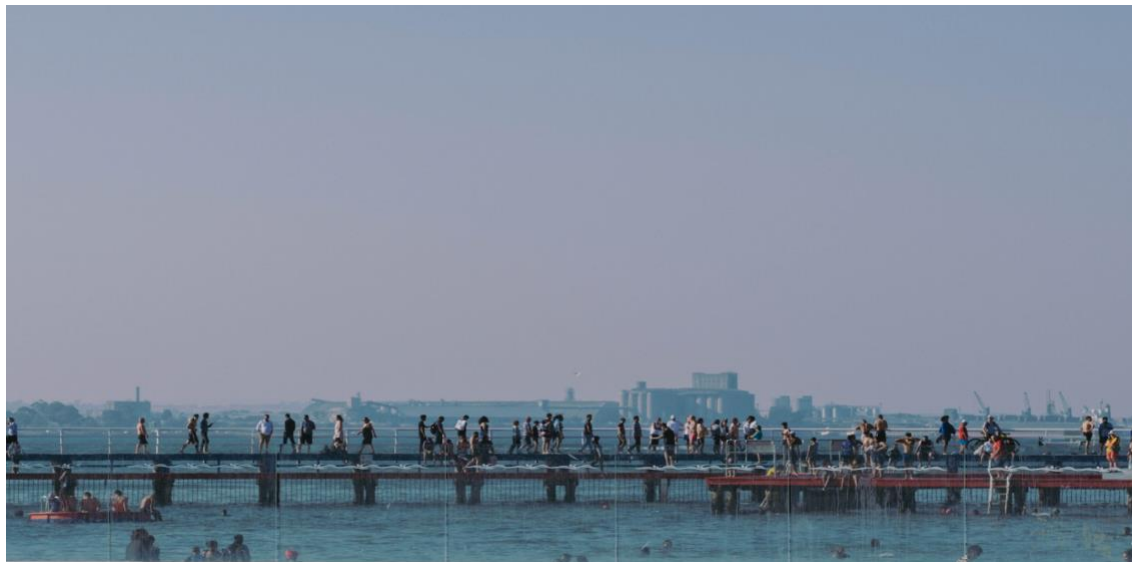


COVID-19 AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ASPIRATIONS: A 3 YEAR STUDY IN GEELONG

Progress Report, January 2023



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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, Year 11 VCAL student

OVERVIEW

The Anthony Costa Foundation has 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.

The work is being undertaken by Professor Peter Kelly and Mr James Goring 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

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

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.

COHORT

During 2021, and in the midst of extended public health lockdowns in response to rising COVID-19 infections, 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.

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
Aaliya	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
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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

THEMES

The project is currently developing a detailed analysis of three interconnected themes that have emerged from the video interviews with young people. 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: [Aspiration and Young People's Sense of their Futures in the Time of COVID](#)



Young people's aspirations, their ability to be 'aspirational', is 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](#)).

In Australia, 'disadvantaged' young people are more likely to aspire to pursue job and career choices that are of a higher risk of automation than young people of high socio-economic status, and around 27% of high-performing, disadvantaged students surveyed did not expect to complete tertiary education (OECD 2020, p.32).

In the video interviews we have conducted with young people in Geelong, we have paid closer attention 'to the stories that people tell about their present conditions', and 'their aspirations and hopes for the future' – to take seriously 'the broader conditions they face as well as their micro-effects and lived realities' Duggan (2017, p.804).

During 2023/24 and beyond the project funding period, we will develop academic publications while considering the following subthemes:

- Aspirations for Employment, Education, and Family
- 'Cool' and 'Inspirational' Figures/Mentors

- Developing a Sense of Self

Theme II: [Young People's Mental Health and Well-being in the Pandemic](#)



In this theme we are interested in thinking about how and why the term ‘mental health’ doesn’t seem to capture much of what young people are talking about – sometimes explicitly, sometimes in a ‘round-about’ sort of way – when they use terms such as: uncertainty, anxiety, angst, stress, disappointment, FOMO, ‘belonging’ (I don’t ‘fit’ at schools that are too inflexible to deal with me...), the judgement of others, being in a crisis, your troubles ‘go around the school like fire’, the difficulty of being able to ‘switch off’, wanting (hoping) to be listened to, looking for people who genuinely care inside and outside of school, being able to ‘just breathe’,...

All of these things shape the way that young people imagine themselves, their pasts, their presents, their futures. How they belong...or not. What they ‘aspire’ to do, to be, to become.

During 2023/24 and beyond the project funding period, we will develop academic publications while considering the following subthemes:

- Asking for or Getting Help and Navigating Support Services
- ‘Connecting and Bonding’ and ‘Going Out’
- Overcoming Challenges, ‘Pushing through’, and ‘Letting the Emotions Out’

Theme III: Young People's Voices and Participation and the Beginnings of 'Co-Design'



In this theme we are interested in taking 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.

Some forms of youth participation – for example, those featured in global youth conferences, youth consultation forums – have been understood as tokenistic and exclusive/exclusionary. In her study of youth forums and leadership conferences conducted by the UN, Soo Ah Kwon (2019) describes how 'these forums were not necessarily political spaces meant to challenge existing political and economic norms', but rather were concerned to 'shape the conduct of youth into ideal global citizens' (Kwon 2019, 928-930).

In thinking about these concerns and listening to young people in the Geelong region, we are left with a number of questions:

- *Why do some young people appear not to have the capability or the opportunity on an ongoing basis to have a say on the circumstances that shape their lives?*

- *Why do many young people appear not to be ‘active stakeholders’ in their own futures?*
- *What practices and interventions might be possible to change these dynamics?*
- *What might the idea, principles and practice of [‘co-design’](#) offer to these practices and interventions?*
- *Do the principles of co-design offer stakeholders a way to engage with the most disadvantaged and marginalised young people in our communities?*
- *What core capabilities are necessary for young people to be able to engage meaningfully in co-design processes, and how might these be developed and accredited?*

During 2023/24 and beyond the project funding period, we will develop academic publications while considering the following subthemes:

- Considering other Education Options and Committing to School
- ‘I can have a Voice’ and ‘Make Change’ and ‘Being an Advocate’ for Equality

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.

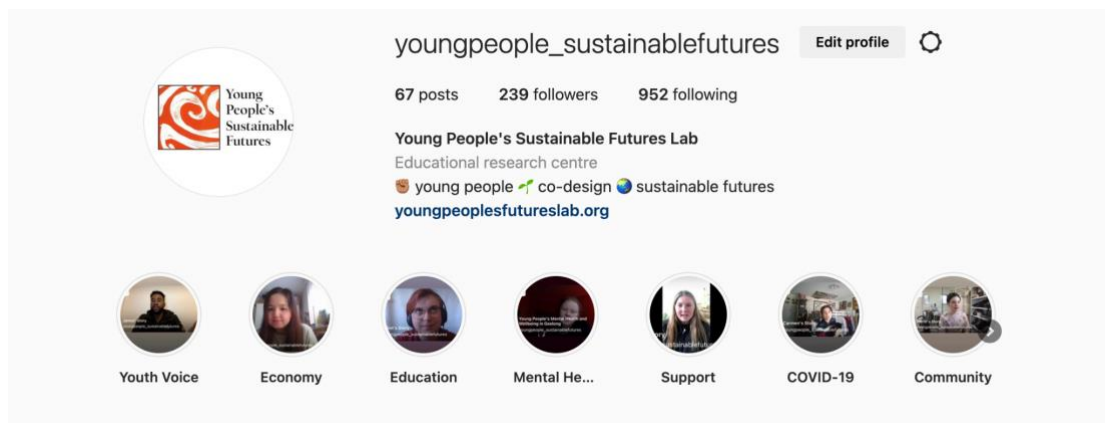
Greg Haynes (GForce Employment Solutions, Service Delivery Manager)

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)

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.

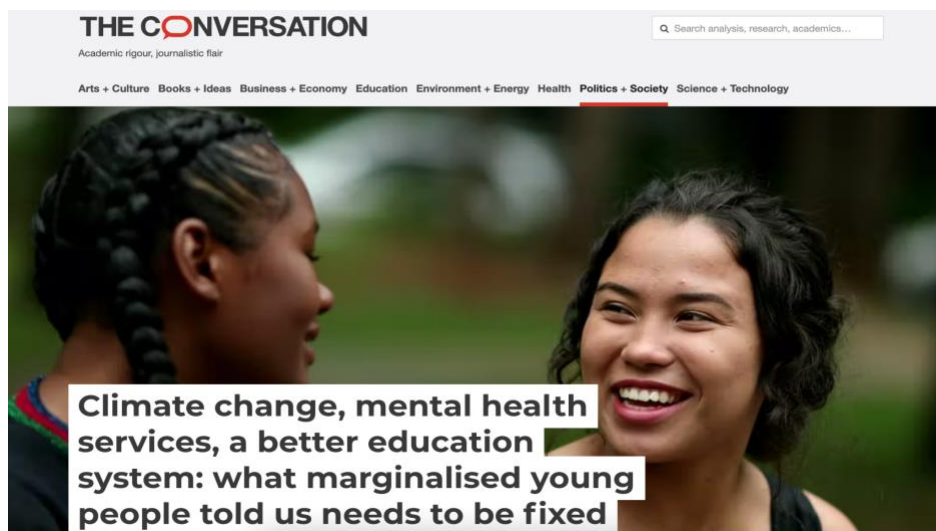


The Conversation

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 participated in action research in order to produce and share their stories in video format via Youtube.

1,046 Views



Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab

@youngpeoplesustainablefut7266
11 subscribers



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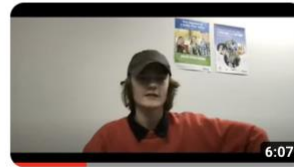
Aspirations

115 views · 7 months ago



Voice and Participation

102 views · 7 months ago



Mental Health and Wellbeing

225 views · 7 months ago

Young People's Sustainable Futures Lab Website & Blogs

Blog posts (to be developed into journal articles), 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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Greater Geelong

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



TIMELINE FOR 2023

Using innovative, platform based, video capture technologies the project is conducting a final round of video interviews with young people as we track their education, training and employment pathways during 2023. In 2023, we aim that young people from the 2021/2022 cohorts will be engaged in the data gathering process

Dec-Jan 2022/23	Feb-March 2023	April-June 2023	July-Sept 2023	Oct-Dec 2023
Finalise Cohort 1 + 2	Recruiting Young People for 3rd Round Workshop planning	Final Round of Data Gathering Young people in Data Gathering Design and distribution of Survey	Final Stakeholder workshop in October- December Young People involved (stipend - to be determined)	Final Report & Video
Thematic Analysis: Instagram Blogs Newspapers Local Media - GT, News / Addy				

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, (previously enrolled) Year 11 VCAL student, Leopold



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