

you**THINK**:Your **Say**



A partnership between the
Australian Government and
The Salvation Army



NOVEMBER 2009

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by Business Group Australia Pty Ltd



skills and labour market specialists



Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the outcomes of the youTHINK: Your Say activities, held on and around the 30 June 2009.

Young people who are living in disadvantaged circumstances and experiencing a range of difficulties in their lives rarely get to speak directly to government about their problems. The youTHINK: Your Say event held in partnership between the Australian Government and The Salvation Army was designed specifically to provide a platform for young people to talk about their problems with unemployment, homelessness, financial difficulties, access to government services and to provide feedback on the Australian Government's Compact with Young Australians. The activities on and around the 30 June 2009 also provided an opportunity for young people to suggest to government what might be done to deal with the issues and problems facing those disadvantaged young people in our society.

Over 700 young people convened in 36 separate locations across Australia to talk about their concerns and to discuss directly four key themes – the global financial crisis, access to government services, homelessness and the Compact with Young Australians. For most of these young people this was the only opportunity they have had to talk to other young people in similar circumstances and to participate in the preparation of a formal response to government.

This report captures the thoughts, feelings, opinions and suggestions of the young people and uses their words to convey to government some important messages.

I commend all those organisations and individuals involved in the youTHINK: Your Say forums and on behalf of The Salvation Army, thank them for their involvement.

MAJOR DAVID ELDRIDGE AM
The Salvation Army

Acknowledgement

This report has been produced as a project funded under the Australian Government's Australian Youth Forum initiative, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



“The you**THINK**: Your **Say** forum provided an opportunity for young people to suggest to government what might be done to deal with the issues and problems facing those disadvantaged young people in our society.”

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1. Executive Summary

The youTHINK: Your Say event was part of the Australian Government's Australian Youth Forum (AYF) initiative. It was a partnership between the Australian Government and The Salvation Army with the aim to collect advice directly from disadvantaged young people in relation to four key themes. The themes were:

- The impact of the global financial crisis on Australian youth and practical measures to address this crisis
- How young people across different groups access government programs and services and possible improvements to the provision of these programs and services
- How to address youth homelessness
- How to engage with the Compact with Young Australians.

The Salvation Army arranged a series of consultation sessions with young people between 15 and 24 years old in locations across Australia.

Over 700 young people participated in a series of face-to-face consultation sessions under the banner of youTHINK: Your Say, on and around the 30 June 2009.

Young people convened in 36 separate locations in all states and territories to discuss the four themes and to provide direct feedback and advice to the Australian Government.

In addition, eight groups met in Centrelink offices around the country to participate in a video-conference to discuss the themes.

In Melbourne, a group of young people held a breakfast meeting with the Hon. Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, aboard The Salvation Army's 614 Bus.

A group of 278 young people converged on the Melbourne Town Hall for a series of discussion sessions to consider the four themes.

Over a thousand young people completed a survey designed to collect additional information on the four key themes.

Young people from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and circumstances provided direct input and advice to the youTHINK: Your Say process.

The process was designed to provide a voice directly to government for those disadvantaged young people who do not normally participate in social policy debate.

The voluntary participation of young people in such significant numbers, proves that given the right approach and the involvement of organisations and individuals young people trust, even the most disadvantaged will engage in the debate.

The strength of the messages provided by the young people and the depth of feeling associated with those messages shows that young people want to be heard and expect government to hear them.

In relation to the four key themes explored during the youTHINK: Your Say process, there are some important issues requiring further consideration.

The following points were made directly by the young people involved in the consultation sessions.

The Salvation Army arranged a series of consultation sessions with young people between 15 and 24 years old in locations across Australia. Over 700 young people participated in a series of face-to-face consultation sessions under the banner of **youTHINK: Your Say**, on and around the 30 June 2009.

Young people said that the Global Financial Crisis was having a direct effect on their well-being, and in particular had resulted in the following:

- Young people already disadvantaged by a range of social circumstances are being further disadvantaged by the current difficult economic situation. Finding employment is harder than it used to be.
- The current financial circumstances have a direct impact that goes beyond the individual young person. In many families, the parents and working age children have lost their jobs or are experiencing difficulty finding jobs.
- Education and training is recognised by young people as a way of securing their employment into the future, but many young people question the value of training for training's sake and doubt that there are real jobs available once training is completed.
- Many young people are unable to pursue vocational education and training places in occupational areas where they believe there are real job outcomes, because they do not have the financial capacity to cover TAFE fees and are unable to access additional government support.

The strength of the messages provided by the young people and the depth of feeling associated with those messages shows that young people want to be heard and expect government to hear them.

With regard to the availability, access, quality and delivery of government services, the young people who participated reported the following:

- Access to government services is harder than it needs to be. Young people view services provided by government (regardless of the jurisdiction) in a collective sense. There needs to be a better integration of service provision for young people.
- There is a need for a single entry point to government for young people.
- The service provided by Centrelink was of particular interest to the young people, given that nearly all the participants are Centrelink clients. The young people believe that Centrelink services are time-consuming, bureaucratic and inconsistent.
- Centrelink services do not recognise the need for individual privacy.
- Centrelink services are complex and repetitive.
- There is no doubt that the single biggest issue with regard to the provision of Centrelink services is the lack of understanding of the situation of young people and a lack of empathy for individual circumstances. Young people believe that Centrelink uses a one-size-fits-all approach that does not recognise the specific needs of youth.
- Centrelink should utilise alternative delivery arrangements such as schools, TAFE and shopping precincts to provide better access to services for young people.
- Services to young people should be provided by youth workers who understand the specific needs of youth.



The voluntary participation of young people in such significant numbers, proves that given the right approach and the involvement of organisations and individuals young people trust, even the most disadvantaged will engage in the debate.

The issue of homelessness and the support provided by government to young people at risk of becoming homeless or already homeless, elicited some strong responses. The young people who participated reported the following:

- Government should do more to prevent homelessness before a young person gets onto the street. Early intervention at home and at school is required.
- Government should do more to tackle the causes of homelessness and to provide support and assistance to prevent the loss of accommodation. Staying in a difficult home environment is not seen by young people as an appropriate option.
- Many young people who have experienced homelessness are critical of the role of state government agencies.
- There is an issue related to the transition of young people in state care that needs to be addressed. These young people often find themselves making a sudden transition from complete state support to no support and a requirement to fend exclusively for themselves.
- There is a need for more transitional housing and accommodation. Young people find it difficult to access appropriate accommodation and find the rigidity of many shelters, refuges and temporary accommodation hard to accept.
- The private rental market is seen by most young people as the best option for providing long-term, sustainable accommodation. Access to public housing is seen by most young people as an unrealistic option.
- Support for private rental bonds and government endorsed references are seen by many of the young people as a way of allowing them to enter the private rental market.
- The best approach for young people who require accommodation is to find an option that suits individual circumstances and to aim for a 'first-time' solution. Putting the effort into getting a young person into 'a place of their own' will work better than numerous transitional accommodation arrangements.

The Compact with Young Australians was an unknown to most of the young people. Many of the young people only became aware of the 'earn or learn' arrangements during the explanations provided at the various consultation sessions. Notwithstanding the low level of recognition, the young people suggested that:

- There is a need for better promotion of the Compact with Young Australians to those young people who will be affected by the 'earn or learn' arrangements.
- Young people believe that 'earn or learn' will only work when there are real jobs on offer. Training in an area with limited employment options or doing 'community service type' work will not lead to better youth engagement.
- It is important that government recognise that many young people are 'doing it tough'. A requirement to return to an education or training program that imposes even great pressure on young people may have serious consequences.

INTRODUCTION

There is a critical need to empower young people who are disaffected to allow them to engage with the current national debates, particularly around issues that impact on them such as homelessness and the impact of the global financial crisis.



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2. Introduction

Ensuring all young people make a smooth transition to independence is more critical today than ever before. Understanding the opportunities and challenges they face is vital if Australia is to respond with adequate and appropriate measures and initiatives that help young people move successfully from school into further study or employment. Their voices can provide a powerful insight into the different perceptions and realities of today's youth labour market, how young people are faring, and what young people require to make a successful transition from school to work.

There is a critical need to empower young people who are disaffected to allow them to engage with the current national debates, particularly around issues that impact on them such as homelessness and the impact of the global financial crisis.

The Salvation Army is one of Australia's largest welfare providers. The organisation is dedicated to helping Australians in crisis.

In a typical week throughout Australia, The Salvation Army will provide people in need with an estimated 100,000 meals. It provides beds to over 5,000 homeless people, rehabilitation to more than 500 addicted and refuge to in excess of 400 victims of domestic abuse. It also provides counselling to several thousand people. Each year many thousands of Australians rely on the support and services of The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army has made a significant investment in the range of programs it operates in all states and territories. These programs address alcohol, drug, gambling, and other addictive behaviour. The programs also include needle exchanges, withdrawal services, counselling and referral, home-based services, residential treatment services, support groups, and services specifically designed to meet the needs of specific groups such as youth, correctional clients, intravenous drug users, women, homeless people, and particular ethnic minorities.

The Salvation Army has provided care, advice and services to Australia's disadvantaged and marginalised for nearly one hundred years. In the recent past it has been called upon to extend its services to a broader client group as the 'working poor' have sought out the organisation's support and services in ever increasing numbers.

The you**THINK**: Your Say event was the result of a partnership between the Australian Government and The Salvation Army in cooperation with youth organisations and was designed to make the fullest use of The Salvation Army's expertise and national networks in relation to disadvantaged and disempowered young people.

A range of events were held throughout Australia on Tuesday 30 June 2009, being:

- A formal video-conference session linking young people in major centres across the country. The video-link operated for around 60 minutes allowing direct dialogue across a number of regions. The Centrelink Videoconference facilities were used in all capital cities, Newcastle and Queanbeyan (NSW).
- A prominent lead event in the Melbourne Town Hall focused national attention.
- The Salvation Army 614 Bus based in Melbourne was used. The bus is sponsored by the investment company, AXA Australia, and is a portable youth centre with equipment such as computers, a library, a large annex area and cooking facilities. It is a popular and well-utilised facility for street kids in the Melbourne metropolitan area.
- The establishment of discussion groups of young people across a broad range of locations throughout the country.

In a typical week throughout Australia, The Salvation Army will provide people in need with an estimated 100,000 meals. It provides beds to over 5,000 homeless people, rehabilitation to more than 500 addicted and refuge to in excess of 400 victims of domestic abuse.

The principles guiding the youTHINK: Your Say activities were:

- There would be the involvement of young people between 15 and 24 who do not usually engage with government due to their level of disadvantage or social circumstances and that these young people should be encouraged to actively engage in the process.
- The conversations with the young people would be facilitated directly by The Salvation Army staff and skilled youth workers, supported by labour market experts. This approach would ensure that all participants would provide honest and open feedback.
- The proposal would deliver solid outcomes, including a consolidated report reflecting discussions and participants' views and ideas.

A key success factor of the youTHINK: Your Say event was the active involvement of the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth.

The groups of young people involved in the various activities would focus on the same four themes. These being:

- The impact of the global financial crisis on Australian youth and practical measures to address this crisis
- How young people across different groups access government programs and services and possible improvements to the provision of these programs and services
- How to address youth homelessness
- How to engage with the Compact with Young Australians.

The intention of the activities on the 30 June was to provide a platform for young people aged 15 to 24 who do not usually engage with government because of their social circumstances or level of disadvantage.

The consultation sessions held in all parts of Australia collected information, opinion, commentary and suggestions directly from young people who are at the most risk from the current difficult financial circumstances.

This report provides a direct insight into the position, thoughts, opinions and feelings of the young people that participated in the youTHINK: Your Say activities on and around the 30 June 2009.

The report has been written in a style that accurately reports the things that the young people said.

The intention of the activities on the 30 June was to provide a platform for young people aged 15 to 24 who do not usually engage with government because of their social circumstances or level of disadvantage.



This report provides a direct insight into the position, thoughts, opinions and feelings of the young people that participated in the youTHINK: Your Say activities on and around the 30 June 2009.

OUTCOMES - LOCATION

The Salvation Army arranged for the collection of information from disadvantaged young people in all states and territories. Most of the consultation sessions were held on the 30 June 2009.



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3. Outcomes – Locations

The Salvation Army arranged for the collection of information from disadvantaged young people in all states and territories. Most of the consultation sessions were held on the 30 June 2009. A small number of sessions were held prior to and after the 30 June to accommodate local requirements.

The information that follows confirms details on the location of consultation sessions and the number of young people that participated in the consultations.

3.1 - 614 Bus

Early on the morning of Tuesday 30 June, the 614 Bus was located outside The Salvation Army's Melbourne building on Bourke St.

The 614 Bus is sponsored by AXA and is a portable youth centre with equipment such as computers, a library, a large annex area and cooking facilities. It is a popular and well-utilised facility for street kids in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Young people known to The Salvation Army as regular users of the 614 Bus service were invited to attend for a cooked breakfast, to meet with the Hon. Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, and to participate in a consultation session on the bus with the Minister.

The event attracted significant media attention, including three live crosses to the 'ABC Breakfast' television program.

The consultation session on the bus attracted 21 young people.

3.2 - Centrelink Video-Conference Consultation Sessions

Commencing at 11.30am (EST) on the morning of the 30 June, a video-conference consultation session was held linking young people gathered in Centrelink offices around the country.

Young people participated in the video-conference activity from the following locations:

- Sydney
- Melbourne
- Brisbane
- Adelaide
- Perth
- Darwin
- Newcastle
- Queanbeyan.

The session was facilitated by Mr Hugh Mackay who was located at the Sydney site. Mr Mackay is a psychologist, social researcher, columnist and the author of eleven books. He has been actively engaged in social research for over fifty years, including projects where he talks to young people about issues that are important to them.

The Hon. Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, participated at the commencement of the Centrelink consultation at the Melbourne (Box Hill) site.

The Centrelink video-conference consultation sessions were attended by 143 young people across the country.

3.3 - Melbourne Town Hall

At the same time as the video-conference consultation session was linking young people around the country, a large group of young people from across the Melbourne metropolitan area was arriving at the Melbourne Town Hall.

The young people were grouped into fifteen separate consultation sessions in various function and meeting rooms throughout the Melbourne Town Hall. A broad range of organisations providing services to young people throughout Melbourne participated in the event. In addition to The Salvation Army groups (identified below as 'TSA') other youth organisations were involved, these being:

- Tranmere St TSA
- Footscray TSA
- Noble Park TSA
- Crossroads TSA
- Brunswick - TSA
- 614 Melb - TSA
- Box Hill TSA
- Reservoir TSA
- Camberwell TSA
- Healsville TSA
- Preston TSA
- ACE
- Visycare/ Sunshine Youth Housing
- Visycare/ Dandenong Youth Housing
- Asylum Seekers Resource Centre
- Youthworks
- Frontyard
- Jahwork
- Handbrake Turn
- Yarra Ranges Youth
- YMCA
- White Lion
- Wesley Youth Services
- Brosnan Centre
- RMIT
- Equip
- Centre for Multi-cultural Youth
- Reclink
- Anglicare
- Doveton

Each group considered the four main you**THINK**: Your Say themes and provided comment, suggestion and opinion during the vigorous discussion facilitated by youth workers from the various participating organisations. All of the key discussion points, including direct participant comments, were recorded by the youth workers. At the conclusion of the group discussions, all the young people assembled for a plenary session in the main hall.

The Hon. Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, addressed the plenary session and four of the groups provided direct feedback on their consultations.

A total of 278 young people participated in the Melbourne Town Hall consultation sessions.



All of the key discussion points, including direct participant comments, were recorded by the youth workers. At the conclusion of the group discussions, all the young people assembled for a plenary session in the main hall.

3.4 - Regional Sessions

Throughout the day on Tuesday 30 June, young people met in various locations throughout the country to consider the four main themes.

Each of the regional sessions was facilitated by youth workers and discussion points, comments and suggestions recorded.

As with the event held at the Melbourne Town Hall, each of the regional sessions was facilitated by youth workers and discussion points, comments and suggestions recorded.

To accommodate local conditions, in a small number of locations consultation sessions were held in the days leading up to and the days immediately following the 30 June.

Consultation sessions were held in the following locations – in some locations multiple sessions were held:

- Surry Hills (NSW)
- Fairfield (NSW)
- Wollongong (NSW)
- Newcastle (NSW)
- Lake Macquarie (NSW)
- Wyong (NSW)
- Frankston (VIC)
- Ravenhall (VIC)
- Bendigo (VIC)
- Ballarat (VIC)
- Kyabram (VIC)
- Adelaide (SA)
- Ingle Farm (SA)
- Port Augusta (SA)
- Perth (WA)
- Mirrabooka (WA)
- Morley (WA)
- Ellenbrook (WA)
- Brisbane – City (QLD)
- Brisbane – Lawnton (QLD)
- Brisbane – Stafford (QLD)
- Brisbane – Caboolture (QLD)
- Brisbane – Fortitude Valley (QLD)
- Hobart (TAS)
- Launceston (TAS)
- Palmerston (NT).

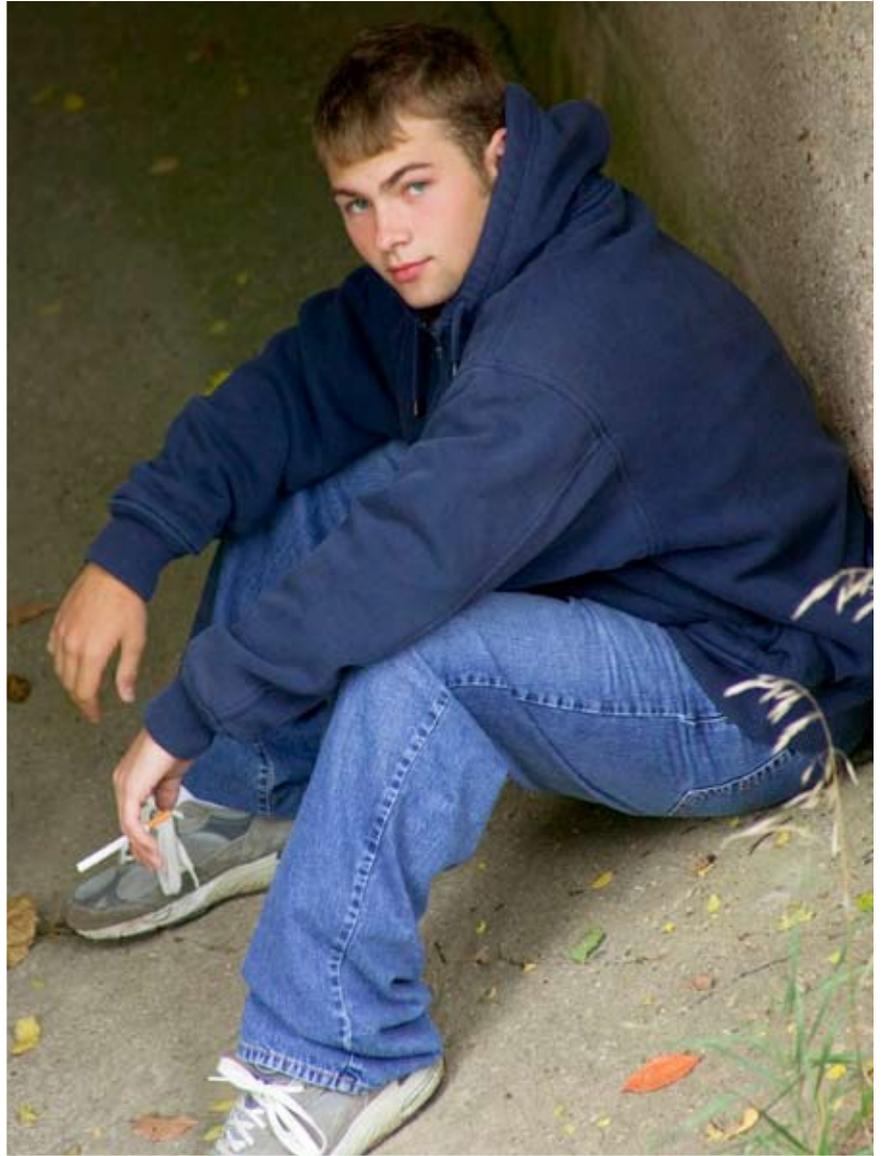
In addition to The Salvation Army groups that participated in regional sessions around the country, other organisations involved in supporting young people were also involved. These other organisations were:

- Families SA
- Port Augusta Youth Focus Group
- Kyabram Living Waters Church
- Balga Senior High School
- Southern Youth and Family Services
- Careers Australia Group.

The regional sessions throughout Australia attracted 264 young people.

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

The application and the completion of the survey instrument was managed under the same arrangements as applied to the youTHINK: Your Say consultation participants. A total of 449 young people completed the survey form during these subsequent activities.



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4. Participant Survey

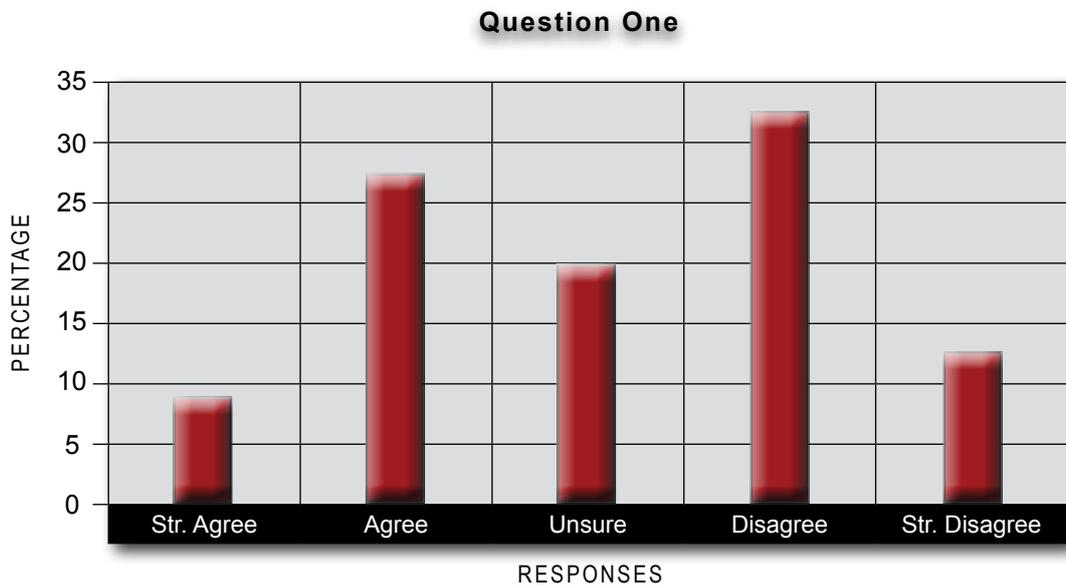
As part of the overall youTHINK:Your Say data collection process, all the young people participating in the various consultation sessions were invited to complete a short survey instrument. A total of 706 young people attended the various sessions and 571 survey forms were completed by this group and returned for analysis.

Subsequent to the 30 June activities, the survey instrument was used by The Salvation Army with a number of other youth groups that for various reasons were unable to participate directly in the youTHINK: Your Say forums. The application and the completion of the survey instrument was managed under the same arrangements as applied to the youTHINK: Your Say consultation participants. A total of 449 young people completed the survey form during these subsequent activities.

An overall total of 1020 survey forms were completed and returned.

The survey responses reinforce the qualitative information collected during the various consultation sessions held on and around the 30 June.

The details of the survey responses are presented below. A short commentary on the responses for each of the ten statements/questions is provided below the respective chart showing the spread of responses.



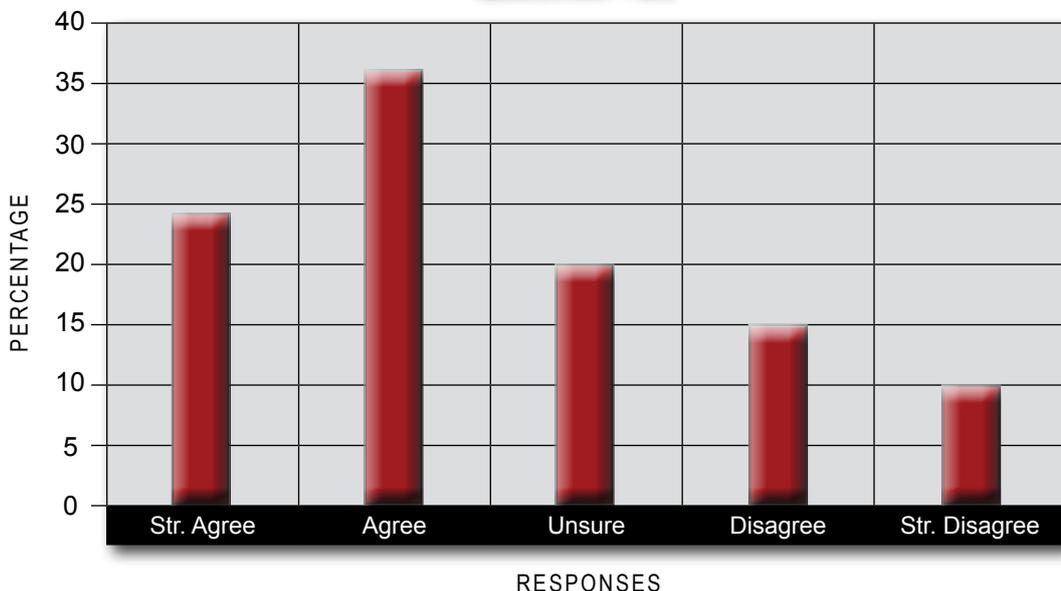
Question 1

In response to the statement:

- The global economic crisis has had no impact on me

The survey responses show that 44% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only 27% of respondents agreed that the economic crisis had no impact on them. 20% of respondents were unsure about the effects of the crisis on them.

Question Two



Question 2

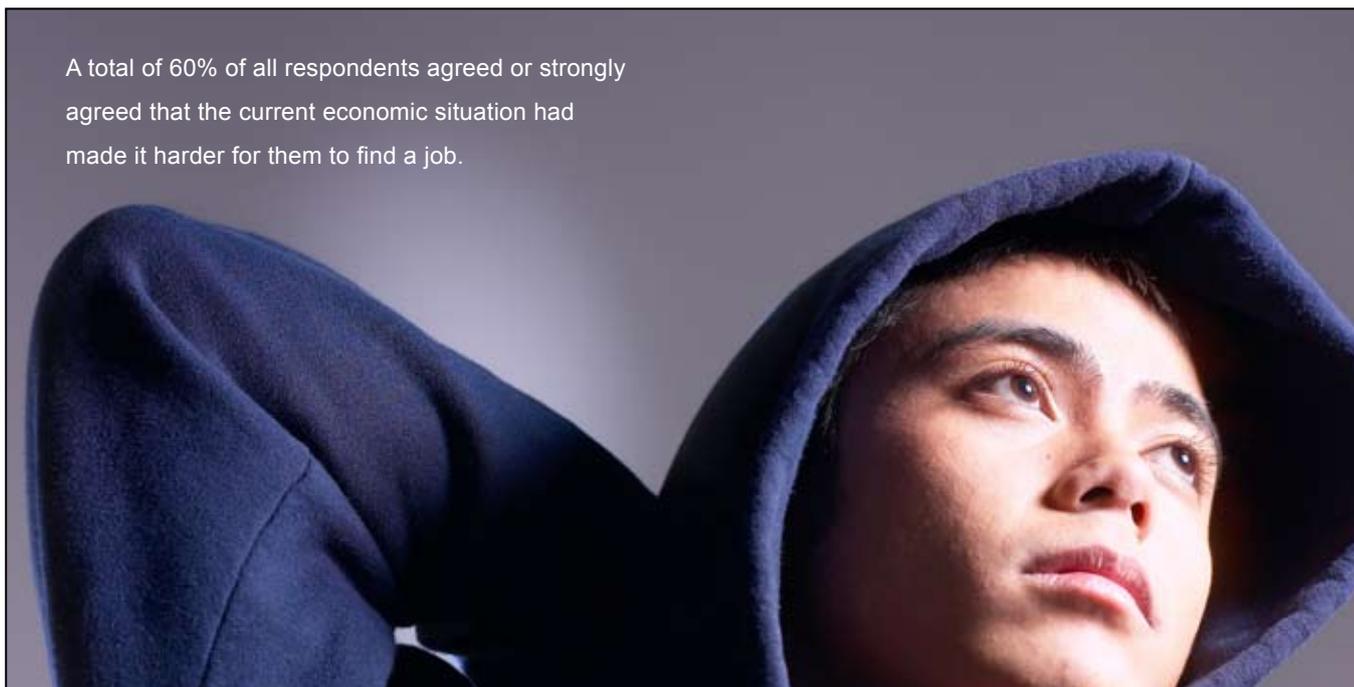
In relation to employment, the survey results show strongly that access to meaningful employment is the single biggest issue associated with the effects of weaker economic activity.

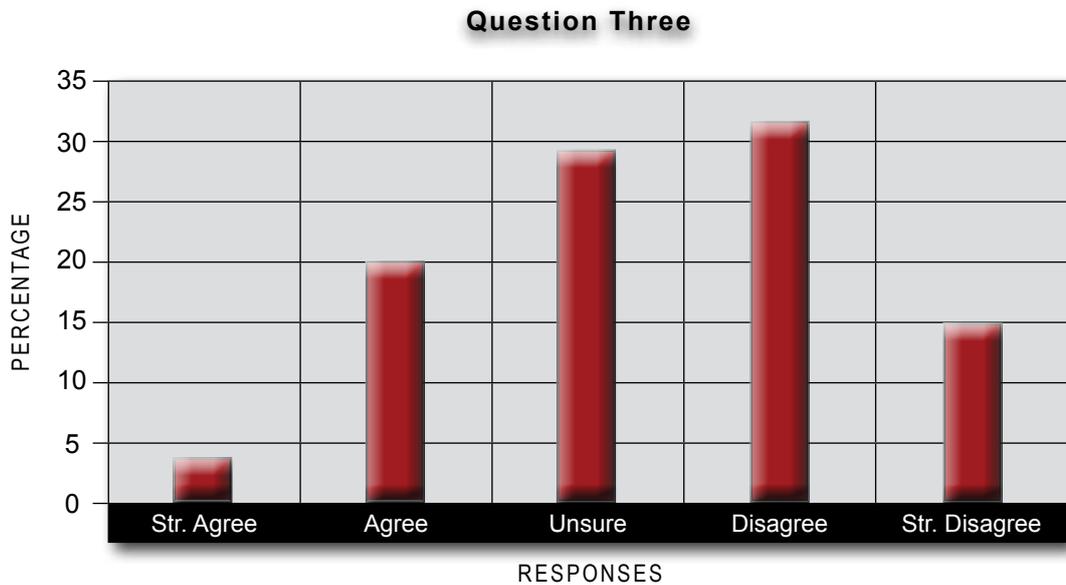
In response to the statement:

- The global financial crisis has made it harder for me to find a job

The survey results were definitive. A total of 60% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the current economic situation had made it harder for them to find a job. Only 20% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was harder to find a job because of the current economic circumstances.

A total of 60% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the current economic situation had made it harder for them to find a job.





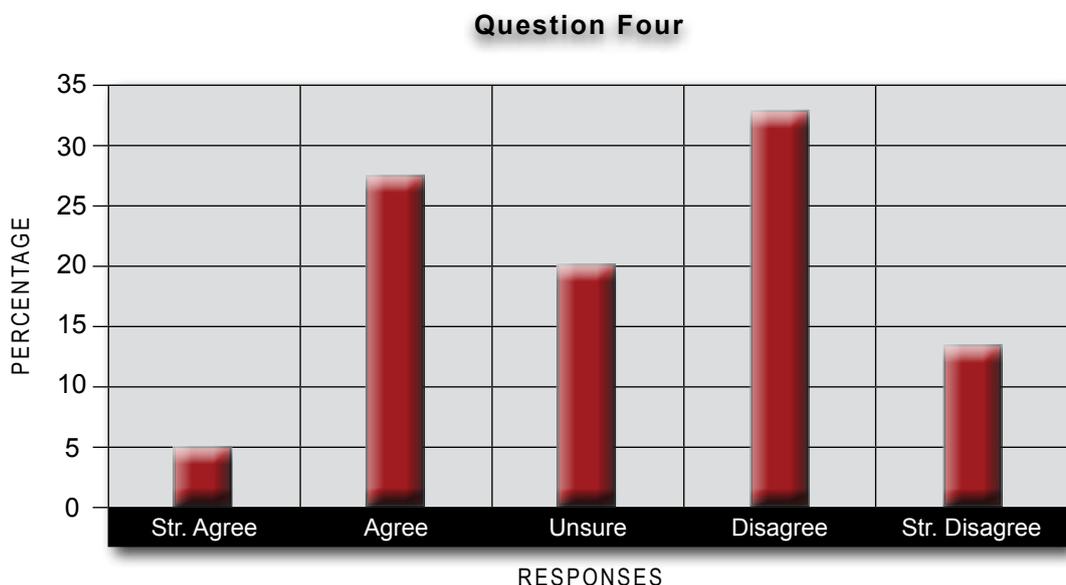
Question 3

The survey results confirm the validity of the information collected during the consultation sessions. The majority of respondents do not believe that Centrelink provides a good service for young people or offers information to jobseekers that is accessible. The accessibility and efficiency of Centrelink services and the interaction with Centrelink staff were the key issues raised during the consultation process.

In response to the statement:

- Centrelink provides good service for young people when they want to enter the workforce

Only 4% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement with another 20% agreeing. A total of 46% of all survey respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.



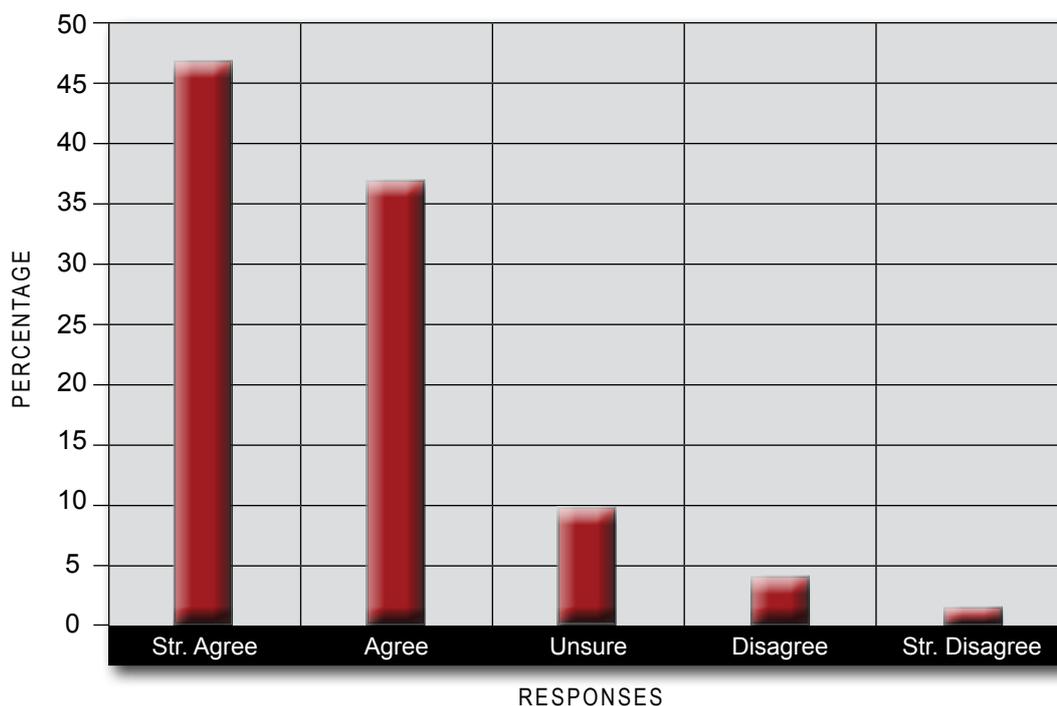
Question 4

In response to the statement:

- Getting information and help to get a job is easy for young people

A total of 33% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with 28% of those agreeing. However, 47% of all respondents did not believe that it was easy to get the information from Centrelink they required to assist them to secure employment.

Question Five



Question 5

The survey responses associated with the issue of homelessness generated the strongest participant response.

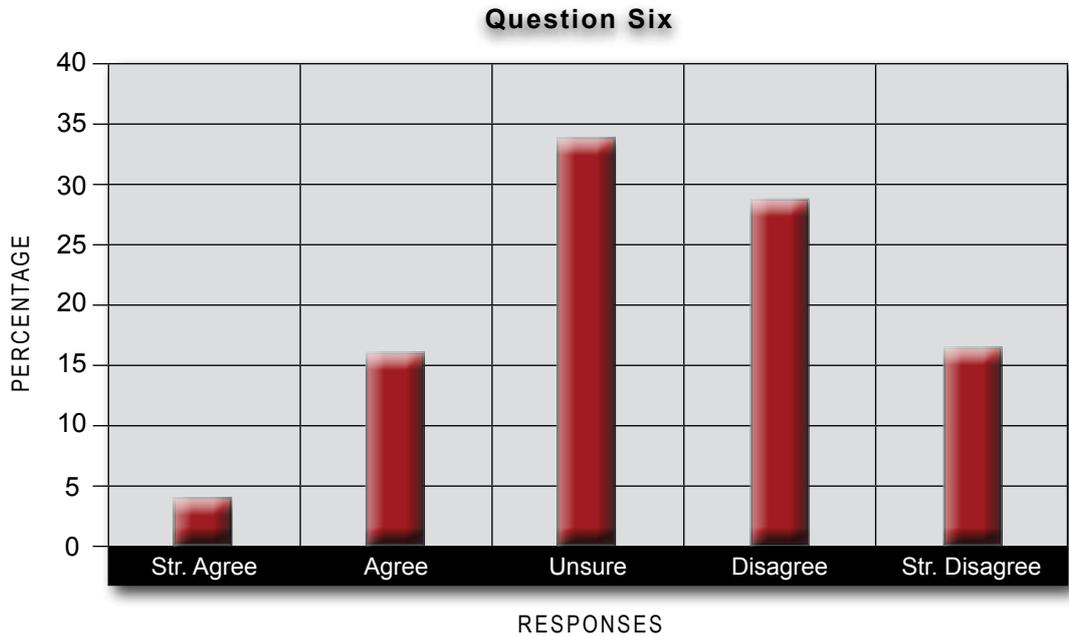
In response to the statement:

- Affordable and suitable accommodation is a big issue for young people trying to live independently

A massive 84% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, with 47% of the respondents strongly agreeing. Only 6% of respondents did not agree with the statement. Only 10% of respondents were unsure about this issue – the lowest rate for this category in the survey.



The majority of respondents do not believe that Centrelink provides a good service for young people or offers information to jobseekers that is accessible.

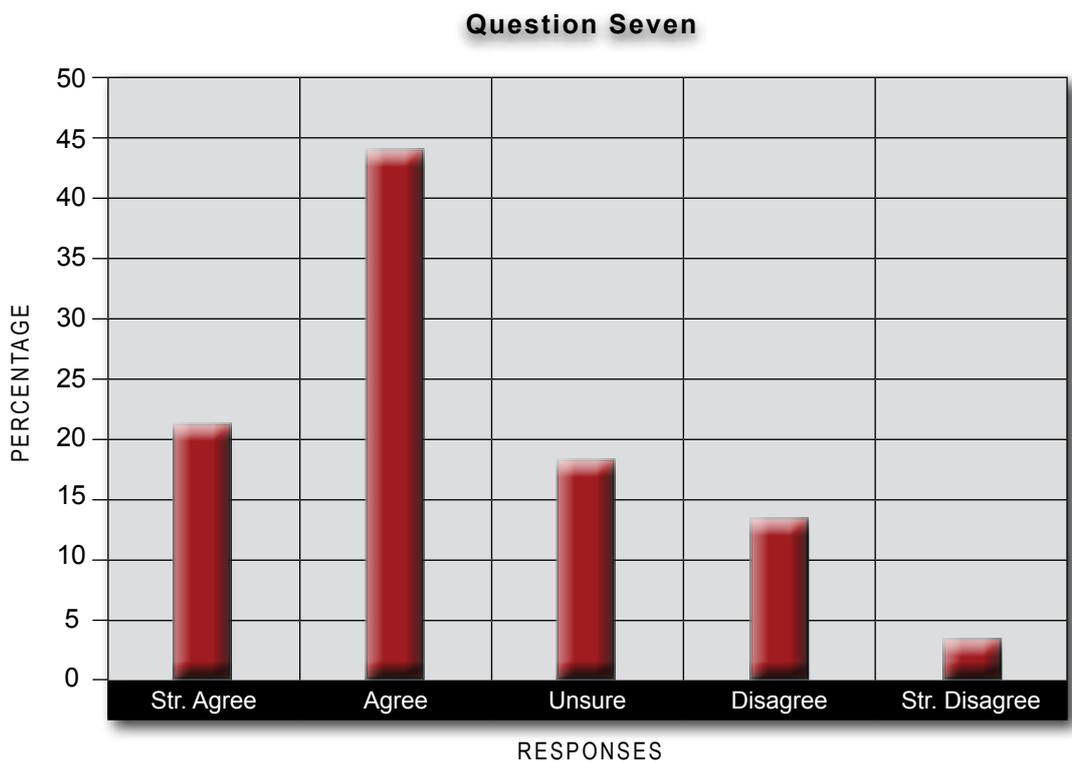


Question 6

In response to the statement:

- A lot is being done by the Government to help young people who are homeless

Only 4% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement with another 16% agreeing. A total of 46% of respondents did not agree that enough was being done by Government. A large number of respondents – 34% - were unsure of the Government’s support in this area.



Question 7

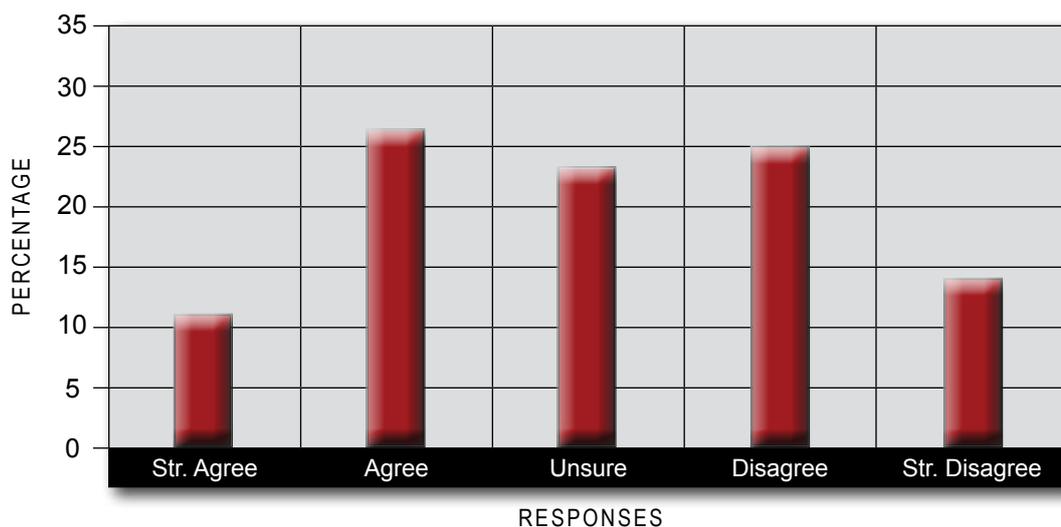
The survey questions in relation to Theme Four focused on the ‘earning or learning’ concept.

In response to the statement:

- If young people can’t get a job they should be required to take a place in a training course

A significant percentage of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, with a combined figure of 65%. Only 17% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. The high response rate in favour of the ‘earning or learning’ concept may seem to be at odds with the strong comments against this approach collected during the consultation sessions. The key issue discussed during the consultations was the matter of mandatory requirements and the consequences on young people who may be unable to comply with the requirements.

Question Eight



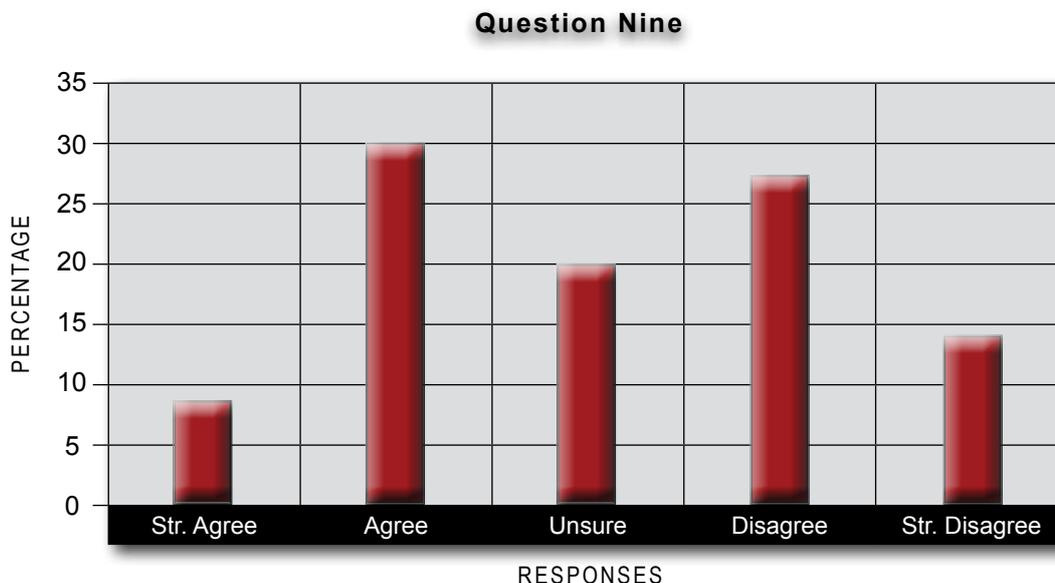
Question 8

In response to the statement:

- Young people should not get youth allowance if they refuse a place on a training course

The responses were almost evenly divided with 37% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and 39% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

The commentary from the consultation sessions was also mixed with some participants accepting that refusal to study may result in a loss of allowances and others arguing strongly that there should be no such penalty.



Question 9

In addition to the eight statements/questions directly linked to the four key themes discussed during the consultation sessions, two other statements/questions were included in the survey. These statements/questions were designed to collect information on the role of schools in providing support for young people with problems and on the view of young people about the future.

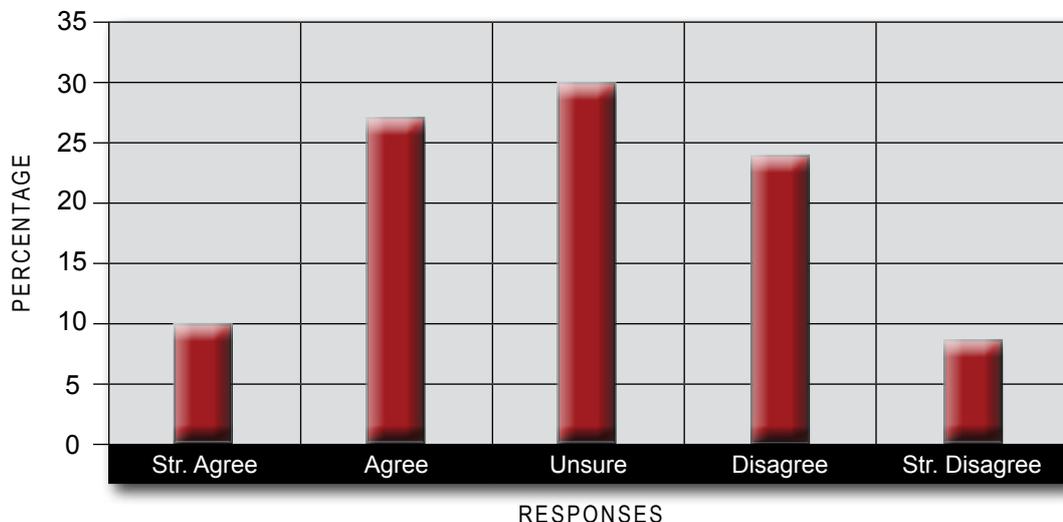
In response to the statement:

- Schools are good at supporting young people who have problems at school and/or at home

The responses were almost equally divided with 39% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and 41% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Given that this issue was not discussed during the consultation sessions there is no additional information available to assist with the further analysis of this response.

Question Ten



Question 10

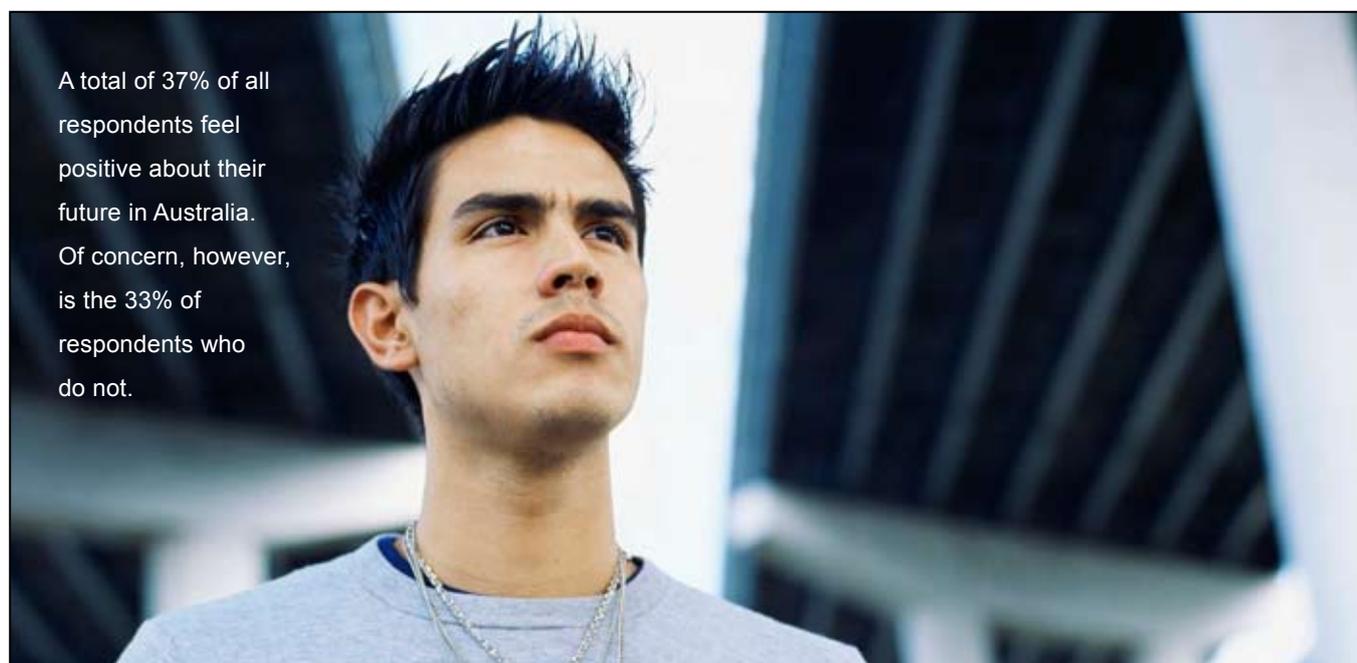
In response to the statement:

- Most young people feel positive about their future in Australia

A total of 37% of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Given that the respondents were drawn from young people currently experiencing disadvantage with a broad range of problems and difficulties including homelessness, family troubles and unemployment, this is a very positive response that shows an optimistic view of the future.

Of concern is the 33% of respondents who have the opposite view – with 9% of these strongly disagreeing with the statement.

A total of 30% of respondents are unsure about what their futures hold.



A total of 37% of all respondents feel positive about their future in Australia. Of concern, however, is the 33% of respondents who do not.

OUTCOMES - FOUR THEMES

Other issues such as access to affordable accommodation, drug and alcohol problems and poor relationships with the police and other authority figures were mentioned, but none was as keenly discussed as getting and holding a job.



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5. Outcomes – Four Themes

The youTHINK: Your Say activities were designed to provide an opportunity for young people who may not normally interact with or provide representation to government. Most of the young people that participated in the 30 June activity have experienced or are currently experiencing disadvantaged circumstances.

To provide a platform for comment, the young people were asked to consider four main themes and were provided with some explanatory material to assist them in their discussions.

The notes that follow are presented under each of the four themes.

Extracts from the explanatory material have been included to provide context and to show how the youth workers supported the young people during the discussion process. The summary of participant responses under each of the four themes has been developed from the raw material provided by all of the consultation sessions identified in section three of this report. Exact participant comments as provided in the consultation session material have been used to highlight and emphasise key messages.

5.1: Theme One

The impact of the global financial crisis on Australian youth and practical measures to address this crisis

To assist in the discussion around Theme One, participants were provided with some brief notes explaining the Global Financial Crisis. These notes provided some prompts and asked some questions that the youth workers facilitating the sessions could use to stimulate the discussion. The explanatory notes stated in part:

- Young people are likely to experience the effects of the economic crisis earlier and more seriously than others. Often, young people new to the workforce are the first to become unemployed. Young people in apprenticeships and traineeships may have their training contracts suspended because companies do not have the work available to keep them on.
- Young people in permanent work may find it hard to get access to bank loans and those with loans may have problems meeting the repayments.
- We want to know what effect the financial crisis is having on you and what the government can do to provide some practical support.
- Are you having trouble finding a job or have you recently lost your job? Have you received any support from the Government to find a job or to assist you after losing your job?
- Do you have a loan that is difficult to repay?
- We want to hear your ideas about the practical things Government could be doing to help young people during this difficult period.

The material from the consultation sessions shows that there is an overwhelming feeling from the participants that the global financial crisis has had (and is continuing to have) a major effect on their lives.

The feedback from the consultation sessions shows that the single biggest issue facing young people around the country is access to meaningful employment. Although other issues such as access to affordable accommodation, drug and alcohol problems and poor relationships with the police and other authority figures were also mentioned, none was as keenly discussed as getting and holding a job.

The feedback from the consultation sessions shows that the single biggest issue facing young people around the country is access to meaningful employment.

The feedback from the sessions shows that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are finding it more difficult to get a job.

A participant in a Tasmanian consultation session summed up the view of many by saying...

"I can't get a job – I've applied everywhere"

Many of the participants expressed the view that the current economic conditions have made things worse for them and that, in relation to employment, what was previously a difficult task had become almost impossible. The raw material from the consultation sessions contains many comments similar to the words of a participant in one of the Brisbane sessions.....

"No hope. I'm not going to get a job so what's the use in trying"

A single mother who participated in the Brisbane Centrelink session spoke about her difficulty in getting into employment while dealing with a number of other significant issues. She said....

"How am I meant to deal with all of these issues at once"

The feelings of despondency and frustration evident in the comments of the participants in Brisbane are repeated in similar comments from participants in all of the sessions from across the country.

The general view was that finding a job used to be hard, but not impossible. The global financial crisis has created an environment for most of the participants where even looking for a job was considered as a futile exercise.

Participants were also worried about the future.

A participant in Melbourne said.....

"If I can't get a job now and the global financial crisis has only just started what happens in the future"

A participant in the Sydney Centrelink session made a similar comment. He said....

"If the next generation is more broke than we are, what chance have our kids got"

Many participants described how the economic downturn had impacted on their families, as well as themselves. A participant from a session held in South Australia commented that.....

"Lots of people are losing their jobs - Mum lost her job as a cleaner in the shopping centre"

Participants in all the sessions identified a return to school or another training or education setting as their best option for overcoming the longer term effects of the global economic crisis.

A Tasmanian participant commented that it was preferable to remain at school because...

"There is a need for education and there are no jobs available anyway".

Many of the participants expressed the view that the current economic conditions have made things worse for them and that, in relation to employment, what was previously a difficult task had become almost impossible.

Two participants from the same session in New South Wales provided similar comments on the importance of education as a way of dealing with their current economic difficulties. One participant said...

"It's important to stay in school"

The other participant commented....

"If I stay in school I can get a better job"

Although the need to stay in education or to return to a training or education setting was given as the best option for dealing with the current economic situation (both now and into the future) by all the consultation sessions, having the financial capacity to do so was identified as a major barrier. A participant in one of the Melbourne Town Hall sessions commented...

"I need more help getting money for TAFE. I'm struggling for money as it is and I don't have much to spare"

In a number of sessions, participants spoke of the problems they had encountered while undertaking education or training programs. Participants in the Perth Centrelink sessions claimed that local employers were moving away from apprenticeship training in favour of cheaper contract labour.

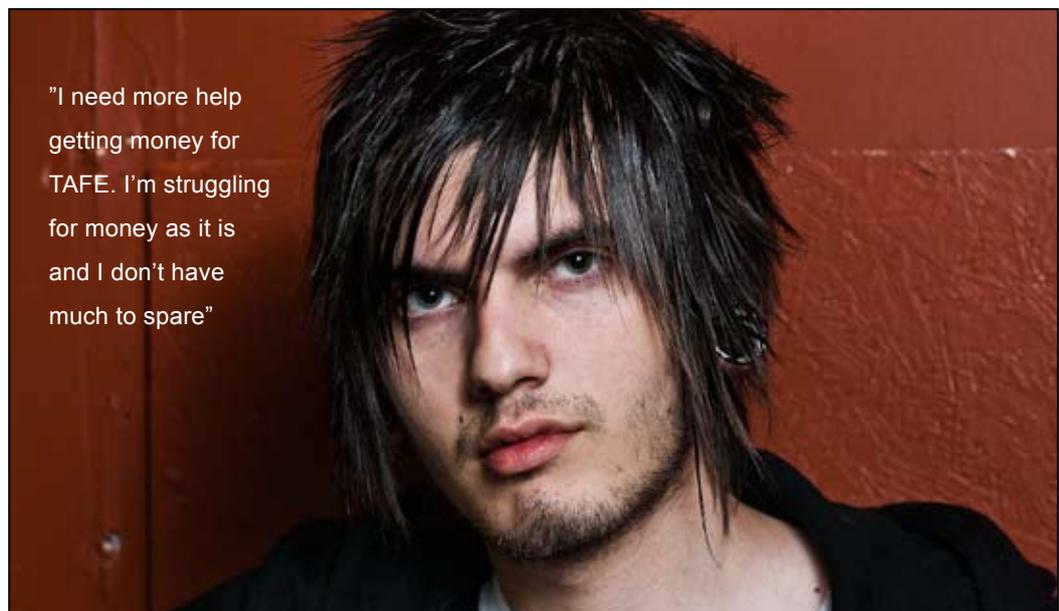
Notwithstanding the financial problems facing many of the participants, getting a good education was regarded overwhelmingly by the participants in all consultation sessions as the best way of dealing with the effects of difficult economic conditions. The words of a young Western Australian participant reflect the views of many. The participant said...

"I need to be the best I can – to stay at school and study hard for the future"

A participant in the Sydney Centrelink session made a plea for government to develop a 'partnership' with young people in the development of their skills. This participant suggested that government do not recognise young people as equal partners and said.....

"It can't be an investment without love, it can't be a selfish investment it needs to be done hand in hand"

Notwithstanding the financial problems facing many of the participants, getting a good education was regarded overwhelmingly by the participants in all consultation sessions as the best way of dealing with the effects of difficult economic conditions.



5.2: Theme Two

How young people across different groups access government programs and services and possible improvements to the provision of these programs and services

The notes for participants for the Theme Two discussions dealt with the services provided by government with a particular focus on Centrelink. The explanatory notes stated in part:

- The Government also provides services and support for young people through Centrelink. You may know that Centrelink is responsible for all the payments that government provides for things such as income support, rental assistance and study support.
- Centrelink offices are located all around the country and it has a website at www.centrelink.gov.au that provides details on all the services and payments available, lists emergency telephone numbers and provides application forms that can be downloaded.
- For many young people who are experiencing problems it may not be easy to access the Centrelink services and some young people might be frustrated by the paperwork and the processes.
- Do you currently receive Centrelink payments or have you received payments in the past? What has your experience with Centrelink been like?
- We would like to hear from you about those things that Centrelink can do to assist you. Is there a better way for Centrelink to provide support and services that would better suit you and the people you hang out with?
- Are there other Government departments you are in contact with or government services you use? What are they? Tell us about these services and how well they support you or provide the help and assistance you need.

The material and comments from the consultation sessions provides direct advice from disadvantaged young people who regularly access a range of government services.

Participants from across the various sessions identified a range of services they access including:

- Job Search
- Youth Allowance
- Support programs for Indigenous Australians
- Disability support
- Assistance with Homelessness
- Rent Assistance
- Carer's Allowance
- Austudy
- Living away from home allowance
- Child support payments.

The raw material from the consultation sessions shows that participants regard services provided by government in a collective sense. Participant comments show that services provided by the Australian Government and the various state and territory governments are considered in much the same way. To the young people involved in the consultation sessions, government is government regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.

Participant comments show that services provided by the Australian Government and the various state and territory governments are considered in much the same way. To the young people involved in the consultation sessions, government is government regardless of jurisdictional boundaries

All consultation sessions advised that there are difficulties in attending government offices and once there, access to advice and services often involves long queues and lengthy waiting periods.

The one area of government service identified directly by participants in all sessions was the services provided by Centrelink. In part, this was a consequence of the briefing notes and the questions and prompts associated with the role of Centrelink. However, a substantial majority of the consultation session participants identified themselves as regular users of Centrelink services and as such provided feedback from that perspective.

The general feedback from across all of the consultation sessions can be categorised under three areas:

- Accessibility and consistency of the various services
- Complexity of the various processes and procedures
- Empathy of the public servants providing the services.

The participant feedback from across all groups was consistent in relation to access to government services. All consultation sessions advised that there are difficulties in attending government offices and once there, access to advice and services often involves long queues and lengthy waiting periods. The majority of participant comments about access, consistency and efficiency of service provision relate to Centrelink.

A participant in South Australia said...

"You have to fill in a lot of forms. You've got to prove a lot of things and you wait too long".

The length of time it takes to access Centrelink services was a common theme across all consultation sessions. A participant from a Sydney session said...

"You're in there for two and a half hours for something simple".

The length of time to source appropriate information and to access the necessary service, once at a Centrelink office was identified as a key problem across most consultation sessions. A participant in Brisbane said...

"Hard. You have to wait for ages. Unhelpful. Too many forms".

Many of the participants linked the delays in service provision to the pressure that Centrelink staff may be under. A participant in one of the Melbourne Town Hall sessions stated what many other participants across the country reported....

"They're probably under-staffed and it takes forever to do stuff".

There are comments in the consultation session feedback material that recognise the pressures that Centrelink staff appear to be under from dealing with a growing and diverse clientele. This view is represented by the comment of a participant in a consultation session in Sydney who said....

"Employ more people to work at Centrelink so they could help more people and be less stressed and rude".

Many consultation sessions reported that there was inconsistent service provision across Centrelink. Participants in a number of the Melbourne Town Hall sessions reported that they actively move around Centrelink offices and seek particular staff who are more efficient. One participant reported...

*"I avoid that Centrelink office, they treat people like s***. They all went to lunch and I waited two hours. I go to another Centrelink now".*

Another participant in the same Melbourne Town Hall session said that Centrelink...

"Does not have uniform rules – it's different rules for different people".

The same person said that...

"You need to make friends in Centrelink to streamline the process".

The complexity of processes and procedures for accessing services and financial support was identified as a key issue across all consultation sessions.

One of the participants in the Northern Territory said...

Too many forms asking the exact same thing. I have to tell my story over and over. It would be good to have a place where we can just tell the story once".

A participant in a South Australian session said...

"Different queues for different things".

There was an overwhelming view from across all consultation sessions that Centrelink's procedures and processes are time-consuming and repetitive. Many participants reported that Centrelink seem unable to provide services to suit individual circumstances. One participant in South Australia said....

"They use jargon I can't understand. One size fits all and that's bad".

A comment from a session in New South Wales highlighted the feeling of anonymity consistent with the feedback from across all consultation sessions....

"They treat us like a number. It's not by name it's by reference number. They act like cops".

There was a common view across all sessions about the lack of expertise within Centrelink to deal with the issues faced by young people. A participant in the Darwin Centrelink session suggested that Centrelink staff had no real understanding of the problems young people face and that specialised youth services should be provided. This participant said that services with a focus on youth should be provided.....

"So they relate and understand youth in a better way because they seem to deal with you in the same way as anybody else and they don't understand youth culture or where we are coming from".

A participant in the Sydney Centrelink session suggested that Centrelink should hire and train young people who had experienced the same issues and problems faced by many of Centrelink's young clients. This participant suggested that young people would relate to Centrelink in a better way if they could access services from young people with similar experiences. He said....

"We can relate to them, we trust them, we know them, they know us and they know how we live".

The complexity of processes and procedures for accessing services and financial support was identified as a key issue across all consultation sessions.



A participant in the Sydney Centrelink session suggested that Centrelink should hire and train young people who had experienced the same issues and problems faced by many of Centrelink's young clients.

Although the general feedback from across all sessions was that access to government services was time-consuming and complex regardless of the federal, state or territory department involved, the extensive involvement of participants from all sessions with Centrelink, highlighted the particular difficulties with this agency.

Similarly, the comments about the empathy of public servants focussed particularly on the experiences of participants with Centrelink.

The raw material collected from every consultation session contained similar comments about the lack of empathy from Centrelink staff for the issues and concerns of those participants that regularly access Centrelink services.

Of all the areas commented on by consultation session participants, the approach, style, behaviour and characteristics of Centrelink staff was by far the area that attracted the most comment.

Of all the areas commented on by consultation session participants, the approach, style, behaviour and characteristics of Centrelink staff was by far the area that attracted the most comment. Many of the comments about the way young people are treated by Centrelink staff contained very strong language that showed the depth of feeling associated with this issue.

Many of the participants commented on the impersonal approach and the requirement to speak about private issues in a public environment. The comments of a participant in a Brisbane session are typical of similar comments...

"You have to give all your confidential information with 10 people waiting behind you in the queue".

Although some consultation session participants commented on the help and assistance they had received from Centrelink, such as the Melbourne Town Hall participant who said...

"I had a good experience with Centrelink getting me a health care card".

The majority of comments suggested that dealing with Centrelink was often difficult and frustrating for participants.

A participant in Victoria said....

"You go in for something simple and they make you run around".

A participant in a consultation session held in Sydney said that dealing with Centrelink was difficult because the staff....

"Are always judgemental and discriminating".

A participant in a Western Australian session said that Centrelink make things...

"Deliberately hard, they don't trust me".

A participant in the Sydney Centrelink session complained about how he had been treated by Centrelink when trying to access support and services available to all their clients. He said....

"They treat us like crap, everybody else gets it all like the stimulus package and we don't get anything and we're the ones on the street".

The strength of the feedback on the lack of empathy from Centrelink staff and the capacity of those staff to deal efficiently with the issues raised by young people was significant.

A participant in a Western Australian consultation session said....

“You get screwed around a lot. They make mistakes, forget and lose your stuff”.

Another participant in the same session said....

*“They don’t give a s*** about young people”.*

Even though the majority of direct comments from consultation session participants in relation to their experiences with Centrelink (and other government departments) were negative, all sessions provided feedback on how government services may be improved so that the experience becomes more positive.

With regard to access to services, many of the sessions suggested that a single point of contact where the complete range of government services available to young people could be located, would be helpful. A participant in New South Wales suggested that....

“There should be youth workers at Centrelink rather than social workers to help young people”.

A participant at the same session said that...

“There should be a separate section of the Centrelink offices for young people”.

The participants in the Darwin Centrelink session spoke about the lack of control they felt when dealing with Centrelink. The participants said that the power and authority displayed by Centrelink overwhelmed them and they became demoralised with the system and the processes they were required to follow. The Darwin participants suggested that a ‘young person’s advocate’ should be established to assist young people in their dealings with Centrelink. One of the participants said that an advocate was required because young people.....

“Don’t seem to have any power when dealing with Centrelink on their own or have any confidence to say what they want”.

A number of sessions suggested that access to government services would be improved if the services were available in places such as shopping centres, schools and TAFE colleges, rather than in dedicated government buildings.

Similarly, the feedback from many sessions was that there was a need to better integrate the services provided by federal, state and territory governments. The direct feedback from the participants was that they do not discriminate services provided by different levels of government and, as such, find it hard to understand why services that they see as being essentially the same require visits to various different locations.

Most consultation sessions reported on the inconsistent responses from government service providers – most particularly Centrelink. The clear view from the raw material is that participants ‘shop around’ to find

Centrelink offices and individual staff that provide an efficient and supportive service. The participants in most of the consultation sessions reported that different answers are often provided to the same question. There was a common view that it would be helpful to have uniform and consistent advice.

The area of greatest concern from the participants in all the consultation sessions was the apparent lack of empathy when dealing with government service providers – particularly Centrelink.

A number of sessions suggested that access to government services would be improved if the services were available in places such as shopping centres, schools and TAFE colleges, rather than in dedicated government buildings.

A common view from many of the consultation sessions was that services for young people at Centrelink were often 'lost' within the broad range of other services the agency is required to provide. There was a consistent view amongst all participants that Centrelink staff do not understand the needs and requirements of young people and that the allocation of youth workers within Centrelink would be beneficial.

A common view from many of the consultation sessions was that services for young people at Centrelink were often 'lost' within the broad range of other services the agency is required to provide.

The most common positive comments about the 'client relationships' at Centrelink, where those associated with individual case management.

There was a consistent message from across all sessions that Centrelink does not have the capacity or capability to deal with people as individuals. All the sessions reported that Centrelink 'treat them like numbers'. A comment from a participant in the Sydney Centrelink session was representative of the general view. He said....

"Treat us as individuals, treat us as human beings, not homeless on the streets".

Many participants reported that where they had developed relationships with individual Centrelink staff and were able to see those staff during repeated visits, the experience changed completely.

The comments of a participant in a New South Wales session are typical of the positive feeling about dealing with a nominated staff member....

"I see her every week. Every week it's the same person. There is an individual connection. I'm not just in a roomful of strangers. She understands my situation. I don't have to explain my story every time".

A participant in Victoria gave the same feedback...

*"Most Centrelink workers are s***. They don't listen, not understanding, don't take into consideration the facts. My outreach worker is great. She actually sits and listens. There is an ongoing relationship, she knows my situation".*

5.3 - Theme Three

How to address youth homelessness

The explanatory notes on homelessness provided to consultation session participants highlighted the serious problems and consequences that arise once a young person becomes homeless.

The youth workers facilitating the sessions asked the young people to provide feedback on homelessness and the situations that lead to homelessness. The explanatory notes stated in part:

- We want to know what you think the Australian Government could do to help young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Young people often end up living on the streets because of problems or difficulties at home. The consequences of unemployment and problems paying the bills, too much alcohol or drug use, physical or mental abuse are just some of the things that can result in young people moving out of home.
- Most young people start off by couch-surfing with other family members or mates before they find themselves living on the streets.
- Once they are on the streets young people must face the most basic problems – Where do I sleep? How do I get enough to eat and drink? How do I stay warm? How do I keep myself safe?

- Contact with family and friends is lost and the longer young people stay on the streets the harder it is for them to think about education or getting a job.
- Young people living on the streets can be exploited by other people who use alcohol, drugs, food or a promise of a place to stay as a way of getting them to engage in risky or illegal behaviour.
- We want to know what your thoughts are about the reasons young people become homeless and the things that happen to them once they become homeless.
- If you are homeless, used to live on the streets or know people who live on the streets, what is it that the government should know about this situation? What are the things that the government can do to help young people who have recently moved onto the streets?
- After a while on the streets it becomes more and more difficult for young people to get back into education or into a job. This means that it gets just as difficult to find a decent place to live. Getting into private rental accommodation is really difficult and there is not a lot of public housing available.
- What could the Government be doing to help young people who have been living on the streets for some time?

The advice from young people on the seriousness of homelessness provided the strongest response from all four themes considered at the consultation sessions.

A large number of participants provided direct comments sharing their own experiences of homelessness. The raw material shows overwhelmingly that participants believe that the most appropriate action for government is to provide intervention before a young person becomes homeless.

All those participants with direct experience of homelessness identified early intervention before the young person gets onto the street as the best possible approach for government to take. The same participants suggested that the problems and difficulties that beset young people once they are on the streets make the task of reversing homelessness extremely difficult for government.

A number of participants describe in their comments how their homelessness was a direct consequence of family breakdown and placement in foster homes at a young age. The raw material shows overwhelmingly that participants believe that the most appropriate action for government is to provide intervention before a young person becomes homeless.



The need for early intervention before homelessness became a bigger problem was a common discussion point across all sessions. The participants in the Perth Centrelink session suggested that youth workers should be available in schools to assist young people at risk of becoming homeless.

Many of these participants provided comments that were critical of the role of state government agencies in their slide into homelessness. One participant in a Melbourne Town Hall session said...

"The minute they took me away from my mum that was it. I was taken by people I didn't know to live with people I didn't know".

Another Melbourne Town Hall participant said...

"The department is always trying to catch out people. They never tell you why you are being removed from your house. You always feel like it's your fault".

A third Melbourne Town Hall participant traced his homelessness to his experiences with the state government agency as a child....

*"They got me to trust them. Worst thing I ever did. They f***ed my family and ruined me as a kid. In and out of prisons – lived on the street most of my life".*

A participant in one of the Perth consultation sessions reported that problems leading to homelessness were associated with the quality of the services provided by the Western Australian government agency....

"I had too many case workers. They just kept on changing".

Many of the consultation sessions provided comments from young people about the helplessness of being homeless. One participant from a session in New South Wales said....

*"Street life is a piece of s***. It's no place for you to get onto the path of life from. There is no opportunity to step up".*

Many of the participants made comments about the ease of slipping into a life on the streets and the difficulty of getting away from that life. A participant in a Western Australian consultation session provided the following comment....

"Homeless mum, lost son, lost home, can't get a house without a stable job, can't get a job without an address".

Another Western Australian participant said....

"I couldn't receive Centrelink benefit for the first month of being homeless due to having no fixed address".

Many of the young people involved in the consultation sessions identified themselves as 'homeless', although they are not living on the streets.

One participant involved in a Brisbane consultation session said....

"We know lots of young people who don't necessarily have a proper place to live. We move around a lot to mate's places".

A participant in a session in Adelaide responding to a question about the practice of sleeping rough in the homes of friends and relatives, known as couch-surfing said....

"A lot of young people do that because they don't have a place to stay".

The fragility and tenuousness of living without a 'proper home' was an issue that was raised in many of the consultation sessions. A participant from New South Wales made a comment typical of many from young people around the country no longer living with their parents and reliant on the kindness of friends....

"It is hard for young people who don't want to live at home to find housing. Even if I wanted to find a place I wouldn't know where to start".

There was a general view common across all consultation sessions that intervention by government to deal with the causes of homelessness should be a priority issue.

A participant in a consultation session in Brisbane made a comment that was similar to others across many of the sessions...

"It seems like the government only really notices the problem once the person is actually on the street. We need more preventative services".

The need for early intervention before homelessness became a bigger problem was a common discussion point across all sessions. The participants in the Perth Centrelink session suggested that youth workers should be available in schools to assist young people at risk of becoming homeless.

The participants suggested that young people at risk of becoming homeless would benefit from access to a qualified young person able to offer a range of options for further study, work and accommodation.

A participant in a Melbourne Town Hall session spoke about the need to have independent young people who could be trusted and relied upon to act on behalf of other young people facing difficulties at home that could lead to homelessness. This person said.....

"We need mediators to tackle the issues at the home front so that youth don't leave home too young".

This was an issue also raised by a participant in a New South Wales session. This participant said....

"It's more effective and cheaper to have more staff to intervene in the home and to intervene early".

Many of the sessions reported on the need for transitional arrangements for when the relationships at home had broken down and the young people had already decided to move out.

Simply requiring young people to remain in the family home when relationships had deteriorated was given no consideration by any of the participants.

Many of the sessions reported on the need for transitional arrangements for when the relationships at home had broken down and the young people had already decided to move out.



The need for early intervention before homelessness became a bigger problem was a common discussion point across all sessions. The participants in the Perth Centrelink session suggested that youth workers should be available in schools to assist young people at risk of becoming homeless.

A participant in a Sydney consultation session identified the importance of strong support during the transition from home to other living arrangements. This person said...

"We need anything at all that will help people into independent living. More transitional housing, living skills, money, hygiene – everything".

The need for more sheltered accommodation and improved access to transitional housing was a common theme across all consultation sessions. There was also a debate in many sessions about the suitability of current transitional arrangements.

The common view across all sessions was that government should focus its efforts on the provision of support and assistance to enable young people to get into the private rental market.

The issue of access to affordable, private rental accommodation and the capacity to pay the bonds and advance rental and to provide the references, checks and documentation required was a recurring theme from across all sessions.

A Sydney based participant suggested that government should help young people with the references and checks they need to get into independent, private rental accommodation...

"Government could provide a reference to a landlord for a young person to get accommodation".

Public housing as a solution to youth homelessness was discounted by just about every consultation session as being impractical.

Similarly, the various types of supported accommodation were rejected by most consultation sessions as being too inflexible and over-regulated. One participant in a Victorian session said...

"Some accommodation services are all about rules. They have rules for the staff and different rules for us".

A Western Australian based participant said...

"I was in crisis accommodation and after that I had no where to go – I ended up back on the streets".

Many participants suggested that improvements in transitional accommodation were needed because the range of current options often added to a person's difficulties. A participant in the Adelaide Centrelink session highlighted the problems faced by some people who access homeless shelters. This participant said....

"Unstable people get thrown out of shelters, they can't work and that's not fair, they suffer more stress and go downhill. The stable get help, the unstable get less help".

There was some concern amongst the participants in the Sydney and Newcastle Centrelink sessions that shelters have different rules and regulations and that this often made life difficult. Other participants countered this view. One participant said...

"Stop thinking of yourself as a victim and do something positive, do something for yourself".

A participant in Victoria was blunt about supported accommodation in his state. He said.....

*"I'd rather sleep in the f***ing train station than sleep in a refuge – they're s***holes".*

The common view across all sessions was that government should focus its efforts on the provision of support and assistance to enable young people to get into the private rental market.

Offering supported or transitional accommodation was seen by many of the participants as a stop-gap measure. One participant in New South Wales commented on his experiences when released from prison and placed in temporary accommodation.....

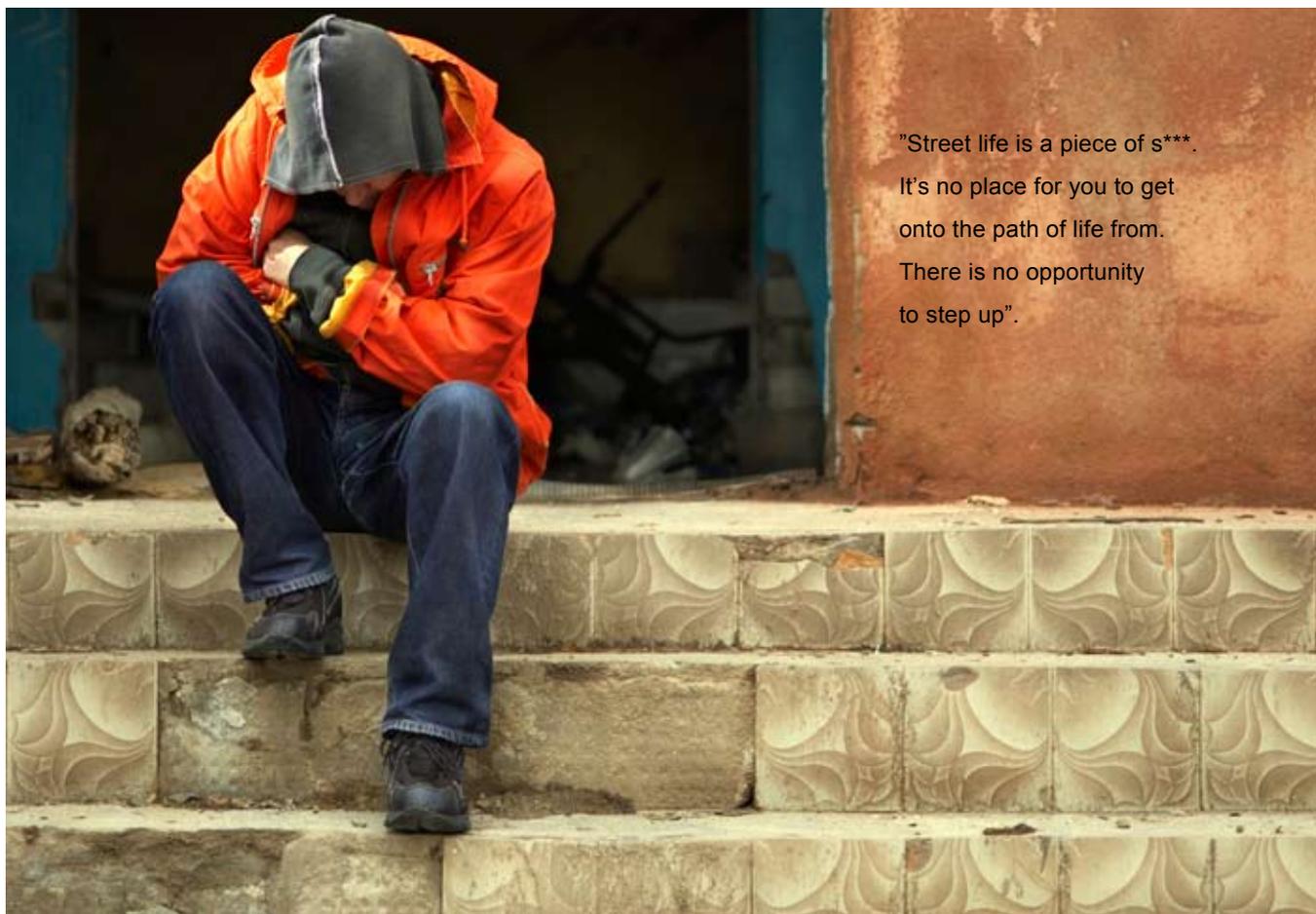
*"I s*** myself when I got out. I got kicked out of transitional housing once I was given a job. I went to other housing, was unemployed and straight away I was back on the street".*

Feedback from the participants in all sessions across the country was that government support to assist young people in the private rental accommodation market was the most efficient way of dealing with the homelessness issue.

The responses from the consultation sessions across the country show that the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation after leaving the family home and the homelessness that is often a consequence of the move away from the family, are matters of immense importance to young people.

The desperation and fear of finding yourself with nowhere to live may be seen in the comments of a participant in a Melbourne Town Hall session who responded to a question about sleeping rough by saying...

"It's very difficult. You miss your warm bed and comfort of your home. It's difficult to close your eyes or relax when you're lying on the cold ground".



*"Street life is a piece of s***.
It's no place for you to get
onto the path of life from.
There is no opportunity
to step up".*

5.4 - Theme Four

How to engage with the Compact with Young Australians

A number of sessions commented on the need for 'real work and real jobs' if there was an expectation from government that young people should be required to work or study in order to receive allowances.

For most participants the explanatory notes and explanations provided by youth workers about the Compact with Young Australians (the Compact) during the consultation sessions, was the first time most of the young people had heard about the new arrangements. The explanatory notes stated in part:

- You may not know that the Australian Government and all the states and territories recently released details about its 'Compact with Young Australians'.
- All governments have agreed that the best way to support young people is to provide an opportunity through the Compact to get some qualifications.
- The Compact is like an agreement or a contract. It sets out what education and training services the government will provide for young people aged between 15 and 24. It entitles every Australian under 25 to an education and training place.
- Anyone under the age of 17 must be 'earning or learning'. All young people will need to complete Year 10. If they are under the age of 17 they will need to stay at school, be enrolled in vocational training or be in work.
- Young people aged from 17 to 20 who are not working full time will be offered an education or training place so that they can finish year 12 or get a vocational training qualification equivalent to Year 12.
- Young people under the age of 21 who are not studying or working full time must accept an education or training place, in combination with other approved activities for 25 hours a week, to receive the Youth Allowance.
- What will the Government's 'Compact with Young Australians' mean to you?
- Do you think that it is a good idea to only give the youth allowance to young people who take-up one of the education or training places offered?

For most young people involved in the consultation sessions, the Youth Compact was an unknown. Very few of the participants had any knowledge of the Compact and those who did had only a limited understanding of the details of the Compact.

As an example of the limited knowledge, of the 23 participants in one Melbourne Town Hall consultation session, only one participant had heard of the Compact.

The overall responses on Theme Four were significantly less than for the other three themes. However, where participants had heard previously about the Compact or had the time to consider the issues and to discuss the Compact during the consultation session, they provided some commentary.

A participant in the Darwin consultation session highlighted the problem of forcing young people to undertake a training or education program without a focus on an area of interest. This participant said...

"You don't always like the course you're in so you quit. It's better if you have a goal, because it gives you passion and confidence".

The direct participant feedback from a number of consultation sessions showed that some participants disagreed entirely with the 'earning or learning' concept. One participant in Sydney said.....

*"It's bulls***. What if you can't get a job or the training you want and you really need Youth Allowance. How are you supposed to survive?"*

A participant in a regional Victorian consultation session made a similar comment....

"It is crap. It's hard to get a full-time job and I left school because I hated it, so I wouldn't want to go back".

The situation of those young people that are at most risk was highlighted in a number of the Centrelink sessions.

The participants in the Adelaide and Canberra sessions asked a number of questions about exemptions and assistance for those who are unable to conform to the Compact arrangements. One participant said....

"What happens to those that have literacy/numeracy problems....are there provisions for them?"

Another participant said....

"Are there supports in place for those people unable to work or train?"

This same person highlighted the fact that many young people take on the role of carers within dysfunctional family environments....

"It's hard to find work when there is pressure on teenagers to look after mum and dad".

There was some support for the 'earning or learning' concept. A participant in a Brisbane session said....

"It's a good idea. It gives the opportunity for young people to succeed in life. It gives initiative and motivation as well".

The issue of compulsion to study versus encouragement to study was commented on in a number of consultation sessions.

A participant in a Brisbane based session said...

"I think it's pretty lame to be FORCED to do things you don't want to do".

A participant from Melbourne said...

"Being forced to study won't work".

A comment from a Melbourne Town Hall consultation session was....

"You can only help those who want to help themselves".

Participants in a number of the Centrelink sessions expressed concern about training for jobs that did not exist.



The notion of 'earning or learning' was seen by many young people as just another way that disadvantaged young people would continue to receive negative responses from those various government agencies they deal with.

The notion of 'earning or learning' was seen by many of the young people that participated in the consultation sessions as just another way that disadvantaged young people would continue to receive negative responses from those various government agencies they deal with.

A participant from regional New South Wales supported the approach, but doubted the worth of the compulsory arrangements. This participant said.....

"It can help give youth an edge and skills they need to get into the workforce, but I don't like it that it will be forced upon them. They have to want to help themselves before anything or anyone can help them".

A number of sessions commented on the need for 'real work and real jobs' if there was an expectation from government that young people should be required to work or study in order to receive allowances.

Participants in a number of the Centrelink sessions expressed concern about training for jobs that did not exist. One participant said....

"What do you do after you've learned and there aren't any jobs?"

Another participant said....

"You can't earn and learn if there's no jobs to earn and learn from".

Given the very low level of awareness of the Compact, there is an obvious need for further work to ensure that young people currently disengaged from education and training and those in disadvantaged circumstances are provided with appropriate information.

One participant in a consultation session in Sydney had heard of the Compact and provided a considered response....

"I have heard of it. How can a young person get a job or training without the support of Centrelink? Some youth are homeless because of bad situations and education or work are not a possibility. They have no financial support. Too much pressure to gain employment can make young people feel more depressed, stressed and isolated. Reward the good and discipline the bad stuff. Give incentives for gaining employment. If we are pushed too hard we will fold".

The discussions around Theme Four took place in all sessions towards the end of the consultation process and as such there was a focus on how government responds in general to young people.

The notion of 'earning or learning' was seen by many of the young people that participated in the consultation sessions as just another way that disadvantaged young people would continue to receive negative responses from those various government agencies they deal with.

The comments of the Sydney participant who suggested that additional pressure on young people will lead to more difficulties and greater isolation was repeated by participants in other sessions.

Although participants in general accepted the intentions of the Compact in a positive way, there were warnings about dealing with the fragility of many young people. Participants in the Centrelink video-conferencing sessions commented that there will be many young people who will be able to earn or learn and will benefit from the Compact. However, there will be many more that will fall through the cracks because of the underlying social issues that stop them from active participation currently.

One Centrelink participant made it clear that some young people could not cope with any more pressure. This participant said....

"Then there are those who just want to die. How are they supposed to earn or learn if they don't want to?"

KEY MESSAGES

The involvement of over 700 young people in consultation sessions held in all parts of the country, proved that given the right approach and the involvement of organisations and individuals young people trust, even the most disadvantaged will engage in the debate.



you**THINK**.Your **Say**

6. Key Messages

The youTHINK: Your Say activities were designed to provide a voice directly to government for those disadvantaged young people who do not normally participate in social policy debate.

The involvement of over 700 young people in consultation sessions held in all parts of the country, proved that given the right approach and the involvement of organisations and individuals young people trust, even the most disadvantaged will engage in the debate.

The survey instrument used in conjunction with the consultation process allowed several hundred more young people to have their say. Over 1000 young people provided a response to the survey.

The Salvation Army worked in partnership with the Australian Government for the youTHINK: Your Say activities and managed the overall process, because it believes that the best way to find out what young people think is to ask them.

The strength of the messages provided by the young people and the depth of feeling associated with those messages may be seen in the commentary provided in this report – most particularly in the direct quotes of the participants.

The youTHINK: Your Say activities generated hundreds of pages of direct participant commentary that shows what the young people involved think about the four key themes.

The key messages provided directly by the young people for the four key themes are provided below:

Global Financial Crisis

- Young people already disadvantaged by a range of social circumstances are being further disadvantaged by the current difficult economic situation. Finding employment is harder than it used to be.
- The current financial circumstances have a direct impact that goes beyond the individual young person. In many families, the parents and working age children have lost their jobs or are experiencing difficulty finding jobs.
- Education and training is recognised by young people as a way of securing their employment into the future, but many young people question the value of training for training's sake and doubt that there are real jobs available once training is completed.
- Many young people are unable to pursue vocational education and training places in occupational areas where they believe there are real job outcomes, because they do not have the financial capacity to cover TAFE fees and are unable to access additional government support.

Government Services

- Young people believe that access to government services is harder than it needs to be. Young people view services provided by government (regardless of the jurisdiction) in a collective sense. There needs to be a better integration of service provision for young people.
- There is a need for a single entry point to government for young people.

The Salvation Army worked in partnership with the Australian Government for the youTHINK: Your Say activities and managed the overall process, because it believes that the best way to find out what young people think is to ask them.

- The service provided by Centrelink was of particular interest to the young people given that nearly all the participants are Centrelink clients. The young people believe that Centrelink services are time-consuming, bureaucratic and inconsistent.
- Young people believe that Centrelink services do not recognise the need for individual privacy.
- Young people believe that Centrelink services are complex and repetitive.
- There is no doubt that the single biggest issue with regard to the provision of Centrelink services is the lack of understanding of the situation of young people and a lack of empathy for individual circumstances. Young people believe that Centrelink uses a one-size-fits-all approach that does not recognise the specific needs of youth.
- Centrelink should utilise alternative delivery arrangements such as schools, TAFE and shopping precincts to provide better access to services for young people.
- Services to young people should be provided by youth workers who understand the specific needs of youth.

There is no doubt that the single biggest issue with regard to the provision of Centrelink services is the lack of understanding of the situation of young people and a lack of empathy for individual circumstances.

Homelessness

- Young people believe that government should do more to prevent homelessness before a young person finds themselves on the street. Early intervention at home and at school is required.
- Young people believe that government should do more to tackle the causes of homelessness and to provide support and assistance to prevent the loss of accommodation. Staying in a difficult home environment is not seen by young people as an appropriate option.
- Many young people who have experienced homelessness are critical of the role of state government agencies.
- There is an issue related to the transition of young people in state care that needs to be addressed. These young people often find themselves making a sudden transition from complete state support to no support and a requirement to fend exclusively for themselves.
- There is a need for more transitional housing and accommodation. Young people find it difficult to access appropriate accommodation and find the rigidity of many shelters, refuges and temporary accommodation hard to accept.
- The private rental market is seen by most young people as the best option for providing long-term, sustainable accommodation. Access to public housing is seen by most young people as an unrealistic option.
- Support for private rental bonds and government endorsed references are required to allow young people to enter the private rental market.
- The best approach for young people who require accommodation is to find an option that suits individual circumstances and to aim for a 'first-time' solution. Putting the effort into getting a young person into 'a place of their own' will work better than numerous transitional accommodation arrangements.

KEY MESSAGES

The events of and around 30 June 2009 have shown that young people from disadvantaged circumstances have important things to say to about how they are treated by government and how government should respond to their needs.



you**THINK**:Your **Say**

7. Concluding Comments

A total of 706 young people attended the various youTHINK: Your Say consultation sessions held on and around the 30 June 2009.

The consultation sessions were held in all states and territories. The participants in the sessions provided comprehensive raw material, including direct quotations, comments and suggestions that has been used as the basis for this report.

Almost 1200 young people participated in the overall data collection process, a remarkable result given that most of the young people involved are living through a period of disadvantage.

The Salvation Army partnered with the Australian Government for the youTHINK: Your Say activity to ensure that young people, who are often disenfranchised from the process of government and have no say in the development of policy that impacts directly upon their daily lives, could participate in the social policy debate.

The youTHINK: Your Say activity has proven that when young people are consulted by organisations and individuals they trust, they are prepared to participate.

More than simple participation, the events of and around 30 June 2009 have shown that young people from disadvantaged circumstances have important things to say to about how they are treated by government and how government should respond to their needs.

The key messages provided by the young people must be heard by the Australian Government. There are young people at risk and many of these have serious concerns about their future. Conversely, the 30 June activity has shown that many young people who are currently experiencing difficult times believe that with the right support and access to appropriate advice the future will be more positive.

This report provides a direct report on the thoughts, feelings and comments of the young people involved in the various youTHINK: Your Say activities.