



LEARNING BRIEF

Best practice in youth programme
design and delivery: lessons from
YearBeyond



INTRODUCTION

South Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world.¹ **Sixty-two percent of young people ages 15-24 are unemployed**,² and **1 in 3 are not in education, employment or training** (NEET).³

The state and the private sector have spent billions of rands to help young people access jobs and further study. But because many young people are ill-prepared for these opportunities, they often drop out, or struggle to find the next opportunity once one has ended.

What is often missing is a “bridge”: between NEET young people’s capabilities and circumstances, and their ability to find, access and hold onto opportunities.

To cross that bridge, young people need mentorship, work experience, generic skills and competencies, the right mindset to leverage opportunities, psycho-social support and help navigating transitions.

Employers are not always well-positioned to meet these needs – nor should they be expected to. This is why **bridging programmes that prepare young people for opportunities are critical to addressing youth unemployment. As part of a continuum of interventions that includes social protection, internships and job placement, they are unique in that they:**

- Are positioned as a stepping stone;
- Build general competencies (rather than industry-specific skills);
- Offer holistic support; and
- Cultivate vision and a sense of purpose.

To prepare young people to navigate the labour market with competence, resilience, networks and agency, bridging programmes need to be carefully designed and effectively delivered, drawing on research, best practice and experience.

YearBeyond, a youth service programme initiated by the Western Cape Government, is a powerful case study that demonstrates how best-practice design and delivery can effectively move NEET young people onto a path of opportunity and agency. The Programme currently operates in the Western and Eastern Cape, with plans for expansion into other provinces.

This learning brief explores:

- Why youth bridging programmes are needed to sustainably tackle youth unemployment;
- Bridging programmes’ unique role *vis a vis* other efforts to link young people to jobs; and
- Best practice recommendations for design and delivery, drawing on the YearBeyond programme as a case study.

¹ World Bank 2023

² Statistics South Africa 2023. “Unemployed” is defined as the population of young people who are willing and able to work but not working.

³ Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

WHY DOES SOUTH AFRICA NEED BRIDGING PROGRAMMES?

Among South Africans ages 15-24:

1 in 3 are **NEET** (not in education, employment or training)

Among those actively looking for work:

4 in 5 have never had a job

4 in 5 have been looking for a year or more

1 in 5 have been looking for more than 5 years⁴

In South Africa, one in three young people ages 15 to 24 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).⁵

This is not because young people are disengaged: South African youth generally have high aspirations,⁶ and two-thirds of NEETs ages 15-24 are actively searching for or keen to work.⁷ But they are thwarted by structural constraints and by multiple, overlapping conditions of deprivation and exclusion.⁸

Job creation is not keeping pace with demand: in 2018, there were 17 job seekers for every vacancy advertised.⁹ And jobs are not well-matched to youth skills: only 4.3% of jobs created from 2009 to 2019 went to people under 35.¹⁰

Even when jobs are available, young people struggle to access them due to the high cost of work-seeking, limited social networks and a lack of information about how to find and apply for jobs.¹¹ A 2022 Youth Capital survey found that 8 in 10 young people have to choose between buying food and looking for work.¹²

This situation has grave consequences for individuals, their families and society. The longer a young person remains NEET, the harder it is to get into or back into the labour market.¹³ They are more likely to experience long-term income poverty, poor physical and mental health, strained family relationships, alienation and disengagement and a sense of despair and failure; and to engage in risk-taking behaviour and substance abuse¹⁴ – a vicious cycle that makes it even harder to participate in the labour market. Ultimately, this leads to lifelong dependency on the state and drives up criminal justice, policing, health and social grant costs.

4 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

5 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

6 de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

7 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

8 de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

9 Lucha Lunako 2020

10 Youth Capital 2023

11 Graham et al 2016; Graham et al 2019; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

12 Youth Capital 2022

13 Graham et al 2019

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

Addressing youth unemployment has been a government, business and civil society priority for decades.¹⁵ Efforts to reduce NEET-hood have reached millions of people and drove an estimated R20 billion per year in state spending by 2020.¹⁶

Estimated annual reach of efforts to reduce youth unemployment (2020):



GOVERNMENT:

1 million young people participated in public employment programmes



TVETs AND CETs¹⁷:

1 million young people participated in vocational and skills training or second chance programmes



PRIVATE SECTOR:

1 million young people received work readiness and job placement support



CIVIL SOCIETY:

Hundreds of thousands participated in youth development programmes¹⁸

Despite this, South Africa has struggled to make a meaningful dent in the problem. Lack of coordination between government agencies and low accountability, inefficient matching of young people to jobs, poor understanding of what drives employer hiring preferences, a poor basic education system, lack of sustained economic growth and persistent individual and household level barriers all contribute to this stagnation.¹⁹ Further, programmes to address youth unemployment often have poor quality implementation, are disconnected from young people's realities²⁰ and fail to acknowledge or address young people's trauma and holistic needs.²¹

This means 3.4 million South Africans ages 15-24 remain on the margins of society²² – and that number is set to rise.²³

Innovative, evidence-based approaches, developed and iterated in response to young people's lived experiences, are needed to turn the tide – and bridging programmes are a critical part of the solution.

15 Graham et al 2019

16 Lucha Lunako 2020

17 Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges and Community Education and Training Colleges

18 Lucha Lunako 2020

19 de Lannoy et al 2018

20 de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

21 Lucha Lunako 2020


22 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

23 PWC 2023

WHAT ROLE DO BRIDGING PROGRAMMES PLAY IN TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT?

Youth bridging programmes focus on *preparing young people to seize a variety of opportunities*.

They are distinct from social protection programmes, internships and skills programmes and formal employment. Each of these plays an important role, and they exist on a continuum, as shown below:



	SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES	BRIDGING PROGRAMMES	INTERNSHIPS AND SKILLS PROGRAMMES	FORMAL EMPLOYMENT
PURPOSE	Provide an income floor to smooth consumption and reduce emergency need.	Support transition to work by building key competencies and growing networks and connections into the economy.	Prepare for a specific job or industry by strengthening industry-specific skills and pipelining into employment.	Deliver a specific job and gain work experience
CHARACTERISTICS	Fixed-term or open-ended Stipend Part-time Focus on sense of purpose, self-worth	Time-limited Stipend Full- or part-time Focus on general skills, competencies and mindsets for work	Time-limited Stipend Focus on technical skills for a specific job/sector	Fixed-term or open-ended Salary Less skills development and support
EXAMPLES	Community Work Programme (CWP) Social Employment Fund (SEF) Some Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) programmes	YearBeyond Premier's Advancement of Youth (PAY) Programme Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) Youth Employment Service (YES)	Work and Skills Apprenticeship Learnerships and internships offered by various SETAs, government departments and private companies	Formal employment Some Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) programmes

Public funding and the national conversation tend to focus largely on formal employment and public employment programmes that provide short-term work opportunities. Bridging programmes are often seen as too expensive because they provide more intensive support.

However, many young people are not ready to thrive in a job – and many companies are ill-equipped to support them when they arrive in the workplace. As a result, many young people drop out of jobs as soon as they hit a “traction wobble” – a challenge at work or at home that they lack the skills or support to navigate.

Young people also want to feel a sense of progression and upward mobility. Many are unwilling to “go backwards” – to accept a lower salary or less prestigious job – even when they need to fill gaps in work readiness and personal development. As a result, young people who dive straight into jobs before they are ready and then drop out often get stuck in the pool of long-term NEETS.

For this reason, bridging programmes play a critical role. They prepare young people to make the most of any opportunity by providing more extensive support than workplaces can offer. This reduces poor performance and dropout once they access employment – which saves companies money and improves productivity and delivery.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF BRIDGING PROGRAMMES:

- **A stepping stone:** they are time-limited, only let young people participate once and may pay below minimum wage (e.g. a stipend for volunteering).
- **Core skills:** they focus on generic competencies, skills and mindsets that aid young people in any job or entrepreneurial activity.
- **Practical experience:** they include hands-on work or service experience to apply new skills and build “work fitness” and stamina.
- **Developmental approach:** they generally use coaching and mentoring in place of disciplinary approaches, to support problem-solving and resilience.
- **Holistic support:** they recognise the complex conditions of exclusion and deprivation that young people face and offer psycho-social and wellbeing support.
- **Vision and purpose:** they cultivate self-efficacy, agency and vision, helping young people to see each opportunity as part of a bigger journey.
- **Service and volunteerism:** they often take a “youth service” approach, positioning young people as assets who can make a difference in their communities.

THE YEARBEYOND PROGRAMME: A BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

YearBeyond (YeBo) is a youth service programme for 18- to 25-year-olds who are NEET that prepares them for and connects them to opportunities. In 2023, 3535 young people benefited from the Programme.

YeBo offers a ten-month “bridge” that prepares young people (known as YeBoneers) to become economically active, via:

- **Meaningful work experience:** YeBoneers receive a stipend for delivering social programmes, like academic support in Grades 3-4 or ICT support in libraries.
- **Training, mentoring and coaching:** YeBoneers develop core competencies and work readiness through weekly “Future Fit” sessions, coaching and mentoring, job fairs and practice interviews. They also have access to psycho-social and mental health support.
- **Connections:** YearBeyond builds YeBoneers’ networks and helps graduates find work, training and further study opportunities through pathway and progression support.

YeBo’s **dual beneficiary approach** benefits both YeBoneers and the people they serve, by harnessing young people’s skills and talents to give back to their communities. YeBo uses a **social franchise model** to scale its impact: partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) run YearBeyond programmes, hire mentors and supervise young people, while YearBeyond’s head office provides tested models, training, systems and platforms for scale, progression and placement services and a contribution to partner NGOs’ operating costs.

Since its inception by the Western Cape Government in 2014, YearBeyond has helped move NEET young people into opportunities. Each year, at least three-quarters of participants²⁴ access their next opportunity within three months of completing the Programme. Evaluations show that the Programme has built participants’ emotional resilience, encouraged them to exercise agency, helped them navigate conflict and complex team dynamics and taught them to lead effectively.²⁵ Alumni are more hopeful, more satisfied with their lives and more confident.

In the long term, by reducing the number of people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), YearBeyond is reducing dependency on the state, growing the economy and moving families out of intergenerational poverty.

“Most of our young people have no working adults in their household and are dependent on the state. We are helping to launch young people to change that trajectory – not just for them, but for their families and for the next generation.”

- Jacqui Boulle, Head: Youth and After School Programme, Western Cape Government

²⁴ Progression rates since YeBo was launched range from 74% to 82%; the average from 2019-2022 was 77%.
²⁵ YearBeyond 2019

UNPACKING YEBO'S DESIGN: BEST PRACTICE BUILDING BLOCKS

Since its launch in 2014, YearBeyond has identified and implemented ten key elements in its design and delivery that contribute to its success. These fall into three categories:



Best practice design and delivery for bridging programmes:
key elements

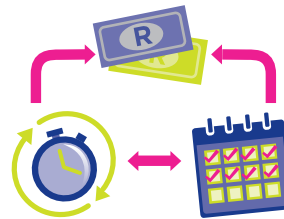
1. Who is it for?

- 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



Each key design element is unpacked below, drawing on the evidence base and YeBo's experience to summarise recommendations for other youth bridging programmes.

1. Who is the programme for?



Key takeaways:

- Focus on young people ages 18-25 to prevent long-term NEET-hood.
- Target the “survivors” not the “thrivers” – survivors benefit most from the programme.
- “Work with will” – those who are most eager for the opportunity.

YeBo targets young people ages 18 to 25. While all young people who are NEET deserve support, it is most effective to focus on preventing young people from becoming long-term NEETs in the first place.²⁶ The longer they are NEET, the harder it is to access opportunities and the more ‘scarring’ takes place.²⁷

Young people tend to fall into three categories:

- **Thrivers**, who are likely to succeed with or without YeBo – they were at the top of their class, have a tertiary qualification, or have social networks and connections;
- **Survivors**, hustlers who are focused on day-to-day survival, but have an appetite to grow and develop; and
- People who have **lost hope** and would require immense investment to benefit from YeBo.

Thrivers may look like the best candidates on paper, but they often leave the Programme mid-year as soon as a higher-paid opportunity comes along. YeBo's goal is to find the survivors and help them to become thrivers – even if they do not interview as well or do not have the best matric marks.

Intrinsic motivation is critical to succeed in the Programme but is hard to train. In recruitment, YeBo looks for the young people who are most eager for the opportunity.

Programme structure helps with targeting, as discussed below.



Often, those who interview well are the ones who look good on paper. But they are often the thrivers already – the ones who will drop out because they will go to something better. The money isn't enough. We would rather take the people who don't interview so well, because there's more room for them to grow within the year.”

- Carrie Mashek, Education Portfolio Manager: YearBeyond

²⁶ Gadsby 2019

²⁷ de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

2. How is the programme structured?



Stipends

Key takeaways:

- Set pay slightly below the National Minimum Wage so minimum wage jobs will be a “step up”.
- Offer a stipend for volunteering, or a chance to “earn while studying,” rather than a salary.
- Consider a “pitch-and-pay” approach to build work fitness.

YearBeyond pays young people a stipend of up to R3300 per month (~75% of the National Minimum Wage²⁸) in exchange for volunteering. It uses a “pitch and pay” approach: participants are paid only for the days they attend, rather than a fixed monthly amount.

Minimum wage exists for important reasons: to prevent exploitation in the labour market and work towards a real living wage. Some public employment programmes, like the Community Work Programme and the Social Employment Fund, keep per-person costs down by creating part-time roles at minimum wage.

However, when a programme is clearly structured as a bridge, with a limited duration and once-off eligibility, it is more beneficial to peg payment slightly below the national minimum wage (NMW) and increase hours per week. This is because:

- Young people need a sense of progression in their careers. Paying below NMW positions minimum wage jobs as a step up, and participants are more motivated to take entry-level roles after their bridging year.
- It attracts the right candidates: those who can land minimum-wage jobs without bridging exit into the market and make way for others who need the stepping stone.
- Spending more time on task builds work fitness (see below).
- It allows the programme to reach more people with limited budgets.

Programmes must strike a fine balance: to encourage retention, the costs of participating in a bridging opportunity (like transport and childcare) should not outweigh the income. YeBoneers must live near their place of work to ensure stipends are not consumed by transport costs.

Programme participation is governed by an MOU, not an employment contract. This frees YeBo from a narrow, legalistic, employment-based frame of how to work with young people and enables a more developmental, coaching-focused approach.

²⁸ Based on the hourly NMW rate of R25.42 per hour as of March 2023, and an average of 21.67 working days per month.



Full-time vs. part-time

Key takeaway:

- Ask for full-time commitment if building “work fitness” is a programme goal.

After piloting both full-time and part-time models, YearBeyond learned that full-time is necessary to build “work fitness” and stamina. It is a full-time programme: young people volunteer four days a week and attend “Future Fit” sessions every Friday.

Nearly 40% of NEET young people come from households where no adult is working,²⁹ and do not have a blueprint for what it means to be part of the formal labour market. Young people who have never worked need to learn how to show up five days a week, eight hours a day. Many struggle: they take sick leave every month simply because they are tired, stop showing up mid-year when winter sets in or disappear as soon as they hit a personal or professional roadblock. Full-time commitment builds the stamina and competence to persevere.

Part-time work still has benefits: like full-time work, it offers regular income, dignity, community involvement, mental wellbeing, networks and a sense of purpose. However, it is a more appropriate strategy for programmes whose primary objective is to provide social protection, smooth income and consumption and take away emergency need, and less suitable for programmes that seek to prepare young people for work and study.



Duration

Key takeaways:

- Limit bridging programme duration to between 6 and 24 months, based on intention and available resources.
- Only allow participation once.
- Sequence activities wisely so that participants do not leave too early.

YearBeyond is a ten-month programme that runs from February to November each year. Young people are only eligible to participate once.

Building foundational skills, vision, connections and confidence takes time.³⁰ YeBo

²⁹ Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023

³⁰ Lucha Lunako 2020

sequences activities carefully throughout the year to encourage retention and communicates this journey to YeBoneers: when young people understand how each activity builds on the next, it improves outcomes.³¹

For example, activities that support progression and placement, like practice interviews and career fairs, only start in September, after young people have made substantial progress in personal and professional development. If they took place earlier, more YeBoneers would drop out of the Programme.

3. What does the programme offer to young people?



General skills and competencies

Key takeaways:

- Prioritise general, transferrable skills and mindsets.
- Spend at least two weeks (and more if possible) on general skills development.
- Provide clear competencies and examples of what they look like in practice.

Young people often lack key skills for workplace success, like effective communication, digital literacy, problem-solving, initiative and self-awareness. These skills, known as “socio-emotional”, “soft”, or “generic work readiness” skills, enable young people to learn further skills³² and are relevant across different work and study contexts (in contrast to industry- or role-specific technical skills). They are an important predictor of labour force participation, higher-paid jobs and social inclusion.³³

In a 2019 evaluation of eight South African youth employability programmes, participants in programmes that explicitly built these skills were more likely to find work, spent less time unemployed and were more persistent in seeking work. Outcomes were notably better when programmes spent at least two weeks on these skills.³⁴

YearBeyond offers 30 Future Fit sessions throughout the year (5 weeks in total) that address 24 topics, including time management, emotional intelligence, dealing with conflict, financial literacy and effective communication. YeBoneers practice and hone these skills in their volunteer placements.

YeBo has also developed a competency framework, with nine generic competencies and concrete examples of what each looks like in practice (see below). Each participant also develops three technical competencies linked to their service placement.

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32 Lucha Lunako 2020

33 Lucha Lunako 2020

34 Graham et al 2019

YeBoneers and their mentors assess progress against the framework three or four times a year. At the end of the year, they receive a personalised reference letter that highlights their best competencies and helps differentiate them to employers.

YearBeyond generic competency framework

Category	Competencies
Professionalism	Work Ready Effective Communicator Digitally Literate
Emotional Intelligence	Self-Aware Resilient Effective Relationship Manager
Agency	Initiative Taker Problem Solver Entrepreneurially Minded

INNOVATION CASE STUDY: RISING STARS AND GOLD STARS

Throughout the year, YeBoneers can qualify as “Rising Stars” if they meet attendance, submission and participation criteria. At year-end, Rising Stars who are rated “Proficient” in at least eight of 12 competencies become Gold Stars and enter the “top talent” pool.

This transparent system with real, tangible rewards – a personal recommendation to a prospective employer – stokes aspiration and motivates high achievement. It also helps YeBo to confidently recommend young people for jobs based on their specific skills.



Practical work experience

Key takeaways:

- Offer practical work experience so young people can apply new skills.
- A “service learning” approach can benefit communities, give young people a sense of purpose and attract more funding and partners.

Youth programmes are more effective when they include practical opportunities to apply new skills.³⁵

³⁵ Lucha Lunako 2020

YearBeyond offers work experience via a service learning model. After training, young people spend four days a week delivering social programmes that improve educational outcomes, social cohesion and wellbeing in their communities. These include in-school academic support, at-home learning, early childhood development, library support and scouting.

These placements give young people practical opportunities to:

- Practise punctuality, accountability and good communication skills;
- Negotiate workplace relationships, navigate conflict and problem-solve;
- Use digital tools to clock in and out and submit beneficiary data; and
- Build placement-linked skills including facilitation, learner support, customer service, research and community mobilisation.

YeBo's dual beneficiary approach leverages young people's talent and skills to make a meaningful difference in their communities. Positioning the work as "service learning" rather than "work experience" instils an ethos of giving back and a sense of purpose.

It has also helped YearBeyond mobilise a broad network of stakeholders and partners and attract more funding because it is tackling multiple social challenges at once.



High-quality mentoring and coaching

Key takeaways:

- Offer in-person developmental mentoring and coaching.
- Ensure mentor quality through standardised, easy-to-deliver curriculum, experiential face-to-face training, clear guidelines and regular action learning and reflection.

Young people need accessible role models, intensive personal interaction and clear expectations.³⁶ Programmes to help NEET young people are most effective when they include mentorship,³⁷ which helps tailor support to young people's diverse needs.³⁸ Mentor presence is not enough: mentor quality is critical.³⁹

YeBoneers receive individualised mentoring and coaching throughout the Programme. (This is usually in-person, though YeBo has piloted virtual mentoring in rural areas.) Sessions are built around the competency framework and take a developmental approach: poor performance is addressed via a coaching conversation rather than a disciplinary process.

³⁶ Lucha Lunako 2020

³⁷ de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

³⁸ Kluve et al 2019; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019

³⁹ Western Cape Government 2019

YearBeyond does not hire or manage mentors directly; they are based at partner organisations. To elevate and standardise mentor quality, YeBo:

- Caps the mentor-to-YeBoneer ratio at 1:30.
- Provides a standardised curriculum that can be delivered well by people with diverse skill levels.
- Runs three experiential, multi-day, face-to-face training blocks each year, where mentors practice delivering content, get feedback, reflect and problem-solve in a non-threatening, fun environment.
- Provides written guidelines for key processes, like interviewing and selection, practice interviews or dealing with performance issues.
- Uses routine action learning processes: head office staff observe, give feedback to and reflect with mentors, and revise the YeBo curriculum based on what mentors do well, what they struggle with, and how content lands with YeBoneers.
- Builds in exit points: while mentors are selected and employed by NGOs, YeBo must approve appointments and can veto if they are unsuitable.
- Established the YeBo Academy to train programme alumni as high-quality mentors.
- These efforts have largely been successful: young people often cite Future Fit sessions and their mentor as their favourite part of the Programme.

INNOVATION CASE STUDY: YEBO ACADEMY

Mentors are selected and managed by YearBeyond's social franchise partner organisations, not by YearBeyond directly, and have a variety of backgrounds and skill levels. This led to inconsistent quality of programme delivery.⁴⁰

To address this, YeBo established the YearBeyond Youth Academy, which trains YeBo alumni to become mentors. The one-year programme (which can be completed while working or studying part-time) creates enough distance for new mentors to effectively lead participants and hold them accountable. This innovation is creating a pipeline of mentors who understand and are passionate about the Programme.

40 Western Cape Government 2023



Connections to opportunity and transition support

Key takeaways:

- Implement a structured programme to help young people find opportunities.
- Expose young people to a wide range of options.
- Build skills and confidence via practical experiences like practice interviews.
- Position entry-level jobs as a stepping stone to overcome perceptions that they are a dead end.
- Tailor services to employers and educate them about what young people need.

Across eight South African youth programmes, matching – defined as bringing young people directly in contact with employers looking for their skills, and orienting training to employer expectations – was the strongest predictor of successful employment and higher earnings.⁴¹ It also reduced time spent unemployed, increased job applications and increased active work-seeking even after two years unemployed.⁴²

Each year, at least 75% of YeBoneers access their next opportunity within 3 months of completing the Programme – a time frame that means they are more likely to stay out of NEET-hood.⁴³ In 2022, 79% of YeBoneers achieved this target: 48% to work full-time, 13% to study full-time, and 18% to study part-time.

To achieve this high success rate, YeBo:

- Offers a comprehensive pathways and progression programme, including sessions on CVs, job searching and interviewing, a study fair and career fair, practice interviews and individualised reference letters.
- Works with a growing network of more than 100 “opportunity partners”, including large corporates, the public sector (particularly health, education, social work and municipalities), universities, TVET⁴⁴ colleges, SETAs⁴⁵, the Youth Employment Service (YES) and NGOs. YeBo researchers and networks proactively to reach new industries and lesser-known opportunities.
- Identifies and markets “top talent”. Offering companies well-matched candidates builds employer demand for first-time workers.

Employers also need awareness about what young people can realistically produce, what support they need, and the complex living environments and challenges they face.⁴⁶ In 2023, YeBo hosted business breakfasts to share lessons about how to

41 Graham et al 2019

42 Graham et al 2019

43 Gadsby 2019

44 Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges

45 Sector Education and Training Authorities, which offer internships and learnerships

46 Lucha Lunako 2020

create youth-friendly workplaces. This includes support and mentoring, a structured onboarding process, gradual salary rises clearly linked to performance, and awareness that an office environment may be a young person's first experience of abundance. These events gave employers space to problem-solve around their experiences of working with youth.

INNOVATION CASE STUDY: REPOSITIONING ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS

When a recruitment partner shared that YeBoneers were not interested in entry-level jobs, YeBo's team asked young people for feedback. Many had seen adults stuck in entry-level roles for life; they saw these jobs as dead ends, rather than as starting points.

To address this, YeBo revised its curriculum to rebrand entry-level careers with large companies as "a toe in the door", emphasised how to develop skills from every job experience, and showcased stories of people who have gone from packers and cashiers to managers. This led to much higher uptake of entry-level jobs.



Well-being support

Key takeaways:

- Offer holistic well-being support.
- Cater for young people's diverse needs.
- Build strong referral networks that can address trauma and personal challenges.

Young people in South Africa face multiple, intertwined and debilitating challenges. More than two-thirds of NEET young people live in income poverty.⁴⁷ The trauma burden is high: 96% of South Africans have experienced violence by adolescence (ages 14-17).⁴⁸ Often, young people drop out of the workforce, and struggle to re-enter, due to challenging personal circumstances.

Youth employment programmes work best when they avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and offer and tailor multiple services to young people's diverse needs.⁴⁹

YeBo offers an "eco-system of support" to help young people improve wellbeing and face challenges. It arranges group interventions and workshops and refers people for professional counselling and crisis support on an as-needed basis, and all YeBoneers have access to self-help tools and online courses, with incentives for completion. Mentors help build local referral systems and are trained on when and how to refer young people for professional assistance.

⁴⁷ Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023, based on Statistics South Africa's upper-bound poverty line of R1,335 per person per month.

⁴⁸ Richter et al 2018

⁴⁹ Kluve et al 2019; Graham et al 2016; de Lannoy and BPS consortium 2019; TIPS 2008



Because the deprivations in young people's lives are so high and intertwined, placing them in an opportunity is insufficient to solve for all of that. You have to add additional support by providing wraparound services, so they are in a better position than where they started. This doesn't happen when you just place a young person in a job."

- Ariane de Lannoy, Associate Professor, Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) and Project Lead, Basic Package of Support



A sense of purpose and belonging

Key takeaways:

- Build self-efficacy, vision and purpose intentionally in the programme curriculum.
- Offer volunteering or service opportunities.
- Create opportunities to connect to other young people and feel part of a larger movement.

Self-efficacy is one of the most-valued skills in the labour market,⁵⁰ and programmes for NEET young people are most effective when they focus on finding purpose and building a vision for life-long development, rather than just landing in a job.⁵¹

YeBo builds young people's sense of purpose and belonging via:

- **Volunteer placements**, where young people do meaningful work in their communities;
- **Opportunities to connect with other young people** from diverse backgrounds, including a three-day conference;
- **Cultivating lifelong skills**, which builds confidence and self-efficacy;⁵²
- **Making progress visible** through routine competency assessments; and
- **The Rising Stars and Gold Stars programme**, which incentivises and rewards excellence.
- Seventy percent of YeBoneers keep volunteering in their communities after the Programme - one indicator of their drive and sense of purpose.



Young people gain a sense of, 'When I go and volunteer, I am making a difference in a child's life, and that has given me a feeling of purpose I haven't felt before.' They can carry that for the rest of their career."

- Amena Hayat, Youth Pathway and Progression Manager: YearBeyond

50 Lucha Lunako 2020

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52 Graham et al 2019

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below summarises YearBeyond’s key design choices for youth bridging programmes, and the rationale behind these choices.

	YearBeyond Design	Evidence / Rationale
Who is the programme for?		
Targeting	Young people ages 18-25 “Survivors” who are most eager for the opportunity	Catching young people early prevents long-term NEET-hood. “Thrivers” are likely to leave the programme for a better opportunity.
How is the programme structured?		
Stipends	Volunteering stipend, set at 75% of minimum wage “Pitch-and-pay” approach	Young people need a sense of progression and movement. A stipend below minimum wage positions a minimum wage job as a step up. Pay-for-work builds work fitness.
Full-time or part-time	Full-time programme	Young people need to develop stamina for full-time work.
Duration	Ten-month programme Can only participate once Sequence activities wisely	One year is long enough to develop required skills, but short enough that young people have to launch themselves and do not get stuck. Offering progression and pathway support too early increases dropout.
What does the programme offer to young people?		
General skills and competencies	General, transferrable skills prioritised 30 sessions (5 weeks) on developing generic skills and mindsets 9 generic and 3 placement-specific competencies, with clear examples	General, transferable skills are important predictors of labour force participation, higher pay and social inclusion and lead to better outcomes. Programmes that spend at least 2 weeks on this achieve better outcomes.
Practical work experience	Practical work/volunteering experience “Service learning” approach	Young people need to apply and practise skills. Service learning benefits communities, gives young people a sense of purpose and can attract more funding and partners.

<p>High-quality mentoring and coaching</p>	<p>Regular mentoring and coaching with a maximum 1:30 ratio</p> <p>Standardised, easy-to-deliver curriculum and clear guidelines</p> <p>Face-to-face, experiential mentor training</p> <p>Regular action learning and reflection</p>	<p>Programmes that include mentoring are more effective.</p> <p>Mentor quality is a key determinant of programme outcomes.</p>
<p>Connections to opportunity and transition support</p>	<p>Structured programme with practical, hands-on experiences</p> <p>Exposure to a wide range of opportunities</p> <p>Recommend well-matched candidates to for employers</p> <p>Raise awareness about first-time workers' needs</p>	<p>Young people are more likely to stay out of NEET-hood if they access a new opportunity within 3 months of completing the programme.</p> <p>Matching is a strong predictor of employment and higher pay.</p> <p>SA creates few jobs for youth skills; offering well-matched candidates can grow demand for first-time workers.</p> <p>Workplaces are not always youth-friendly.</p>
<p>Wellbeing support</p>	<p>General resources and as-needed professional support</p>	<p>Two-thirds of NEET South Africans live in income poverty and most face multiple, overlapping challenges.</p> <p>Programmes that tailor well-being support to young people's diverse needs achieve better outcomes.</p> <p>Equipping young people to get past "traction wobbles" and personal challenges improves long-term outcomes.</p>
<p>Sense of purpose and belonging</p>	<p>Curriculum includes focus on developing vision and purpose</p> <p>Volunteering opportunities</p> <p>Connection to other young people</p>	<p>Self-efficacy is highly valued in the labour market.</p> <p>Programmes are more effective when they focus on finding purpose and a vision for life-long development (rather than just landing a job).</p>

CONCLUSION

Just as there is no one-size-fits-all solution for NEET young people, there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for youth programme design. Design decisions should be explicit and conscious, based on the outcomes a programme seeks to achieve.⁵³

However, the problem of youth unemployment is too big, and has such significant consequences, that we do not have time to reinvent the wheel.

By sharing what it has learned over the last decade, and the design choices that consistently help it place more than three-quarters of its alumni, YearBeyond hopes to help government, NGOs and funders sharpen programme design and delivery, and support more young people on a journey from surviving to thriving.

Our young people deserve nothing less.

END MATTER

This learning brief was written by Katie Huston. It is based on interviews with YearBeyond staff and sector experts, and a review of relevant research.

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