected that TtW participants gained lasting skills that would help them throughout their working lives:

Working within the Advantaged Thinking framework young people are inspiring themselves to move forward, and learning skills that they'll have for a lifetime, as opposed to us doing things for them that only help in the short term. (YDC, focus group).

The importance of this know-how for obtaining, retaining and changing jobs throughout one's career is stressed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

It will also be critical that young people not only have the skills to enter work, but also to remain in work, and to adapt to the changing work and workplaces they will encounter across careers subject to multiple disruptions and continuous change (ACCI 2018, p. 15).

Table 8 Work skills and tasters/experiences (Phase 2 & 3)

 Component	Work skills and tasters/experiences (Phase 2 & 3)
 Context	Coaching and group work. Established networks maximising learning and work opportunities.
 Mechanism	Young people gain know-how (cultural capital).
 Outcome	Young people are better able to navigate their learning and work lives.

12 Keys to the success of the TtW CoP model

This evaluation of the TtW CoP model has considered the value of the model for service delivery, and the way it has been implemented. The evaluation is particularly concerned with what aspects of the model work for whom and in what circumstances.

First, it is useful to state what the model is not. The TtW CoP is not a deficits/problem-focused model that seeks to 'fix' young people so they become acceptable employees. Nor does it activate young people through punitive measures—that is, 'participate or lose your income support'.

Instead TtW is guided by capabilities theory. Thus, it firstly seeks to maximise young people's external capabilities by harnessing community resources such as employers to create opportunities for them. Secondly, it seeks to maximise young people's internal capabilities by using an Advantaged Thinking practice approach and, specifically, enabling relationships that support young people to identify and work towards personally meaningful career goals through training, work tasters and experience. The model's response at individual and structural (i.e. the opportunities available to them) levels means that young people experience a sense of agency over their lives through being able to choose from a range of opportunities.

Results from the Advantaged Thinking survey support the finding that the Advantaged Thinking approach contributed towards young people's sense of agency. Most survey participants agreed that staff recognise them as the best person to plan their future and provide them with support to do that (88%) and feel inspired and motivated to make plans for their life (83%). Some 79 per cent said TtW connected them with people (e.g. teachers, employers, mentors) who can help them work toward their goals.

This sense of agency and support to overcome individual barriers and access opportunities was also evident in the written comments:

They have always listened and cared in what I have to say and if there has ever been anything holding me back they have managed to push me past my barriers and opened up some of the best opportunities. (20-year-old man)

Importantly, fidelity to this model, specifically fidelity to the practice approaches of Advantaged Thinking and harnessing community investment, leads to better outcomes for young people and the higher the fidelity, the better the outcomes.

The realist evaluation method's focus on what works for whom under which circumstances revealed the components, contexts and mechanisms that contributed to good outcomes. Critical components included:

- **The convening component**

- 1 The TtW CoP convenor (BSL) took on the role of an 'enabling organisation' that supported CoP members through the coordination of regular meetings, training and practice consultancy on behalf of members that share information and feel a sense of collegiality and trust. This has led to the trialling and promotion of new approaches, service-to-service collaboration and the development of 'good practice' specific to the local context.

- **The model components**

- 2 A four-phase model provided a flexible structure which ensures that the core activities are delivered, while accommodating the tailoring of offers to the individual young person, and allowing a place-based response that considers the local conditions and evolves over time with collective learning and experience.
- 3 While employment interventions tend to focus on young people (supply) and neglect demand, the TtW CoP model attends to demand by activating employers through a Community Investment Committee or equivalent. TtW staff built strong community connections and used Advantaged Thinking to promote young people's potential while focusing on the benefits for employers. Employers then opened up more opportunities for young people and were recruited in the wider campaign to address youth unemployment.

- **The practice components**

- 4 The relationship between TtW staff and young people was bound together by the Deal, which was understood as working together for a common goal rather than as a tool for compliance. Young people felt accountable to themselves and knew staff were accountable to them. The Deal built a culture of reciprocity and accountability between young people and staff. This led to young people making progress with their plans with sufficient support from their coaches.
- 5 Phase 1 of the model (exploration, inspiration and goal-setting) was grounded in trusting relationships and workers' belief that young people can succeed. Young people felt empowered and experienced a sense of agency which enabled them to step out of their comfort zone and take up opportunities such as study and employment that were aligned with their goals.
- 6 Group work in a shared and welcoming space helped reduce young people's social anxiety, and built confidence, a connection to their peers, and a commitment to progress their career objectives.
- 7 Work skills and tasters helped young people gain know-how and establish networks to help them seize career opportunities and better navigate their learning and work lives.

13 Implications

Findings from this study point to the key shifts in the framing ideas, assumptions and service model components necessary for effective youth employment policy and program delivery. They have implications for driving systemic change in the youth employment ecosystem.

Social change

1 Activate employers in the campaign to address youth employment

While policy to address youth unemployment focuses heavily on activating young people, there has been much less attention to the need to activate employers. The Advantaged Thinking approach refers to this as the Campaign. While the rhetoric around unemployed young people can be negative, the Campaign promotes young people as capable community assets and valuable employees.

Policy change

2 Reframe mutual obligation as reciprocity

The TtW CoP uses the Deal to reframe mutual obligation as reciprocity and mutual accountability. Staff and young people are valued equally in the Deal which sets out their respective responsibilities.

Staff hold high expectations of young people and offer ongoing support and opportunities for them to achieve personal goals.

Young people meet departmental requirements (e.g. 25 hours participation) but rather than simply undertaking government-mandated activity, they see this time as their opportunity to pursue their dreams. Young people feel accountable to themselves and the service and know that the service is accountable to them.

The evaluation found that a culture of reciprocity and mutual accountability enables young people to make progress with their career goals with support from their coach. Reframing policy principles to support this approach has the potential to transform youth employment services and the lives of young people.

3 Trial collaborative commissioning in other contexts to test its potential in enabling traditionally competitive agencies to co-produce effective service responses

Competitive tendering and dependence on short-term government contracts have undermined community building, collaboration and innovation to address complex social problems. This is exemplified by the impact of the defunding of Youth Connections on the youth sector and young people, the competition and the siloes in mainstream

employment and youth services, and the inefficiencies and poorer outcomes that this produces.

Collaborative commissioning by contrast facilitates collaboration with like-minded professionals while retaining organisational autonomy through individual contracts with government (BSL 2017, Thornton 2018).

4 Promote the mutual advantage of communities of practice to service providers and government

Communities of practice have a strategic advantage in their advocacy to government because they can present the considered and collective views of a group of providers based on research evidence. It is also more efficient for government to liaise with a CoP than separately with each of their contractors.

Structural change

5 Balance focus on the individual with focus on the structural

Policy must take into account not only the aspirations and responsibility of individuals but also the structures that enable them to achieve their potential.

The TtW CoP, and Advantaged Thinking, seeks to balance developing individual talents and aspirations with a concern for structural change and providing access to the opportunities and resources young people need to lead sustainable and personally meaningful lives. This includes access to training, group-based career development and real world experiences.

This is important because overemphasising individual responsibility (finding a job) can blame young people for their failure and ignore the need to address structural, systemic issues such as high regional unemployment, industrial decline, lack of transport and poor access to suitable training.

6 Harness local investment through partnerships & Community Investment Committees

Policy and programs need to harness local investment through a broad range of partnerships to maximise the opportunities available to young people in their community.

The TtW CoP model harnesses community investment by building partnerships with local community, education/training, government sectors and employers. The average service had 47 such partnerships.

The key mechanism for harnessing community investment was Community Investment Committees or equivalent bodies which recruited the stakeholders who collectively hold

the keys to youth employment in the region. One purpose of CICs is to engage the broader community as champions of youth employment.

Practice reform

7 Activate young people through positive relationships rather than negative, punitive approaches

Young people's progress in TtW CoP services is fuelled by positive, trusting relationships with Youth Development Coaches. Coaches inspire and support young people to identify career aspirations, co-design goals and pursue relevant opportunities. Staff say this relationship and focus on aspirations ignites a spark in young people that engenders a sense of agency and is a motivating force for progress. We call this way of working 'positive activation' which is quite different from the punitive approach of mainstream employment services. In psychology, thanks to Pavlov and his dog, there is a recognition that positive reinforcement works better than negative and yet the punitive approach persists in social policy. 'Positive activation' in the TtW CoP model provides a progressive alternative and should be adopted more widely in service responses to youth unemployment.

8 Maximise the resources and supports of service providers through Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice collaborate to address complex issues such as youth unemployment and develop good practice for their local context.

There is evidence that this has wide-ranging benefits. Members have described how collegiality has energised and improved their practice. Additionally, pooling resources provides access to greater supports than community organisations would have in isolation. Examples include a practice guide, training, professional development, practice consultancy and trouble-shooting, research and evaluation, and support with advocacy.

Service delivery

9 Equip young people to manage their employment and education paths

Career 'know-how', in the form of skills and networks and real world experience, is critical if young people are to take the first step on a career pathway. These are also essential lifelong skills that enable young people to adapt and manage job and career changes throughout their working lives.

Most young people we interviewed for the evaluation said they had little or no career support at school, and needed assistance with these skills.

Policy to ensure that all young people receive substantive careers development in schools and training organisations is important. However, for early school leavers and those who need additional support, the importance of having a TtW-like service with model phases focused on equipping young people for employment cannot be overstated.

Further work

Policy analysis was beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, these findings point to areas for policy development and advocacy and subsequent evaluation efforts. The next stage of the evaluation will focus on the broader ambition of the TtW CoP model to effect systems change to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people. To realise this ambition, a policy framework should be employed that enables cross-sectoral responses that draw on the expertise, and address the needs, of young people, communities and employers. For example, policy solutions aiming to bring about systemic change must be grounded in place and understand specific local challenges, such as transport infrastructure and regional shortfalls in education, training and employment opportunities.

Appendix: TtW CoP purpose and governance

Smarter commissioning

Through its collaborative model, the TtW CoP has reduced but not entirely addressed the unintended negative consequences of the marketised system on the providers of employment services for youth. Consequently, BSL has continued to advocate for measures to address these issues at the systems level.

In its submission to the Productivity Commission (2017), BSL argued that the provision of public services requires ‘smarter’ commissioning. This includes:

- recognising that complex needs such as youth unemployment require multifaceted solutions. Rather than being driven by markets, these must be driven by networks with closer work between the public and non-government sectors. ‘Commissioning means that governments are not primarily “contract managers” but facilitators of cross-sectoral networks bound by trust’ (BSL 2017, p. 30)
- incentives for organisations to work together rather than tendering processes that force them to compete for scarce resources. These collaborations must be built on trust and reciprocity, sharing ideas and trying new approaches
- strengthening downward accountability by having government devolve some decision-making power to local agencies, which are best placed to respond to local needs and conditions. This would recognise that there is no longer ‘one best way’, but ‘different ways for different circumstances’ (O’Flynn & Alford 2012, p. 254)
- funding ‘enabling organisations’ to act as intermediaries between government and small local agencies, and to build the organisational capacity of the latter.

TtW CoP model: purpose and context

BSL as the convenor of the TtW CoP seeks to foster collaboration and good practice among the employment service provider members.

The BSL aims to ‘enable’ member organisations to contribute and develop their complementary expertise, rather than directing them on how to deliver the model. The goal is that sharing practice lessons will develop CoP members’ capacity to work effectively with communities and local employers to create sustainable employment pathways for young people (BSL 2017, p.21).

The CoP is a form of ‘collaborative governance’ which brings together cross-sectoral stakeholders to co-produce and implement policy or manage programs, particularly in the context of public issues which may not be easily addressed by government alone. It has been suggested that this may be appropriate for innovations that address complex problems and seek broader policy reform (BSL 2017, O’ Flynn et al. 2014)

Accordingly, the TtW CoP aims to:

- share collective expertise to trial and refine an evidence-based youth employment service model
- participate in action research evaluation to ensure collective learnings inform adaptation and improvement
- leverage business and community expertise to drive economic development for young people.

Membership in the TtW CoP requires commitment to a model of service characterised by some core approaches (as outlined in this report), while remaining flexible enough to be adapted to local conditions. As the enabling organisation that convenes the CoP, BSL coordinates regular meetings and communication, training, professional consulting and advocacy in return for three per cent of payments tied to member services' contracted case load. BSL separately funds the evaluation part of the model.

Unlike 'prime provider' models, BSL is not the governing body for the CoP; members have individual contracts with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and their participation in the CoP is voluntary. BSL's role is to enable the active collaboration of members in the co-design, development and refinement of the TtW CoP model (BSL 2017).

The broad ambition of the TtW CoP is to provide evidence for an effective, capabilities-based model that moves young people into sustainable and meaningful employment, and to work with government and communities to embed this way of working in the mainstream response to youth unemployment. This requires achieving structural change in how government invests in communities by valuing young people. In driving this structural change, attention must be directed at both local and national levels. Addressing youth unemployment requires action across multiple intersecting domains: service delivery, practice, structural, policy and social.

National Employment Reference Group

Working closely with employers is key to the delivery of local TtW services and the TtW CoP's broader agenda to improve employment outcomes for young people. Employers who participate in local Community Investment Committees can elect to be part of the National Employers Reference Group (NERG).

The purpose of the NERG is to:

- bring together employers, government and TtW CoP providers to collaborate and create solutions to barriers to youth employment
- highlight and share on a national scale what is working well in local areas in creating pathways to employment for young people
- link the local with regional and national action for change.

Employers around the country provide advice on how to co-develop better work opportunities and industry links to the wider employment system, such as with education, training and policy.

The NERG represents a wide range of industries and employers of all sizes to provide diverse views and share information across the nation to inform innovative practice and supportive policy and investments.

Youth Alliance

The TtW CoP Youth Alliance Working Group was created in late 2019 to promote and generate young people's knowledge of how to better support their access to quality training and education, real work experience opportunities and specialised support. It was not in operation at the time of this evaluation. Supported by BSL as the enabling organisation and by their TtW services, young people nationwide meet regularly online to initiate and undertake projects and provide input to the delivery of TtW and employment responses to young people generally.

The aim is to put young people at the centre of practice—challenging us to rethink how we see, speak about, and listen to and work with young people. Leveraging the expertise and experience of young people in the design and implementation of the model is critical to its success. This allows for more tailored, relevant strategies that support young people in the areas they need, while also assisting them to develop the social capital and agency essential for success in the labour market.

The National Youth Employment Body

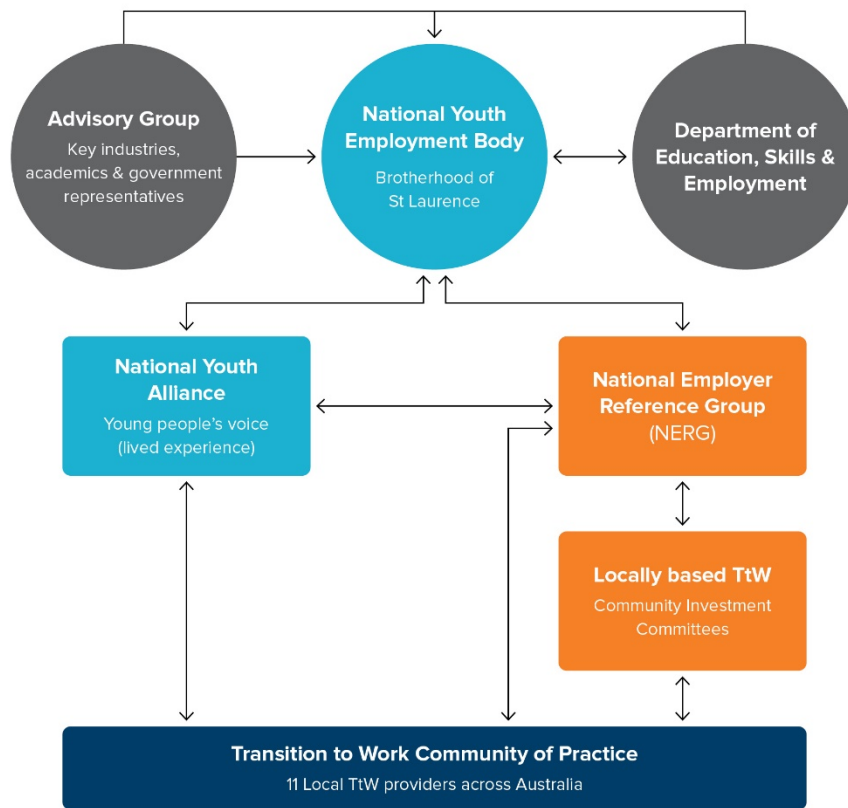
Building on the work of the TtW CoP, BSL sought and received funding from the federal government to convene a National Youth Employment Body (NYEB). The NYEB aims to:

- facilitate collaborations, including with employers and industry, which harness community investment and local economic development initiatives,
- identify key elements of good practice in delivering coordinated, multi-sectoral and place-based responses to youth unemployment and,
- understand how these can be adapted and scaled across different local contexts.

The ambition is to inform a coordinated and coherent national approach to youth employment that aligns key investments, including employment, education and industry. The NYEB works at the local and national level to identify and co-develop adaptable, place-based solutions for moving young people into sustainable, meaningful work.

Figure 14 illustrates the connections between the TtW CoP and its Community Investment Committees and the NERG, the recently established National Youth Alliance, and the BSL convened National Youth Employment Body.

Figure 14 TtW CoP in context



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