



The OzHarvest Nourish Program: An evaluation of a hospitality-based program to support employment for young Australians

Lauren Ball^{a,b,*}, Julie Marsh^{a,b}, Breanna Lepre^a, Belinda Woollett^d, Dan Baynes^d, Joy Parkinson^{b,c,**}

^a Centre for Community Health and Wellbeing, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 4072, QLD, Australia

^b Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University, Southport, 4215, QLD, Australia

^c Faculty of Law and Business, Australian Catholic University, 250 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne, 3002, VIC, Australia

^d OzHarvest Australia, 46-62 Maddox St, Alexandria, 2015, NSW, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Program evaluation
Mixed-methods research
Employment
Education
Young people
Health and wellbeing

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The youth unemployment rate in Australia is more than double the national average. Policies and programs to address barriers and improve youth engagement in education and employment are essential to achieve many of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim of this mixed-methods study was to evaluate the OzHarvest Nourish Program, a free, hospitality-focused pathway to support employment and engagement for young people aged 16–25 years.

Study design: Mixed-methods study.

Methods: An online survey, workshop and semi-structured interviews with staff, volunteers, participants, and broader stakeholders were conducted using a qualitative, exploratory approach. Ethics approval was granted by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (#2022/492).

Results: Five key themes were identified from interview data and a logic model was developed. Participants described significant benefits of participation, including improved food security, self-efficacy, and communication skills, reduced social isolation, and greater hope for the future.

Conclusions: The Nourish Program is a transformative service that is improving wellbeing outcomes for program participants. Additional resourcing, including adequate funding, may be required to maximise program impact and support sustainability.

1. Introduction

Educational attainment is an important predictor of future employment, which is linked with outcomes for health, social and emotional wellbeing [1]. Yet, young people in Australia aged 15–24 report an average of 4.7 years required to find full-time work after completing full-time education, and an average of 2.3 years to find any work at all [2]. One in three young people in Australia are unemployed or underemployed, and the youth unemployment rate is more than double the national average (7.6% youth unemployment compared with the 3.5% national average) [3–5]. This underutilisation of the available workforce, namely young people, costs the Australian economy 790 million lost hours of work each year, equating to an opportunity cost of AU\$15.9 billion [6]. Barriers to education and employment for young people in

Australia include financial difficulties, mental health issues, academic ability, limited employment opportunities, and more recently, the coronavirus pandemic [7]. Furthermore, the inequitable distribution of resources, money, and relational power leads to social inequities that can affect an individual's ability to engage in health systems, society, and education [8]. Priority populations such as, but not limited to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and gender diverse young people may experience additional barriers to engagement in employment, education, or training, including discrimination and inadequate or inappropriate support [9–13]. Policies and programs to address these barriers and improve youth engagement in education and employment are aligned with several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, decent work and

* Corresponding author. Centre for Community Health and Wellbeing, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 4072, QLD, Australia.

** Corresponding author. Faculty of Law and Business, Australian Catholic University, 250 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne, 3002, VIC, Australia

E-mail addresses: lauren.ball@uq.edu.au (L. Ball), Joy.Parkinson@acu.edu.au (J. Parkinson).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2023.100431>

Received 28 June 2023; Received in revised form 17 August 2023; Accepted 7 September 2023

Available online 19 September 2023

2666-5352/© 2023 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of The Royal Society for Public Health. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

economic growth and reduced inequalities [14].

OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation, with the mission to fight food waste through food rescue, education programs and advocacy work [15]. The OzHarvest Nourish Program is a free, hospitality service training program to support employment and engagement for young people aged 16–25 years; specifically, those who face barriers to education, training, and employment, such as inter-generational unemployment, low literacy, and numeracy, mental health challenges including anxiety and depression, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Program is underpinned by the concept that addressing these barriers through providing specialised supports is effective in breaking the cycle of disadvantage and re-engaging young people with education and employment. Education and employment are known to develop human capital leading to reduced poverty and improved health and wellbeing outcomes [16,17]. The aim of this mixed-methods study was to evaluate the OzHarvest Nourish Program, to inform its ongoing facilitation, planning and promotion and maximise the potential of the program to benefit young Australians.

2. Methods

2.1. The OzHarvest Nourish Program

The Nourish Program is targeted toward young people who (1) face barriers to education and employment participation and (2) express an interest in hospitality. The Nourish Program runs over 18 weeks with intakes in February and July/August each year. Delivered in partnership with Registered Training Organisations, the Program facilitates students to achieve a Certificate II in Kitchen Operations, gain employability skills including resume writing and preparing for job interviews and broader engagement skills such as teamwork and communication. Training occurs twice per week and is facilitated by 2–3 OzHarvest staff and volunteers. Class sizes are limited to approximately 12 participants to ensure individualised support can be provided as required. The objectives of the program are to build capacity in priority young Australians aged 16–25yrs, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, gain employment, engage in education and training, and positively engage in society. At the time of the evaluation (October 2022), there have been 28 completed program intakes and 207 graduates from Sydney, Adelaide, and Newcastle. Of these Nourish graduates, 83 were subsequently employed, while 71 pursued further education.

2.2. Study overview

This study draws from a workshop, brief online survey, and semi-structured interviews to develop a logic model and an evaluation plan. The workshop content was informed by a brief anonymous online survey with additional data collected from participants and through observations during the workshop. Semi-structured interviews with staff, volunteers, participants, and broader stakeholders using a qualitative, exploratory approach were undertaken to evaluate the Program. Workshop and interview data were synthesised to develop a logic model and a monitoring and evaluation plan to inform the ongoing review and development of the Nourish Program.

This study was conducted from a social constructivist position, which acknowledges that the lived experiences of all people form and shape the realities of their world [18]. This position also acknowledges that the project team's reality is collectively constructed based on personal and professional lived experiences, as well as their interactions with OzHarvest staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and participants. The research team included a dietitian, Professor of Community Health and Well-being, and primary care researcher (LB), Principal Health Scientist and Associate Professor of Social Marketing (JP), fourth year Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics Honours Student, with experience in quantitative and qualitative research methods (JM), Nourish Program Manager Belinda Woollett and Nourish Projects Coordinator Dan Baynes, who

have worked in the program since its launch in 2015. The OzHarvest staff did not influence the evaluation outcomes of this research. Ethics approval was granted by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (#2022/492).

2.3. Workshop

A one-day, face-to-face workshop was conducted with Nourish Program staff from Newcastle, Sydney, and Adelaide to develop a logic model to guide future evaluation of the Nourish Program. A logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share an understanding of the relationships among the resources available to operate a program, the activities planned, and the changes or results hoped to achieve [19]. Creating logic models in a group setting brings with it the power of consensus and a group examination of values and beliefs about change processes and program results [19]. Thus, the workshop aimed to gather the perspectives of key staff regarding Nourish Program inputs, activities, outputs and impacts, as well as assumptions and broader context through group discussion. The workshop took place in Sydney in July 2022 and was conducted by two members of the review team (LB and JP). The workshop covered the principles of monitoring and evaluation, and the components of a program logic model. One researcher (JP) facilitated the workshop while the other researcher (LB) observed and took notes that were used to inform and confirm the themes for the draft logic model. The workshop was attended by all 12 OzHarvest team members from the national office and all three Nourish Program sites (Sydney, Adelaide, and Newcastle). Participants were provided with a program logic worksheet which they completed throughout the workshop. These worksheets were collected by the research team and collated into a draft logic model, for further development in triangulation with interview data. The draft logic model was sent back to workshop participants for feedback and confirmation and was modified iteratively as interviews took place. The logic model is presented in results (Fig. 1).

2.4. Interviews

Individual semi-structured telephone and teleconference interviews were conducted with eligible stakeholders of the Nourish Program to explore experiences and perspectives about what is working well in the program, and potential areas for improvement. Criterion sampling was used to recruit potential participants. Potential participants comprised any person who has been involved with the OzHarvest Nourish Program, including past participants, funders, referrers, employers and staff. Relevant participants were identified and contacted by OzHarvest staff using a script and provided with a plain language information sheet developed by the researchers. Purposeful sampling was used to gain maximum variation [20] to ensure each stakeholder group had representation. These were checked by the research team during the course of the interviews and the OzHarvest staff purposively sampled for missing cases [21]. The name and contact information of participants who provided written consent to take part in the study were placed in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by OzHarvest staff for researchers to contact and conduct interviews. Consent was confirmed by researchers at the time of the interview. Participants were provided with a gift card as compensation for their time. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a member of the research team at the time of the interview and imported into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Data were de-identified and stored on password protected computers to ensure data protection.

2.5. Data analysis

Data analysis applied a systematic process of transcript-based analysis following the six-phases of thematic analysis [22]. This was supplemented by the research team iteratively examining the analysis at the end of each step. This form of analysis provides a framework for organising broad definitions and general boundaries of key themes

Nourish Program Objective	To build capacity in priority young Australians aged 16-25yrs, increase self-esteem and self-confidence, gain employment, engage in education and training, and positively engage in society.			
Problem Statement	Priority young Australians aged 16-25yrs identified as being at-risk lack confidence, self-esteem & purpose, leading to disengagement from society, reduced employment & education opportunities, food insecurity, and poorer health outcomes (including mental health).			
Inputs	Outputs: Activities	Short-Term Outcomes	Medium-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants and key professional support RTO Venues (including appropriate kitchens & theory training space) Qualified trainers & youth workers Volunteers General OzHarvest Support In-Kind Providers Student recruitment network Work Experience Providers Employment Pathway Partnerships Industry Mentors Teaching Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver Foundation/ Introduction Course over 3-4 weeks Deliver Cert II in Kitchen Operations over 14-15 weeks Conduct Work Experience Practicum (including excursions) Teach Interview Techniques & Resume Construction Engage participants to improve attendance and participation levels and course completion rates. Conduct Youth Worker Action Plan Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive relationships, connections & enhanced trust between students and trainers Improved skills in: social, employability, cooking, kitchen, barista, teamwork Increased participant empathy, self-esteem, resilience, autonomy self-confidence & self-determination Action Plan goals are achieved. Post-program goals & pathway plan established Improved understanding of individual learning needs & increased food & financial literacy of participants Increased self-sufficiency through cooking confidence & awareness of food waste Program satisfaction of participants Participant's identify employment, education & training opportunities Improved social connectedness for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduates gain employment or continue through education pathway Improved intrapersonal & interpersonal relationships of graduates Graduates contribute to OzHarvest/become volunteers Students gain credit toward broader education outcomes e.g. SACE, HSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduates' improved food security & reduced food waste Graduates sustain long-term employment & embark on career pathways Graduates embrace life-long learning Graduates engage positively in society Improved health outcomes (including mental health) in graduates Graduates use food literacy & practical skills to benefit family & friends

Fig. 1. Logic model of the OzHarvest Nourish program.

while identifying links between the themes [23]. Rigor was demonstrated through the use of constant comparison, member checking and repeated interviews. Themes generated in the analysis were continuously reviewed and refined by the research team in regular discussions until no new themes were identified. Data from the workshop and interviews were triangulated and cross checked with survey responses, observer, and interview notes. All researchers verified and agreed on the themes via consensus including the OzHarvest Nourish Program team to form a comprehensive understanding of the Nourish Program and its impact. The selected quotations primarily serve as illustrations.

3. Results

3.1. Logic model

A logic model (Fig. 1) was developed based on workshop and interview data and is a visual representation of how the Nourish Program is believed to work and what will be measured in the monitoring and evaluation plan. The logic model can be used to guide resourcing and operational planning, to ensure that inputs and activities are adequately supported to facilitate the short, medium and long-term outcomes of the program.

3.2. Interviews

Thirty-two individual, semi-structured telephone and teleconference interviews were conducted (Table 1). Interview participants were based in Adelaide, Newcastle, and Sydney. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 min, with an average duration of 45 min.

Five themes were identified from interview data and these themes are described below, with illustrative quotes provided to aid interpretation (Table 2).

3.2.1. The Nourish Program successfully supports people in employment opportunities and in their broader life

Participants heralded the Nourish Program as genuinely successful in supporting employment and in providing other tangible and intangible benefits. Of note, participants repeatedly expressed that the Nourish Program met their needs at a time when their options were limited and has created employment and social opportunities that have benefitted

Table 1 Participant demographics.

Gender	
Male	12
Female	19
Non-binary	1
Stakeholder	
Nourish participants	11
Nourish program staff	6
Nourish program referrers	6
Graduate employers	3
Graduate family members	2
Program funder	1
Community development lead	1
Registered training organisation assessment officer	1
OzHarvest senior leadership team	1

their quality of life, mental health, self-determination, and future vision. The transition to employment was identified as a key success factor. However, other significant benefits were described by participants, including improved food security, self-confidence, and communication skills. Participants reported improvements in their self-esteem and self-confidence from participation in the Nourish Program, perceived as critical to engagement not only with further education or employment, but society more generally. This included improved personal communication skills and general social skills. Addressing food insecurity is a key objective of OzHarvest and the Nourish Program. Over the course of participating in the program, as participants' food security improved, so did their sense of self-efficacy and overall health and wellbeing.

3.2.2. Building a safe place: The Nourish Program staff provide respectful, individualised support

Many participants and stakeholders described the OzHarvest staff and volunteers as a critical component of the program's success. More specifically, participants described staff as contributing to a safe, respectful family-style learning environment which helped participants to build trust in the facilitators of the face-to-face training sessions. Staff were described as going above and beyond in their care for participants, performing beyond expectations of typical workplaces, and as having exceptional respect, dignity, and warmth for program participants.

Table 2
Themes and illustrative quotes from interviews with key stakeholders.

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
1 The Nourish Program successfully supports people in employment opportunities and in their broader life	<p>“I am more confident and have an apprenticeship now. I’m learning how to become a chef. That would not have happened without the course.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“When I started, I was really shy, but now I have really come out of my shell. I am a more out-there person. I feel like me. Other people have noticed too. I am more comfortable with myself. I feel confident, happy and me.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“I learnt how to function in life and in society again.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“I can feed myself better and am driven to feed myself. I wasn’t before. It has become a routine and I like feeding myself. Once I began feeding myself, I had enough room in my brain to exercise which drove up my confidence too. The program taught me the foundations needed to live.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“I started the course due to the points [it would provide] for the Year 12 certificate and knew that I would learn some cooking skills. But I became more confident in my ability and to speak more clearly; I didn’t expect that to happen. It gave me knowledge to work in any restaurant or cafe. The friendships I built with people in the class are people that I know I can call on whenever I need.” – (Past participant)</p>
2 Building a safe place: The Nourish Program staff provide respectful, individualised support	<p>“[The Nourish Program team] and staff treat us like we are family. They create a safe environment and are understanding. We are treated like adultsI felt respected.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“They made me feel comfortable, respected. The atmosphere is relaxed. I hadn’t been in the education system for a very long time and my last experience was TAFE, which I hated. But Nourish was different ... The facilitators had more of an understanding that I had other things going on - like family issues. I just came out of rehab and started living by myself on my own in my own place. They understood that. It was a nourishing environment to be in. I felt comfortable with [the Nourish Program team] and looked forward to each session. They felt like family.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“The supportive environment. There’s no pressure to do things. Sure, we are encouraged to give it a go, but not forced. Everyone is at different stages, so no-one was pushed. I felt respected which allowed me the freedom to step up when I was ready. Step by step. Everyone worked as a team to help each other understand.” – (Past participant)</p>
3 The Nourish Program is adapted to suit the context of each participant and cohort	<p>“We have fluidity and flexibility and give power to the trainers to change to meet the participants’ needs ... That is important because our participants are so different and have different learning capabilities. We need to adjust to meet their needs.” – (Program facilitator)</p> <p>“I am dyslexic, so it is a lot of work for me to do the theory, but [the Nourish Program facilitator] was always there to lend a hand. Whenever I struggled with reading, they would read it to me. Even with like reading the menus and measuring cups. If I was unable to read it, they helped me</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
4 Scarcity of resourcing, personnel, and space limits the opportunity to expand and scale up the Nourish Program	<p>every step of the way. I’m a visual learner, and I mentioned it on the first day, but they would have picked it up, even if I hadn’t mentioned anything. They were good like that ... The environment was safe.” – (Past participant)</p> <p>“If we gave the students a formal structure of assessments that wouldn’t work, as it would create more anxiety and stress, so we adjusted the program so that we do continual assessments all the time.” – (Assessment officer)</p> <p>“If we could have kitchen space for another day [we could run another cohort]. Not having the resources and funding is hard. We don’t have long term ownership of any spaces, they are given in kind, so to go in and knock walls down or build workstations, it’s security that’s missing.” - (Program trainer)</p> <p>“Recruiting the right trainers and staff is our biggest challenge ... Due to participant dynamics we need staff with a broad range of skills and finding someone that possess the necessary skills and the patience required for the role is very hard ... The participants like stability and require a safe environment, so staff that come and go is not going to work.” – (Program team member)</p> <p>“Having a culturally, like an Aboriginal identified person in their team, would be useful if they are trying to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and consultancy to the program as well, that would be really useful” – (Program referrer)</p>
5 Supporting the transition from graduation from the Nourish Program to ongoing employment requires support, resources, attention, and care	<p>“Transition - quite often they love the program and get an apprenticeship but can’t sustain it. You know mental health causes such anxiety for the graduates and they take days off work. Employers need staff that are reliable and having staff members that can’t make work isn’t sustainable for the employers. That’s tough for small businesses and they don’t understand mental health and how that impacts a person’s ability to work sometimes. 18 weeks is not long enough to help the students to understand what an employer requires. I’m not too sure what the solution would be but maybe Youth workers could help with that transition into full-time/part-time and casual work and help those graduates that require some extra help.” – (Program facilitator)</p> <p>“While the program met my expectations, it was too short. My daughter changed so much during the program and learnt lots of coping strategies to help her deal with her anxiety ... if the program was longer, those strategies would be further embedded, and they would be able to adjust better on the job when challenges arise, instead of over-reacting and feeling anxious.” – (Parent of a Nourish graduate)</p>

3.2.3. The Nourish Program is adapted to suit the context of each participant and cohort

While the Nourish Program has a set structure, program staff, facilitators, and volunteers reported being well-supported by the Nourish team to adapt components as required to suit the context of each participant and cohort. While the key components of the program are

adhered to for consistency (e.g., theory), staff, facilitators and volunteers reported adjusting the mechanism and format of learning and skill acquisition as required in acknowledgement that each individual participant has unique needs (e.g., scribing for theory or adjusting the recipes that are taught).

3.2.4. *Scarcity of resourcing, personnel, and space limits the opportunity to expand and scale up the Nourish Program*

Program team members identified resource limitations, including appropriately trained personnel, as preventing realisation of the full potential of the Nourish Program. Of note, they reported that space and equipment are often acquired opportunistically and identified limitations to resourcing as a key factor inhibiting scale and spread of the Nourish Program to reach more young people in cities where the program has already been implemented, as well as in additional locations across Australia. Identifying and recruiting appropriate staff remains a challenge. More specifically, the need to recruit staff with a diverse range of skills and attributes, such as patience, tenacity, and cultural competence was identified by program team members.

3.2.5. *Supporting the transition from graduation from the Nourish Program to ongoing employment requires support, resources, attention, and care*

The transition from graduation to employment was perceived by several stakeholders as a delicate and challenging time. Past efforts to individually place graduates in OzHarvest ventures or in services of partner organisations were well received, and therefore may represent an opportunity to further benefit participants and increase Program impact.

To provide further benefits to Program participants, extending the duration of the Nourish Program was suggested to enable further development of skills, both practical and social. Extending the Nourish Program duration was perceived as important in further supporting Program participants in the transition from graduation to ongoing employment.

4. Discussion

The OzHarvest Nourish Program is a transformative service that aims to improve wellbeing outcomes by providing a hospitality-focused pathway to employment and education for young Australians who may otherwise not participate in learning and training opportunities. The Program is making progress on several United Nations' SDGs including no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth and reduced inequalities [14]. Participants described significant benefits of participation, including improved food security, self-efficacy, and communication skills, reduced social isolation, and greater hope for the future [24].

A number of success factors and enablers to program implementation were identified, including tailoring learning and the ability of staff to provide support which validates learners' identities and local knowledge, together with the development of meaningful relationships underpinned by a sense of community. The learning environment described by participants differs from traditional learning environments in terms of both organisational and pedagogical approaches, a characteristic identified as best practice in the delivery of programs and activities for priority young people [25–27]. The ability to exercise learner agency is essential for the construction of knowledge and meaning; critical tenets of learning [28,29], and the presence of positive social supports (e.g., teaching staff who can provide personalised and respectful support) has been shown to increase self-efficacy and lead to improved academic and social-emotional outcomes [30,31]. The success factors and enablers to program implementation identified in this study are in accord with those previously identified in studies of youth development programs for priority young people [32].

The Nourish Program is an example of intersectionality in social and health support that achieves downstream social, health and economic benefits. For example, some participants reported that their diet and food security improved, others reported that the program helped them to achieve employment or housing while some described benefits relating to mental health and self-efficacy. When considering the social determinants of health, these outcomes are encouraging, and similar findings have been reported elsewhere. For example, in an evaluation of youth-led programs run by the Reach Foundation, young people reported significantly enhanced life meaning, improved engagement with life and increased perseverance as a result of program participation [33].

The transition from graduation to further education or paid employment requires specific skills to navigate and was identified by participants as challenging. This transition can be a vulnerable time for young people, particularly for those who may not have social support or role models and those who have limited understanding of the transition process [34,35]. The transition can also be influenced by factors such as structural changes in the economy, for example inflation and employment opportunities [36]. The Nourish Program has previously aimed to facilitate the transition by individually placing graduates in OzHarvest ventures or in services of partner organisations, and this was reportedly well-received by stakeholders. To this end, establishing strong links with other stakeholders (e.g., agencies and organisations) to support graduates in this process may be an opportunity to improve outcomes for Nourish participants [25]. Participants suggested extending the length of the Nourish Program to enable further development of skills to assist with the transition into further education or employment; but this would require additional investment. Having insufficient funding to support the complex needs of priority young people has been shown to be a barrier, limiting the ability to deliver all aspects of a program in this context [32]. Conversely, availability, and mobilisation of resource needs, including sufficient funding and appropriate personnel have been identified as enablers to implementation and scale-up of programs and are therefore important in the ongoing success of the Nourish Program [37].

Importantly, a key strength of this research is the incorporation of lived experience of program participants as recommended to enhance program outcomes for people from priority groups [38]. However, the relatively small sample ($n = 32$) might be considered a limitation. Future research could establish a monitoring and evaluation plan that considers the complex context and enables long term follow-up without overburdening the organisation or participants.

The OzHarvest Nourish Program is a transformative service that is improving wellbeing outcomes for program participants. Participants described many benefits of the program, including improved food security, self-efficacy and reduced social isolation, indicating the potential for intersectionality in social and health support. Additional resourcing, including adequate funding, may be required to maximise program impact and support sustainability. The findings from this evaluation call for increased investments into programs which support priority young people in Australia.

Funding

This research was funded by OzHarvest Australia.

Statement of ethical approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (#2022/492).

Author contributions

Conceptualization, L.B., J.P., D.B and B.W.; methodology, L.B., J.P., D.B and B.W.; formal analysis, L.B., J.P., and J.M.; investigation, L.B., J.

P., and J.M.; data curation, L.B., J.P., and J.M.; writing—original draft preparation, B.L.; L.B., J.M., and J.P.; writing—review and editing, B.L.; L.B., J.P., J.M., D.B and B.W.; supervision, L.B. and J.P.; project administration, L.B., J.P., D.B and B.W.; funding acquisition, L.B., J.P., D.B and B.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: OzHarvest staff (Nourish Program Manager Belinda Woollett and Nourish Projects Coordinator Dan Baynes) were involved in this research, though they did not influence the evaluation outcomes of this research.

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to thank the study participants, who generously shared their time and experiences for the purpose of this study, and OzHarvest Australia for their support of and input to this research. We would also like to thank Clare Van Dorsen, from the University of Queensland, for her input to the figure in this paper.

References

- [1] The Smith Family, *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Disadvantaged Young Australians: the Learning for Life Program*, The Smith Family, Sydney NSW, 2016.
- [2] Foundation for Young Australians, *How Are Young People Faring in the Transition from School to Work?* Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 2015.
- [3] *Generation Stalled: Young, Underemployed and Living Precariously in Australia*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, VIC, 2017.
- [4] Youth Action NSW. *A NSW for Young People: beyond 2019*, Youth Action NSW, Woolloomooloo NSW, 2019.
- [5] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia, ABS, Canberra, 2022* [cited 2023 30 January]; Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release>.
- [6] Foundation for Young Australians, *Unlimited Potential*, Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), 2014.
- [7] S.B.N. Leung, T. Freeburn, W. Waugh, R. Christie, *Youth Survey Report 2022*, Mission Australia, Sydney NSW, 2022.
- [8] F.O. Baah, A.M. Teitelman, B. Riegel, *Marginalization: conceptualizing patient vulnerabilities in the framework of social determinants of health—an integrative review*, *Nurs. Inq.* 26 (2019), e12268.
- [9] J. Howard, J. Jeffery, L. Walters, E. Barton, *Rural Aboriginal high school students' views of their future tertiary education*, *Aust. J. Indig. Educ.* 50 (2021) 293–303.
- [10] M. Gruppetta, E. Southgate, R. Ober, L. Cameron, J. Fischetti, A. Thunig, et al., *Yarning the Way: the Role of Indigenous Paraprofessionals in Guiding the Post-school Educational Pathways of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth*, The University of Newcastle, Newcastle, 2018.
- [11] S. Hall, J. Fildes, E. Tiller, K. Di Nicola, J. Plummer, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Report: Youth Survey 2019*, Mission Australia, Sydney, NSW, 2020.
- [12] Hill A, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, et al. *Writing Themselves in 4: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQA+ Young People in Australia*. Melbourne, VIC: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University 2020.
- [13] E. Smith, T. Jones, R. Ward, J. Dixon, A. Mitchell, L. Hillier, *From Blues to Rainbows: Mental Health and Wellbeing of Gender Diverse and Transgender Young People in Australia*, The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Melbourne, VIC, 2014.
- [14] United Nations, *The 17 Goals: Sustainable Development*, United Nations, 2022 [cited 2023 6 January]; Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
- [15] OzHarvest Australia, 2022 [cited 2022 30 December]; Available from: <https://www.ozharvest.org/>.
- [16] A. Ade Marsinta, A. Bugi, R. Al Fitra, *Impact of education on poverty and health : evidence from Indonesia*, *Econ. Dev. Anal. J.* 9 (2020) 89–99.
- [17] A. Alamanda, *The effect of government expenditure on income inequality and poverty in Indonesia*, *Inf. Artha* 4 (2020) 1–11.
- [18] J. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed-Methods Research*, Sage publications, 2014.
- [19] W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Logic Model Development Guide*, Michigan, 2004.
- [20] I. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, Teachers college press, New York, 2006.
- [21] J. Parkinson, D. Gallegos, R. Russell-Bennett, *Transforming beyond self: fluidity of parent identity in family decision-making*, *J. Bus. Res.* 69 (2016) 110–119.
- [22] V. Braun, V. Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*, Sage, London, 2013.
- [23] V. Clarke, V. Braun, N. Hayfield, *Thematic Analysis. Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, 3 ed, SAGE, 2015, pp. 222–248.
- [24] A. Delaforce, J. Li, M. Grujovski, J. Parkinson, P. Richards, M. Fahy, et al., *Creating an implementation enhancement plan for a digital patient fall prevention platform using the CFIR-ERIC approach: a qualitative study*, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Publ. Health* (2023) 20.
- [25] K. Wilson, K. Stemp, S. McGinty, *Re-engaging young people with education and training: what are the alternatives?* *Youth Stud. Aust.* 30 (2011) 32–39.
- [26] T. Spielhofer, G. White, L. O'Donnell, D. Sims, *Determined to Succeed and Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)*, Edingburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research and the Department of Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, 2005.
- [27] M. Mills, G. McGregor, *Re-engaging Students in Education: Success Factors in Alternative Education*, Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ), Brisbane, 2010.
- [28] Hempel-Jorgensen A. *Learner agency and social justice: what can creative pedagogy contribute to socially just pedagogies?* *Pedagog. Cult. Soc.* 23 (2015) 531–554.
- [29] van Lier L. *Agency in the classroom*, in: J. Lantolf, M. Poehner (Eds.), *Sociocultural Theory and the Teaching of Second Languages*, Equinox, London, 2008.
- [30] S. Rajasekaran, J. Reyes, *Back to School: Pathways for Reengagement of Out-Of-School Youth in Education*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2019.
- [31] Center for Promise, *Supporting Young People's Success in High School Re-engagement Programs: the Role of Social Support and Self-Efficacy*, America's Promise Alliance, Washington, DC, 2014.
- [32] G. Tidmarsh, J. Thompson, M. Quinton, J. Cumming, *Process evaluations of positive youth development programmes for disadvantaged young people: a systematic review*, *J. Youth Dev.* 17 (2022) 106–140.
- [33] D. Vella-Brodrick, N. Rickard, T. Chin, *Evaluation of Youth-Led Programs Run by the Reach Foundation*, Monash University, VIC, Australia, 2013.
- [34] M. Vuolo, J.T. Mortimer, J. Staff, *Adolescent precursors of pathways from school to work*, *J. Res. Adolesc.* 24 (2014) 145–162.
- [35] Y. Ivzori, D. Sachs, S. Reiter, N. Schreuer, *Transition to employment program (SUPER) for youth at risk: a conceptual and practical model*, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Publ. Health* 17 (2020).
- [36] D. Bowman, J. Borlagdan, S. Bond, *Making Sense of Youth Transitions from Education to Work*, Brotherhood of St Lawrence, Fitzroy, VIC, 2015.
- [37] P. Weber, L. Birkholz, S. Kohler, N. Helsper, L. Dippon, A. Ruetten, et al., *Development of a framework for scaling up community-based health promotion: a best fit framework synthesis*, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Publ. Health* 19 (2022) 4773.
- [38] C. Doyle, K. Gardner, K. Wells, *The importance of incorporating lived experience in efforts to reduce Australian reincarceration rates*, *Int. J. Crime Justice Social. Democr.* 10 (2021) 83–98.