

LEARNING SNAPSHOT

This is an overview of the YearBeyond Youth Bridge Programme Design. It is supplemented by a more comprehensive learning brief on the same topic.



The case for bridging programmes: moving young people into sustainable economic participation

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). Economic exclusion is a vicious cycle: the longer a young person remains NEET, the harder it is to enter or re-enter the labour market.³

This has **grave consequences for individuals, families and society**. It locks people into poverty; drives poor physical and mental health, alienation and substance abuse and leads to lifelong dependence on the state.⁴

Addressing youth unemployment has been a government, business and civil society priority for decades.⁵ But although efforts to reduce NEET-hood drove an estimated R20 billion per year in state spending by 2020,⁶ **South Africa has struggled to turn the tide**. While a lack of jobs is the largest challenge,⁷ many young people are ill-prepared for work and struggle to navigate the labour market.

This is why **bridging programmes are critical to addressing youth unemployment**. These programmes **prepare young people to seize opportunities** with generic skills development, work experience, mentoring, psycho-social support and help navigating transitions.

This learning snapshot:

- **Positions** bridging programmes in relation to other efforts to tackle youth unemployment;
- **Argues** that bridging programmes fill a gap that is not addressed by other types of programmes;
- **Presents** the YearBeyond Programme as a best-practice case study; and
- **Advocates** for bridging programmes' inclusion in a comprehensive response to youth unemployment.

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 Graham et al 2019

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

5 Graham et al 2019

6 Lucha Lunako 2020

7 Lucha Lunako 2020, Youth Capital 2023

Bridging programmes: preparing young people to thrive

Bridging programmes **target gaps in work readiness and “build a bridge” to the labour market.** Key characteristics include:

- **A stepping stone:** they are time-limited and only allow participation once; some pay below minimum wage (e.g. a volunteering stipend).
- **Core skills:** they focus on generic competencies, skills and mindsets that aid young people in any job or entrepreneurial activity.
- **Practical experience:** they offer work or volunteering placements to apply new skills and build “work fitness” and stamina.
- **Developmental approach:** they tend to use coaching and mentoring in place of disciplinary approaches, to build problem-solving and resilience.
- **Holistic support:** they offer psycho-social and well-being support to respond to the complex conditions of exclusion and deprivation that young people face.
- **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.

“Building the bridge”: a key ingredient in SA’s youth unemployment strategy

Bridging programmes are **distinct from social protection programmes, internship and skills programmes and formal employment.** These interventions exist on a continuum, and each plays an important role.

	Social Protection	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.

Public funding and the national conversation tend to focus on moving young people straight into internships, entrepreneurship and jobs. But **many are not ready to launch businesses or thrive at work** – and many companies are ill-equipped to support them. These young people **often drop out** when they hit a challenge or roadblock. Others **fail to transition** to a next opportunity.

Young people also want a sense of progression and upward mobility. Many are **unwilling to “go backwards”** – to accept lower pay or re-enter a training and development programme after they have held a job – and wind up back in the NEET pool.

For investment in internships, enterprise and jobs to “pay off,” many young people need more time to develop generic skills, learn to navigate the job market and build confidence and purpose.

While bridging programmes are often considered expensive, **sustainably moving young people out of NEET-hood is an efficient spend**. Dropout and churn reduce productivity and drive up overall costs of tackling unemployment.

YearBeyond: evidence that bridging works

YearBeyond (YeBo) is a **youth service programme** that **prepares young people for and connects them to opportunities**. It offers a ten-month “bridge” that includes:

- **Meaningful work experience:** Participants receive a stipend for delivering social programmes, like academic catch-up or mental health support.
- **Training, mentoring and coaching:** Participants develop core competencies and work readiness through weekly “Future Fit” sessions, coaching and mentoring, work and study fairs and practice interviews. They also have access to psycho-social and wellbeing support.
- **Connections:** YearBeyond builds participants’ networks and helps graduates find work, training and study opportunities.



YearBeyond Fast Facts



Launched in

2014 by

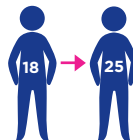


Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport.



Targets

18 to 25
year-olds



who are not in education, employment or training.



Has **scaled** from

399 young people in **2019** to

964 in **2021** and

3535 in **2023**.



Placed **79%** of **YeBo alumni**

who were on the programme in **2022**:

48% in **jobs** and

31% in **further study**.



Each year, **at least three-quarters of participants land their next opportunity within three months** of completing the Programme.⁸ Additionally:



The Programme builds emotional resilience, agency, interpersonal skills and leadership.⁹



Alumni are more **hopeful**, more satisfied with their lives and more confident.



70% of alumni **continue volunteering** in their communities after completing the Programme.

When young people re-engage in the labour market (whether studying, working or running a business) after less than three months of inactivity, it reduces the odds of long-term NEET-hood.¹⁰ And when they develop a sense of purpose, they see each opportunity as a stepping stone and are more likely to take entry-level roles and persevere through challenges.

To achieve these results, YeBo:

- Targets young people ages 18-25 who are eager but need more support;
- Runs a ten-month, full-time programme with a “pitch-and-pay” stipend at 75% of minimum wage (so minimum wage jobs are positioned as a step up);
- Offers work experience, general skills development, high-quality mentoring and coaching, wellbeing support and transition support; and
- Builds purpose, vision and belonging.

Conclusion and recommendations

There is no silver bullet that can solve the youth unemployment crisis. The South African economy cannot absorb everyone who needs a job. However, when young people under age 25 access work, study or self-employment - particularly those who have completed school and are partway up the ladder of opportunity - it has enormous benefits: it reduces long-term costs to the state, and many future work opportunities are suited to “digital natives”.

To improve youth economic participation while addressing the needs of older South Africans, we **need a spectrum of interventions**, including:

- social grants, which help young people stay engaged in work-seeking;
- social protection programmes that provide a sense of purpose, dignity and regular income, and are particularly well-suited to older people who have higher barriers to entering the labour market;

⁸ Progression rates since YeBo was launched range from 74% to 82%; the average from 2019-2022 was 77%.

⁹ YearBeyond 2019

¹⁰ Gadsby 2019

- bridging programmes that build skills, social and economic connections and a sense of possibility in young people; and
- internships, skills programmes and jobs, which help young people launch themselves in the industries they have chosen.

Given the scale of the problem, and the degree of skills gaps, disengagement, trauma and need among NEET young people, **bridging programmes are a critical piece of the puzzle. They tackle the gap between social protection and industry-specific skills programmes by preparing young people for a variety of opportunities.**

When designing strategies to tackle youth unemployment, **policymakers and funders should:**

- **Invest in youth bridging programmes** that prepare young people to thrive in the workforce;
- **Design bridging programmes carefully**, so they build generic competencies and are positioned as a stepping stone; and
- **Include bridging programme characteristics** in design of other youth employment programmes to support positive labour market outcomes.

References

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