Improving outcomes for homeless jobseekers: the YP⁴ experience
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YP⁴ is the bold initiative of four leading not-for-profit organisations in Victoria: Hanover Welfare Services, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne Citymission and Loddon Mallee Housing Services.

It is a three-year trial which seeks to demonstrate that joining up programs and services in a client-centred manner will result in more sustainable employment and housing outcomes for young homeless jobseekers.

YP⁴ supporters and funders include:
- Department for Victorian Communities
- Victorian Department of Human Services
- Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Commonwealth Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Centrelink

In Australia, up to 65,000 young people experience homelessness and unemployment each year (Grace, Wilson and Batterham 2005). The outcomes of public assistance to these people are unsatisfactory. Public assistance seems to be a step behind the requirements of a contemporary, ever-changing population, and it is plagued by oppressive and inflexible business rules and fragmentation. YP⁴ represents a new paradigm for assisting individuals who experience both homelessness and unemployment, in recognition that existing forms of housing and employment assistance are linear, ineffective and inefficient for homeless jobseekers⁴. YP⁴ offers homeless jobseekers a single and consistent point of contact to address employment, housing, educational and personal support goals in an integrated manner over a two-year period.

YP⁴ is probably the most ambitious attempt to join up and integrate public assistance for disadvantaged people in recent Australian history. Constructed as a randomised controlled trial, the quality of evidence emerging from YP⁴ is unrivalled. YP⁴ is able to compare the experiences of two groups of participants over time: one group receiving joined up services and one group receiving standard services. YP⁴ has offered joined up services to 228 participants across four sites, covering inner metropolitan, outer suburban and regional areas. YP⁴ participants are very disadvantaged, even more disadvantaged than other young homeless jobseekers of a similar age (Grace, Batterham and Cornell 2006). They are in the first one-third of their working life, they are currently homeless or have a history of homelessness and they are looking for work, although they may be deemed not to be ‘work ready’ as yet.

The next section of this paper provides more details about the experiences of YP⁴ participants.

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¹ For more information about the evidence base for YP⁴, see the ‘foundation paper’, *A New Approach to Assisting Young Homeless Jobseekers*, authored by Susan Campbell and published in January 2003. The trial proposal has the same title, was authored by Michael Horn and published in March 2004. Copies of both papers are available from www.yp4.org.au
Profile and circumstances of YP\textsuperscript{4} participants in the twelve months prior to trial entry

YP\textsuperscript{4}'s 414 participants were assigned to one of two groups; J group (228 participants who would receive services in a joined up way); and S group (186 participants who would receive services in the standard way). The participants, young people aged 18 to 35 years experiencing both homelessness and unemployment, were recruited between January 2005 and January 2006, primarily by local Centrelink Customer Service Centres in Central Melbourne, Bendigo, Cheltenham and Frankston. Data sources for the outcome evaluation include administrative data sets (Centrelink and SAAP NDCA\textsuperscript{2}), and interviews conducted on behalf of YP\textsuperscript{4} with 135 of the 414 participants.

Once recruitment into the trial was finalised, we compared the YP\textsuperscript{4} participants with the broader population of young people experiencing homelessness and unemployment. To do this, we used the socio-demographic profile of this population at both an Australian and Victorian level published in our Benchmark Report (Grace et al. 2005). The YP\textsuperscript{4} participants, drawn from Central Melbourne, Bendigo, Cheltenham and Frankston, cannot be seen as representative of the broader Australian or Victorian population of homeless jobseekers. However, this profile shows that they are reasonably similar to that broader population, meaning that our findings may be cautiously generalised.

*Table 1: Comparison of key characteristics of YP\textsuperscript{4} participants with Australian and Victorian estimates for young people experiencing homelessness and unemployment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Australian estimates\textsuperscript{3}</th>
<th>Victorian estimates</th>
<th>All participants (n = 414)</th>
<th>J group (n = 228)</th>
<th>S group (n = 186)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59% - 69%</td>
<td>57% - 66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31% – 41%</td>
<td>34% - 44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ATSI status\textsuperscript{4}</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex offender status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ex offender</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education level achieved</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 11 or below</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58% - 60%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Year 11</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated/missing</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{2} Supported Accommodation Assistance Program data is gathered and analysed by the National Data Collection Agency of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

\textsuperscript{3} Australian and Victorian estimates of young homeless job seekers were calculated for the Benchmark Report (Grace et al. 2005). For more information please see this report.

\textsuperscript{4} Disclosure of ex-offender and ATSI status to Centrelink is voluntary, and both may be under reported.
### Table: Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Australian estimates (^5)</th>
<th>Victorian estimates</th>
<th>All participants (n = 414)</th>
<th>J group (n = 228)</th>
<th>S group (n = 186)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age at entry (with range)</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 years (18-36)(^6)</td>
<td>23 years (18-36)</td>
<td>23 years (18-35)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program eligibility at entry(^7)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive Support Customised Assistance (ISCA)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Support Program (PSP)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement Employment Training (JPET)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: YP\(^4\) research database and Grace et al. 2005*

Compared with national and state population estimates for young people experiencing homelessness and unemployment, YP\(^4\) participants are similar in terms of gender and Indigenous status. However, YP\(^4\) participants are more likely to be ex-offenders and have lower levels of educational attainment than this population generally. These characteristics identify the YP\(^4\) participants as particularly disadvantaged, even among people who are both homeless and unemployed.

The average age of YP\(^4\) participants at entry to the trial was 23 years (range: 18-36 years, n=413). Although the upper age limit of 35 is high for a ‘young’ homeless jobseeker, 51 per cent of participants were 21 or under at entry, and 74 per cent were 24 or under at entry, making the participants quite young overall.

Sixty-five per cent of participants were eligible for ISCA from the Job Network, while 21 per cent of participants were eligible for PSP, and 15 per cent of participants were eligible for JPET. Generally, it is the most disadvantaged of jobseekers that are eligible for ISCA. People participating in PSP and JPET are understood to face significant personal barriers to employment, and time is allocated to addressing and overcoming these before they are expected to look for work. Confirming eligibility for ISCA, JPET and/or PSP is important for YP\(^4\) participants, as these are among the programs being joined up in the service delivery component of the trial.

There are some differences between S and J groups. J group participants are more likely to be male, ex-offenders, and identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. J group participants had lower levels of educational achievement than S group participants. Participants’ program eligibility at entry to the trial did not differ between groups. While randomisation will produce apparent differences between groups, and these differences are expected to be balanced by unknown characteristics, our analysis indicates that the differences reported above are greater than could be expected by chance. This raises the question of the extent to which the groups are comparable for future analysis of differences in outcomes, and to what extent future differences are attributable to

\(^5\) Australian and Victorian estimates of young homeless job seekers were calculated for the Benchmark Report (Grace et al. 2005). For more information please see this report.
\(^6\) Please note one participant was aged 36 at the time of entry but was allowed to remain in the study as they had received an SMS from DEWR inviting their participation.
\(^7\) Participants can be eligible for more than one program at a time.
differences in the way the two groups received their services. In general, J group could be seen as more disadvantaged than S group. In this situation, if J group has better outcomes than S group this would be a particularly convincing result. When we analyse future results, we will use appropriate statistical methods to explore apparent differences, taking account of the differences between the groups, and we will report these analyses in detail in order that findings can be interpreted with confidence.

We examined a great deal of data in relation to participants’ circumstances in the twelve months prior to entering the trial. In the following sections, we present details about their accommodation, employment, income, education and training, use of community services, health and wellbeing, and community connectedness. We have identified the typical issues for people aged 18 to 35 who are in this situation of experiencing both homelessness and unemployment. It is not easy for services to attend simultaneously to so many different issues, but this is clearly the task for those seeking to assist young people such as the YP4 participants to achieve their modest aspirations of a job and a home.

**Accommodation**

In the twelve months prior to entry participants moved frequently. Most participants had moved between two and six times. Only 36% of YP4’s 414 participants had used SAAP services in the twelve months prior to trial entry. Participants had most commonly stayed with friends (84%), in private rental (48%), slept rough (42%) and stayed with immediate (52%) and extended family (29%). However, participants did not stay long at each place and did not expect to be able to stay long at the accommodation they were in at the time of interview. A small number of participants had been in prison (9%) or in a drug treatment service (10%) in the year prior to YP4 entry.

The proportion of participants’ income spent on rent was alarming. Participants spent a median of 55 per cent of their income on rent with some spending all their income and a small minority spending more than their income.

*Figure 1: The proportion of income spent on rent by YP4 participants in the twelve months prior to trial entry*

![Figure 1: The proportion of income spent on rent by YP4 participants in the twelve months prior to trial entry](image-url)
Many participants (43%) who were interviewed received financial support of some kind to maintain their housing in the year before entry. Thirteen per cent of participants rated their current accommodation as unavailable.

Just over a quarter of the participants who were interviewed rated their present housing situation as unsuitable to some degree, and only eight per cent indicated they were happy with their current arrangements. For many participants it was either not easy or really difficult to see friends (28%), see family (39%), access shops (17%) or access services (31%), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2: YP participants’ ratings of ease of contact with friends and family and ease of access to shops and services

![Graph showing participant ratings of ease of contact and access](source)

Source: YP zero-month interviews

When asked about their accommodation aspirations, participants gave modest responses. Typically, they wanted a specific number of bedrooms (31%); to live in a unit, flat (29%) or a house (18%); for their accommodation to be close to services, transport and jobs (18%); and for it to be their own (22%).

**Participants’ education and training, employment, income, past and present**

Participants were more educationally disadvantaged than expected, with over two-thirds indicating that year 11 or below was their highest level of education completed. A majority of participants were considering further education or training at the time of interview (63%), with most (70%) nominating secondary school or a specific course at TAFE. Just under a quarter indicated that the location of their current accommodation was a barrier to participating in further education or training.

Almost all participants had been employed at some time in the past, and around half had been in paid employment in the past twelve months. Participants had most commonly been employed in hospitality (44%), retail and customer service roles (42%), labouring (32%), factory work (23%), trades (19%), farming and agriculture (19%) and personal or health care roles (11%). Participants were typically looking for work similar to what they had done in the past. When asked, participants were most commonly looking for ‘any kind of work’ (21%).
A vast majority of participants who were interviewed reported experiencing barriers to gaining employment, the most common being transport (30%), homelessness (18%), physical health (17%), education and training (14%), and mental health issues (11%). Just over one quarter indicated that the location of their current accommodation was a barrier to gaining employment.

Most participants who were interviewed had prepared a resume (89%) and used services that provide links with employment opportunities (81%), while just under half had changed their personal presentation in order to increase their employment prospects. The diversity of participants’ employment aspirations for the future was striking, and generally modest.

Most participants had been in receipt of Newstart (55%) or Youth Allowance (61%) in the year prior to entry, however some had also received Parenting Payments, Carer’s Allowance, Abstudy or Austudy. A small number had made unsuccessful applications for the Disability Support Pension.

There was substantial variation in participants’ average fortnightly and annual incomes based on Centrelink records. Participants’ median earnings from employment were $29.17 per fortnight, accounting for 13 per cent of their overall income. Participants’ median income from Centrelink, including Commonwealth Rent Assistance was $304.18 per fortnight or $7930.33 per year. Including earnings from employment, participants’ median income was $328.62 per fortnight or $8567.53 annually. Eleven per cent of participants were breached during the past twelve months and received reduced payments as a result.

Participants’ experiences with community services, past and present
As expected in a trial specifically for people experiencing homelessness and unemployment, the most commonly used services were Centrelink and the Job Network (97% and 70% respectively at the time of the interview). Many of the participants used housing services (40% of those interviewed) and health services. About two-thirds saw a general practitioner in the year prior to entering the trial, and 41 per cent used a public hospital. Over one quarter used a generalist counselling service, and a quarter used a community health service. Many participants used mental health services (8%), drug treatment services (12%), other employment services (13%), and youth specific services (19%) in the year prior to trial entry.

Only 27 per cent of participants who were interviewed indicated that community services met their needs really well. A further 43 per cent rated community services as being OK. Only five per cent gave a rating of ‘really badly’. Forty per cent agreed that services appeared to be working together to help them. About one third stated that services did not work together. Twenty-two per cent reported that services appeared to be working together to some extent.

Over one quarter of the participants encountered difficulties accessing services in the three months prior to trial entry. Key issues mentioned included long waiting times, low responsiveness of services, unavailability of meaningful assistance, and geographical access difficulties. Services that were noted as difficult to access included housing services (such as public housing and crisis accommodation), employment services (such as Centrelink and the Job Network) and health services (such as community health services, general practitioners, and drug rehabilitation services). Half of the participants waited for services in the year prior to trial entry. Almost a quarter reported that they had no case workers. About half of the participants had one case worker, 11 per cent had two case workers, 9 per cent had three, and 4 per cent had four or five case workers.
Participants’ health and wellbeing, past and present

Only forty per cent of the participants who were interviewed rated their overall health as good or very good. This is well below the Australian average of 56 per cent (ABS 2006b). Thirteen per cent rated their health as not good or poor. Thirty-nine per cent reported no change in their health in the previous year, while 33 per cent said that it had become worse. Only 28 per cent reported an improvement in their health.

Generally, participants reported undertaking healthy activities such as regular exercise (71%), healthy eating (65%), and, to a lesser degree, receiving healthcare and/or treatment (59%). One quarter reported receiving drug treatment, and about 40 per cent reported that they had reduced their drug use. More than one third reported they had been sleeping better than in the past.

Thirty-four per cent of the participants rated their wellbeing (defined as mental and emotional health) as good or very good, 36 per cent rated their wellbeing as average and 30 per cent rated it as not good or poor. When asked about what had affected their wellbeing, nearly two-thirds of the interviewed participants indicated that relationship issues affected their wellbeing. About 43 per cent cited accommodation issues associated with homelessness as affecting their wellbeing. Financial difficulties and unemployment were also mentioned by many (26% and 24% respectively). Physical health, alcohol and drug use, psychological health, and emotional problems also had an effect on wellbeing. A small percentage cited problems with education and/or training, and with transport.

Figure 3: Circumstances affecting YP’s participants’ wellbeing

![Bar chart showing per cent of participants affected by various factors.]

Source: YP’s zero-month interviews

Participants’ connection to community

More than half the interviewed participants did not feel connected to a community. Only 39 per cent said they felt connected to either a local community or a network of people with similar interests. Fourteen per cent participated in community activities such as sports, clubs, or organised groups. About 80 per cent of the participants had someone who was outside their family (not a worker in an agency) who they could talk to if they were worried about something. Three-quarters had someone they could ask for help if practical assistance was needed, for example assistance with lifting something heavy if moving house. These levels of community connectedness are much lower than in the broader community, where 98 per cent of young people had someone they could talk to, and 93 per cent had someone they could ask for assistance (ABS 2006a). More than 70 per cent of the
YP<sup>4</sup> participants said that they use community facilities such as parks, libraries and swimming pools. The most popular facility to be accessed was parks (43%), followed by swimming pools (29%) and libraries (28%). Some participants reported using only one of these facilities while others reported using two or three.

Our findings revealed that YP<sup>4</sup> participants have experienced multiple disruptions and intersecting forms of disadvantage. The picture that emerges from our research is of people persevering in the face of multiple barriers, in contrast to myths about young unemployed people as ‘job-snobs’ or ‘job-shy’. Participants had been employed in the past and aspired to similar employment in the future. They had typically worked in hospitality, retail and customer service, labouring and factory work and when asked, participants were most commonly looking for any kind of work.

The complexity of disadvantage our participants live with suggests that models of service delivery that have a single focus are unlikely to be successful in providing these people with the opportunities they are seeking. This underscores the rationale for YP<sup>4</sup>. Joined up services may be what makes a difference for our participants. Our next report will present and examine evidence about any differences between J and S group participants following the delivery of joined up services to the J group.

**Joined up practice in YP<sup>4</sup>**

Six principles underpin YP<sup>4</sup>. First, housing, employment and personal support must be interlocked and delivered as an integrated package of assistance. Second, the integration of housing, employment and personal support assistance must happen at every level, not just at the level of casework but also at systemic and structural levels. Third, sustainable employment is understood as the over-arching goal, which must determine the way that other forms of support are provided. Fourth, it is relationships, and not transactions, that count. Fifth, solutions must be locally specific, and joined up locally too, and sixth, coordinated case management is the key and it must be well resourced enough to ensure individualised, timely and flexible responses.

It follows that the key components of the YP<sup>4</sup> service model are:

- Resourced case management
- Access to a flexible pool of resources
- Timely, individualised assistance
- Negotiated pathways to employment, which could include mentoring, work experience, vocational training and/or subsidised employment
- Commitment to secure, affordable housing and a living wage

In practice, YP<sup>4</sup> combines funding and other resources from the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), Personal Support Program (PSP), Job Network, JPET, and other programs and applies them more flexibly for young homeless jobseekers.

Following a series of four workshops in 2006/7 at which YP<sup>4</sup> case managers critically reflected on their own practice, the four aspects of YP<sup>4</sup>’s service delivery model most valued by case managers became clear. They are:

1. the longer, two-year timeframe for working with clients;
2. the breadth of focus that case managers are able to take with their clients, incorporating a focus not only on employment, but also on housing, health, family connection as well as a range of other matters;
3. having the capacity to work flexibly and creatively, without some of the traditional constraints associated with funded programs, such as narrowly defined eligibility criteria, timeframes and outcomes; and
4. the greater attention given to partnership with other service providers, which is a feature of the trial.

Other essential elements of good joined up practice identified by YP case managers in these workshops included:
- The importance and centrality of the relationship with participants
- A flexible approach, tailored to the participant
- A strength-based focus, in which case managers support participants in identifying and building on their existing strengths, rather than focusing on any perceived deficit
- Creativity and artistry in practice. By this, case managers are referring to the important role of intuition and acknowledging that case management is more like art than science.
- A significant role in advocacy
- Seeking to respect participant choices and assisting participants in retaining their dignity
- Protection of personal credibility (both with participants and other workers), which takes on a heightened importance when working in partnership
- Clearly articulated boundaries between personal and professional life.

Working with other agencies is critical to delivering a joined up service. In this regard, YP case managers note that:
- Managing relationships with other services is time-consuming and requires lots of energy and goodwill;
- Dependence on others can be difficult, especially when there is not a shared understanding of the importance of the task or agreement about what is to be done;
- We struggle to be respected and tend to be tentative and careful in how we ask for assistance from others;
- Assessment of other services is an ongoing or continual process; and
- Personal flexibility is (again) critical.

To understand the types of community service organisations with which YP case managers maintain relationships, and the number, type and quality of these relationships, all YP case managers were surveyed in January 2007. Survey results showed that, across the four trial sites, YP case managers had in total 337 relationships with external agencies and services. Each YP case manager had between 19 and 67 relationships with distinct and independent local services. As expected, most relationships were with housing services and employment services. Thirty (45%) of the relationships with employment services were with Job Network Members. Case managers expressed a wish to have more relationships with community health centres, mental health services and drug and alcohol services, especially detoxification programs.

Most of the case managers’ relationships with other community services organisations were deemed ‘cooperative’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘minimal but active’. Less than one in every hundred relationships was reported as being a genuinely collaborative partnership. The partnerships reported as genuinely collaborative by YP case managers were with Centrelink, a Job Network member and a psychologist in private practice.

The number and nature of local relationships helps to illustrate the size and complexity of the service system that homeless jobseekers navigate and negotiate on a potentially daily basis. It also demonstrates the enormity of the task facing case managers in their effort to sustain their networks and diverse professional relationships. Exhortations to work in partnership need to be matched both by an understanding of the level of effort involved and adequate resources to build and sustain strong relationships.
References


