

20 December 2019

Pathways Review panel members
Review of Senior Secondary Pathways
Education Council

Dear Pathways Review panel members,

Submission to the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Review of secondary pathways into work, further education and training (Pathways Review).

We are a not-for-profit organisation that works with partners to overcome disadvantage in Australia, which requires great education, sustainable jobs, stable housing and appropriate health, disability and community services.

SVA has a vision for Australia where all people and communities thrive and believe that this will be achieved when all Australians are empowered, have a voice in decisions that impact them, have a sense of belonging and experience social inclusion. SVA believes that belonging for all Australians requires, and is enabled through, specific recognition and respect of First Australians¹ knowledge and cultures.

SVA is not a traditional service delivery organisation. We work at the intersection of government, social purpose organisations and the business sector. We seek to influence the way systems operate by providing funding; advising on strategy and evaluation; and making investments in partner organisations to significantly increase their social impact. We advocate for more effective programs and policies, and we convene unlikely coalitions to build support for system wide solutions.

For over 15 years, SVA has been working to improve education and employment outcomes for people experiencing vulnerability. Our submission draws on expertise developed from our partnerships with a wide range of ventures and initiatives across the education and employment ecosystems, as well as research and policy work underpinning these projects.

We believe that Australia's approach to senior secondary pathways must be designed to meet the needs of children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Changes to the system that support the majority of students to transition successfully but don't help vulnerable cohorts will only exacerbate inequality in education and employment outcomes.

We are encouraged by the Pathways Review panel's focus, as outlined in the Background Paper and Discussion Paper, on ensuring effective pathways for all students, and providing tailored support for students experiencing disadvantage or at risk of disengagement.

We know that there are cohorts of young people – such as those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, those involved in the child protection system, young people with disability or mental ill health, those from rural and regional areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people – who are especially ill-served by the education and employment systems.

While each of these cohorts – and each individual young person – faces a unique set of risks and challenges, and has a unique set of strengths, there are some common themes in the kinds of support they require to make effective transitions from school to further education, work or study. These

¹ The term First Australians is used here to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

include a need for flexible, tailored, wrap-around support options that recognise that transitions are not always linear. The system must be designed to meet young people where they are.

This need for joined-up services is especially important given that young people experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability are less likely to have access to financial, social and economic capital than others. They may have less access to support that will help them identify and take advantage of opportunities that are available to them. They may also struggle to access resources that are important for making a smooth transition through and beyond school, but which many people making decisions about systems and services take for granted – from parental networks for work experience placements, to a copy of their birth certificate. These tend not to be the responsibility of major players in the senior secondary pathways ecosystem, but their absence can create significant roadblocks to better outcomes. A necessary but not sufficient step towards this goal is to reduce the silos between Commonwealth and States, and the education and employment departments in each jurisdiction.

A system designed with young people at the centre will produce better outcomes for all young people – not just those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

We also see a need for genuine needs-based resourcing for systems and programs supporting vulnerable cohorts. Even with the best of intentions and a good understanding of the evidence, many organisations – schools, employers, service delivery organisations – do not have the resources to support young people with complex needs. Governments must recognise that appropriate resourcing is required to achieve the outcomes they seek.

Our experience working to improve education and employment outcomes has shown us that there are promising solutions to support young people experiencing disadvantage to make a good transition, but they tend to be too small and fragmented to meet demand. Prevention and early intervention services are often neglected in place of crisis response and re-engagement approaches. There is a need to build and share a stronger evidence base on what works to improve outcomes for this cohort in education, in transition, and in employment.

The following pages summarise several recent pieces of work that SVA has completed that may be useful in informing the Pathways Review panel's deliberations on these issues. These are:

1. Perspectives on children and young people disengaged from education
2. Approaches to supporting transitions for young people experiencing vulnerability
3. Understanding the future work environment for today's young people
4. Understanding what works to support young people into employment

Each includes examples of programs and services we have been involved in that have worked to successfully support young people experiencing disadvantage to find their path through school to further education, training and employment.

We have noted where this work may be particularly relevant to the five key questions identified on page 5 of the Discussion Paper.

We would welcome the chance to discuss any of these projects with the Pathways Review panel or secretariat further.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important Review.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Flynn
Director, Policy and Advocacy

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1. Perspectives on children and young people disengaged from education

SVA believes that it is critical that Australia's approach to reforming senior secondary pathways be focussed on the needs of children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Many of these young people are at risk of disengaging early from education, significantly reducing their chance of finding a successful pathway from school to further education, training or employment.

To achieve this, we need to understand the drivers of this disengagement, and the evidence on what can be done to prevent it and to support young people to stay engaged or re-engage.

Education Perspective: Children disengaged from education

SVA has recently published a Perspective Paper outlining our evidence-based understanding of the drivers of better educational outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education.

SVA undertook desktop research and analysis, commissioned an evidence scan, reviewed SVA and partner projects related to education and youth employment, examined sources that summarised the experience of those with lived experience, and engaged with the sector through workshops and interviews.

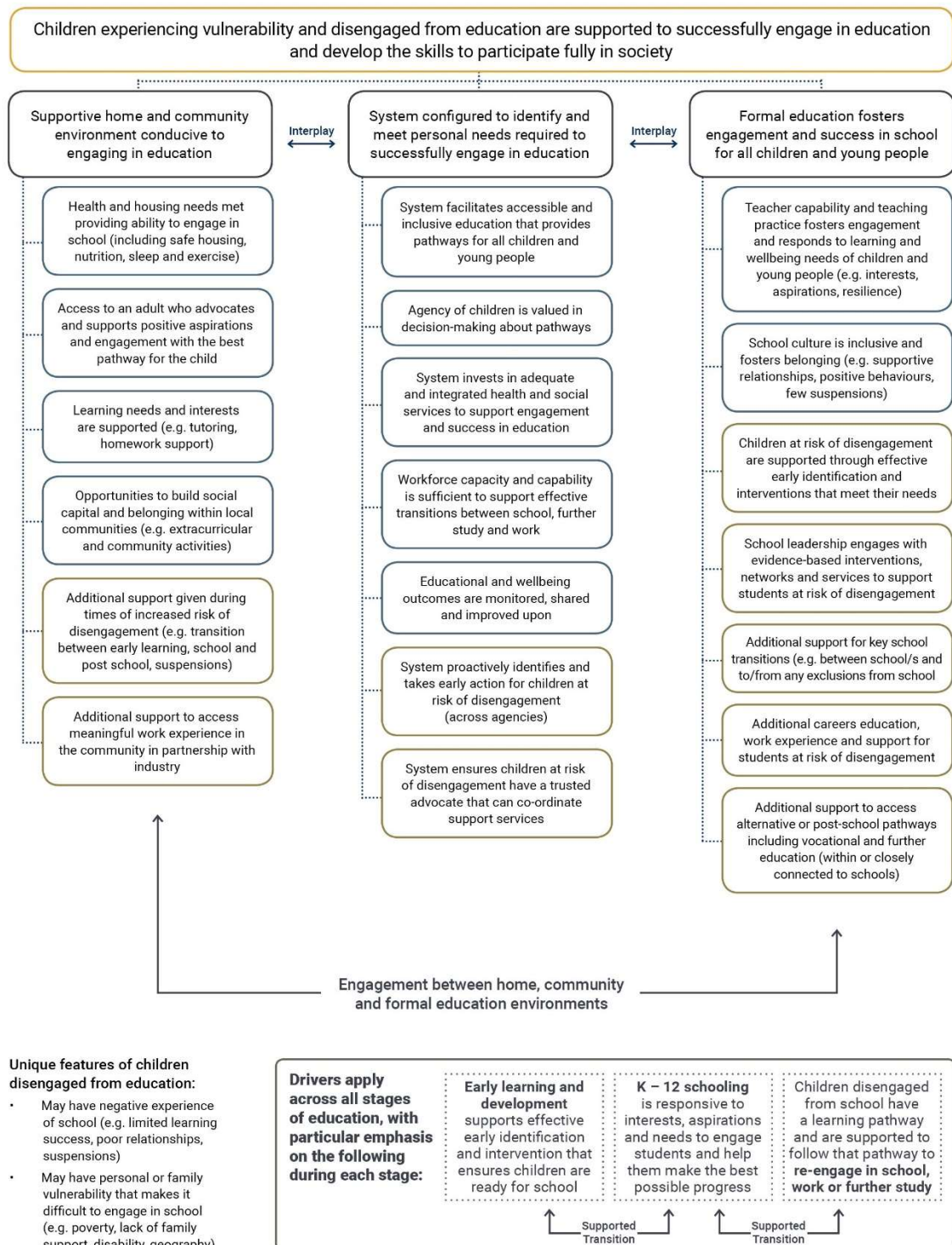
The core of the paper is a summary of the drivers of better outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education, as shown in the 'driver tree' on the next page. It identifies the key drivers of better educational outcomes for these children and young people across home/community, the system and formal education environments.

The research identifies a series of key gaps and issues in the current ecosystem of support for children and young people disengaged from education, including:

- Children at risk of disengagement are not identified, even though there are strong, reliable predictors of school dropout.
- Prevention and early intervention programs are not adequately prioritised, targeted and resourced, even though quality programs have been shown to successfully reduce school dropout.
- Exclusions, expulsions, and suspensions increase disengagement, and a disproportionate number of expelled children experience additional risk factors such as having a disability, having experience of out-of-home care, identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or coming from backgrounds of significant trauma.
- Support for transition from school is inadequate. Positive school experiences, peer and community networks, transition programs and mentoring, and well-informed and appropriate careers advice can assist in young people making successful transitions from school. However, schools and vocational education centres are not adequately resourced to support the successful transition of children and young people experiencing vulnerability.

The paper provides examples of the identified drivers of better outcomes in action to highlight activities in the sector that are creating promising outcomes for children and young people disengaged from education. These include organisations such as Ganbina (an alumnus of SVA Ventures) and Hands On Learning (part of Save the Children) and schools like Western Port Secondary College (part of SVA's Bright Spots School Connection), which provide comprehensive additional supports to students at-risk of disengagement to keep them successfully engaged in school.

Figure 1: Drivers of better outcomes for children disengaged from education



Note: Blue boxes indicate a universal driver, Olive boxes indicate a driver related to students identified as at risk who require additional support.

The paper finds that:

“Children disengaged from education and experiencing vulnerability face a number of challenges in their home, community and formal education environments. Support provided by the education system is not meeting the complex needs of these children, with one in five Australian children not completing Year 12 in an uninterrupted, linear fashion from the start of high school.

There are some key drivers and promising practices, but more investment, evidence and the prioritisation of early intervention is needed to keep this cohort of children engaged in education, training or employment. Return to education, employment or training is much less likely for those who are long-term disengaged and every attempt must be made to keep school-aged children and young people engaged in a suitable learning pathway. To help achieve this aim, we need further Australian research on the most effective interventions for students at risk of disengagement and those newly disengaged from education”.

This Perspective Paper is available at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/education/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel’s consideration of:

2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?
4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.

Evidence scan of educational interventions for children and young people disengaged from education

As part of the Perspective Paper project, SVA commissioned the Mitchell Institute to conduct a scan of the evidence on the effectiveness of policies, programs, practices and interventions aimed at strengthening educational and wellbeing outcomes for people highly disengaged from education, employment and training. The evidence scan found that:

“Overall the body of evidence did not yield any clear conclusions on the effectiveness of policies, programs, practices and interventions aimed at strengthening educational and wellbeing outcomes for people highly disengaged from education, employment and training.

However a number of factors were consistently referred to across the literature as being associated with positive outcomes:

- *Creating personalised/individualised supports*
- *Addressing student wellbeing and any broader issues the young person is facing outside education*
- *Creating relevant and meaningful pathways that reach beyond the period of the intervention*
- *Fostering family and community involvement*
- *Creating strong and trusting relationships*
- *Creating a safe and comfortable setting*
- *Creating a curriculum and pedagogy that mixes general curriculum with applied vocational learning for work*

Most strategies and interventions reviewed were found to produce moderate positive effects. No clear picture of a single effective intervention emerged, in terms of duration, setting, or parameters. Much of the research finds that individual programs are unlikely to achieve transformational change - rather a system of integrated and aligned services is needed, and further research required to understand interactive effects. Most of the meta-analyses reviewed conclude that the quality of current evidence is limited, leaving policy makers and vulnerable young people underserved. In addition, the research raises an inherent challenge in determining ‘what works’ for this cohort, as effective interventions for disengaged young people are particularly variable and relative to context and background.”

This Evidence Scan is available at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/education/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel’s consideration of:

2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
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5. How can we collect and disseminate the data we need to understand young peoples’ choices and help governments to make informed public policy decisions?

Education Perspectives and evidence scans: Children in out-of-home care; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The Pathways Review panel may also be interested in two accompanying sets of papers and evidence scans SVA has produced – one on drivers of better educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care, and one on drivers of better educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. As both of these cohorts are known to face a higher risk of not transitioning smoothly through senior secondary education to further education or employment, the findings presented may help inform the panel's consideration of the needs of these groups.

These documents are available at: <https://www.socialventures.com.au/education/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?

2. Approaches to supporting transitions for young people experiencing vulnerability

For over 15 years, SVA has been working to improve education and employment outcomes for people experiencing vulnerability. In this time, we have partnered with a wide range of people and organisations across the education and employment ecosystems to develop new approaches. This section provides an overview of some of these initiatives that are particularly relevant to the Pathways Review.

SVA Venture Partners

Since its inception, a critical aspect of SVA's work has been our venture philanthropy portfolio, in which we work closely with promising programs to expand their impact. Many of our venture partners have worked with young people transitioning from school to further education, employment and training, and the policy and research work outlined elsewhere in this submission is informed by their work.

A common theme across these initiatives is that they meet the young people where they are, and provide individual tailored and holistic support to help them move forward with their lives. These programs often seek to support young people through a combination of:

- Long-term, non-timebound support, with an emphasis on post-employment support and learning.
- A focus on the undertaking and achievement of hands-on, practical projects that develop both technical and employability skills.
- A coaching and mentoring component, with a focus in social and emotional wellbeing and resilience as well as job readiness.
- Connection to employers, and support to transition to mainstream employment once appropriate; and
- Authentic, paid work experience to introduce and prepare the job seeker and the employer.

These programs include:

- **BackTrack** works with young people from regional communities who have disengaged from school and are at risk of becoming entrenched in long-term disadvantage. BackTrack is holistic, flexible and long-term, and addresses both emotional and physical wellbeing needs, education and training, work readiness and ultimately pathways into employment. BackTrack's education and training programs focus on the development of 'soft skills' needed for employment. Initially the focus is predominately on wellbeing needs and gradually over time the proportion of support aligned to technical skills grows with young people progressing into authentic employment via the BackTrack social enterprise BT Works. Throughout the program, the focus remains on addressing the most critical issues facing youth in the moment.
- **Dismantle** supports young people experiencing disadvantage in Western Australia. Dismantle offers two key services; BikeRescue, a 10-week mentoring program that uses bicycles to engage young people and support them to improve their self-confidence, connection to social supports and aspirations for education, training and employment; and Renew Properties, a property maintenance social enterprise developed to facilitate work readiness and employment opportunities for BikeRescue Graduates who are at-risk of long-term unemployment. Work readiness for youth trainees is structured as 10-week paid work experience, with wrap-around support available through Dismantle's existing Youth Team.
- **Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)** is model of structured mentoring for any group of young and marginalised people globally. It was initially developed to close the gap in education between Indigenous high school students and their non-Indigenous peers in Australia,

AIME exists to support young people to develop their self-identity, resilience, growth mindset and aspirations for the future, and in turn increases Year 12 attainment and post school education, training or employment for marginalised students. It is a structured group mentoring program, which connects university students as mentors with disadvantaged high school students as mentees.

- **Ganbina** undertakes a place-based approach focusing on helping young people in Shepparton, Victoria. The highly practical approach emphasises partnerships with the local community, including teachers, families and local employers. Ganbina's suite of intensive programs helps individuals to reach their full potential in education, training and employment. Ganbina supports young people to successfully transition from primary to high school and from high school into work. Ganbina places a strong focus in measuring their impact. 91% of Ganbina participants graduate year 12, and 76% of Ganbina participants aged 25-24 are employed.
- **STREAT** works with some of the most marginalised young people in Melbourne within an integrated self-funded hospitality social enterprise. STREAT provides individually tailored holistic support, supported work experience, on-the job training, recognised hospitality qualifications, work readiness and life skills curriculum, group activities and excursions, case management and specialist referral as needed. The trainees experience genuine wrap around support from an integrated team. For graduates, STREAT works with carefully selected employer partners to offer employment opportunities. STREAT provides comprehensive post-placement support for six months to both the graduate and the employer to ensure a successful transition into open employment.
- **Career Trackers** creates pathways and support systems for Indigenous young adults to attend and graduate from university, with high marks, industry experience and bright professional futures. The CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program is a non-profit creating private sector internship opportunities for talented Indigenous university students. The program provides support and structure for both student and employer. All internships are merit based and program participants receive intensive interview and employability skills training before undergoing an employment selection process. Similarly, CareerTrackers prepare the employer for the intern providing cultural awareness training and structure to the intern's workplace assignments.

Further information about each of these programs is provided as an appendix to this submission.

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?
4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.

Sticking Together Social Impact Bond

Social Ventures Australia is one of Australia's major players in social impact investing. We have facilitated around half of Australia's social impact bonds (SIBs), including the Sticking Together Social Impact Bond.

The Sticking Together SIB is Australia's first SIB addressing youth employment. It provides an example of how governments, investors and the social sector can work together to improve outcomes. It offers investors the opportunity to generate a financial return whilst helping young people who are experiencing disadvantage find jobs and keep them.

The Sticking Together Project is an intensive 60-week coaching program that supports young people to get ready for work and, importantly, develop life skills that enable them to stick with their jobs. It is an evidence-based approach to tackling youth unemployment that moves beyond the Government's usual definition of employment at 26 weeks as the desired outcome. The Sticking Together Project aims to help young people into work as quickly as possible, based on their readiness to work and to keep them engaged in the labour market consistently over a 60-week period.

The Sticking Together Project is delivered by SYC, a highly experienced non-profit service provider that has delivered employment, training, housing and wellbeing services to young people for over 60 years. SYC developed the Sticking Together Project and has piloted it in three States.

The program will work with over 800 young people aged 18 to 24, who are currently unemployed and have high barriers to employment, such as a disability or mental health challenges, a criminal conviction or lack of a permanent home. The program will find ways to improve each young person's connectedness, motivation and personal self-worth through the lens of home, health and relationships, and will also provide support to their employers. It uses an intensive coaching model to improve the wellbeing, employability skills and goal setting behaviours of participating young people over a 60-week period. The coaching process focusses on non-vocational skills development, and the provision of support to address barriers to employment, such as home, health, or relationship challenges.

This innovative transaction is expected to generate a positive impact through the participants' increased participation in employment and a reduction in utilisation of government services, along with improved wellbeing and greater lifetime earnings for young people themselves.

Further information about the Sticking Together SIB is available at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/sticking-together-social-impact-bond/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?
4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.
5. How can we collect and disseminate the data we need to understand young peoples' choices and help governments to make informed public policy decisions?

Bright Spots Schools Connection

The SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection (*The Connection*) is a network of high-performing school leaders across Australia, delivering exceptional results within communities experiencing disadvantage.

The Connection brings together highly experienced educators and emerging leaders within a collaborative framework, exposing school leadership teams to best practice and innovative thinking from all over the world.

By connecting, leveraging and supporting these 'bright spots' in the Australian education system, The Connection gives school leaders the chance to address common challenges and drive evidence-informed action in their schools.

The outcomes and findings from *The Connection* are shared continually, both formally and informally, with school leaders, government partners and supporters.

Developing effective school leaders is critical to providing young people with the support they need to successfully transition through and beyond their senior secondary years. But beyond this general benefit, an aspect of *The Connection* that may be of particular interest to the Pathways Review panel is the work done by some participating schools to align activities to deliver outcomes for their students that will support successful transitions. For example:

- Sunshine College in Victoria is one of a subset of *Connection* schools with a focus on STEM capabilities.
 - Sunshine College chose to focus their *Connection* work on aligning content delivery in STEM related fields with the development of capabilities through a Research & Design teaching and learning environment. The College's desired outcome was student growth and development in Research & Development skills (STEM practices) with an increased knowledge of how the areas of STEM align to the real world. This arose from their understanding that their students needed to be better-equipped to engage with the changing world of work. The project's achievements include 24% more students being more directly involved in STEM related courses and electives than when the project began; an average of 88% of eligible staff being involved in Action Research Teams within the Research & Development Communities over two years; and 92% of STEM electives in Year 9 and 100% of STEM electives in Year 10 running at capacity.
 - Sunshine College have also sought to build school capacity through industry engagement. They have partnered with Toyota to create integrated learning opportunities that create employment pathways before a young person leaves school
 - One campus of Sunshine College is Harvester Technical College - a boutique senior secondary facility which specialise in pathways into traditional trade areas including Engineering, Electrotechnology, Carpentry and Plumbing. It is a unique senior secondary institution which offers young people in the western and outer western communities of Metropolitan Melbourne an opportunity to complete secondary education whilst building employment ready skills in a variety of trade areas. This program has arisen from school leaders identifying local needs and being empowered to develop community-based responses.
- Several *Connection* schools participated in the *Sparkling STEM Horizons* project, which exposes primary school students to a range of STEM related career opportunities.
 - There is evidence that young people form career aspirations and expectations early, and that starting careers education in primary school is important in shaping their views. This project builds primary school teachers' capability and knowledge of STEM careers and how they connect to the curriculum.

- The project co-designed career-related learning activities exploring who primary age children ideally want to become and challenging their perceptions by introducing a range of adults doing different jobs, in different STEM sectors and at different levels – e.g. apprentice to astronaut. The design included the use of technology and was co-designed by SVA, two primary schools, a STEM expert and a representative from project sponsor Teachers Mutual Bank.
- The program also includes engagement with STEM volunteers from the world of work. They talked with students about the diverse routes they have taken to get to their current job e.g. vocational (apprentice), academic (astronaut), entrepreneur (Big Data / analytics start-up / owner) through online / VR sharing. Schools also incorporated excursions or incursions into their projects in a variety of ways, including visiting universities, museums and the CSIRO.
- Key outcomes from the project included building STEM understanding and increasing capacity at the school level; and increasing student capacity and student aspiration.
- Western Port Secondary College in Victoria, discussed in Part 1 above, is also a *Connection* school. It has focused on supporting strong transitions from primary to secondary schools. They also provide multiple pathways through secondary school via annexed learning, a Hands On Learning program, connections to community resources, and an extensive student support team.

Further information about the *Bright Spots Schools Connection* is available at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/education/the-sva-bright-spots-schools-connection/>

The Connection has also engaged with industry to support their engagement in schools, including a multi-school partnership with Samsung to support the STEM Learning Hub. From this work, we have identified four themes which may inform the Review Panel's thinking about industry-education partnerships:

- Convenors can bring potential partners together, 'translate' between them, and help them to align priorities and desired outcomes. They can also contribute resources, provide quality control, and act as a 'scout' to ensure that partnership activity is based on the best evidence of what works.
- While all schools and students have the potential to benefit from STEM-focussed partnerships, investments in schools in low socioeconomic areas are likely to achieve greater returns. By the age of 15, students in disadvantaged communities are up to five times more likely to be low performers in mathematics than a student in a higher socioeconomic area. Investing in STEM in these communities presents a significant opportunity to boost social mobility by unlocking access to higher wage professions and growing labour markets.
- There is considerable research showing that Communities of Practice (CoPs) are useful professional development structures in school environments, where 'silos' of practice are common. Industry partners that can leverage these CoPs can potentially magnify their improvement.
- A focus on evidence, outcomes and impact in schools is at the heart of SVA's approach to education. There are multiple tools available to support schools and industry to focus on outcomes, spanning the spectrum from project design to evaluation.

Further information about *The Connection's* work in convening education industry partnerships is available in our submission to the 2018 Chief Scientist's inquiry into optimising STEM industry-school partnerships at <https://www.apf.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=73292be0-fd65-4bd6-8429-23feee390796&subId=664586> (Attachment 4 at the link).

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

1. What are the essential skills and knowledge with which young people should leave secondary school in order to enhance their lifetime career prospects whilst meeting Australia's future workforce needs? Whose job is it to make sure they acquire them?
2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.

3. Understanding the future work environment for today's young people

As the Pathways Review panel notes in the Background Paper and Discussion Paper, young people are transitioning through senior secondary pathways into a rapidly changing world of work. It is critical that our systems are set up to support students in this new world. This is especially so for children and young people experiencing vulnerability, who may have less ability to access the human, economic and social capital to thrive in a shifting workforce environment.

In recent years there have been many reports about the impact of new technologies on the 'future of work'. There is general agreement that what is described as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' will change the content and distribution of jobs. Young people, whether currently in work or entering the workforce over the next decade, have the most to lose or gain from workforce change.

Future Fair? Securing better quality jobs for young people in Australia

SVA has recently published a report describing major trends in the Australian labour market that are shaping the future prospects of young people, particularly young people from less advantaged backgrounds. The '*Future Fair? Securing better quality jobs for young people in Australia*' report considers current labour market program settings as well as the findings from a review of a number of smaller scale workforce-readiness programs.

The goal of this report is to stimulate discussion about what can be done to improve the opportunities young people have to move into jobs that provide economic mobility and the opportunity to continue to learn. It identifies actions for employers, governments and those who develop or invest in workforce-readiness programs. We believe that the findings and recommendations of this report provide important context for the Pathways Review panel's deliberations.

Key findings of the report include:

- Already, young people's pathways both into and within work look very different from those of their parents. While young people have always borne the brunt of economic downturns, over the last decade young people's employment rates, in particular rates of full employment, have not rebounded as strongly when the economy improves. Even the most educated young people are taking longer to find full-time work. In addition, the pay gap between younger and older workers is widening and underemployment among young people is on the rise. Many young people end up in work that doesn't make use of their skills. At the same time there are skills shortages in many parts of Australia, and many employers argue that young people seeking employment are not adequately prepared for 'the world of work'.
- Young people today are more educated than those in previous generations. However, entry-level job opportunities that offer career progression have declined. In addition, a closer look at post-secondary education and training highlights the risks for many young people in a labour market that favours those with higher level skills. University participation rates have increased markedly over the last decade, yet the overall rate of participation in post-secondary education has declined. Participation in the vocational education sector (VET) has been affected by a 'perfect storm' of changing community attitudes, poor policy decisions and lack of strategic investment. Even though the prospects for many VET-qualified workers are good, young people are not participating in VET education at a rate that reflects emerging employer demand. Creation of new apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities has fallen behind overall employment growth. Employer investment in skills training for existing employees has also declined, with those who start off with lower levels of education most likely to miss out. The risk is that existing inequities in access to training will be entrenched and exacerbated by labour-market change.
- Schools and tertiary institutions have been asked to do more to teach 'employability' skills and to prepare their students for work. However the usefulness of teaching employability skills in the

abstract – that is, in a way that is divorced from specific occupational or industry content – has been questioned. While it is clear that these skills are critical, there is little evidence that employability skills programs make a difference on their own. What is most important for many young people – particularly those who are more marginalised – is the opportunity to integrate learning with work.

- Apprenticeships, provided they are well supported, offer a model for work-based learning that could be applied to many more emerging domains of work. This requires greater action from employers to create opportunities. Fragmented supply chains, use of more insecure forms of employment, and reduced investment in training have all made it much more difficult for young people to secure a foothold in the labour market and to develop skills in the workplace. While employers demand higher skill levels and experience from prospective employees, many appear to be doing less of the ‘heavy lifting’ regarding skills development themselves. In addition, wages have stagnated and the financial rewards to individuals from time spent acquiring skills on or off the job have become less certain.
- In recent years there has been a recognition that Commonwealth Government investments in labour-market programs are not working as well as they could be for people who face more significant obstacles to employment. To date, the employment services reform process has not seriously addressed either problems of underemployment or the need to prioritise skill formation. Many of the jobs that unemployed people find through employment services are casual and offer limited prospects for skill or career progression. Fewer employers are using government employment services and there is a risk that these programs may contribute to, rather than work against, job polarisation.
- While government action is critical, it is employers who must decide how they structure employment opportunities, how they reward those who bring their skills to the workplace, and how much they invest in the future skills of their employees. If young people are to thrive in the changing world of work, employers must be willing to invest in providing opportunities for them to get their first job within their organisations, to continue to learn over time, and to share the economic and social gains from technological change.

In response to these findings, the report makes several recommendations for governments, the community sector, educational institutions, philanthropy and employers. We urge the Pathways Review panel to consider these as it develops its own recommendations. Those most relevant to the scope of the Pathways Review include:

- Reinvigoration of VET institutions and structures. The need to reinvigorate the VET sector has been identified as a priority for Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. This must include a program to rebuild and renew key institutions that have proven their value in fostering social mobility:
 - TAFE needs to be recognised as a critical and unique institution that has the capacity to anchor initiatives bringing together employers, schools and community members. Realising this capacity will require greater investment in its people and infrastructure.
 - Vocational qualifications should include work placements, as proposed by the Joyce Review. This is likely to require investment in TAFE to rebuild its industry linkages, as well as a broader program of work to secure employer support.
 - The importance of ensuring continued relevance and take up of apprenticeships and traineeships cannot be underestimated. The use of government purchasing power to increase employer investment in these pathways should be extended beyond infrastructure projects into other sectors, including professional services. Young people need to be consulted about the barriers they face to taking up VET pathways and be involved in their reform

- Group Training Organisations have proven their ability to engage and support young people into and through apprenticeships and traineeships both in their ordinary operations and through programs like the Multi-Industry Pre-apprenticeship program, which assisted young people in school, as well as those who were unemployed after leaving. Additional, ongoing support should be offered to GTOs to allow them to extend their work to new employers in growth sectors and to increase engagement with young people experiencing disadvantage.
- Better practices for learning within and from community-led workforce-readiness programs
 - Smaller, tailored work-readiness programs can play an important role in responding to specific needs. More needs to be done to capture learning from these smaller-scale efforts and to embed effective practices more widely. Program evaluations should be made public.
 - Among the practices that funding bodies should encourage through their practices are inclusion of young people in project design, providing adequate time for project learning, and ensuring that projects focused on employment connect young people directly with employers.
- Employers need to do more
 - The consequences of restructuring large workplaces and of increasingly precarious employment can be seen in declining skills investment and chronic shortages in key occupations. Too many employers expect other employers or educators to provide young people with technical and employability skills, or rely on availability of skilled labour from other countries.
 - More employers need to nurture young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged in the labour market, within both their own enterprises, and in organisations in their supply chains. This includes ensuring that young people in school have access to a range of work experience placements, and increasing use of school-based apprenticeships.
 - Governments can do more to support these efforts, not just by using social procurement, but by ensuring that they nurture young workers – particularly those who face employment barriers – within their own organisations.
- The need to rethink how risks and rewards of change are distributed. Changes in both labour-market regulation and in systems of social protection will be needed to arrest current trends in income inequality and instability. The risks of future uncertainty should not be borne by individuals, or governments, alone. Similarly, social dialogue and proactive investment are needed in communities that are likely to be significantly affected by change.

The full *Future Fair?* report is available at <http://www.socialventures.com.au/work/future-fair-report/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

1. What are the essential skills and knowledge with which young people should leave secondary school in order to enhance their lifetime career prospects whilst meeting Australia's future workforce needs? Whose job is it to make sure they acquire them?
2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
4. What is being done well to help students make effective and well-informed choices? We wish to examine career education; different schooling models; vocational and work-related learning in schools; and industry-education partnerships.

4. Understanding what works to support young people into employment

SVA has developed a strong understanding of the evidence base relevant to youth employment policies and programs. This section summarises two relevant projects we have undertaken.

Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment

The *Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment* report is the product of a national and international research project into the fundamental principles that underpin successful programs and initiatives supporting young people into sustainable employment. The research concentrated on identifying the approaches that were most successful at moving long-term unemployed young people (those who have been out of employment for 12 months or more) back into employment. This cohort was chosen as the primary focus of the research because extended periods outside of the workforce when young can result in entrenched unemployment over the course of a person's life leading to a cycle of disadvantage. Importantly, the fundamental principles of what works for this cohort will ultimately be the same principles that work for all young people at risk of or experiencing unemployment.

The report identifies ten fundamental principles which are essential to effectively support young people into employment. These are detailed in the *Principles Framework* shown in Figure 2 below, and can be broadly split into two key categories:

- **Personal: Young people are ready to work:** the capabilities and experiences a young person needs to develop to gain and retain meaningful employment
- **Community infrastructure: Collaboration to deliver employment solutions for young people:** the components of a healthy ecosystem required to support the successful transitions into employment

Figure 2: SVA's Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment



The *Principles Framework* outlines the key components of successful initiatives and is designed to provide a guide to organisations looking to support young people into sustainable employment. The ten principles can be used in any combination depending on the young person's needs and the complexity of the barriers they face. The case studies and included Appendices in the report provide real examples of how these principles are used by programs and organisations that are successful in supporting long-term unemployed young people to secure sustainable employment.

This *Principles Framework* may be useful in informing the Pathways Review panel's thinking on what is needed to support young people experiencing vulnerability to transition to meaningful employment.

The findings on the Community Infrastructure components of the Framework are of particular relevance. They demonstrate that supporting successful transitions cannot be the responsibility of any one player in the system. Collaboration and connection between education providers, social purpose organisations and employers are required:

“Effective cross sector partnerships with business can build a young person’s employability skills, meet employers’ recruitment and retention needs and create better employment outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers.

“Partnerships with the purpose of improving youth employment can range in size and scope across all intersection points of a young person’s career journey. They may start with careers exposure and work experience activities, the co-design and delivery of curriculum, meeting recruitment needs through partnerships with employment services and partnering with community support agencies to provide mentoring and coaching support to employees.

“The most successful cross sector partnerships are those that provide transformative solutions for getting young people into work. These partnerships involve multiple providers and employers working within a particular industry or function, working together to support young people into real employment.

“For young people searching for work, opportunities for regular and meaningful connections to employers provides a distinct advantage over peers who don’t have this exposure. Research undertaken in the UK found that young people who have no contact with employers while at school are five times more likely to become NEET than their peers with the same qualifications.”

The full *Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment* report is available at:

<https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/youth-employment-report/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel’s consideration of:

1. What are the essential skills and knowledge with which young people should leave secondary school in order to enhance their lifetime career prospects whilst meeting Australia’s future workforce needs? Whose job is it to make sure they acquire them?
2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?

Review Toolkit

As noted throughout this submission, there is no one single type of intervention that is likely to assist across the board in supporting transitions. More effective programs are holistic and closely tailored to the needs of local young people and employers. A key challenge in improving youth employment outcomes is understanding the evidence of what works, and translating that into the design of effective programs at the local level.

Through a new project, SVA is seeking to maximise the effectiveness of community-based employment programs and better meet the needs of young people who face disadvantage. The focus is on helping organisations understand and improve their performance over time.

SVA has recently launched a free online toolkit for organisations that deliver community-designed employment programs for young people. The *Review Toolkit* puts young people at the centre of effective program design and asserts that successful employment outcomes go beyond the narrow definition of 26-weeks and are attached to youth voice and agency.

The *Review Toolkit* encourages the design and delivery of youth employment programs that include the youth voice, and ten characteristics important to maximising program effectiveness. The *Toolkit* also offers a set of surveys that enable youth employment program providers to measure their effectiveness and to measure meaningful employment outcomes. The *Toolkit* is based on the principle of continual improvement and encourages the use of feedback from young people to inform program improvements over time.

SVA is currently working with community organisations to develop a free online platform for data collection which will embed the *Review Toolkit* participant surveys. Over the next 18 months SVA will be working alongside these organisations to improve practice in data collection and use, and the involvement of youth in program design. The online platform is not yet publicly available, but we would be willing to share the beta version with the Pathways Review panel if this is of interest.

In developing the *Review Toolkit*, SVA conducted a program review of more than 20 organisations across Australia that deliver alternative employment programs for young people – including many discussed elsewhere in this submission. This review identified five themes, which were aligned to the *Principles Framework* described above: the development of soft skills, providing individualised support; demand-led skills development and job opportunities; integration across systems; and preventative approaches. The detailed findings of this program review have informed the development of the toolkit.

Further information about the *Review Toolkit* can be found at <https://reviewforoutcomes.com.au/>

This work may be particularly relevant for the Pathways Review panel's consideration of:

2. Are current arrangements both in schools, at work, and in tertiary education supporting students to access the most appropriate pathways? Are routes sufficiently flexible to allow young people easily to change direction?
3. What are the barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to the pathways that are available?
5. How can we collect and disseminate the data we need to understand young peoples' choices and help governments to make informed public policy decisions?

Appendix: SVA-supported transition programs listed in Part 2 – additional information

Backtrack

- BackTrack works with young people from regional communities who have disengaged from school and are at risk of becoming entrenched in long-term disadvantage. BackTrack is wholistic, flexible and long-term, and addresses both emotional and physical wellbeing needs, education and training, work readiness and ultimately pathways into employment.
- BackTrack's education and training programs focus on the development of 'soft skills' needed for employment. Initially the focus is predominately on wellbeing needs and gradually over time the proportion of support aligned to technical skills grows with young people progressing into authentic employment via the BackTrack social enterprise BT Works. Throughout the program, the focus remains on addressing the most critical issues facing youth in the moment.
- All BackTrack program activities are designed to allow participants to gain a sense of belonging, strong positive identity and the self-belief to pursue their personal aspirations. Effective wrap-around support is provided to participants, which may include accommodation, support through the justice system, mental health support and individualised mentoring.
- Most existing services in Australia fail to effectively connect and serve the multiple needs of the most disadvantaged young people. This is sometimes the result of targeted funding for programs with tight eligibility criteria and short-term outcomes measures. BackTrack takes a different approach, allowing all individuals to develop at their own pace. One of the core principles of BackTrack is taking a non-time bound approach and never excluding a participant but responding to their needs.
- One of the first things the BackTrack team does is provide a sense of belonging. No kid is ever turned away from BackTrack and everybody is treated equally. BackTrack spends a lot of time with the kids getting them to understand that they have to be accountable for themselves. BackTrack spends 80% of its time focusing on the future, 10% on the past and 10% on the present day. It takes accountability for the present and then focuses on where the kids want to be in the future. Its programs bring mastery to life through agricultural training, welding, woodworking and working with dogs. It is through this work that BackTrack participants embody generosity by creating things that give back to the community.

Further information about Backtrack is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/backtrack/> and <https://backtrack.org.au/>

Dismantle

- Dismantle supports young people experiencing disadvantage in Western Australia. It uses bicycles as the vehicle for engaging with young people in a positive and meaningful way and equipping them with skills for securing long-term education and employment opportunities.
- Dismantle offers two key services: BikeRescue, a 10-week mentoring program that uses bicycles to engage young people and support them to improve their self-confidence, connection to social supports and aspirations for education, training and employment; and Renew Properties, a property maintenance social enterprise developed to facilitate work readiness and employment opportunities for BikeRescue Graduates who are at-risk of long-term unemployment. Work readiness for youth trainees is structured as 10-week paid work experience, with wrap-around support available through Dismantle's existing Youth Team.

- BikeRescue supports young people to improve their social and emotional well-being and develop personal skills. Most participants are still in school, although at risk of disengaging. Most return to school after the 10-week program. The program creates a developmental mentoring space allowing participants to identify and pursue their life, learning and work goals in self-directed ways. It is run in partnership with youth service providers, ensuring appropriate wrap-around support is available before, during and after the program. Facilitators work with the young people to Dismantle and reassemble two bikes each, with the participants earning one to keep themselves and giving one to a local charity.
- To date, Dismantle has supported over 1,900 young people through over 120 metropolitan and regional WA-based partners, and has over 20 youth employees.

Further information about Dismantle is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/dismantle/> and <https://www.dismantle.org.au/>

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

- Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) was initially developed to close the gap in education between Indigenous high school students and their non-Indigenous peers in Australia, and now has evolved into a model of structured mentoring for any group of young and marginalised youth globally.
- AIME exists to support young people to develop their self-identity, resilience, growth mindset and aspirations for the future, and in turn increases Year 12 attainment and post school education, training or employment for marginalised students.
- AIME is a structured group mentoring program, which connects university students as mentors with disadvantaged high school students as mentees. The program is guided by a curriculum and underpinned by imagination, with an AIME mentor helping to facilitate the delivery of the content.
- The unique design includes a session called 'Failure Time', coupled with a program rule 'No Shame at AIME', whereby all participants are challenged to try new activities such as imagining themselves as their country's prime minister or learning a local Indigenous language. Students rotate among these Failure Time stations which are run by local community members, embracing failure as a necessary step to learning and success. This is designed specifically to act as an antidote to shame amongst kids from marginalised communities, whilst allowing the community to come together to educate the mentees.
- For young people in year 12, AIME also offers one-on-one support for six months during and post school completion to support their transition into further education or training, or employment.
- An independent economic evaluation conducted by KPMG found AIME contributed \$38 million to the Australian economy in 2018. \$8 in benefits was generated over the working life of participants were for each \$1 spent on the AIME program.

Further information about AIME is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/australian-indigenous-mentoring-experience-aime/> and <https://aimementoring.com/>

Ganbina

- Ganbina undertakes a place-based approach focusing on helping young people in Shepparton, Victoria. The highly practical approach emphasises partnerships with the local community, including teachers, families and local employers. Ganbina's suite of intensive programs helps individuals to reach their full potential in education, training and employment.

- Ganbina's Jobs4U2 program is one of the most successful school to work transition programs in Australia, with a minimum of 80 per cent of all young people who enrol each year completing their full course activities. The program enables young people to unlock their career and life opportunities, with the focus on being the very best they can be. The elements of the program are Jobs Education, Jobs Training, Jobs Employment, Scholarships, Leadership Training, Driver Skills Program and the Youth Achievement Awards.
- Ganbina supports young people to successfully transition from primary to high school and from high school into work.
 - For children aged 6-12 years in primary school, Ganbina works to develop strong relationships with families.
 - When a young person enters Year 7, they begin working with a case manager who develops a client plan specific to the needs of the young person. Case managers take an honest interest in where a young person is at which helps them to feel like someone is interested in them and that they have someone that they can turn to for help.
 - Young people in Year 10 can take part in a three-year leadership program, which exposes kids to corporate relationships, travel, resume writing, training and part-time work.
- Ganbina places a strong focus on measuring their impact. Their 2016 Impact Assessment Report shows that:
 - All participants aged 25 to 34 years who had been with Ganbina for five years or more had attained Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, surpassing the Greater Shepparton and regional Victorian rates and nearing the Victorian rate
 - The employment rate for Ganbina participants aged 25-34 was 76 per cent. This was substantially higher than the total Shepparton Indigenous population (45%), regional Victorian Indigenous (55%) and Victorian Indigenous (59%) populations in this age group.

Further information about Ganbina is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/ganbina/> and <http://www.ganbina.com.au/>

STREAT

- STREAT works with some of the most marginalised young people in Melbourne within an integrated self-funded hospitality social enterprise.
- STREAT provides individually tailored holistic support, supported work experience, on-the job training, recognised hospitality qualifications, work readiness and life skills curriculum, group activities and excursions, case management and specialist referral as needed.
- The trainees experience genuine wrap around support from an integrated team. For graduates, STREAT works with carefully selected employer partners to offer employment opportunities. STREAT provides comprehensive post-placement support for six months to both the graduate and the employer to ensure a successful transition into open employment.
- STREAT aims to help young people thrive and belong with a healthy sense of self (social and emotional wellbeing), home (housing), and work (accreditations, work experience, employment or further training).
- These outcomes are measured by tracking progress towards the trainee's individual work and personal goals. Young people and workers complete a small 'pack' of psychometrically validated survey tools that take a maximum of 30 minutes to complete at the start and end of the program. These individual responses provide a metric of overall progress towards the long-term goals, while also informing case work support for the trainee. A structured interview at intake, case

notes, a workplace learning checklist and case managers' professional judgement are also used to monitor a young person's wellbeing, learning and performance.

- STREAT has a Chief Impact Officer who conducts an evaluation with the trainees at the end of each program. In this session the trainees give their 'report card' on all aspects of the program and the deidentified responses are used to improve the program, as well as for reporting purposes.
- STREAT has also just commenced a 10-year review going back out to former trainees to evaluate the long-term impact of the program.

Further information about STREAT is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/streat/> and <https://www.streat.com.au/>

CareerTrackers

- CareerTrackers creates pathways and support systems for Indigenous young adults to attend and graduate from university, with high marks, industry experience and bright professional futures.
- The underpinning philosophy at CareerTrackers is 'Students at the Core'. All decisions made in the delivery of the program focuses on the benefit to students.
- The CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program is a non-profit social enterprise creating private sector internship opportunities for talented Indigenous university students. The program provides support and structure for both student and employer. All internships are merit based and program participants receive intensive interview and employability skills training before undergoing an employment selection process.
- Similarly, CareerTrackers prepare the employer for the intern providing cultural awareness training and structure to the intern's workplace assignments.
- CareerTrackers monitors the relationship between the intern and employer to ensure a meaningful experience and constructive feedback. It also provides academic support to help interns balance their study and work commitments. Through the CareerTrackers Alumni Association they can access continuing personal, professional and peer support. CareerTrackers is creating a community of Indigenous business professionals to serve as corporate and community role models.

Further information on Career Trackers is at <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/careertrackers/> and <https://www.careertrackers.org.au/>