

# LEARNING SNAPSHOT

This is an overview of best practice design recommendations for programmes that prepare young people for and connect them to work. These recommendations are drawn from a case study, the YearBeyond programme, and are intended as a guide for other youth programmes, funders and government working on building youth capability and reducing youth unemployment. It is supplemented by a more comprehensive learning brief on the same topic.

## Youth programme design and delivery: lessons from YearBeyond



### The problem

South Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world.<sup>1</sup> One in three young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET),<sup>2</sup> and this number is set to rise.<sup>3</sup>

The longer a young person remains NEET, the harder it is to get into or back into the labour market.<sup>4</sup> Long-term economic exclusion drives income poverty, poor health, alienation, risk-taking and substance abuse,<sup>5</sup> and leads to long-term dependency on the state.

### What do young people need?

Job creation is not keeping pace with demand,<sup>6</sup> and only 4.3% of jobs created from 2009 to 2019 went to under-35s.<sup>7</sup> First and foremost, youth need more jobs.

But even when jobs are available, young people struggle to find, access and hold onto them. They also struggle to access further study or launch their own businesses. Multiple, overlapping conditions of deprivation and exclusion create these barriers to job-seeking.<sup>8</sup>

Further, many are not well-prepared for work or study: they have not developed core skills, like communication or problem-solving, struggle to navigate workplace relationships and lack the stamina to show up daily to a full-time job.

These young people often drop out when they hit a challenge or roadblock, or fail to move on to the next opportunity, and re-enter the pool of NEETS.

1 World Bank 2023

2 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

3 PWC 2023

4 Graham et al 2013

5 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

6 Statistics South Africa 2023; Lucha Lunako 2020

7 Youth Capital 2023

8 de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

To access and stay in the labour market, they first need to cross a “bridge” – between their capabilities and circumstances, and readiness to find and seize opportunities. To build that bridge, they need generic skills development, work experience, mentoring, psycho-social support, the right mindset to leverage opportunities and help navigating transitions.

## YearBeyond: a best-practice case study

To prepare young people to navigate the labour market with competence, agency and resilience, and to ultimately connect them to work and further study opportunities, programmes need to be carefully designed and effectively delivered, drawing on research, best practice and experience.

The YearBeyond programme, launched in 2014, offers important lessons for other youth programmes. Each year, at least 75% of participants access a new opportunity within three months of completing the YearBeyond programme – which means they are more likely to stay engaged in the labour market.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally:

- The Programme builds **emotional resilience, agency, interpersonal skills and leadership**.<sup>10</sup>
- Alumni are **more hopeful**, more satisfied with their lives and **more confident**.
- **70% of alumni continue volunteering** in their communities after completing the Programme.

### About YearBeyond

YearBeyond (YeBo) is a youth service programme that connects young people ages 18-25 to opportunities. In the programme, participants:

- **gain work experience** by volunteering to deliver social programmes (like academic catch-up or mental health support);
- **develop core skills and work readiness** through weekly sessions, coaching and mentoring, work and study fairs and practice interviews; and
- **build their networks** and are supported to access their next work, study or training opportunity.

YeBo reached **3535** young people in the Western and Eastern Cape in 2023 and is poised to scale to other provinces.

<sup>9</sup> Gadsby 2019

<sup>10</sup> YearBeyond 2019

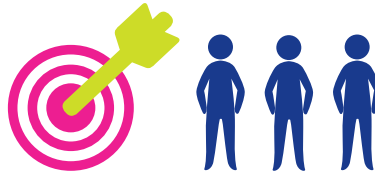
# Key insights for youth programme design



To achieve this success, YearBeyond has identified **ten key insights** that provide input to inform the design of other youth programmes. These insights fall into three categories:

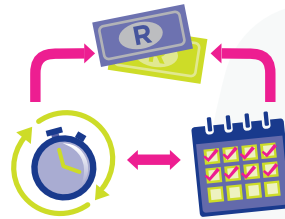
## 1. Who is it for?

- Targeting



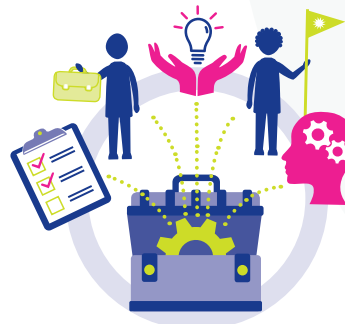
## 2. How is it structured?

- Stipends
- Full-Time vs Part-Time
- Duration



## 3. What does it offer?

- General Skills and Competencies
- Practical Work Experience
- High-Quality Mentoring and Coaching
- Connections to Opportunity and Transition Support
- Wellbeing Support
- Sense of Purpose and Belonging



The table on the following page summarises YearBeyond's key design insights and why they are effective. More information about how YeBo applies and implements these insights is available in the accompanying learning brief, *Best practice in youth programme design and delivery: lessons from YearBeyond*.

## Designing an effective youth programme: insights and rationale

	Insight	Rationale
<b>Who is the programme for?</b>		
Targeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on young people ages 18-25.</li> <li>Target “survivors”, not “thrivers”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catching young people early prevents long-term NEET-hood.<sup>11</sup></li> <li>“Thrivers” are likely to leave the programme for a better opportunity.</li> </ul>
<b>How is the programme structured?</b>		
Stipends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set pay slightly below the minimum wage.</li> <li>Offer a stipend for volunteering, rather than a salary.</li> <li>Consider a “pitch-and-pay” approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people need a sense of progression and movement. A stipend below minimum wage makes entry-level jobs a more attractive next step.</li> <li>Stipends below minimum wage attract the right candidates – not those who can secure minimum-wage jobs without support.</li> <li>Pay-for-work builds “work fitness”.</li> </ul>
Full-time vs part-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make programmes full-time if “work fitness” is a key goal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly 40% of NEET young people come from homes where no adult works and lack a blueprint for labour market participation.<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Youth often take monthly sick leave because they are tired or drop out as soon as they hit a “traction wobble”.</li> <li>Full-time commitment builds “work fitness” stamina and competence.</li> </ul>
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit bridging programmes to 6-24 months, based on intention and available resources. (YeBo is 10 months.)</li> <li>Only allow participation once.</li> <li>Sequence activities wisely to reduce dropout.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One year is long enough to develop required skills, but short enough that young people need to launch themselves and do not get stuck.</li> <li>Introducing career pathing activities too early in the programme increases dropout.</li> </ul>
<b>What does the programme offer to young people?</b>		
General skills and competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritise general, transferrable skills and mindsets.</li> <li>Spend at least 2 weeks on developing generic skills. (YeBo spends 5 weeks.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General, transferable skills are important predictors of labour force participation, higher pay and social inclusion.<sup>13</sup></li> <li>Spending at least 2 weeks on these skills leads to better outcomes.<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>
Practical work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer work or volunteering experience.</li> <li>Consider a “service learning” approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programmes that provide real-world opportunities to apply new skills are more effective.<sup>15</sup></li> <li>Delivering social programmes benefits communities and gives young people a sense of purpose.</li> <li>A dual beneficiary approach can attract more funding and partners.</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Gadsby 2019; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

<sup>12</sup> Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

<sup>13</sup> Lucha Lunako 2020

<sup>14</sup> Graham et al 2019

<sup>15</sup> Lucha Lunako 2020

<p>High-quality mentoring and coaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer in-person, developmental mentoring and coaching.</li> <li>• Ensure mentor quality through standardised, easy-to-deliver curriculum, experiential in-person training, clear guidelines and regular action learning and reflection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmes that include mentoring are more effective.<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• Mentor quality is critical to programme success.<sup>17</sup></li> <li>• Mentor expectations need to be achievable for a range of skill levels.</li> </ul>
<p>Connections to opportunity and transition support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a structured approach to help participants find opportunities.</li> <li>• Expose participants to a wide range of options.</li> <li>• Build skills and confidence via practical experiences like practice interviews.</li> <li>• Position entry-level jobs as a stepping stone.</li> <li>• Recommend well-matched candidates to employers.</li> <li>• Raise awareness about first time workers' capabilities and needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people are more likely to stay out of NEET-hood if they access a new opportunity within 3 months of completing a youth programme.<sup>18</sup></li> <li>• Matching is a strong predictor of successful employment, higher earnings, reduced time unemployed and work-seeking resilience.<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• Young people can see minimum-wage jobs as a dead end. These need to be reframed as a “toe in the door” and an opportunity to grow.</li> <li>• SA creates few jobs for youth skills.<sup>20</sup> Offering well-matched candidates can grow demand for first-time workers.</li> <li>• Workplaces are not always youth-friendly.</li> </ul>
<p>Well-being support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer holistic well-being support, including workshops, counselling and crisis support, self-help tools and mentoring.</li> <li>• Cater for young people's diverse needs.</li> <li>• Build strong referral networks that can address trauma and personal challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-thirds of NEET South Africans live in income poverty.<sup>21</sup></li> <li>• Young people face multiple, intertwined challenges,<sup>22</sup> and many cope with trauma due to adverse experiences.<sup>23</sup></li> <li>• Young people often drop out when they hit a challenge and need to develop problem-solving skills and resilience to navigate obstacles.</li> <li>• Programmes that avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach and tailor multiple services to individual needs are more effective.<sup>24</sup></li> </ul>
<p>Sense of purpose and belonging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build self-efficacy and purpose in the curriculum.</li> <li>• Offer volunteering or service opportunities.</li> <li>• Connect young people as part of a larger movement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-efficacy is highly valued in the labour market.<sup>25</sup></li> <li>• Programmes are more effective when they focus on finding purpose and a vision for life-long development (rather than just landing a job).<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>

16 Lucha Lunako 2020; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

17 Western Cape Government 2019

18 Gadsby 2019

19 Graham et al 2019

20 Lucha Lunako 2020; Youth Capital 2023

21 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

22 de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

23 Richter et al 2018

24 Kluge et al 2019; Graham et al 2016; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

25 Lucha Lunako 2020

26 Lucha Lunako 2020

## Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for NEET young people or designing programmes to support them. However, the problem of youth unemployment is so large, and has such grave consequences, that we do not have time to reinvent the wheel.

This learning snapshot has codified the design choices, underpinned by research and action learning, that consistently enable YearBeyond to transition more than three-quarters of its alumni to their next opportunity. These learnings can help other youth programmes sharpen their design and delivery, and support more young people on a journey from surviving to thriving.

Our young people deserve it.

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