



HUNTER RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



Young people pipe up

Is the HSC right for everyone? Do young people feel prepared for the real world? Is finding employment in the Hunter wishful thinking?

The latest HRF Regional Resilience Research project, YOUNite, gets the answers straight from the horse's mouth, young Hunter people aged 14 - 25.

With one in five Hunter young people leaving school this year potentially facing unemployment, YOUNite Project Leader, Shanthi Ramanathan, said HRF sought to empower young people by giving them a voice to make their concerns and experiences known.

"All the data is telling us that many young people in this region are struggling," she said. "The youth unemployment rate in the Hunter is 18 per cent and we also have a lower rate of educational attainment than the NSW and Australian averages.

"We wanted to know what barriers there are preventing so many young people from moving smoothly from study to work and independent life, and to see what can be done to help overcome those barriers."

"We also want to see young people championing their own cause and working to remove these barriers to adult life."

The research tells us that the views of young people aren't always the same as those of older Hunter residents. Almost half (48%) of young people still at school agree it's important to complete Year 12, compared to 75 per cent of Hunter residents. Focus groups with local young people revealed that alternative career paths are important for those who do not fit well into the structure of the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

There also appears to be a lack of communication between businesses and young people. The views of businesses suggest that doing well in, or even completing, the HSC is not as important as young people and residents think. Eighty per cent of businesses said they would consider employing a young person who had not completed their HSC.

The same is true of work experience. Forty-five per cent of Hunter businesses surveyed, and 8 out of 10 non-profit organisations, said they offer work experience opportunities for young people whereas many focus group respondents believed there was little or no opportunity within high school/TAFE and university to undertake work experience.

Considering that, it's no surprise YOUnite found that young people still at school are concerned about their futures, with 53 per cent saying they felt unprepared and the same proportion wanting more career information.

"Having energy and resources is important for careers advisors," said one focus group participant.

Another said "My careers advisor made me feel like a burden."

Of those who felt unprepared for post-school life, 38 per cent nominated work experience (paid or unpaid) as a potential remedy.

Meanwhile 44 per cent named coordinating relevant work experience as a way for schools to give students a taste of different jobs and help them figure out what they want to do when they finished school.

YOUnite found that Hunter businesses were willing to employ young people, with 72 per cent of those surveyed either currently or previously employing people between 15 and 24 years old.

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of the businesses that had not employed young people were sole traders or micro-businesses who could not afford staff, although one-quarter said young people would not have the qualifications or skills required by their business.

Seventy four per cent of businesses who employed young people were positive about the experience overall, although close to one-quarter of them had less positive experiences.

The YOUnite data was collected over the past six months from young people directly as well as a range of other sources across the Hunter.

HRF engaged six young research trainees (under 25) to interview 540 of their peers (13-24 year olds) face-to-face. Three of these trainee researchers also analysed the survey results and reported on them at the YOUnite Summit on 25 February.

HRF also consulted regional youth stakeholders, ran focus groups, conducted 1,200 telephone interviews with businesses and residents, and facilitated workshops with more than 60 young people at the YOUnite Summit to seek potential solutions.

Port Waratah Coal Services, Hunter Valley Training Company, The Bloomfield Group, The Newcastle Herald, NBN Television and the Reach Foundation showed their interest in making a difference to outcomes for young people in our Region by supporting HRF's YOUnite project.

HRF researchers will be working with a regional Youth Stakeholder Group in the coming months to develop potential solutions. The results will also be published on www.hrf.com.au along with the other YOUnite Project findings.

To get involved call HRF on 4041 5555 or email info@hrf.com.au