

# Media Release



## **SURVEY FINDS MOST YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE ARE ENGAGED IN WORK OR STUDY, BUT SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS REMAIN ABOUT THEIR FUTURE CAREERS**

A longitudinal study on the post-school transitions of young people experiencing disadvantage has found that while the vast majority are engaged in work or study two years after finishing school, they are missing out on career progression opportunities which could have long-term consequences for their futures.

The Pathways, Engagements and Transitions (PET) research project, which is being conducted by The Smith Family, found that 85% of young people were engaged in study or work in their second year after finishing high school. A further 11% were looking for work or volunteering. However, despite this high level of engagement, it revealed many young people experiencing disadvantage are in precarious employment and need additional support to progress their careers.

The PET research is exploring the different work and study pathways young people experiencing disadvantage take after they leave school, with over 1,000 young people who were in Year 12 in 2020 taking part in a survey in both 2021 and 2022. Thirty-three young people also took part in in-depth interviews as part of the research. The survey data shows:

- 85% were in work and/or post-school study in 2022.
- 57% were fully engaged in work and/or study (over 35 hours or more a week) in 2022, up from 54% in 2021.
- 28% were partially engaged in study or work (less than 35 hours a week) in 2022, up from 23% in 2021.
- In 2022, a further 11% were looking for work or volunteering, with only 3% of young people not engaged in work, study, looking for work or volunteering.
- In 2022, 70% of young people were working, up from 55% in 2021 and 48% were studying in 2022, down from 52% in 2021.

Head of Research and Advocacy at The Smith Family, Anne Hampshire said that while this high level of engagement is positive, she is worried about the employment challenges these young people are facing, especially in the current economic environment.

“Having left school during COVID-19 and now facing significant cost-of-living increases, these young people are particularly vulnerable in the labour market.”

“While many were in work, much of this was in precarious employment. We found that of those in employment, 14% were working two or more jobs, 37% wanted to work more hours, and 34%

were looking for a new job. Many were working in precarious, low-wage roles, with unclear career progression opportunities.”

The PET research also shows that young people’s engagement in work or study is very dynamic.

“We found that two in five young people had different levels of engagement between 2021 and 2022. But this is very likely an under-estimate, as 32 of the 33 interviewees experienced some change in their work or study circumstances during their second year post-school.”

“When we combine this dynamic with their work situation – and that only 48% of survey respondents were studying – we’re concerned about what this might mean for their longer-term futures. Without targeted support now, these young people are likely to find it very hard to get ahead in life, particularly in these economically uncertain times.”

Ms Hampshire also said she is worried about the multiple barriers preventing young people from completing school and post-school study.

“Our interviews revealed that a number of young people want to study post-school, but they face barriers that are outside their control. Some had to drop out of courses due to financial constraints, health or mental health issues, caring responsibilities and the challenge of online learning.”

“This isn’t just happening at the university and VET level either. One in ten young people surveyed didn’t complete Year 12 and they had poorer post-school engagement outcomes than their peers who did.”

The report makes several recommendations to better support young people experiencing disadvantage to complete Year 12 and navigate the world of work and careers post-school, including:

- Greater individualised support while at school to help more young people complete Year 12.
- Fund an expansion of high-quality career-related, remunerated work placements, cadetships and internship programs, which target young people experiencing disadvantage. These are particularly important to help overcome some of the financial constraints of completing post-school study.
- Implement intentional and high-quality career development learning throughout school and beyond, so young people can form career development skills, are exposed to a range of different career pathways, and have clear information and support on how to get there.
- Identify young people as a priority group in national and state/territory employment policies and programs, including helping those experiencing disadvantage to build meaningful career pathways.
- Strengthen young people’s access to timely and affordable health and mental health services.

Ms Hampshire said the PET research shows that these young people are working hard to secure their futures, but more needs to be done to ensure they can get ahead.

“These young people have faced disadvantage over a lifetime, and while they, and others like them, are doing their best, they need a range of additional supports, both while they’re at school and post-school.”

“With help from governments, business, educational and training institutions and organisations like The Smith Family, we can better support young people to fulfil their potential, with the benefits flowing not only to young people themselves but the whole community.”

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*The Smith Family is a children’s education charity that helps young Australians experiencing disadvantage to create better futures for themselves through harnessing the power of education. Visit [thesmithfamily.com.au](https://thesmithfamily.com.au)*

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### **Key Characteristics of the young people surveyed**

Gender: 55% are female and 45% are male.

Indigeneity: 15% are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Location: 72% live in metropolitan areas and 28% live in regional areas.

States and territories: All were represented, with around a quarter living in each of New South Wales and Victoria, one-fifth in Queensland, and around one in 10 in each of South Australia and Western Australia. Tasmania and the two territories together comprised 6%.

Health and disability: 37% indicated they had a health or mental health condition.

Year 12 completion: One in 10 had not completed Year 12 at the time of the 2022 survey.