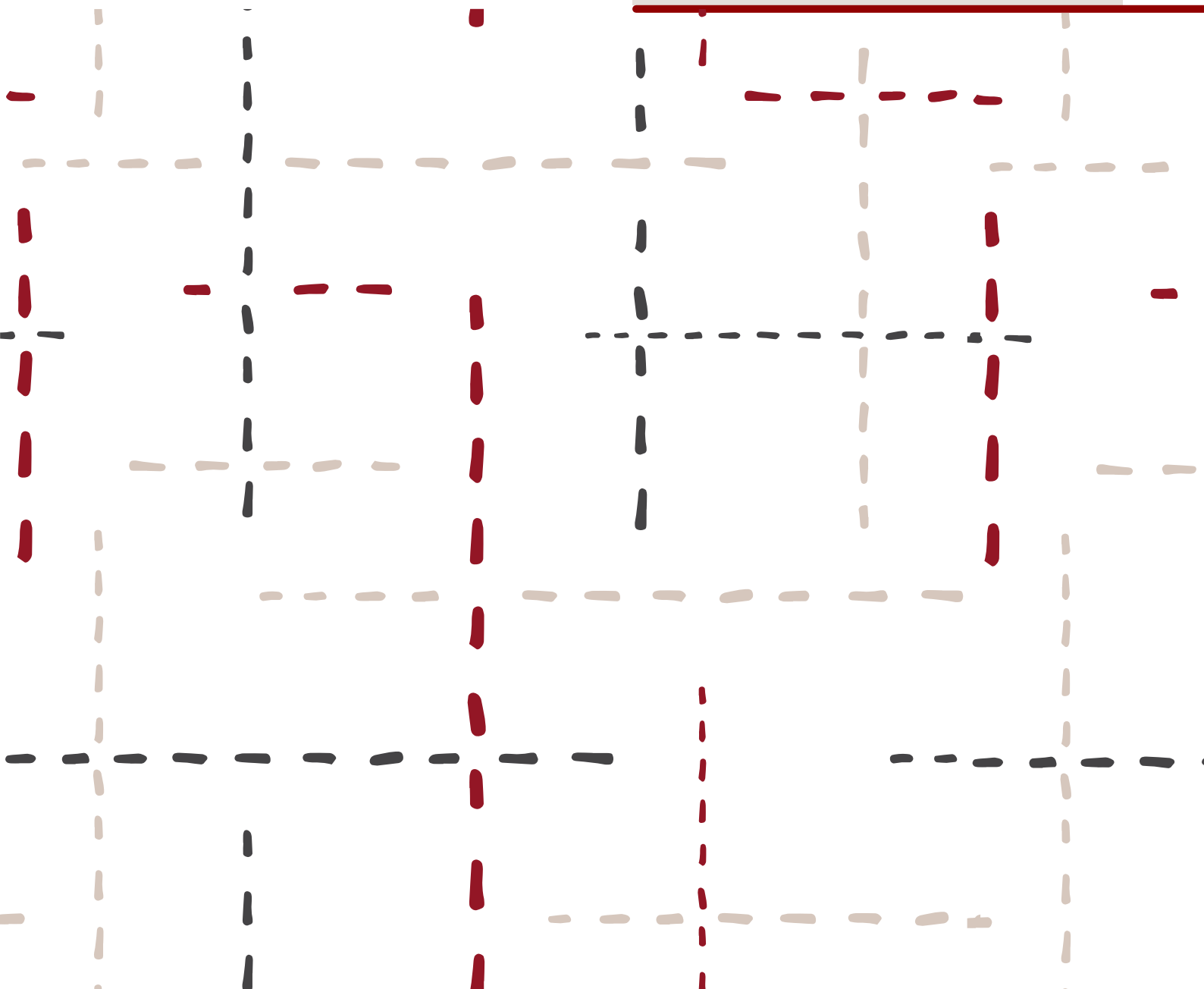


LITERATURE
REVIEW

**MID-WEST
YOUTH
SKILLS**

SEM 2, 2021





ABOUT

The WA Justice Association (**WAJA**) is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity with the ACNC. WAJA's mission is to reduce incarceration rates and improve outcomes for people coming into contact with Western Australia's criminal justice system. We hope to achieve this by effecting law/policy reform and promoting student engagement with social justice organisations and the legal community.

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The Western Australian Justice Association acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and custodians of Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We acknowledge and respect Aboriginal Elders past and present, and support emerging leaders across Western Australia and Australia.

As this paper focuses on the Mid-West region, we would also like to acknowledge the Yamatji, Amangu, Badimaya and Kaalimaya people as well as any other Indigenous people engaged in the region.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper is an abridged version of the final Literature Review developed by the WA Justice Association (WAJA) Team and delivered to their Supervisor, Mentor and Partner Organisation. This paper has been edited to exclude sensitive information, information obtained via private consultation and other references to confidential elements of the Project. As such, some sections and references have been omitted.

The scope of research and content in this paper was tailored to the needs of the Partner Organisation in this Project. The focus of this Project was to investigate opportunities and best practice in developing programmes which support young people who are at risk of becoming engaged in the criminal justice system. The Project considered how such a programme could be implemented in Western Australia's Mid-West region to provide young people with valuable skills and employment potential - key factors in preventing offending and reducing recidivism.

This Literature Review should be read in conjunction with the Project's Final Report which is also available on WAJA's website.

KEY YOUTH STATISTICS

GENERAL

Greater Geraldton is home to 38,231 people, with 26% aged between 10-19 years. The population has a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 9.6%. The City retains a strong Catholic following of 26.8%, 5% above the state-wide average.[1]

EMPLOYMENT

The region's largest employer is health care and social assistance, employing 2153 people [2]. Other strong industries include primary education, retail, transport and secondary education [3]. The unemployment rate in Greater Geraldton was 6% in March 2021, above the state level of 4.9% as of April 2021 [4]. The most common occupation reported in the 2016 Census held by employed persons 15 years and over were technicians and trades (17%), followed by professionals, clerical and administrative roles (16%), labourers (11.6%) and community and personal service workers (11.5%) [5].

EDUCATION

The highest level of educational attainment of people aged 15 years and over in Greater Geraldton is Certificate III or IV (20.5%). In contrast to the state average, Certificate attainment is lower at 17% but almost double the people aged 15 years and over have attained their Bachelor's degree [6]. There is a strong influence of Catholic education institutions, with rates of attendance at all levels of schooling at Catholic institutions being higher than the State average [7]. Literacy and numeracy levels appear to be in line with the State average [8].

SMOKING

There was a negligibly higher rate of smoking amongst Geraldton youth than the State average (36% as against 35%). However, youth were almost twice as likely to smoke if their parents smoked. In Geraldton, 52% of parents with children aged 12 –17 years old smoked.

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Rates of alcohol consumption were slightly higher in Geraldton than the State average, with 27% of youths across WA having drunk alcohol against 20% of female and 32% of male youths in Geraldton.

DRUG USE

Rates of marijuana use were similar between the State and Geraldton with 14% of youths in Geraldton using the drug weekly compared to 12% of youths across the State. Combined drug use was higher in Geraldton with 17% of males and 9% of females as against 11% of youths across WA.

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR

The most alarming statistics revealed in this study were the rates of attempted suicide by youth in Geraldton. Within the 12 months prior to the survey, 12% of youth in Geraldton had contemplated suicide with 52% of those youth actually attempting suicide. In contrast, although 16% of youths across WA contemplated suicide, a significantly lower proportion of 39% carried out an attempt.

GERALDTON: KEY ISSUES

(A) HOMELESSNESS

In WA, 21% of homeless people are aged between 21-24 years. Whilst the STAY program can have an individual 'tenancy-ready' within three months, there is a rising tenancy crisis, with 77 recorded cases of unmet demand in the 2019-2020 financial year [9]. A small-scale survey of 45 homeless people living in Geraldton revealed that those people had been homeless for an average of approximately 4 years. 60% of this group suffered from a mental disability and 44% had suffered physical abuse in the previous 6 months [10]. 69% of this group identified as Aboriginal. [11]

(B) CRIME

WA's total incarceration rate dwarfs the national average at 324 per 10,000 residents against 215 per 10,000 nationwide. This is exacerbated within WA's Aboriginal population with 39% of the state's prison population identifying as Aboriginal, against a general population rate of 3.9%. In WA youth detention centres, approximately 75% of youths identify as Aboriginal. Incarcerating youths does not effectively address the causes of crime, with 52.9% of WA's imprisoned youths re-offending within 2 years of their release.[11A]

(C) SOCIAL ISSUES: MID-WEST REGION

Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Approximately 1000 drug offences have been pursued in court within the 2018-2019 financial year. Furthermore, it is estimated that alcohol use per capita is 2nd highest amongst regional WA (3.3 standard drinks per day).

Domestic Violence and Housing: At the time of writing, there are several cases of terminally ill women still on the WA Housing Authority waitlist after 12 months on the Housing Authority's emergency list. In Geraldton, 700 people are on the waitlist and more than 100 social housing properties are vacant and in disrepair. It is not unusual for people on the priority list to be waiting up to 2 years.

Income Access: Many would rather go without income than rely on Centrelink and paid employment. Peoples' ability to gain employment is heavily impacted by the highly competitive job market [12].

(D) Health

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA): Low SEIFA correlates with a lower health status, due to increased health risk factors. There is a significant number of Mid-West residents living in local government areas with SEIFA scores in the bottom 10% of the state [13].

Aboriginal Maternity: Compared to non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women generally experience poorer maternal health outcomes, higher rates of perinatal and infant mortality, and deliver babies with lower average birth weights. Teenage pregnancy is 1.8 times higher than the State average. Aboriginal teenage pregnancy accounted for 19% of Mid-West teenage pregnancies [14].

Alcohol and Smoking during Pregnancy: In the Mid-West, approximately 45% of Aboriginal mothers and 14% of non-Aboriginal mothers smoked during pregnancy. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy has caused a large incidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in children. FASD is a common cause of medical, cognitive and behavioural problems in children including prematurity, brain damage, birth defects, growth restriction and developmental delay. WA's FASD birth prevalence is 0.26 per 1000 births whereas rates of FASD in WA's Aboriginal community is 4.08 per 1000 [15].

Child and Adolescent Health: There is an issue of low birth weight in the region. Approximately 15% of Aboriginal babies were born with low birth weight compared to the overall Mid-west low birth weight rate of 8% [16].

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC): The AEDC measures how children are developing upon commencing full-time school. 22% of children in Australia are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains of the AEDC. This percentage varies greatly between towns in the Mid-West, ranging from 10% to 65% [17].

Mental Health: In the Mid-West, one in eight people aged 16 and over (12%) suffered from a diagnosed mental health problem, yet only 5% accessed a mental health care service between 2009-2012 [18].

Hospitalisation: Mid-West residents are hospitalised 10% more often compared to the State average. The primary cause of hospitalisation is digestive diseases (11%, highest in the state) [19].

Mortality: Between 2007-2011, the Mid-West mortality rate was significantly higher than the State average. Approximately 58% of deaths under the age of 75 could have been avoided through the better use of primary prevention and treatment interventions [20].

Summary

The key areas identified as **most critical** for youth in Geraldton and the wider Mid-West region are:

- 1 Accomodation
- 2 Work and Skills Development
- 3 Mental Health Support



INTERNATIONAL MODELS

ON-THE-RISE PROGRAM - OHIO, USA

The On-the-Rise (OTR) program has been operational for 15 years and serves at-risk youth aged 10-15 in central Ohio.

- Youth are referred by Children's Services, the Juvenile Court, County and City Schools and Mental Health agencies.
- Academic tutoring by university student volunteers is available, and time is set aside for the completion of homework.
- OTR works on social, employment and life skills through agricultural-based activities. Participants care for animals and work at the Farmers' Market selling produce, improving their training and social skills as part of OTR's effective job-readiness programme.
- By using a hands-on approach and offering positive and rewarding activities, OTR exposes youth to new ways of thinking. This builds on participants' self-esteem and responsibility, encouraging them to make better choices and to feel success.
- The programme's purpose is to bring excitement back into learning and instil positive behaviours in participants in order to mitigate stress, social issues and delinquency.
- OTR functions as a holistic program that promotes overall wellbeing in at-risk youth [45].

COOK-IT-UP! FOOD LITERACY PROGRAMME - CANADA [46]

Background:

- Poor dietary habits during adolescence have negative impacts on several health and wellness indicators including: day-to-day wellbeing and functioning, achievement and maintenance of healthy weight, proper growth and development patterns, and dental health.
- Research has shown that when youth are involved in preparing food for meals, they are more likely to eat healthier foods.[46A]
- At-risk youth are characterised by their diverse racial backgrounds, negative influences from family environment and/or peers, social factors that restrict healthy mental and social growth, limited financial resources, difficulty achieving optimal education and behavioural issues.

Methods:

- 'Cook-It-Up!' was an 18-month community-based cooking programme for at-risk youth which focussed on food education and building cooking skills. The London Community Resource Centre was the host agency for 'Cook it Up!'.
- The objective of 'Cook-It-Up!' was to provide education and to increase skills and awareness of agriculture, healthy eating and food preparation, and food purchasing among London-Ontario Youth.
- During the 18-month program, youth engaged in a variety of cooking opportunities focussing on seasonal and local food ingredients. Sessions were facilitated by local chefs.

- The participants engaged in field trips to local farms and farmers' markets on a monthly basis – the field trips were selected to connect the youth to their cooking experiences. For example, specific farms growing particular commodities were selected based on the recipes the participants would follow.
- The programme also included a field trip to visit a college-level culinary programme, observing food demonstrations in the college's test kitchen and learning about the college's available culinary programmes.

Steering Committee Selection (comprised of 10 individuals) including:

- local chefs (for cooking education);
- local farmers (for connection to local agri-food industry);
- education specialists (for guidance on how to work with at-risk youth);
- social service agency representatives focussing on the youth population (to assist in participant recruitment and youth engagement);
- public health representatives (to assist in proposal writing, research and evaluation and regarding nutrition);
- food service industry reps (provide opportunities for field trips);
- community members with relevant interests and skills (to ground the Steering Committee and ensure best interests of the participants and programme goals were prioritised); and
- a food specialty store owner (to provide business representation and programme resources).

Target Population and Recruitment Strategies

- The programme's significant time and effort requirements required full commitment from participants.
- The Steering Committee utilised local media outlets to introduce the programme to the community, conducting interviews which were advertised on social media.
- The Steering Committee conducted informal interviews with potential participants to determine fit, interest, enthusiasm and commitment – this proved to be an effective recruitment and retention strategy.
- 30 youth applied and nine were selected. One participant withdrew later due to personal issues and the other eight participants remained for the full duration of the programme.

Implications for Practice

- Cooking skills programmes for youth provide numerous benefits, including the development of necessary life, social and economic management skills, and education about healthy eating required for the promotion and enhancement of a healthy lifestyle.
- The programme provided a unique intervention to improve important life skills in a population that is at-risk of disadvantage in the aforementioned areas.

AGRICULTURAL TRAINING PROGRAMME - LIBERIA, AFRICA

Important questions the programme considers:

- Are rural youth interested in agriculture?
- What kinds of agricultural support can help them expand their activities?
- Can anti-poverty programmes reduce illegal activities, peacefully open up concessions and reduce the propensity for crime and violence?
- What are the most cost-effective means to reduce poverty and improve security in rural towns and villages?

The programme has 6 main components:

1. Three to four months of coursework and practical training in rice and vegetable farming, animal husbandry and rubber and palm oil production
2. Basic literacy and numeracy training
3. Formal and informal psycho-social counselling and conflict management
4. Meals, lodging, clothing, basic medical care and personal items while in residence
5. Facilitation of re-entry and access to land into any community of their choice
6. A two-stage package of agricultural tools and supplies, tailored to the specific type of agricultural work chosen by the trainee (worth approximately \$200 USD)

Qualitative Observations:

- Significant improvement in confidence and respect
- The residential training program appeared to be both carefully implemented and popular. Classroom and practical instructions were intensive, hands-on, and appeared to be pitched at the appropriate speed and level for each participant.
- Participants learned to live better in groups and according to rules, and settle disagreements non-violently.
- More than two-thirds of participants were doing agricultural work for themselves or another at the time of surveying, and nearly two-thirds planted crops or raised animals after returning from the programme.

Psychosocial Impacts

- More stable livelihoods and new skills have the potential to improve self-esteem and reduce depression.
- A number of studies show a link between social support and mental health – the program aims to reintegrate individuals into society and improve social skills.
- To deal with war trauma – the curriculum included psycho-education on war trauma and PTSD.
- Inside and outside the classroom, participants learned to regulate their emotions, communicate clearly, build sustainable relationships and resolve interpersonal conflicts. [47]

SUCCESSFUL PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH AT RISK (SUPER) - ISRAEL

The SUPER programme focused on four main content dimensions:

1. Knowledge and understanding of concepts related to the working world and employability. The YAR (Youth at Risk) participants acquired knowledge through lessons, meeting with employees and workplace visits - especially through ongoing work experiences.
2. Self-advocacy and occupational identity which involves participants understanding their current abilities and strengths and desired future identities and developing skills to act out this identity.
3. Future orientation - involves participants developing aspirations through exposure career planning and higher education.
4. Work experience – including students' participation in school extra-curricular activities and out of school paid work with consistent feedback.

PEER REVIEWED RESEARCH ON YOUTH SKILLS PROGRAMMES

Tim Fish (Monash University) conducted an ethnographic study of a rural secondary school in Victoria. The school was established as an alternative education programme for disengaged youth based upon a therapeutic ethos focussing on perceived social and emotional deficits [49]. The key finding was that a therapeutic ethos positions certain young people as 'lacking' and in need of remediation, while ignoring socioeconomic factors. This is particularly evident when young people who have disengaged with mainstream education are defined as being 'at-risk.' The idea of 'at-risk' suffocates the individual's agency, placing them in a passive and dependent role, and eventually becomes their identity.

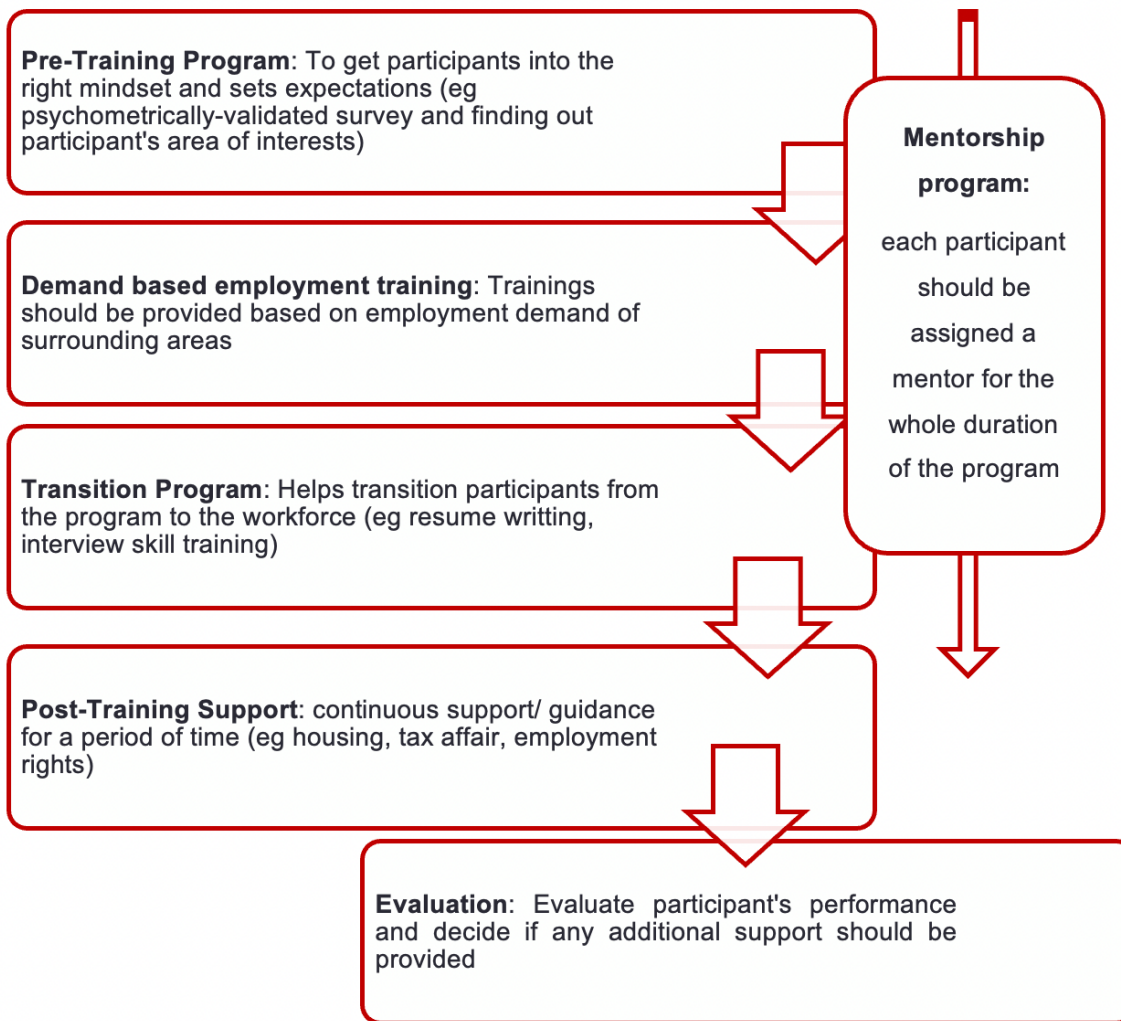
Fish argues that an alternative education programme in a rural town should not only re-engage students with education and learning but also seek to redress some of the stigma many suffer in the community. This can be done by involving local community members in programmes creating positive relationships, in work related roles. Working with and in the community challenges both the perceptions young people have of their community and the deficit-based positioning of these young people by adults in the community. This gives youth a chance to demonstrate their true potential.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In developing a youth skills programme in Western Australia's Mid-West region, we should be mindful of the community stigma that youth may face, which often arises from their socioeconomic position. We need to be careful of language and how we frame the programme. For example, we could consider removing the term 'at risk' youth in programme material.

To ensure that participants in the programme can emerge from the programme with the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the community, the programme itself must work with the local community and local service providers. For example, local community members could be involved in teaching certain skills programmes such as cooking or carpentry, helping to form working relationships and remove deficit-based thinking.

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICE SUMMARY



10 FEATURES COMMON TO EFFECTIVE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS [50]

1. Recognises young people's strengths and aspirations
2. Supports young people to develop employment goals and (where relevant) life goals
3. Identifies and responds to the range of issues experienced by young people
4. Builds trusted relationships with young people
5. Includes activities that support young people to develop employability skills eg communication, problem-solving, teamwork
6. Includes activities that support young people to develop technical skills that meet specific job needs
7. Provides young people with high quality, relevant information that supports the search for work
8. Provides young people with opportunities to gain practical and useful work experience
9. Connects young people with employers
10. Provides post-programme support to young people for the period required for them to reach their goals

The 10 features were developed following a review of the available research and existing youth employment programmes in Australia, as well as consultations with experts in youth employment from Government, peak bodies, social purpose organisations and academia [50].

1. PHASE ONE: GUIDANCE & EXPLORATION

- 1.1. Recognises young people's strengths and aspirations
- 1.2. Supports young people to develop goals for employment and where relevant life goals
- 1.3. Identifies and responds to the range of issues experienced by young people
- 1.4. Builds trusted relationships with young people

2. PHASE TWO: WORK PREPARATION

- 2.1. Includes activities that support young people to develop employability skills e.g. communication, problem-solving and teamwork
- 2.2. Includes activities that support young people to develop technical skills that meet specific job needs
- 2.3. Provides young people with high quality relevant information that supports their search for work

3. PHASE THREE: WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.1. Provides young people with opportunities to gain practical and useful work experience
- 3.2. Connect young people with employers

4. PHASE FOUR: POST-PROGRAMME SUPPORT

- 4.1. Provides post-program support to young people for the time needed for them to reach their goals

MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED - GOALS [52]

1. To have delivered a programme that includes the features of an effective programme, including the involvement of young people in key performance indicator measurement.
2. Find and maintain good quality work
 - In paid employment
 - Satisfaction with job
 - Not underemployed
 - In work that is teaching them skills that will assist with their future career
3. Support young people to develop the skills, attitude and behaviours needed to find and maintain work
 - Improved attitudes to work
 - Increased capacity to access labour market opportunities
 - Improved career direction
 - Creating and building professional networks
4. Use data collected to strengthen programmes and improve programme outcomes

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