**COVID-19 and young people with disability**

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COVID-19 will have a significant impact on young people with disability. It will be disproportionate, and it will be long-term.

The crumbling labour market has hit young people under 20 the hardest when it comes to the loss of jobs, reduction in hours or reduced income.

During the last recession in 1992, the youth unemployment rate peaked above 20 per cent, in comparison the peak was 11.2 per cent for the broader unemployment rate. After the Global Financial Crisis, youth unemployment climbed again, hitting 14 per cent in 2014 and remaining elevated today (Chalmers, 16 April 2020). The Grattan Institute estimates that about 40 per cent of employed teenagers will lose work due to the COVID-19 shutdown and the knock-on effects of special measures such as spatial distancing (Coates, Cowgill, Chen, & Mackey, 2020).

The longer-term impact can be mitigated with appropriate interventions right now.

It is crucial that we support young people with disability to ensure that they are prepared to access the post COVID-19 labour market and that they stay connected with the labour market during their transition years. We need measures to create employment opportunities (Social Ventures Australia, 2019).

Ensuring that schools have the knowledge and ability to create ‘positive futures’ for students with disability is a proven means for circumventing the longer-term risks. If these preventative measures are not put in place, we risk creating a ‘lost generation’ where unemployment and low quality work contribute to poverty and poor mental health destroying access to employment and quality of life over the longer term (Butterworth et al., 2011).

In Australia, 53% of young people who experienced instability in employment and education between ages 16 and 25 were unemployed at 25. Young people with disability were more likely than others to be part of this group (Ranasinghe, Chew, Knight, & Siekmann, 2019). A national snapshot of adults with intellectual disabilities in the labour force in 2013 found that if young people with intellectual disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will (Siperstein, Parker, & Drascher, 2013).

Across the intervening years of economic prosperity, the gap between young people with disability and those without widened. The economic and social participation of those with disability has declined even further. Indicative of this is over 10 years there was:

* 10% decrease in the number of young people with disability in employment.
* 8% decrease in the number of young people with disability being fully engaged in education or work (Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014).

It is imperative that these trends are reversed if we are to ensure the current economic downturn does not embed lifelong disadvantage.

Early intervention is the key as it is “crucial that young people with a disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible. Doing so will drive effective long-term employment outcomes and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011)”.

Interventions to support senior secondary students with disability are essential not only at school but beyond the classroom. An analysis of longitudinal data collected on 12,000 students with disability found that the most critical elements predicting employment outcomes for students with disability were employment experiences in high school and parental expectations of post-secondary school employment (Wehman et al., 2015).

Yet many students with disability are not afforded the same school to work opportunities as their classmates; not obtaining access to work experience, after school work or assistance with job-seeking or job-placement

**Time to do things differently**

There is a long history demonstrating that when communities are healthy and connected, they respond better to hardships, and they recover quicker to stressors. These findings are also emerging in the literature on the bushfire emergency and even in community responses to COVID-19.

In commentary on the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) website Cox, Reddel, and Hogan (2020) write about [‘Building a fairer Australia after COVID 19’](https://www.ceda.com.au/Digital-hub/Blogs/CEDA-Blog/April-2020/Building-a-fairer-Australia-after-COVID-19#_edn7). They point out that while the scale of our current health, economic and social crisis feels unprecedented, place-based approaches have a long legacy of success in Australia’. In their opinion collaborative, community-based approaches will be critical to the pandemic recovery.

There has been renewed interest in collective approaches to challenging problems before COVID-19. In February 2020, the Victorian Government released a new framework for place-based approaches, [Working Together in Place](https://www.vic.gov.au/framework-place-based-approaches), It states programmatic or siloed funding approaches counteract this work. Nationally, Stronger Places Stronger People initiative aims to demonstrate the potential for ‘collective impact’ approaches to interrupt disadvantage (Department of Social Security, 2020). Internationally, a plethora of organisations, strategies, frameworks, evaluations and networks have been built for impactful and integrated social and economic development at local and regional levels (Cox et al., 2020).

In COVID-19 recovery, governments need to be flexible and innovative in how they allocate resources. There is a need to embed models of shared accountability and ensure place-based collective approaches in navigating the difficult road ahead.

**Ticket to Work**

Ticket to Work is a collective impact approach, established in response to poor and falling school to work transition for young Australians with disability,

While not underestimating the challenges, Ticket to Work networks have demonstrated in significant numbers that young people can thrive in open employment when prepared and supported while at school through a coordinated approach. The Ticket to Work model was developed from scoping ‘what works’ in other countries.

At its simplest, Ticket to Work’s collective impact approach (34 local networks; 205 schools; 105 local community organisations) has already delivered 1,621 jobs for young people with disability. Compared to a similar group of young people Ticket to Work participants post-school are more likely to complete Year 12 (95% compared to 52%), work in open workplaces (57% compared to 16.5%) participate in the labour force (89% compared to 58%), and be involved in social activities: more socially active (83% compared to 65%); more independent (63% compared to 32%).

A valuation of Ticket to Work found that the collective approach is highly cost-effective, delivering overall savings in government expenditure (SVA 2020). Ticket to Work networks are proving to be durable in the midst of COVID-19.

The Grattan report stated that in the interest of investing to catch up on COVID-19, priority should be given to initiatives that:

* Have been shown in research studies to improve student learning significantly;
* Have benefits that clearly outweigh the costs;
* Have a track record of successful implementation across many schools and can be implemented quickly (Sonnemann & Goss, 2020).

Ticket to Work ticks those boxes. The adaptability of the Ticket to Work model is highly advantageous to expanding its reach.

Connecting students with disability to employers while still at school as well as tailoring education and training to ensure young peoples’ skills meet industry demand is critical to the recovery of the youth labour market. Doing this in a place-based approach is essential.

While many efforts and initiatives are happening to support Australians through the pandemic, there will be more to do in the recovery phase. Those already disadvantaged in the labour market, such as people with disability, must not be left out.

We need Government to take the opportunity during COVID-19 recovery to overhaul a system that does not work for young people with disability and reimagine the world where there is inclusive access to ensure we give young people with disability a fighting chance.

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