



Jesuit Social Services

**Victorian State Election Platform:
Education, Training and Employment**

November 2018



**Jesuit
Social Services**
Building a Just Society

The Victorian State Election

Elections are times for asking what kind of a society we want. They invite us to name our own vision. At election times, too, politicians offer us their visions for a good society. We have a responsibility to assess what they offer, and have an opportunity to advocate for change.

Jesuit Social Services accompanies and works with people and communities who are excluded and isolated.

Our work with people on the margins draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on. This understanding challenges us to take account of these challenges in our accompaniment and our advocacy. We bring together 'doing' and 'influencing' to ensure our programs and advocacy are shaped by our practice wisdom, evidence and rich heritage.

We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion.

We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them onto a pathway to education, training and employment.

Our doing and influencing spans:

- Disadvantaged and marginalised communities
- People with complex and multiple needs
- People involved or at-risk of entering the youth and adult justice systems
- Boys and men who are in trouble or causing trouble
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People and families seeking asylum
- Education, training and employment

The experiences of vulnerable people are diverse. So are their needs. Effective responses demand programs that can be tailored to individual needs, constant adaptation for successful delivery, and sustained commitment from governments. Above all, they must be founded on the recognition that every human being deserves a second chance.

Education, training and employment

Education, training and employment play a powerful role in addressing many of the overlapping issues facing highly vulnerable people in our community. The promotion of education, lifelong learning and capacity building is fundamental to the work of Jesuit Social Services.

Education is a protective factor against justice involvement. Disengagement from education can often be the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory into anti-social behaviour and potential involvement with the youth justice system.¹ Jesuit Social Services' Navigator program has been successful in reaching out to young people at risk and re-engaging them with school, TAFE or other pathways to education and employment.

When re-engaging with education and training, or entering the Victorian training system for the first time as a recently arrived migrant, support is vital. Flexible and adaptive education and training strategies, which encourage and promote success for individuals with low confidence in their abilities, are integral to this support.

Long-term unemployment is a feature of the complex disadvantage many Victorian communities face. Jesuit Social Services works with people who are often unable to access work experience and employment opportunities without support to overcome barriers to employment and improve their readiness for work. This includes Victorians from disadvantaged families who are experiencing generational unemployment, who may have left school early, or who have been involved in the justice system.

Our research work into locational disadvantage over the past 20 years, through our *Dropping Off the Edge*² series, vividly highlights the need for place-based responses. Approaches that partner with communities in need to create pathways to employment are an effective means to break the ongoing cycle of unemployment, disadvantage, and poverty.

There are a number of current Government initiatives that are making a difference in addressing these issues. These must be continued, and more needs to be done.

We call on the next elected Victorian Government to look at long-term initiatives that support people in education, training and employment, and which are targeted to communities experiencing disadvantage, to create jobs and pathways to employment.

Our asks

We call for the next state government to:

- Continue to expand investment in Navigator to meet growing demand and lower the age of eligibility to 10, to support vulnerable children at risk of disengaging from education.
- Develop long-term place-based initiatives targeted to communities of greatest disadvantage, that work with community, industry and employers to create real jobs and pathways to employment, particularly for young people.
- Continue to provide and expand education, training and employment pathways that support people facing barriers to employment.

Continue to expand investment in Navigator to meet growing demand and lower the age of eligibility to 10, to support vulnerable children at risk of disengaging from education.

To keep children and young people on track, early intervention is crucial.

Disengagement from school is often a precursor to contact with the youth justice system. The Youth Parole Board Annual Report for 2017-18 found that of a snapshot of young people involved with the justice system, more than half (65 per cent) of those in youth detention had previously been suspended or expelled from school.³

If we support children at a young age, when they start to show signs of disengaging from education, we can keep the community safer by preventing future involvement in the justice system.

The Navigator program has been successful in reaching out to young people at risk and re-engaging them with school, TAFE or other pathways to education and employment.

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the Victorian Government's expansion of the program statewide, as announced in the 2018/19 budget.

There is an opportunity to do more. Our experience delivering the program has highlighted a need to start **even earlier** to identify and engage children at the first signs of trouble, before problems become entrenched.

For this reason, Jesuit Social Services is calling on the elected Victorian government to:

- lower the eligibility of the Navigator program from 12 to 10 years old.
- trial new programs that work in a holistic and restorative way with children aged 8-14 years, such as group conferencing, engaging families and schools to address the risk factors that may lead to offending in the future.

Develop long-term place-based initiatives targeted to communities of greatest disadvantage, that work with community, industry and employers to create real jobs and pathways to employment, particularly for young people.

Youth unemployment rates in Australia are currently more than double that of the unemployment of the general population.⁴ Youth unemployment is dire in some communities, with rates currently exceeding 20 per cent.⁵

In 2015, Jesuit Social Services along with Catholic Social Services Australia released the findings of its fourth *Dropping off the Edge* report.⁶ We found that disadvantage is concentrated in particular postcodes, evidenced by poor performance across a number of measures such as employment, educational attainment, health, technology access and justice involvement. Those living in the three per cent most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria are three times more likely to be experiencing long-term unemployment than the broader Victorian population. We know that disadvantage is persistent and entrenched in some Australian communities, and that this has a significant effect on young people.

The OECD has conducted research into local strategies for youth unemployment, identifying that it is often at the local level that government policies can be integrated and combined with place-based initiatives to provide multidimensional responses to complex problems. From their analysis of various case studies and initiatives, a number of key lessons emerged, including the need to:

- put in place the right incentives and success measurement to support collaboration and target action on critical areas
- improve data availability and understand any local mismatch of supply and demand of particular skills
- support sectoral approaches to bring together educational institutions, industry organisations, employment agencies and government departments to develop career pathways and connect young people to the local economy, and
- monitor the implementation of programmes and evaluate success.

Given the overlapping needs and web of disadvantage some communities face, any approach aiming to achieve a genuine and effective place-based response must incorporate a range of appropriate supports. A place-based approach must encompass interventions across all facets and stages of life, including early childhood, school, mental health, justice and crime prevention, and at the same time, build the capacities and resources of local communities.

We call on the elected government to develop long-term place-based initiatives targeted to communities of greatest disadvantage, that work with community, industry and employers to create real jobs and pathways to employment, particularly for young people.

At the same time, solutions to these issues do not rest with the State government alone. The State government, in partnership with private sector employers, the community sector, and local government employers, have a key role to play in providing employment opportunities for young people leaving school.

We propose that the elected Victorian government introduce a Local Community Traineeship Program offering three days of paid employment in conjunction with structured vocational training, for at least twelve months, for young people who have left school and are without employment or any reasonable prospects of employment. This major initiative to break the cycle of disadvantage would initially target areas and communities of high social disadvantage and need. To make a significant impact, it is proposed that the initial response is a three-year program commitment to these areas of high social need.

Continue to provide and expand education, training and employment pathways that support people facing barriers to employment.

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. For example, individuals who have lost work at an older age and been unable to secure new employment, who have left school early or arrived as refugees, who experience poor mental health, or who have been involved in the justice system, may experience significant barriers to securing employment.

Access to pre-accredited training provides an opportunity to successfully engage in education and enhance skills and work readiness. For some, this is the first such opportunity in many years. Through the pre-accredited training provided by Jesuit Social Services, participants gain the essential vocational and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to employment.

We call on the elected Victorian government to continue to provide and expand pre-accredited training programs delivered through the Adult, Community and Further Education Board, to support disengaged learners and people needing support to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.

The Skills First Reconnect initiative represents a critical support to people who have left school early, enabling them to re-enter education and training and begin improving and enhancing their vocational skills. It has enabled many hundreds of people to successfully undertake training. For many participants, this is not an achievement they may ever have thought themselves capable of, and often forms a critical first step in gaining work.

We call on the elected Victorian government to continue to provide and expand on the Skills First Reconnect initiative which identifies, engages and supports people with low levels of educational attainment into education and training and an employment pathway.

Current initiatives, such as the Jobs Victoria and Jobs Bank programs, have enabled organisations such as Jesuit Social Services to work closely with individuals to address issues affecting their ability to secure employment - their skills, their work readiness, their understanding of Australian workplace cultures - and to maintain employment once a job is secured. The programs enable individual support, provided over a longer period of time, and enhanced where necessary by tailored training. Jesuit Social Services has worked closely with employers to identify vacancies and provide suitable and reliable candidates. These programs offer support for Victorians who are not eligible for Commonwealth Government services, and who have previously been unsuccessful in securing employment, especially those Victorians who are also engaged with other State Government agencies.

We call on the elected Victorian government to continue to expand investment in Victorian jobs initiatives, particularly targeted to Victorians who experience significant barriers to employment and who may also be engaged with State Government programs, such as those delivered by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice and Regulation.

Endnotes

- 1 Youth Parole Board. (2017). Annual Report 2016-17. Retrieved from https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge_cache/emshare/original/public/2018/08/2f/7a73bdaeb/youth_parole_board_annual_report_2016-17.pdf
- 2 Vinson, T., & Rawsthorne, M. (2015). *Dropping Off the Edge 2015: Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia*. Melbourne, Vic.: Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.
- 3 Youth Parole Board. (2018). Annual Report 2017-18. Retrieved from https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge_cache/emshare/original/public/
- 4 Brotherhood of St Laurence. (2018). *An unfair Australia?: Mapping youth unemployment hotspots*. Retrieved from http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/10573/1/BSL_Unfair_Australia_Mapping_youth_unemployment_hotspots_Mar2018.pdf
- 5 Ibid.