

Maribyrnong City Council & Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network

Youth Employment Pathways Program (YEPP) Evaluation Report

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

In 2020, Maribyrnong City Council (MCC) and Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network (MMVLLEN) formed a unique partnership to develop the Youth Employment Pathways Program (YEPP) in response to early findings relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns on young people aged 18 – 29.¹ These findings included anxiety and depression, self-reported stress and disturbed sleep².

In September 2021 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported on the results of a global survey that confirmed the pandemic's impact on young people. The most significant concerns for young people in the 15-24 year age bracket globally are the toll the pandemic is taking on their mental health, employment prospects and education³, thus validating the premise of YEPP being to *"build and support the development of skills, knowledge, confidence and experience of young people in the City of Maribyrnong to prepare for future employment.*⁴"

Through YEPP, the partners are striving to create greater awareness of the challenges local young people face in gaining employment, particularly through the extended COVID-19 period. In addition to direct delivery, YEPP provides the opportunity to explore models utilising a joined-up approach between the partners to effectively facilitate career pathways and employment options for young people.

YEPP commenced in October 2020, with the Evaluation conducted in December 2021. In just over 12 months, 71 young people were engaged in a total of 128 activities. YEPP is the only program in the City of Maribyrnong supporting young people with practical employment preparation options regardless of the length of their unemployment or underemployment. YEPP is tailored to meet the needs of young people and includes young people in decision making about the activities they want and their delivery modes.

Three factors have contributed to the successes of YEPP: 1) MCC and MMVLLEN are local organisations, trusted by young people; 2) the focus on quality engagement has led to word-of-mouth referrals amongst young people; 3) teaming professional generalist youth workers with employment pathway specialists provided the activities with a heightened level of credibility.

This Evaluation Report follows a September 2021 Interim Evaluation Report and provides an overview of the activities undertaken, identifies the outcomes and explores the effectiveness of the partnership and other strategies for achieving the goals of YEPP. It strongly recommends the continuation of the partnership between MCC and MMVLLEN to provide YEPP as an effective place-based response to the significant needs facing young people in the City of Maribyrnong as they transition into a rapidly changing world of work at a time of major disruption to education, entry-level jobs and career pathways.

¹ <u>COVID-19 and mental health: A review of the existing literature (nih.gov) Asian J Psychiatr.</u> 2020 Aug; 52: 102066., <u>Ravi</u> <u>Philip Rajkumar</u>

² ibid

³ Mental health, unemployment and education – COVID concerns for the young | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

⁴ YEPP Operational Guidelines, June 2021

2.0 The YEPP Program of Activities

YEPP provides a range of customisable activities for each young participant, including 1:1 support, mentoring, and small group workshops. Two skilled Youth Workers, one generalist from Maribyrnong Youth Service (MYS) and one bringing specialist expertise in employment pathway transitions from MMVLLEN, work together to ensure each YEPP participant is provided with an individualised program of supports to pursue education and employment pathways appropriate for their career aspirations.

By joining up expertise, reach, resources and goodwill Youth Workers are able to activate and engage young people in the City of Maribyrnong catchment area and assist them to move into, or closer to, paid work and a career pathway. 1:1 support ensures that the young person's immediate needs are being met and, where necessary, refers to specialist services. Each young person has an element of 1:1 support depending on their own individual needs.

Young people engaged in mentoring are carefully matched to trained mentors for 9 months and are placed, where possible, in a paid internship in a local business/organisation. This second component was difficult during COVID19 lockdowns and had to be varied for many participants.

Small group workshops are developed in collaboration with young people on the following topics:

- Developing Personal Goals
- Developing a resume and writing a cover letter
- Discovering your passion and developing confidence
- Acing the job interview
- Entrepreneurship
- Laws and rights in the workplace
- Meet the professionals
- Tax and Finance
- Achievements, goal setting and reflection
- Self-care and work/life/study balance

YEPP engaged a range of organisations to collaborate on service and support initiatives, including workshop delivery and presentations, and promotional activities including the distribution of flyers and social media engagement. These organisations included Brighter Futures (WCIG), Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley VET & Pathways Network, Maribyrnong/MV/Brimbank/Melton VCAL Coordinators Network, Job Advocates (Uniting), Jobs Victoria Employment Service (JVES) (WCIG), Australian Migrant Education Service (AMES), Inner Melbourne VET Cluster (IMVC) and WEstJustice.

Workshops generally ran for around 20 minutes with their length determined in conjunction with young people early in the program rollout. Participants receive follow up after the workshops and resources such as information booklets, PowerPoint presentations and care packages, where appropriate. The packages consist of a \$10 Myki card, sunscreen, pencil case and USB stick. Participants also receive the presenting organisations' contact details if they require further assistance or one on one support.

An additional component of YEPP has been the opportunity for young people to participate in the Kickstarter Grant process, where they pitch an entrepreneurial idea in a bid to gain a Kickstarter Grant to support the realisation of this idea.

3.0 YEPP Uptake and Outcomes

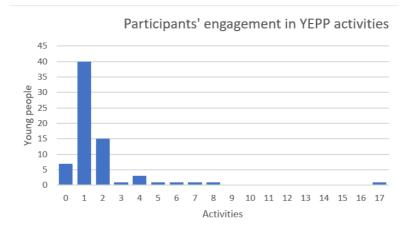
3.1 Participation Data

Overall, 71 young people have engaged in YEPP activities between October 2020 and the 30 November 2021. These 71 young people represent a total of 128 instances of participation in YEPP activities and engagements.

Table 1 and Graph 1 show the pattern of young people's participation in one or more activities:

Young People (YP) undertaking activities	Total number of YP undertaking 1 or more activities	Total instances of participation
YP = o activity	7	0
YP = 1 activity	40	40
YP = 2 activity	15	30
YP = 3 activity	1	3
YP = 4 activity	3	12
YP = 5 activity	1	5
YP = 6 activity	1	6
YP = 7 activity	1	7
YP = 8 activity	1	8
YP = 9 – 16 activities	0	0
YP = 17 activity	1	17
	71	128





Graph 1

Graphs 2 & 3 provide the activity data from September 2021 and the data from December 2021. The graphs show that, whilst there is growth in the number of participants, there is a drop in the overall numbers not yet engaged in any activities, indicating that Youth Workers are able to efficiently engage young people entering YEPP into activities.



Young people engaged in at least one activity Young people engaged with no activity

Graphs 3

Table 2, below, provides a summary of the achievements of YEPP against the agreed deliverables as of 30 November 2021. The key achievement of YEPP is the engagement of 71 participants in a year dominated by lockdowns and producing a reliance on digital communication.

Agreed Deliverables	Achieved as of 30 th November 2021		
Mentoring program for	23 young people in mentoring program.		
20 participants	Supported Mentors in training and support activities		
Entrepreneurship	Enterprise Workshops delivered, and associated Kick-		
Workshops and Kick-	starter grants awarded to 3 participants (Initially 4		
starter grants x 5	participants in the Entrepreneurship Workshops).		
Traineeships x 10	Redesigned the target to include traineeships, internships,		
Payment for work	work placement and work experience.		
placement	2 participants in total undertook a work placement or		
	traineeship. 1 participant undertake a work placement (and		
	then transitioned into a traineeships). 1 other participant		
	undertook a traineeship		
Workshops, forums and	Implemented 23 skill building workshops, forums and		
network facilitation	activities with 50 individual young people as participants,		
	totalling 100 workshop participations.		
Tracking tool	Developed and rolled out an evaluation tracking tool to		
development	participants and collected data to provide detail around		
	program activities and participant outcomes.		

Table 2

3.2 YEPP Tracking Tool: Measuring Intent, Experience and Impact

3.2.1 About the Tracking Tool

The YEPP Tracking Tool was developed to supplement/complement engagement, participation and attendance data. Its purpose is to track individual outcomes and measure the impact of YEPP on hard to measure critical indicators of change.

Who I Am Demographic Data - as participants enter the Free space for each young person to project **My Participation (What** Captures the YEPP activities (and the response to those provide insights am I doing?) activities e.g. surveys) that each participant is into who they are undertaking e.g. video, audio, My Story (What Has Baseline plus maximum 2 reflections (April and text Changed For Me) September)

To evaluate Individual Participant Outcomes the Tracking Tool collects the following data:

At this point in time, the data collections tools are housed on Moodle as a learning management system. It is a commonly used, easily accessible learning management system and meets government cyber security requirements.

3.2.2 The Participants and their engagement in YEPP

The age range of young people using the tracking tool is from 16-to 24, with the average age being 19, and most common age being 18. 45 out of 71 provided their gender with 49% identifying as male and 51% as female. None have identified as non-binary.

The majority of participants come from CALD backgrounds, with their first language being Vietnamese, Nepali, Somali, Persian, Dari, Hazaragi, Swahili, Oromo and Karen. No young people identified as Indigenous or as having a disability.

Participants took part in the following YEPP activities - Workshops, Volunteering, Education/training, Mentoring, Traineeship, Work experience and Skill-building activities.

The reasons participants offer for undertaking YEPP were focused heavily on getting and keeping a job (or a new job). The following quotes provide examples of the reasons the young people provided for engaging in YEPP:

"To learn how to get a job" and "build confidence and skills in maintaining a job"

"I haven't really tried this year because of COVID. I was hoping to do Year 10 Work Experience so I could organize a resume and start applying for casual employment at local retail outlets like KMART, Coles (etc). I also am not sure how to apply for a job or how to prepare for an interview".

"I am currently working at a Warehouse and Coles but would like to work on my literacy to get into a Security course".

Other goals related to wanting to give back to the community via mentoring and broader preferences around confidence and skill building.

3.2.3 Participant Feedback

YEPP offered 23 x workshops, 1 x enterprise Kickstarter grant initiative, 1 x mentoring program, paid internship, work placement and traineeship opportunities – a total of 28 activities.

The feedback in the Tracking Tool shows the majority of young people found the activities helpful and informative. Satisfaction ratings ranged from 2 - 5 with the majority of the rankings at either a 4 or a 5 out of 5 (excellent). Mentoring, skill-building and workshops were identified as the most valuable activities undertaken by the Participants.

The following is a sample of the feedback provided through the Tracking Tool:

"Super practical advice which I will be able to implement right away".

"I feel more confident about searching for work and feel better prepared."

"I now have a strategy on how to approach interviews"

"The information was really informative when it comes to creating your own business and the steps that are involved".

"I really liked the workshops as a I got to learn more on how I can achieve my goals."

"I did resume writing and interviews and I thought they were very helpful as I have an interview coming up".

"I attended the resume and cover letter writing workshop. I thought the workshop was insightful, there were lots of good advice provided. The facilitator was personable. I liked the different resources to help with CV building. I learnt about the dos and do not when applying for a job. Going through the sample resumes was also good. It would be good to have a HR perspective from companies perhaps to provide further insight".

"I attended the Boost your Confidence. I thought the workshop was short and sharp. I liked learning about the advice from the facilitator and learned about ways to boost confidence".

"Resume and Cover Letter Writing: This was a really informative workshop because I learnt more information when it comes to resume and cover letter writing and what we need to put in".

"Beat the recruitment workshop was a really informative because I got to learn how to get a job and where to look when it comes to finding a job and what websites are available when it comes to looking for one"

"Design your personal goals: I really loved this workshop because I got to write down the goals that I want to achieve now while I am still at school and when I leave school and also in the future." "I participated in the passion workshop and found it very inspirational".

"I feel more confident about searching for work and feel better prepared"

"I now have a strategy on how to approach interviews "

"Super informative and very helpful session – all the content was awesome!"

'I found the Entrepreneurship session helpful because I got to meet experienced people who have insight and knowledge to the topic is very empowering.'

'The Tax and Finance session was helpful because I got to learn more about superannuation in detail. The presenter explains things very clearly.'

'I learned about how to ace a job interview and learned new quotes I didn't know before.'

"I picked the activities most valuable to me because they have allowed me to expand my knowledge as well as help develop my skills and experiences and just give me the opportunity to better myself and help improved my overall development".

"I picked the activities as being the most valuable to me as I care about my professional career progression"

3.2.4 Impact Indicators

In addition to collecting demographic data and feedback the tool provides a simple mechanism to measure the impact of YEPP on building the abilities of young people in relation to the following indicators:

- Wellbeing
- Problem-solving
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Knowledge of work & community
- Lifelong learning skills
- Experience

Young people using the tool provided a rating between o - 5 (with o being low and 5 being high) for each of the indicators. The aim was to capture the impact of YEPP on the hard to measure but critical personal and soft skills necessary for a successful transition into work. At a minimum, indicators will be updated, when the participant exits the program.

Whilst not all participants' information has been captured in the Tracking Tool, the available charts provide an indication that the YEPP activities are contributing positively across all indicators for the participating young people.

The de-identified charts below demonstrate the way this growth in capacity is captured for participants. The blue rankings show baseline data, and the red shows the change the young person identifies they have made by participating in YEPP.

Chart 1 shows an aggregate average of all the participants' baseline and exit impact indicator data. It clearly demonstrates that, in aggregate, all young people using the Tracker Tool believed their participation in YEPP has increased their confidence, resilience, skills, experience, problem-solving, well-being and knowledge of work and community.



Chart 1

The following charts are provided as a selection to demonstrate how they have been applied to individual YEPP participants. Chart 2 shows a young person who rated themselves very low on the indicators at the commencements of YEPP and high upon exit.



Chart 3 shows a young person who initially recognises that they have skills and experience but lack confidence and resilience, which show significant improvement upon exit.

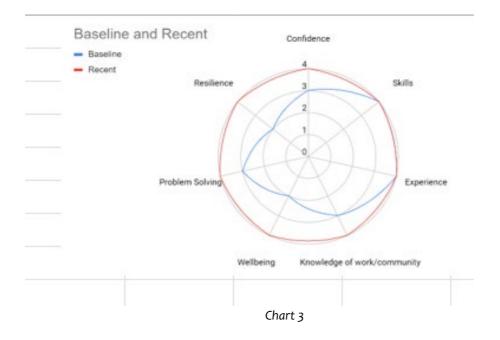
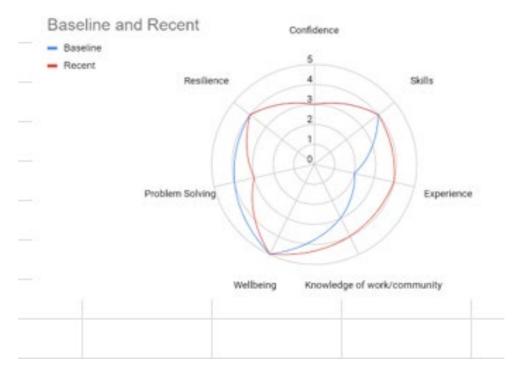


Chart 4 is interesting in that the participant identifies improvements in two indicators but suggests they have gone backwards with the problem-solving indicator. This possibly means, however, that they now know a little more about what problem solving in the world of work entails.





3.3 Participant Case Studies

Whilst the YEPP quantitative data captures the engagement of young people in activities offered by MCC and MMVLLEN, the following case studies provide an understanding of their personal journeys as they participated in YEPP activities.

Case Study 1

Case Study 1 is a young male who didn't want to be involved in YEPP initially. His attitude was "I'm fine, I'm cool".

The Youth Workers persisted in reaching out to the young man, with relaxed communications and by dropping the workshop links into Facebook Messenger. This led to him attending a session and, from there, attending 6 workshops in 2021. The young man was a strong contributor during the workshops and assisted other attendees by giving valuable feedback each time.

He also undertook the entrepreneurship workshop and went on to successfully apply for a Kickstarter grant for his Smart Home Choices idea. He plans to produce datasets and reports for prospective homebuyers/investors to be informed of the liveability factors in any location in which they are interested. He will draw on his expertise in property, urban design, and planning to provide quality research in the form of datasets and reports in a simple to read and informative manner that will help reduce the time and effort for clients.

The target audience is made up of three segments:

- Prospective homebuyers, such as first home buyers.
- □ Investors wanting access to better reports to inform their decision-making.
- Urban professionals urban/town/city/regional planners to improve the living and urban amenity conditions of suburbs.

The Kickstarter grant is being spent on a website domain, use of icons, stock photos for the dataset and reports, platform development, development of templates, ABN and business registration fees and professional development.

Case Study 2

Case Study 2 is a 19-year-old female who had completed a 1-year School Based Apprenticeship Training (SBAT) at MMVLLEN and Kangan Institute which helped in developing her aims to:

- Gain experience in working in an office
- Complete a Certificate III in Business
- Complete Year 12

Case Study 2 came to YEPP through the YMCP Program. She has been meeting with her mentor for over four months, working on her Resume and Cover Letter writing, finding her work-related passion and doing mock interviews online to help prepare her for job interviews.

In addition to undertaking mentoring, she has engaged in 17 YEPP workshops, a demonstration of her dedication, commitment and thirst for knowledge and she presented a MMVLLEN project in front of her year 12 peers after coaching and preparation with MMVLLEN team.

She has also successfully applied for a Kickstarter grant 'P.P athletic, a business idea that focuses on athletic clothing such as leggings, pants, T-shirts, sports bras and crop tops, in a range of colours. She is aiming to sell her products on a website as well as on Instagram, Tiktok and Facebook.

Her feedback is that YMCP and YEPP have helped her personal development and growth as a person in that she is more confident now, particularly when talking to new people for the first time. Participating in the program has been rewarding in that it has helped with her study and pursuing her employment goal. She thinks YEPP is important for young people as it helps them find their next stages in life.

Case Study 3

Case Study 3 was employed in the disability services sector when she joined YEPP. She was, however, considering a career change at the beginning of her YEPP journey but was unsure about her next move. She attended YEPP skill-building workshops where the topics focussed on resume and cover letter writing, boosting confidence, preparing for interviews, employee laws and workplace rights. She juggled many different life commitments (family, work, and own wellbeing challenges) and, whilst she had a very busy schedule, maintained high levels of participation throughout the program.

She reported that the workshops "helped me understand my rights as an employee, and possible career options, supported my ambitions and built my confidence in my ability to find a job".

Case Study 3 now feels more confident and better prepared to actively look for alternative employment pathways and jobs. "As a young person, getting out there in the real world can be tough, but I feel now that with the necessary support in place through YEPP, I am empowered to find meaningful work that aligns to what I can do and what I can grow into".

4.0 What Worked Well and What Can be Changed – Feedback from Partners and Youth Workers

4.1 Strengths of YEPP

Development of the partnership between MCC and MMVLLEN is identified as a key outcome from YEPP. The commitment from both partners is described as excellent as there was an acknowledgement of shared intent, in-kind contributions and a shared appetite for joining up resources to create something new for young people in the City of Maribyrnong.

There were regular meetings between the partners, which were "always constructive, with the participants committed to progressing solutions to issues as they arose".

The partners recognise the achievement of engaging 71 young people in 128 activities in a 12-month period during the continuing lockdowns associated with COVID-19. The team approach taken by the partners meant that shared resources, expertise, knowledge and programs could be brought to the project to effectively provide the services required by individual young people impacted badly by COVID-19.

The Youth Workers feel that YEPP addresses the real needs of young people who are in danger of slipping through the cracks. The end-to-end commitment of YEPP means Youth Workers are part of the commencement, engagement and development process as well as the exit, where young people are reflecting on what they have done and how far they have come. The Youth Workers report YEPP as a "most rewarding" program.

Feedback received by Youth Workers during conversations with participants indicates that young people responded very positively to the program, with many new participants joining because of word-of-mouth referrals from peers. The feedback confirms the following design factors as important:

- The program does not have a hard 'cut off' point with regards to employment status and is flexible in how it engages young people to improve their confidence and employability, even if they are already in some form of employment.
- The program offers a suite of resources rather than operating as an isolated silo dealing only with employment concerns.
- The Youth Workers build positive relationships with the participants in addition to delivering the program and supporting regular 'check-ins' with participants.
- The short-session nature of workshops (20 minutes) has been highly appropriate to the target demographic, with feedback received immediately informing subsequent sessions. Repeat attendance at workshop sessions is a feature.

A point of difference between YEPP and other youth initiatives is its end-to-end design. Other programs have a slice of the service- they may initiate but not see things through all the way with each young person. The Youth Workers believe they are more effective because they are more connected to the young people and can check on how they are engaging with the program. Regular phone calls with the young people are important. The feedback from the participants to the Youth Workers is that they are grateful for the conversations and feel as though they are more than just checking in. Using technology such as Facebook Messenger meant young people were getting regular notifications of workshops and activities. This 'nudge' approach was effective in getting some of the young people to start attending.

MYAC was particularly supportive and key to engaging many young people, with Council members circulating the YEPP programs to their friends and contacts.

The collaborative approach taken by the Youth Workers was effective in engaging the participants in having a say about what they wanted and how. This approach resulted in online workshops being scheduled for 20-minute delivery time – short, sharp and effective. Engaging local service providers to do the delivery provided the opportunity to introduce the Participants to the services and resources available in the community.

4.2 Challenges and Opportunities

The rollout of YEPP has faced challenges associated with the COVID-19 disruptions over 2021 as the community has moved in and out of numerous lockdowns. Activities had to pivot to online and recruiting and onboarding of young people has been harder than expected for certain groups, in particular young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The lockdowns affected the ability of YEPP to reach out to young people and to leverage relationships with schools and to promote the initiative. The ability to conduct workshops and activities and leverage word of mouth referrals from Phoenix Youth Centre was also affected by the lockdowns.

Registering young people who have low-level English proficiency has been challenging, with support taking anywhere from 10 to 90 minutes depending on the young person. This has been compounded by the challenge of engaging young people with online activities during COVID-19. Youth Workers reported that young people were harder to engage as their mental health and wellbeing were impacted by not being able to plan for work, celebrate the end of Year 12 or socialise in person.

Sourcing appropriate work placements has also been a challenge for the YEPP team. The disruptions to workplaces have meant it is difficult to negotiate a supportive work placement for participants.

Navigating different IT systems across two organisations was an unanticipated operational issue. The use of Moodle for the Tracking and Impact Tool was a challenge for participants and the Youth Workers. The original intent in the design was for it to be used by Youth Workers to record the data gathered from the young people. As the project progressed it moved to participants recording their own data which did not work as well as intended, with it currently only housing data for 20 participants. Feedback from Youth Workers is that an app-based approach, rather than a Learning Management System, would be easier for participants if the intent is for them to enter data directly. The use of data in evidenced-based decision making would also ensure that collection is not seen as an additional task. This is an upskilling opportunity for the partners and an opportunity to improve the instructions on its use.

Pivoting workshops to online delivery worked well in that it provided the opportunity to progress with the project despite the constraints created by COVID-19. It did, however, reveal a need to improve the online workshop delivery styles of some presenters to ensure sessions are more interactive. This provides an opportunity for YEPP in the future as it navigates what is likely to be a hybrid delivery world.

The Youth Workers also identified the opportunity to plan and promote workshops in advance if they knew about funding support for the initiative. This would allow them to use the same zoom link and not confuse participants by sending out different links.

Engaging industry was difficult because of the COVID-19 disruptions. Initially the project intended to engage with industry and provide a pathway from YEPP to traineeships or internships. This didn't really materialise with COVID-19 impacting on the ability of the project to engage closely with business and industry. With the economy opening up and the demand for employees rising, YEPP has the opportunity to engage with local industry leaders on how they can become part of the initiative by providing work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, and internships.

Going forward, MYAC has requested a workshop focussed on meeting the professionals from different industries and sectors and being able to ask questions about their career journey.

Not being able to deliver anything in person was a real challenge and, in 2022, with hybrid services likely to become a reality, an extended YEPP could use the Phoenix Youth Centre in Buckley Street, Footscray, as the focus for its face-to-face activities, to provide a space for the Kickstarter Enterprising activities and to engage young people in a variety of ways.

The contribution of MYAC during 2021 to the success of YEPP has been significant. A future model for YEPP would ideally involve MYAC providing guidance and advice to the program and assisting in refining ideas for engagement and activation.

5. Conclusion

YEPP is a highly successful partnership initiative that has made a difference to the ability of 71 young people in the City of Maribyrnong to develop employability skills, confidence and resilience at a time of significant disruption to their education and ability to pathway seamlessly into entry level employment.

The development of formal partnerships between collaborators takes time, commitment and the persistence to resolve operational issues that crop up as a result of bringing different systems of work together. The success for MCC and MMVLLEN lies in:

- Being trusted local organisations
- Quality engagement leading to word-of-mouth referrals amongst young people an indication of trusted organisations, programs and people, including with MYAC as a critical stakeholder.
- Credibility of professional generalist youth workers working closely with employment pathway specialists

Given the prevailing COVID-19 environment and its impact on young people in 2020 and 2021, the ability of YEPP to engage and provide services to 71 young people with 128 instances of participation, including matching 23 young people with mentors, is very positive.

YEPP supports young people who are unemployed or underemployed. The program does not take the length of unemployment into consideration when engaging young people. Other programs, however, have restrictions on the cohorts they can support, the services they can provide and the delivery modes that can be used. With inherent flexibility, the YEPP model enables the Youth Workers to engage young people and involve them in activities quickly, referring to other agencies as needed. As a result, YEPP fills a service gap by providing an immediate response to the employment and career pathway needs of young people.

Involvement of the young people in decision-making about the service and how it is delivered is highly innovative, as the move to 20-minute online workshops demonstrates. This approach optimises the flexibility offered by digital technology whilst staying grounded in best practice in learning design and andragogy.

Whilst pivoting to an online model of delivery has been successful in 2021, in future YEPP will enhance outcomes for young people when it is able to reintroduce face to face services and workshop delivery into its suite of offerings. Exploring what an optimum hybrid model looks like will be an exciting challenge for 2022. A more open economy and community in 2022 will also enable the partners to engage with industry in providing career pathways for participants.

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