

COVID-19 AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ASPIRATIONS: A 3 YEAR STUDY IN GEELONG

Final Report, April 2024



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We acknowledge that the work reported here was conducted on the unceded lands of the Wadawurrung (also known as Wathaurong) First Nations people of the Kulin nation, and we celebrate their enduring connections to Country, knowledge, and stories.

The project was made possible through funding by The Anthony Costa Foundation.

We also acknowledge the support provided by individuals and stakeholder organisations of the City of Geelong Pre Employment Professionals Network who have provided valuable advice and assistance in connecting to young people in the Geelong region.

Finally, we acknowledge the many young people who generously gave their time, and shared their hopes and aspirations in contexts of profound crisis and uncertainty. The stories told here and elsewhere would not have been possible without these young people, and we wish them well in whatever their futures hold.

The work has been undertaken by Professor Peter Kelly, Dr James Goring and Dr Meave Noonan through The Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab (YPSFL) and the Centre for Research for Educational Impact (REDI) @ Deakin University, and Dr Seth Brown (UNESCO UNEVOC @ RMIT)¹

¹YPSFL and UNEVOC@RMIT are responsible for the choice and presentation of the views contained in this review, as well as for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO.

I think mental health in young people is a really important thing, and I think we need to look into it more, and we need to have our voices be heard more. Cause I feel like a lot of people don't understand us. I feel like we need better mental health services in school, cause I feel like right now it's not the best - like more experienced psychologists and therapists.

I think it would be good to have some programs where you can kind of like sit down and talk with other people going through the same struggles, and I think there should be like, better advice. I feel like, here, they just say to people with like anxiety or depression, they just tell us to 'just breathe'. And I feel like for a lot of us that just doesn't work. I feel like they're not trying enough. We just need some better listeners, and I think we need some people who genuinely care - asking more questions, just letting me talk.

Ruby, 17 years old, 2021, Year 11 VCAL student, Leopold

I think it's a pretty cool project. I think regardless of if you get much out of us, if we don't say much valuable things. I think bringing a bunch of kids in and asking them questions and get them talking about their life and about previous experiences in itself is almost like a therapy kind of thing. And it's really good for us to do that. I think just get a bunch of shit out on the table, whether it's good shit or bad shit. Just talk like, kind of reminisce, or let out shit that's been stuck in or anything like that. I think it's really healthy and I think it's a really good idea. And I think it's pretty cool that Deakin is giving us an opportunity to let our voices be heard because I think it's a pretty important thing...different perspectives on things.

Josh, 16 years old, 2021, Year 11 VCAL student

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS **7**

The Project	7
Findings	8
Health and Well-being	8
Education, Training and Employment Pathways.....	9
Hopes and Aspirations for ‘Living Well’	9
Young People’s Voice and Participation.....	9
Recommendations.....	10
Health & Wellbeing	10
Education, Training and Employment Pathways	10
Hopes and Aspirations for ‘Living Well’	10
Young People’s Voice and Participation	11

FINDINGS **12**

Theme I: Young People’s Health and Well-being	12
Introduction	13
“You’ll get judged, and it will go around the school like fire”	13
The pandemic might be over, but its impacts are ongoing and uncertain .	14
Recommendations	15
Theme II: Education, Training and Employment Pathways	16
Introduction	16
The ATAR and Other Pathways	16

“Very few people go in a straight trajectory.”	17
Recommendations	18
Theme III: Hopes and Aspiration for Living Well	18
Introduction	19
Futures of Uncertainty and Crisis	19
Hope	20
Recommendations	21
Theme IV: Young people’s voice and participation	21
Introduction	21
Young people want to be listened to.....	22
Video based Voice and Participation.....	22
Recommendations	23
APPENDIX 1: COHORTS	24
Certificate of Participation	25
Participant details	25
APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH OUTPUTS, IMPACT AND PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS	29
Online Workshop	29
Academic Publications.....	31
Instagram.....	31
The Conversation.....	32
YouTube.....	33
Mini Documentary	34
Reflections on Doing Video Interviews With Young People.....	34

Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab Website & Blogs 35

APPENDIX 3: CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION..... 36

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE PROJECT

The Anthony Costa Foundation provided three years funding (2021-2022-2023) for a project titled: COVID-19 and Disadvantaged Young People's Education and Employment Aspirations: A Longitudinal Study of Young People's Transitions in Geelong.

Using innovative, platform based, video capture technologies the project conducted a series of video interviews with young people as we tracked their education, training and employment pathways in COVID 'normal' socio-ecologies that are profoundly shaped by historical and contemporary processes of disadvantage and marginalisation.

The research has been undertaken during a time of existential crisis as economies and societies were shut down by the pandemic, and as there is an increasing awareness of the inter-connectedness of many existing and looming uncertainties and crises. For example, in 2020 The Lancet observed that a young person born in 2006 in Europe, 'will have gone through the great recession...austerity...a pandemic with disrupted schooling and social isolation, a cost-of-living crisis, war in Europe, and a world coming to terms with the magnitude of climate change'. In August 2021, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2021) issued a press release coinciding with the publication of the IPCC Working Group 1 report on the physical science basis of climate change in which he stated that the report: 'is a code red for humanity'. In this context the

European Policy Centre (EPC 2021) has identified what it calls a state of ‘permacrisis’, and the World Economic Forum (WEF 2023) names the present and future in terms of a ‘polycrisis’.²

The funding of this project by the Costa Foundation has provided a unique opportunity to engage with a diversity of young people in Greater Geelong during a time of profound crisis and disruption. Many of these young people can be characterised as disengaged, marginalised and or historically disadvantaged, in so far as social class, gender and sexual identities, First Nations heritage, migrant and/or refugee background, geographic locality, neurodiversities, and mental and physical well-being challenges continue to intersect in complex ways in shaping young people’s life chances, life choices and life courses.

FINDINGS

The findings from the research are outlined below, and are discussed in greater detail (including through the voices of young people), in what follows.

Health and Well-being

The research indicates that many young people in Geelong are not comfortable with seeking support for their well-being challenges and are concerned with the accessibility of support services in schools and elsewhere.

The research suggests that beyond the disruption of the pandemic, and the public health measures such as school closures and forced isolation, many of the health and well-being challenges faced by young people are ongoing, and in some examples, such as school absenteeism, have been amplified.

² European Policy Centre (EPC 2021) Europe in the Age of Permacrisis. European Policy Centre. Guterres, A. (2021) Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report ‘Code Red for Humanity’ <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm>.

The Lancet (2022) Future Child Programme, <https://www.thelancet.com/campaigns/child-adolescent-health>.

WEF (2023) We’re on the brink of a ‘polycrisis’ – how worried should we be? <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/polycrisis-global-risks-report-cost-of-living/>

Education, Training and Employment Pathways

The research identified that schools, parents and families, and the wider community continue to emphasise the ATAR score as the key measure of educational success in the senior secondary years and as defining post-school pathways. These concerns raise challenges for school and youth service providers in thinking differently about young people's pathways.

The research highlighted that many young people's education, training and employment pathways are not linear, and will comprise any number of pauses, stops and starts, periods of disengagement and changes of direction.

Hopes and Aspirations for 'Living Well'

The research identified that for many young people their sense of their future is largely characterised by uncertainty. This uncertainty is compounded by what they see as inaction or ineffective responses by adults, schools, governments, community organisations and businesses.

The research suggests that given all these challenges, opportunities, uncertainties and anxieties, and the sense of crisis about our present and futures, many young people retain a sense of hope about their own futures and the things that they might hope for and aspire to.

Young People's Voice and Participation

The research identified that many young people are seeking more meaningful opportunities to have their voices heard.

There is strong evidence that the use of video-based research methods supported young people's voice and participation in this project, particularly in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns which limited social interaction and contact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Health & Wellbeing

Youth-Centric Service Improvement Study: Investigate and improve the accessibility of health and well-being services for young people in Greater Geelong. Engage directly with youth to understand their needs and preferences, identify barriers to accessing support services, and explore innovative service delivery models. Use findings to recommend improvements for youth-friendly and inclusive support services.

Long-Term Well-being Monitoring Project: Establish a long-term study to monitor the ongoing impacts of the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of young people in Greater Geelong. Collect data over time to track trends in mental health and social well-being, and identify emerging challenges post-pandemic. Use insights to inform targeted interventions and policies supporting the resilience and recovery of young people.

Education, Training and Employment Pathways

Promoting Pathway Diversity: Increase awareness and support for diverse education, training, and employment pathways beyond traditional measures like the ATAR score. Collaborate with schools, families, and the community to highlight alternative options such as vocational programs. Encourage flexibility in career exploration to adapt to changing aspirations.

Addressing School Absenteeism: Investigate and mitigate post-pandemic school absenteeism, especially among vulnerable groups in Greater Geelong. Work with local stakeholders to understand its causes and develop targeted interventions. Support engagement in education and training through community-based initiatives tailored to diverse needs.

Hopes and Aspirations for ‘Living Well’

Comprehensive Future Planning: Develop a comprehensive framework for future planning that includes health, relationships, climate crisis, and social justice issues. Collaborate with young people and community stakeholders to create place-based strategies addressing uncertainties about the future and empowering youth to navigate complexities.

Fostering Hopeful Engagement: Implement initiatives promoting a "politics of hope" among young people, acknowledging challenges while fostering resilience and motivation for positive change. Encourage open dialogue on social justice and climate issues, inspiring young people to envision transformative pathways for themselves and their communities.

Young People's Voice and Participation

Empowering Meaningful Engagement: Create inclusive platforms for young people to voice their opinions and concerns in community, government, and business settings. Foster collaborative partnerships between young individuals and adults to collectively shape the future of their communities, especially post-COVID.

Leveraging Video-Based Engagement: Utilise video-based methods to enhance young people's participation in decision-making. Implement flexible platforms like Video-Ask interviews to allow for accessible expression. Emphasise the longitudinal aspect of projects to foster reflection and storytelling during and after crises, promoting positive relationships with change and well-being.

FINDINGS

The research has produced a substantial number of significant findings about young people's health and well-being, their education, training and employment pathways, their hopes for 'living well' in futures of uncertainty and crisis, and their desire to have a voice in the processes that shape their lives.

Follow the links in the summaries below to see/hear young people's stories via YouTube, and on the Young People's Sustainable Futures website.

THEME I: [YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING](#)



Introduction

The study examined the health and well-being challenges faced by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional terms like "mental health" and "well-being" did not fully capture the challenges experienced by the young people in our study. They were more likely to speak about these challenges using terms such as: uncertainty, anxiety, angst, stress, disappointment, FOMO, and 'belonging' (I don't 'fit' at schools that are too inflexible to deal with me...), amongst others.

The pandemic provides a powerful reason to view young people's health and well-being through alternative models. In this context we have used the idea of socio-ecological models of young people's lives, and their health and well-being. The US Rural Health Information Hub (2023) outlines how these models highlight 'the interaction between, and interdependence of, factors within and across all levels of a health problem...[and]...people's interactions with their physical and sociocultural environments'.³ We will illustrate a number of these issues below.

"You'll get judged, and it will go around the school like fire"

I feel like a lot of young people don't feel like they're heard and that they have the services around them to support them in being heard.

³ US Rural Health Information Hub. (2023). Ecological models. Rural Health Information Hub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-promotion/2/theories-and-models/ecological>

Like, there's not a lot of healthcare providers around that are easy to access for young people.

And, there's not a lot of spaces that young people feel that they can go to that are just for them, that are safe...

And I think that needs to change.

There just needs to be a lot more, just approaching young people and seeing what they want in the world, and not just assuming. And I don't think that's really done much.

Mackenzie, 16 years old in 2021, studying VCE

A friend said to me, you can't go to the school counsellor – You'll get judged, and it will go around the school like fire. That should not be happening. It should be normal to go get help and to go ask for help

Madeline, 17 years old in 2021, completing VCE while working a casual job at a local supermarket

The research indicates that many young people in Geelong are not comfortable with seeking support for their well-being challenges and are concerned with the accessibility of support services in schools and elsewhere.

While it is difficult to generalise about the number, quality and appropriateness of youth health and well-being support services in Greater Geelong many young people expressed frustration with what they perceive as a lack of such services, and the difficulties and barriers to accessing these services. These concerns, at the least, suggest a need to rethink the relationships between young people, schools and community based health and well-being support services.

The pandemic might be over, but its impacts are ongoing and uncertain

I feel like in the community a lot of people have relaxed in terms of COVID-19. However, it's still very prevalent in our workplace and unfortunately as a nurse and a midwife, we do tend to cop it.

I come home after each shift just exhausted, both mentally, emotionally, physically, and I'm not in that position to work a double.

I've also seen burnout at firsthand, whether that's through other graduates or more experienced staff members, friends have been leaving the profession earlier than they intended to.

Molly (2023), 23 years old, working as a graduate nurse and midwife

The research suggests that beyond the disruption of the pandemic, and the public health measures such as school closures and forced isolation, many of the health and well-being challenges faced by young people are ongoing, and in some examples, such as school absenteeism, have been amplified.

In mid-2021, the Federal Government's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2021), in a report on COVID-19's impact on young people, foreshadowed that mid- and longer-term consequences of the pandemic for young Australians would be 'complex', 'dynamic' and 'interrelated', and that there would be 'a need for ongoing comprehensive monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 on young people's wellbeing'.⁴

Recommendations

Youth-Centric Service Improvement Study: Investigate and improve the accessibility of health and well-being services for young people in Greater Geelong. Engage directly with youth to understand their needs and preferences, identify barriers to accessing support services, and explore innovative service delivery models. Use findings to recommend improvements for youth-friendly and inclusive support services.

Long-Term Well-being Monitoring Project: Establish a long-term study to monitor the ongoing impacts of the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of young people in Greater Geelong. Collect data over time to track trends in mental health and social well-being, and identify emerging challenges post-pandemic. Use insights to inform targeted interventions and policies supporting the resilience and recovery of young people.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). 2021. Australia's youth: COVID-19 and the impact on young people. Canberra: Australian Government
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/covid-19-and-young-people>

THEME II: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

Introduction

In the context of the pandemic and its aftermath many young people who participated in the project told us about the ways in which their education, training and employment pathways were disrupted. These challenges had led many to becoming disengaged and/or marginalised from more mainstream pathways - and in doing so finding it difficult to imagine other opportunities and trajectories, or get the forms of support that would enable them to imagine new possibilities. We will illustrate a number of these issues below.

The ATAR and Other Pathways

I've always been really indecisive about what I want to do.

I think, even if I change my mind, I know there's different ways and different pathways that I can take to get them.

I think schools don't stress that enough, because they usually act like VCE and getting an ATAR score is the be-all and end-all.

And it honestly doesn't seem that way, because I know heaps of students who got decent ATAR scores at our school and then have gone into University and then decided, 'Actually, I hate this', and then either changed subjects, changed what they're doing, or just dropped out.

Marisa (2021) 17 years old, studying Year 11 at Geelong Technical Education Centre (GTEC), and living with her parents and older sister.

The research identified that schools, parents and families, and the wider community continue to emphasise the ATAR score as the key measure of educational success in the senior secondary years and as defining post-school pathways.⁵ These concerns raise challenges for school and youth service providers in thinking differently about young people's pathways.

⁵ The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 that indicates a student's position relative to all the students in their age group...Universities use the ATAR to help them select students for their courses'. (See, <https://www.uac.edu.au/future-applicants/ATAR>).

This is problematic because increasing numbers of young people, across the state and in the Geelong region, undertake an ‘unscored-VCE’ (indicating a growing dissatisfaction with this ‘traditional’ pathway), or seek alternatives to a university education, ATAR dominated pathway that presumes that the young person knows what they want to be.⁶

The research indicates that vocational education programs such as those provided by GTEC offer an important alternative pathway that can support young people in the Geelong region to remain engaged in education and training in the senior secondary years.

“Very few people go in a straight trajectory.”⁷

Me being a graphic designer isn't really a sustainable future for me, to say the least. And I would love to, but I don't see myself doing that anymore. And that's just how the world goes.

Thoughts change, aspirations change, and, you know, whatever you choose to do, it might change later in life, you know, you might not want to do that anymore.

Brandon (2023), 19 years old, studying to become a Paramedic

The research highlighted that many young people’s education, training and employment pathways are not linear, and will comprise any number of pauses, stops and starts, periods of disengagement and changes of direction.

School absences in a post-pandemic present and future are a matter of concern in Australia and many other contexts such as the UK and the US.⁸ There is significant uncertainty in relation to the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. There is a

⁶ More than 10% of young people choose not to sit their VCE exams and not obtain an ATAR, while completing the coursework requirements of their VCE subjects
<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/unscored-vces-show-not-enough-is-being-done-to-support-students-20221213-p5c61t.html#>.

See also Rob Strathdee (2023) The new localism, social reproduction, and reform of school-based vocational education in the state of Victoria, Australia, *Journal of Vocational education and Training*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2023.2174585>

⁷ David Heiber, founder Concentric Educational Solutions, [Has School Become Optional?](#)

⁸ See: [Pandemic scramble: Some lockdown teens are still stuck, while others are thriving; England’s secondary schools are Dickensian. No wonder children are staying away;](#)
[‘Anxiety is a very real thing’: Spike in school refusal sparks call for national plan](#)

sense, however, that disengagement, marginalisation and historic disadvantage means that some groups of young people are more vulnerable in these contexts, and that new understandings and forms of support need to be developed at the place-based level.

Recommendations

Promoting Pathway Diversity: Increase awareness and support for diverse education, training, and employment pathways beyond traditional measures like the ATAR score. Collaborate with schools, families, and the community to highlight alternative options such as vocational programs. Encourage flexibility in career exploration to adapt to changing aspirations.

Addressing School Absenteeism: Investigate and mitigate post-pandemic school absenteeism, especially among vulnerable groups in Greater Geelong. Work with local stakeholders to understand its causes and develop targeted interventions. Support engagement in education and training through community-based initiatives tailored to diverse needs.

THEME III: HOPES AND ASPIRATION FOR LIVING WELL



Introduction

In many policy and service delivery contexts young people's aspirations are largely understood in terms of education, training and employment pathways – which are imagined as being more or less 'linear', and with some 'end point' in mind, where they have become 'aligned' with the 'jobs of the future' ([OECD 2020](#)).

The research suggests that we need to think much more expansively about the ways in which young people understand the relationships between their pasts, their presents and their futures. We need to include a larger range of concerns - young people's health and well-being, their relationships with families, friend and peers, schools and community services, work, their concerns about the climate crisis and a range of social and intergenerational justice concerns - in trying to understand and respond to young people's hopes and aspirations for their future, and the future of their communities and the wider planet. We provide examples of a number of these issues below.

Futures of Uncertainty and Crisis

Trash. The world is trash, and with the current environmental, political and economic environment, it doesn't look like there'll be much of a change.

I'm very pessimistic, very negative about the current state of the world and the current way that our politicians are handling things. Because they're not giving us an opportunity to be optimistic about it...they're not doing their job very well.

Carmen (2021), 17 years old, studying VCE

The research identified that for many young people their sense of their future is largely characterised by uncertainty. This uncertainty is compounded by what they see as inaction or ineffective responses by adults, schools, governments, community organisations and businesses.

Many young people's uncertainties about their own futures have been amplified by the disruptions related to the pandemic, the climate crisis that continues to unfold, and more acutely, the cost of living crisis which they are disproportionately affected by.

These uncertainties and anxieties increasingly intersect with the general sense of uncertainty and crisis that is captured by the ways in which many national and international agencies - such as the United Nations, the European Policy Centre and the World Economic Forum - describe our presents and futures in terms such as a ‘code red for humanity’, ‘polycrisis’ and ‘permacrisis’.

Hope

I think something else that worries me, especially as an emerging social worker, is that inequalities are just so deeply embedded within our society.

For those who aren't oppressed, by simply ignoring the fact that we have these privileges, we're just letting it happen and we're reinforcing the oppression.

I do have hope. I have a lot of hope that things will improve.

But in saying that, and this is hard, because as a social worker, this is like my main commitment and what drives me.

Emilie (2023) 26 years old, studying social work and criminology

The research suggests that given all these challenges, opportunities, uncertainties and anxieties, and the sense of crisis about our present and futures, many young people retain a sense of hope about their own futures and the things that they might hope for and aspire to.

This finding suggests the need to move beyond thinking in terms of being optimistic and/or pessimistic in relation to the many crises that characterise our times, and to think of actions and orientations to pasts-presents-futures in terms of a ‘politics of hope’. A politics of hope emerges in our imagining of the future as ‘an active object of desire’ that ‘propels us forth and motivates us to be active in the here and now’.⁹

You can be and remain hopeful without being ‘optimistic’ and/or ‘pessimistic’. This distinction can be powerful in thinking about developing programs that are concerned with young people’s aspirations and futures.

⁹ Braidotti R. (2013) *The Posthuman*, p.192.

Recommendations

Comprehensive Future Planning: Develop a comprehensive framework for future planning that includes health, relationships, climate crisis, and social justice issues. Collaborate with young people and community stakeholders to create strategies addressing uncertainties about the future and empowering youth to navigate complexities.

Fostering Hopeful Engagement: Implement initiatives promoting a "politics of hope" among young people, acknowledging challenges while fostering resilience and motivation for positive change. Encourage open dialogue on social justice and climate issues, inspiring youth to envision transformative pathways for themselves and their communities.

THEME IV: YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE AND PARTICIPATION



Introduction

The research indicates that community, government and business stakeholders need to think about how they take up the challenge that comes from listening to and trying to understand the concerns that many young people have about 'having a voice'. And having that voice 'listened to' and 'acted upon' in spaces, and by people who can

impact the circumstances that shape their lives. We will explore a number of these issues below.

Young people want to be listened to

See, the future of Geelong, I see it being really good and everything, but I feel that it's up to us to make change.

But we can't make the change, because I feel that adults don't want to hear young people's voices because they believe that our voices and our opinions don't really count, I guess you can say, even though they do.

And I think we all need to work together to be able to, you know, see a good future for Geelong. Especially after COVID, and to rebuild it and to make it stronger. But how can we do that when not everybody's working together?

Madeline, 17 years old in 2021, completing VCE while working a casual job at a local supermarket

The research identified that many young people are seeking more meaningful opportunities to have their voices heard.

Schools, government departments and agencies, and community organisations often conduct various initiatives and programs to give young people a ‘voice’, or to promote ‘youth participation’.

While many of these initiatives are well supported and can produce productive outcomes, much research suggests that the young people who participate in many of these programs tend not to be disengaged, marginalised and/or historically disadvantaged. In this project a number of young people identified a concern for finding more meaningful ways to have a voice in the processes that shape their lives.

Video based Voice and Participation

I think bringing a bunch of kids in and asking them questions and get them talking about their life and about previous experiences in itself is almost like a therapy kind of thing.

And it's really good for us to do that.

I think just get a bunch of shit out on the table, whether it's good shit or bad shit.

Just talk, like kind of reminisce or let out shit that's been stuck in or anything like that. I think it's really healthy and I think it's a really good idea.

Josh, 17 years old in 2022, studying VCAL at GTEC

There is strong evidence that the use of video-based research methods supported young people's voice and participation in this project, particularly in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns which limited social interaction and contact.

Video-Ask interviews could be completed on any device, at a time that suited the participants, and responses could be submitted via video, audio or text. Our experience of the Video-Ask format suggests that many of the young people who participated were expansive and reflective when given the opportunity to respond to the asynchronous video prompt questions that allowed them to consider and curate their responses.

In addition, the longitudinal dimensions of the project involved the young person telling and revisiting 'stories' at key moments during and after times of crisis, providing an opportunity to reflect on biological, social, cultural and other changes. We suggest that this reflection can foster positive relationships to change, complexity, belonging and wellbeing.

Recommendations

Empowering Meaningful Engagement: Create inclusive platforms for young people to voice their opinions and concerns in community, government, and business settings. Foster collaborative partnerships between young individuals and adults to collectively shape the future of their communities, especially post-COVID.

Leveraging Video-Based Engagement: Utilise video-based methods to enhance young people's participation in decision-making. Implement flexible platforms like Video-Ask interviews to allow for accessible expression. Emphasise the longitudinal aspect of projects to foster reflection and storytelling during and after crises, promoting positive relationships with change and well-being.

APPENDIX 1: COHORTS

During 2021 thirty three (33) young people were interviewed as part of the first year of the project. The following list provides more detail on the sample of young people who participated based on a series of ‘demographic’ questions that they were asked:

- The young people were aged between 16 and 23
- They live in a range of suburbs in the local government areas (LGAs) of the City of Greater Geelong, Surfcoast Shire, and the Golden Plains Shire.
- 12 young people identified as male, 17 female, 1 transgender male, 1 responded that ‘gender is a social construct’, and the 2 remaining young people did not answer that question.
- 6 of the cohort provided details about their culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CALD) identities including young people of Italian, Serbian, Iraqi, Maltese, Congolese ('I speak Swahili, Bembe, Chichewa and I'm fluent in English'), Pakistani ('my background is Muslim and Hazara') ethnic backgrounds.
- 1 young person identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Many young people were enrolled in either a year 11 or year 12 VCE or VCAL program. Of those young people who had already completed year 12, about half had completed an ‘unscored’ VCE or VCAL certificate.
- 13 of the young people who were completing further study were enrolled in an accredited vocational training program in areas such as Cooking, Mechanical Fitting, Allied Health, Education Support, ICT Digital Media and Laboratory Skills.
- 5 were enrolled in a Higher Education program including Bachelor of Social Work and Nursing.
- About half were employed, almost all on a casual basis.
- Most were living in a family home.
- 12 young people identified that they have a disability and/or were neurodiverse, and the 4 of those who provided detail said that they were registered with the

NDIS. The details of disability or neurodiversity included: Aspergers, Autism spectrum disorder, ‘learning disability’, ADD, ADHD, Bipolar Disorder (BPD), Anxiety, and Depression.

Of the 33 young people who participated in 2021, 13 completed a second video interview during 2022. An additional 8 participants were also recruited with the support of The Gordon TAFE (total in 2022 = 20). The additional participants, aged 16-18, are enrolled in either Year 11 or 12 VCAL programs. 3 participants in this cohort identified that they have a disability. Additional participants from the original 2021 cohort will respond to a follow up video interview in early 2023 - many were completing year 12 at the end of 2022.

Twelve young people returned to participate in the final round of interviews in 2023: 11 participants from Cohort 1, and one participant from Cohort 2. At this particular juncture in the aftermath of the pandemic, some participants were undertaking VCAL and VET studies, while others were enrolled in university studies, completing apprenticeships or entering the workforce.

Certificate of Participation

In order to acknowledge their ongoing contribution to the project, we provided these key informants with a Certificate of Participation to recognise their commitment to the project, and to identify a range of capabilities that they demonstrated through this commitment. A copy of the Certificate is included as Appendix 3.

Participant details

Table 1: Cohort 1

Name	Age	Suburb
Josh	16	Ocean Grove

Emilie	24	Geelong
Jack	20	St Albans Park
Hannah	20	Leopold
Caleb	19	Corio
Joseph	19	Corio
Holly	19	Teesdale
Natalie	22	Geelong
Brandon	17	Belmont
Molly	21	Bannockburn
Aalija	17	Grovedale
Teila	17	Grovedale
Jaxon	17	Corio
Digby	17	Belmont
Keegan	17	Geelong West
Trent	17	Anglesea
Marisa	17	Geelong

Ruby	16	Leopold
Hamish	17	Armstrong Creek
Makenzie	17	Geelong
Elliot	18	Whittington
Jordan	22	Geelong
Madeline	17	Geelong
Daisy	20	Bannockburn
Rachel	20	Golden Plains
Paris	16	Geelong
James	23	Corio
Mackenzie	16	St Leonards
Carmen	17	Lovely Banks
Elijah	18	Curlewis
Amelia	17	Belmont

Table 2: Cohort 2

Name	Age	Suburb

Edie	16	Grovedale
Lily	17	Lara
Jake	16	Belmont
Taj	16	Newtown
Tennille	17	Leopold
Penny	16	Armstrong Creek
Cal	18	Grovedale
Haley	18	Corio

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH OUTPUTS, IMPACT AND PROJECT COMMUNICATIONS

The project has developed an integrated and expansive impact and communications strategy to translate the research findings as they emerge to stakeholders in Geelong and in wider contexts and audiences.

Online Workshop

In 2022 we invited key stakeholders and members of the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) pre-employment professionals network to participate in an online workshop. The workshop was framed by the three core themes described in this report, and amplified the voices, videos, and audio recordings of young people across the Geelong region. Stakeholders were asked to engage with written and video content, and in particular, to respond to young people's stories with questions, ideas, comments and suggestions via the Video-ask platform.

I think the first thing I'll say is to congratulate all those young people who had their voice heard and were able to articulate their thoughts. I think it's really important that young people can have a say and I think this opportunity here is giving young people a chance to have that opportunity to have a voice. The other point that I think came out to be quite strongly was the aspirations - some of the young people in the videos had aspirations about what they want to do in life, what interests them, or some spoke about things happening early in their life that meant they wanted to do something as a career later in their lives. So I think for

those people - it really comes down to your own identity and where you think you might fit in and make a difference in the world. So, I think a lot of young people in these videos, I've been very conscious of that and the impact on them going forward - where they like to be able to make a difference.

Wayne Elliot (CEO of Geelong Regional LLEN)

Organisations should not simply pay lip service to young people, youth groups or organisations that embody a youth voice such as the National Youth Commission. The best outcomes will be achieved where both sides meet in the middle and identify the undeniable truths that hold regardless of age or background.

What is the future that young people want? What can they do now to get to where they want to be and how can those around them including the various support services and stakeholders be of assistance in the pathway to that future?

Goal setting and purpose should not be under-estimated and youth service providers should put equal focus into short term goals as a way of building strong foundations for young people to grow out of. This includes a more dynamic education system that caters to all learning types and personalities.

Greg Haynes (GForce Employment Solutions, Service Delivery Manager)

I think this has been a really interesting process - doing this Workshop in this way, very different, and I would really like the opportunity to do some in-person catch-ups, if possible or workshops with young people - to try and bridge that gap between them and make young people feel like they've really been heard by the older people in the room.

Ruth Cuttler (City of Greater Geelong, Pre-employment Network)

Academic Publications

The following publications (book chapters and journal articles) have been published, or reviewed pending changes, or submitted for review in international, high impact, academic journals.

Peter Kelly, James Goring and Seth Brown (2024). Young People and the Promise of Sustainable Futures: Rethinking Learning in/for the Anthropocene. In: Wyn, J., Cahill, H., Cuervo, H. (eds) *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. Springer, Singapore.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4451-96-3_100-1

James Goring, Peter Kelly, Seth Brown, Meave Noonan (2024 final review) Young people's hopes and aspirations in a ~~de-industrialising~~ 'clever and creative' city during the time of COVID-19, *Journal of Youth Studies*.

Seth Brown, Peter Kelly, James Goring, Meave Noonan (2024 submitted for review) The Pandemic and the Challenges for Young People of 'Living Well' in the Anthropocene, *Young*.

Peter Kelly, James Goring, Meave Noonan, Seth Brown, (2024 in press) Rethinking young people's aspirations in times of crisis: stories of futures from a de-industrialising city, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

Peter Kelly, James Goring, Seth Brown, Meave Noonan (2024 submitted for review) Young People and the Biocultural Politics of Voice in the Anthropocene, *Emotion, Space and Society*

Instagram

Young people have worked alongside the Research Assistant to share their video and audio-based stories with an Instagram audience. This audience includes a small, though significant following, largely comprised of local youth service providers, schools, local businesses and past and present youth council members across the Greater Geelong region.

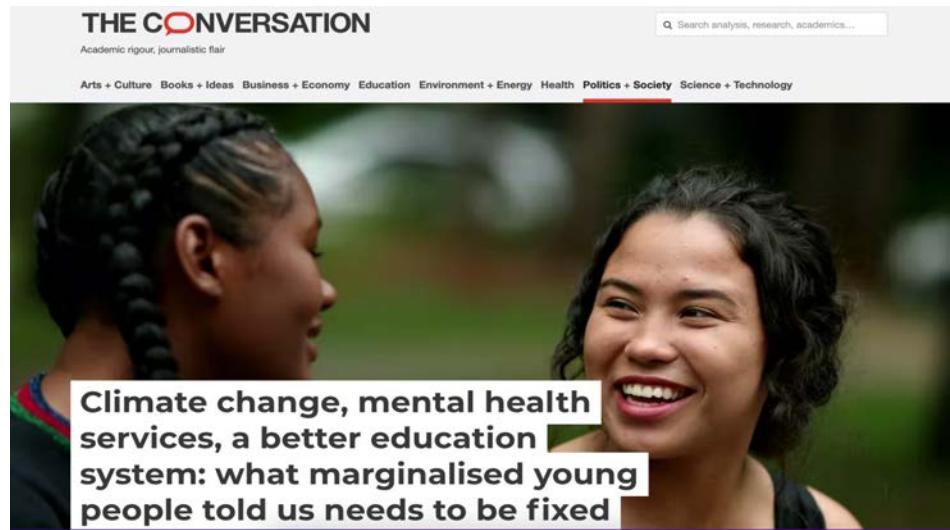


The Conversation

Our article 'Climate change, mental health services, a better education system: what marginalised young people told us needs to be fixed' was published as part of the Conversation series on cycles of disadvantage. This series was supported by a donation to the Conversation by the philanthropic Paul Ramsay Foundation. This work enabled us to reach a wider, non-academic audience and to gain greater traffic on websites, and YouTube channels, where young people's stories have been shared beyond the Geelong region.

Climate change, mental health services, a better education system: what marginalised young people told us needs to be fixed

7,995 Readers



YouTube

Young people's stories have been shared in video format via the YPSFL YouTube channel - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFWst6SNkLpR4nRa_Y-mtbQ.

1,173 Views

A screenshot of a YouTube channel page for 'Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab'. The channel has 11 subscribers. The navigation bar includes links for HOME, VIDEOS (which is underlined in blue), PLAYLISTS, COMMUNITY, CHANNELS, and ABOUT. Below the navigation bar are two tabs: 'Recently uploaded' (selected) and 'Popular'. Three video thumbnails are shown: 'Aspirations' (7:51), 'Voice and Participation' (4:42), and 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' (6:07). Each thumbnail includes the video title and its view count and upload date.

Mini Documentary

In late 2023 we commenced work on a Mini Documentary that we plan to premiere in the second quarter of 2024. This 15 minute film has the working title Crisis + Change + Growing Up in Geelong.

The film draws on the extensive video footage that the project has collected over three years tracking young people's hopes, aspirations, pathways and transitions. It will showcase the voices of some of the young people who emerged as 'key informants' over the course of the project, situating these personal stories and reflections against the background of wider processes of crisis and change, in Geelong and further afield.

The video was produced with the technical and creative support of the Nyaal team at Deakin University - <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/nikeriinstitute/the-nyaal-precinct/>.

The film will be of interest to a wide range of audiences including:

- Local stakeholders in the Geelong region for example key members of the CoGG pre-employment professionals network
- The young people who participated in this project, their families and friends
- The wider Geelong community including education, training and employment service providers
- Academic audiences undertaking research in this space
- students undertaking studies of the impact of COVID-19 on young people
- It may be used as a stimulus in secondary and/or tertiary classrooms.

Reflections on Doing Video Interviews With Young People

In March 2024 we curated a video titled [Mapping Young People's Future Imaginaries in Geelong](#) for the online conference '[Mapping Future Imaginaries - Making Connections](#)'

We have published a blog about this contribution [here](#).

In this video we reflect on some of the technological and ethical challenges and opportunities that come from using video-capture technologies in research with young people. We also consider some of the reasons why young people – so often imagined as 'digital natives' – might feel more comfortable consuming digital video content rather

than producing content. Finally, we highlight the powerful possibilities for engaging young people in these ways – not only in terms of research, but also where stakeholders want to promote young people's participation and voice.

Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab Website & Blogs

Blog posts, young people's stories, updates, news and themes have been shared to over 500+ visitors per month via the Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab website. We have a specific page for our Costa Foundation funded project, which highlights our partners, young people's stories, and publications.



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[Get Involved](#)

Greater Geelong

COVID-19 and Young People's Education and Employment Aspirations: A 3 Year Study in Geelong



APPENDIX 3: CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION





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