

Hi, thanks for the opportunity to comment. I am sending from work email in lunch break but this is a personal parent submission.

As a parent who has now had two young people withdraw from schooling, and I have had to be the main person to provide guidance, alternative pathways and also pastoral care to ensure they have the right supports, I think there needs to be a big overhaul of how we support our youth.

I have recently had to fight to get reasonable adjustment for my daughter in a VET course, as she withdrew from College. It was only after I contacted the Director of VET in Schools that the issue was resolved locally for my daughter. This should not happen.

My feedback is absolutely biased as I have had poor experiences with Colleges, both public and private, when my children have had challenges. However the question I asked the Assistant Principal, the Guidance Counsellor and the Director as I advocated and challenged practices was – What happens to the families who don't have my background or education. What happens to the parents who don't have the confidence to question. What happens to the young people who don't have this support and just leave and end up in bed all day depressed feeling worthless as they are felt to believe that their choice is so terrible.

My daughters are contributing, are achieving, one is even supporting young people who have barriers in this space as her work (and attending Uni), but this is in no way due to encouragement or support or pathway information from the schools. There is still a long way to go in this space, and as I just had to again advocate for another one of my children 8 years later it saddened me that not much has seen to have changed.

So here is my feedback as a parent, and also someone who worked in the youth sector for many years, and as an exTAFE teacher. Thank you 😊

Discussion question 1:

Add in parents/carers to this collaboration and discussion. Bring them with you and educate them on what options are available and how to support their children, and encourage lifelong learning.

Absolutely focus on the value and positives rather than deficits and be creative and flexible in approaches to work with the young person. Ideally they will all stay engaged but if they don't, work with them to 'leave' positively with a great experience, feelings of worth, that they can contribute. That their bump in the road is temporary and people have their backs, the door to learning is always open. Practice with is preached here, make sure there really is encouragement, no wrong door, including if they need to leave for a while due to disability, health or other stressful factors. Be flexible in your assessments and approaches.

Principles listed should include parent/caregiver or other significant person and also mention support for those really struggling to keep those connections to learning or engagement open.

Discussion Question 2:

Unfortunately post placement support often means keeping people in employment at all costs, particularly if the wrong fit. This is tied to funding often for job providers. Definitely having connections with employers is important and deep meaningful connection, not just expos. Increase work placement, increase relationships, look at an employer mentor program for young people, engage young people in volunteering in curriculum. This is a less stressful way to start them in the workplace, do this early years 9 and 10. Develop a community workplace ethic from a young age.

Discussion Question 3:

The most positive impact is schools supporting the young person no matter what the journey. If they are leaving make sure they have the supports in place. Twice now I have had to advocate strongly for my daughters to other pathways as two had to leave school early due to chronic health conditions. I should not be the only safety net. Not all parents have those skills.

Discussion Question 4

Develop better relationships with communities and employers. Look for ways for young people to contribute in their communities as part of their curriculum.

Discussion Question 5

Barriers are real and getting more and more complex. Youth mental health issues are on the rise. From my recent experience it is luck depending on the teacher you have. That is not good enough and we need to do better in this space. I worry about all the young people that have left school without the best outcome they can have, or positive discussions, because there has been no-one to advocate for them. I should not have to insist, and have to go to the Director level, to ensure that a VET provider provide reasonable adjustment, and also suggest the activities to get this done. More education for our teachers, more empathy, more awareness of visible illnesses, more understanding of mental health issues and how debilitating they can be. More youth workers/social workers/psychologists in schools. A Youth Jobs strategy without strong alignment, connection and real support in these spaces will only support those who already have the resources/resilience to succeed.

Discussion Question 6

Better staff education and awareness, not just of health and disability issues including mental health, chronic illness and invisible illnesses. Also awareness of the legal obligations to apply reasonable adjustment, one size

does not fit all and teachers should have time to provide this support or other dedicated teaching staff to support them.

Discussion Question 7

There are some great connector programs now to help with transport. However most young people I know would not go with some 'random' to get to work. Better public transport or ride share initiatives and incentives out in local communities could help with this. This is a really tricky one. We live in a rural community and the buses are terrible. We can afford to purchase and pay for our children's cars, but many families aren't able to.

Discussion Question 8

More to be done in the school space here. More empowering and educating of families. More resources in schools to support and more flexibility in the school approach. TCE is not the be all and end all, positive learning outcomes and a good learning experience that sets young people up confidently, acknowledges their skills and attributes and supports them in their journey is crucial. Increase school based traineeship opportunities, internships in high school, volunteering which gives you workplace skills.

Discussion Question 9

Libraries having young people run programs for them in the community, intergenerational learning. Councils having young people train up and work at hospitality events. We need better than just work experience, we need longer term embedded young people in our businesses/communities/services really honing their skills. The Big Picture program was good for this, but the program providers often relied on the hosts to organise activities. I think we need school led activities, by the students themselves. Building programming, development, ideas, community development initiatives that they can then also put on their resumes. We need buy in from businesses for this to work and education for young people on workplace etiquette, skills etc. Two way streets. Beacon Foundation used to do great work in this space.

Discussion question 10

I find this comment a bit judgey. Decent and meaningful? Define that. What work is not decent and meaningful? I would consider changing that wording to be honest. Any opportunity to connect with others, build work ethic, learn how to get to a place on time, contribute to a service, complete tasks is a fantastic building of skills. Stepping stones to work are important and our younger workforce are more mobile, adaptable and change driven than ever before.

Discussion Question 11

I think the schools need community engagement officers. Not teachers trying to do a million and one things, but people who have come from business/community/industry and know the drivers and how to make this

work. People who can work with young people on their personal attributes, work ready skills, confidence and are not weighed down with assessing those skills against curriculum. More adult relationships with a younger person, not teacher/student. Advocates/job coaches whatever you want to call them.

Allow and actively encourage TasTAFE and part time school, be flexible in approaches. Don't make young people feel weighted down to have it all sorted at such a young age. Rather fill them with hope and optimism that any path they take, or even just small steps are always in the right direction. Provide genuine support without judgement, make being at or leaving education something so positive they want to come back to it.

Final comment:

There is two mentions of parent in this discussion paper. I think we need to do a lot more in this space. I can honestly say that even after working with youth and having a huge degree of experience in supporting adults in employment, education etc, that having your child not well or not able to stay at school is heartbreaking. I would much rather my youngest was still attending College, engaged with her peers and taking every opportunity offered to her. But she is not, so we are working with what we have, and looking at other positive ways to engage. We all just want the best for our kids, for all our young people, and I think we need to focus on that more, whatever that is, not what we think it should be.

My big concern is for those youth who don't have parents/carers in their corner. Who advocates for them?

Kindest, [name redacted]