The agency and resilience of NEET youth and what we can do to support them. Evidence from a synthesis of qualitative research with young people in South Africa.

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About the paper and acknowledgements:

This working paper is one in a series of reports and working papers by the project "Towards a Basic Package of Support for Young People who are not Employed, in Education or Training (NEET) in South Africa". The BPS project, which commenced in November 2018 and runs until March 2020, explores the feasibility and design of a South African intervention to provide more comprehensive support to young people, aged 15 – 24 years, who are NEET.

Based on research and consultations, the project has put forward a detailed proposal for a programmatic intervention that can provide well-targeted, individualised and long-term support to young people in South Africa, while building a local community of practice to support both youth and the services and opportunities that exist for them. The proposal carefully sets out the various building blocks of such an intervention, founded in a review of best practices. It concludes with a proposal for a pilot that can be implemented at the local level across different South African municipalities. It also proposes an approach to develop an overarching, national institutional framework that can both ensure sufficient resource allocation and safeguard the quality, integrity and coherence of the intervention when rolled out at scale.

The project builds on earlier work, led by the Poverty & Inequality Initiative and the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), both at the University of Cape Town, in partnership with a coalition of partners in government, academia and civil society, to conceptualise a more comprehensive approach to support South Africa's youth.

The 2018 – 2020 phase is led by SALDRU and conducted in partnership with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) Africa; the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), University of Johannesburg; DG Murray Trust; and The Jobs Fund. The work was funded and provided with technical support by the Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion (CBPEP), funded by the European Union and based in the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) in the National Treasury.

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The agency and resilience of NEET youth and what we can do to support them. Evidence from a synthesis of qualitative research with young people in South Africa.

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a growing body of knowledge on the situation of young people, and particularly young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in South Africa. Much of this research is focused on statistical analysis and emphasises the staggered and difficult transitions that young people make as they attempt to secure employment. This paper contributes by synthesising the findings of several qualitative studies in order to add the voice of young people to the picture. It illustrates the immense challenges that young people face, ranging from a sense of social exclusion and the implications this has for relationships, belonging and mental health; the consistent barriers to work-seeking such as lack of information and high costs; as well as their struggles to access higher or further education. While there are a range of initiatives attempting to address youth unemployment, this paper offers insight into how young people experience navigating these initiatives. We also draw lessons from young people themselves, about what kind of support they require. This working paper has contributed to the evidence that informs the development of the Basic Package of Support for NEET youth in South Africa.

Key words: NEET youth, youth voice, qualitative, youth development

Introduction

Young people in South Africa are disproportionately affected by a range of deprivations (Frame et al., 2016). National statistics are clear on this: more than half of all young people live in income poverty; almost half of a cohort of learners that enter into grade 1 will not make it to their matric year; the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 24 was at 55.2% in the first quarter of 2019; and 33% of youth in this age category are not in any kind of education, employment and training (NEET). Quantitative data analysis tells us about the prevalence and types of challenges these young people face, and which types of young people are most adversely affected by. There are stark differences within the youth population, according to age, race, class and geography, highlighting heterogeneity (De Lannoy et al., 2018b). Quantitative research cannot, however, provide insight into the lived experiences of young people in South Africa, how their challenges affect them on a day-to-day basis, what support they say they need, and how they use their agency to try and make a difference in their lives.

Young people do not grow up in isolation, and it is important to understand how their development and life choices are shaped by the environments in which they live – including their relationships with family and friends, within their communities and wider society, and by governmental structures that may hinder or support their development. The aim of this working paper is therefore to synthesise qualitative data on the lived experiences of youth from marginalised communities in South Africa from research that the authors have led or been involved in over a period of time. It also draws in youth voices from several consultation dialogues that the research team have hosted, since 2015, initially driven by UCT's Poverty & Inequality Initiative (PII) in partnership with others. These gatherings aimed to debate possible solutions to the situation and all took care to include youth to ensure that young people's views were part of the conversations. We have therefore included the dialogue reports as part of the set of existing data, alongside the abovementioned reports and studies on young people's views about their experiences and their needs.

Whilst poor youth living in South Africa are not a homogenous group, we see that many face the same types of overarching and interrelated challenges. This paper both describes and unpacks the complexity of these challenges and presents potential solutions that young people feel would help them in their development. Following a description of the studies reviewed, we discuss the multiple challenges and experiences of young people that arise from the data. These are issues pertaining to: schooling, post-school education, employment, the support young people feel they need to secure work, family and parenting, financial exclusion, health and safety, information and connection, transport and mobility and, lastly, belonging and networks. Within each section, we discuss the challenges and highlight how the exercise of agency is often thwarted by structural barriers; provide some quotes to expand on the experiences of young people; and suggest solutions based on what the respondents have reported in the studies.

The synthesis of the qualitative data leads to a conclusion that there is a need for a more integrated and multi-faceted approach to support for young people – one that would guide them and support their agency towards a better life. Such a integrated 'package of support' addresses the need to give attention to the cross-cutting issues that are faced by the majority of young people in the country (see also Frame et al., 2016).

Methodology

To address our aim, this working paper provides a summary of 12 qualitative studies that give insight into the multiple and interrelated challenges faced by young people living in South Africa. It draws on ethnographic and in-depth qualitative studies that the authors have led or were involved in. The studies have all grappled with understanding what life, in all its dimensions, is like for young people in post-apartheid South Africa, and deepen the understanding of how some of those dimensions really play out in young people's lives. While we know that young people face a multiplicity of challenges that occur simultaneously in their lives (Frame et al., 2016), specific qualitative studies into, for example, educational decision-making or job search in a context of deprivation provide nuance to that broader understanding. We synthesise the findings that emerge across these studies in order to assist the conceptualisation and design of a BPS intervention that can respond to youth's lived realities and challenges.

Although the studies engaged different methods with different groups of young people, all have involved discussions with youth on the main challenges in their lives, and include suggestions about the kind of support young people felt they needed from various stakeholders in their communities and society at large.

The majority of the interviews and focus group discussions in the consulted studies have taken place in Gauteng and the Western Cape; however, all nine provinces are represented in the participant profile. The interviews and focus groups have taken place in a mix of urban and rural areas. The participants were aged between 11 – 34 years at the time of the respective research and therefore present various developmental periods.

We provide a brief description of the studies consulted:

1) Educational decision-making in an era of AIDS (De Lannoy, 2008)

This multi-method study investigated the validity of widespread hypotheses that young people affected by HIV and AIDS would no longer be interested in investing time and resources in their education. The quantitative and qualitative results of the study rejected this hypothesis and indicated instead high aspirations among South Africa's youth and a positive understanding of the value of education for upward mobility. The work indicated that such aspirations and values were founded upon a belief in open opportunity structures for all in post-apartheid South Africa. Young people and their caregivers did not fully take into account the continued structural barriers to upward mobility for youth from low socio-economic backgrounds. The work was corroborated by similar studies taking place at the time (see, for instance Bray et al., 2010; Swartz, Harding & De Lannoy, 2012).

2) Growing up in the new South Africa: Childhood and adolescence in post-apartheid Cape Town (Bray et al., 2010)

This mixed-method study provides an in-depth understanding of the lives of children and adolescents growing up in different parts of post-apartheid Cape Town. The rich ethnographic work, along with analysis of survey data, interrogates the lives of young people at home, in their communities and at

school. It shows the persistence of poverty, inequality, segregation and their impact on the everyday lives of the participants.

3) After freedom: The rise of the post-apartheid generation in democratic South Africa (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014)

A longitudinal, ethnographic study that asks what life is like for the so-called 'born free' generation in post-apartheid South Africa. Building on almost two years of in-depth research with seven young people between the ages of 18 – 35 living in the Cape Town metropolitan area, the work documents the structural challenges that continue to hinder young people's lives in some of the poorer areas of the city, the class differences that are sustained and grow within and between population groups, debates over policies and politics that are meant to redress the inequalities of the past and the struggles for identity and belonging amidst the complexities of the 'new' South Africa.

4) Youth matters: What young people need to reach their dreams (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

This study explores the challenges that young people face in their communities and outlines a range of potential solutions. It involved workshops with 18 young South Africans aged 14 – 25 from both urban and rural areas across the country, with varying levels of education. Participants first debated the critical issues with other young people in their communities before feeding their insight into the workshops. The work culminated in a short publication that includes a call to action by the young people to the various roleplayers in their lives. The study was led by the Children's Institute and the Poverty and Inequality institute, both at the University of Cape Town, and was conducted in collaboration with IkamvaYouth, Axium Education, GCU Academy, and the South African Youth Project.

5) Investigating the feasibility of a national minimum wage for South Africa (Patel et al., 2016)

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding, from the perspective of young people, of the perceived impact of a national minimum wage policy on labour market outcomes for people aged 18 – 25. Nineteen focus groups were held with 153 people aged 18 – 25 years. The participants were unemployed or employed in low-paying work, and they resided in both rural and urban areas in five provinces: Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and North West. Their education levels varied from having completed grade 9 to having a tertiary qualification.

6) Post-child support grant situational analysis (Graham et al., 2017)

This mixed-methods study assessed the education, post-secondary education, employment and income of youth who had been beneficiaries of the Child Support Grant (CSG). Following the statistical analysis, 16 in-depth narrative interviews were conducted with young people who had transitioned off the grant in the previous five years. The participants were recruited through a database of youth employability programme participants. The respondents resided in rural and urban areas of Gauteng and Limpopo. The interviews were aimed at understanding respondents' life histories, family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, their experiences of transitioning off of the grant, their plans

for the future, their access to services, what they have managed to achieve since exiting the CSG and the challenges they have faced.

7) Youth conversations for action: Towards a basic package of support for youth (Youth Lab & PII, 2017)

This group work session explored possibilities to develop a basic set of structures and interventions that could adequately support young people in South Africa throughout the stages of their development, and set against the background of severe socio-economic challenges that many of them face. This discussion was hosted by the Poverty & Inequality Initiative, Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (both at University of Cape Town), Centre for Social Development in Africa (University of Johannesburg), Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (at the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency), DG Murray Trust, Government Technical Advisory Centre (National Treasury), and the Economies of Regions Learning Network. The participants were researchers, development practitioners, government officials and young people. The key themes covered were health, basic education, post-secondary education and training, employment, income and social security, living conditions and connectedness. The themes that were vocalised by the youth participants are foregrounded in this report.

8) Unpacking the lived realities of Western Cape youth (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

This study explored the well-being and lived experiences of adolescents and young people residing in five of the most deprived areas in the Western Cape. Ten focus group discussions, consisting of 25 young men and 32 young women aged 11 – 24 years, were conducted. The focus groups were held in both urban and rural areas namely; Khayelitsha, Breede Valley, Stellenbosch, Mitchells Plain and Bishop Lavis. Participants were asked to debate the main issues facing young people in their communities, as well access to services and support structures, and suggestions for services they found were lacking in their areas.

9) Young people's experiences of accessing post-secondary education (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

This study was conducted in Doornkop, Soweto, in 2016. It involved in-depth interviews with sixteen participants aged between 18 – 25 years. They were purposively selected – all were NEET at the time of the interviews and had wanted to study after completing their schooling. The aim of the interviews was to understand their experiences of choosing what to study and their perspectives regarding access to post-secondary education.

10) Youth transitions in South African communities (Graham et al., 2019)

The study sought to ascertain the hopes, dreams and plans young people have for their future, and to compare these with those reported in a similar study conducted 20 years earlier. Ten focus groups were held with 85 'born frees'; that is people born after 1994 and aged between 15 and 21 years at the time of the study. Eighty-one percent of the sample were still in school and most were living in households with both parents or, a parent or primary caregiver (82%). Participants resided in seven

diverse areas across Gauteng (Madelakhufa 1, Tembisa, Diepkloof, Soweto, Onverwacht, Kensington and Orange Farm) and two in the Eastern Cape (Grahamstown and King William's Town).

11) Siyakha youth assets study: Developing youth assets for employability (Graham et al., 2019)

The study investigated the role that youth employability programmes play in young people's labour market outcomes. A youth employability programme is one that aims to enhance the employability of young people. Fourty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted with young people who had participated in a youth employability programme. The interviews were conducted 9 – 12 months after they had completed the programme and sought to understand what had happened since completing the programme and what factors in these young people's lives had shaped their outcomes. Participants included those who had found work, those who were studying, and those who had remained unemployed. Participants were recruited from across all nine provinces.

12) The impact of the Raymond Ackerman Academy Of Entrepreneurial Development (RAA) in creating improved and sustainable livelihoods amongst academy graduates (Yiannakaris, 2019).

This recent mixed-method study investigated the impact of an entrepreneurship education programme, in South Africa, on youth considered vulnerable to unemployment. In-depth interviews were conducted with 32 participants, all young black men and women between the ages of 18 – 30 from low-income areas on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape.

Findings

The findings are presented in ten sections, with each section covering an important dimension of life in which young people experience deprivation, or challenges. Given the interrelated nature of these challenges, the sections are not clearly delineated and quotations in individual sections often apply to numerous others. As one reads the report, it is hoped that the intersecting and reinforcing nature of the difficulties faced by young people becomes apparent.

1. Schooling

The quality of education provided by a school and within a schooling system is influenced by numerous factors. These include the physical environment, such as the availability of buildings, toilets and chairs; the interpersonal environment, including trust, guidance and support; and each individual's intrapersonal context such as the motivation and skills of staff and learners. The connection of the school within the community and broader environment, such as with tertiary education institutions, local government, businesses, community centres and clinics, also plays an important role.

Whilst this is not true for all schools, many young people residing in low socio-economic environments have described their school environment as generally unconducive to teaching and learning (Bray et al., 2010; De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al, 2017; Graham et al., 2019). The large class sizes, sometimes reaching over 100 learners per class, indicate schools where there is insufficient capacity to meet the demand. Several schools are said to lack the required resources, including toilets, desks, windows, textbooks, libraries and computer centres.

> "I studied at a township school and I worked really hard because I knew what I wanted. I came in at 6.30am and left at 11pm. But at some of the other schools in this country, kids start at 8.15am and leave at 2.15pm, then they do extramural activities and they still get all A's. In their class there are 25 kids, in my class there were 105 kids." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

The qualitative research indicates that the quality of teaching and learning, and the availability of resources is often related to school management:

> "So we got a new principal. Mr. B. So when he came he changed the school. We got a new hall, we got a library built for us. The school was fixed, the school was repainted and decorated. Some of the classrooms were painted; we got new desks, new projectors. The school was known as corrupt, but since the upgrades the school started to change and we got more sponsors from different organisations … the principal, he was there for the school when no-one really cared." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Young people describe how the attitude of principals and teachers greatly influences the quality of education provided, which in turn influences the motivation and commitment of the learners. As indicated in the following quotes, the quality of school staff with regards to their commitment to their job and their professionalism, varies.

> "For me, school is a challenge because [you] deal with a lot of personalities and not just the students but the teachers as well. Have to understand them before approaching them. Some teachers you go to for help and others will gossip about you. It's a challenge to find people you can trust." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

> "Miss who plays with her phone during period [when] she should be teaching us ... they [the teachers] say 'let's sleep'; after that she plays on her phone." - Khayelitsha, Western Cape (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

> "For me at my school, it [is] a combination of our teachers and the principal. When you walk past him, he greets[s] you by your name. Our principal always look[s] out for the well-being of the students. I would say he has a heart." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Studies that have aimed at understanding educational decision-making or subject choice indicate that limited subject choice seems to be particularly problematic in poor-resourced schools (Bray et al., 2010; Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; De Lannoy, et al. 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al, 2019).

Young people speak about the curriculum being too academic with few choices for those who are more practical or creative minded (De Lannoy et al., 2015). They also relay how they were streamed into subjects due to the capacity of the school and not to the abilities or interest of the learners. Young people have spoken about how they were forced to take maths literacy where 'pure' maths was preferred.

> "Art in South Africa comes first. Actress, music, being a comedian, anything in that industry comes number one … I really love culture but at our school we don't actually have none of those … and I had to choose the subjects that I am in. I didn't even have a choice … because the classes were full. So I had to take Economics, Business, Maths Literacy and Consumer Studies." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a).

> "I would say that [being forced to take agriculture as a subject] killed me because the course that I wanted to do, I didn't need agriculture. I was also thinking of medicine if I passed well. I was also thinking of mechanical engineering, it was my first option. Medicine was my second choice. So one of the requirements for mechanical engineering was sciences which was one of the courses my teacher said I must not take it and I was very good at the subject, however there was no space and in the school that I was at previously [where] I was doing eight subjects so they said I must omit just one. It had a huge impact on my future and I believe that if I was at [my previous high school] I would be somewhere else, I would have passed very well. This changed my life." (Graham et al., 2017)

Many young people also raise concern about the lack of career guidance, or low quality career guidance, offered at school. Although career guidance is included in the school curriculum, some report never having received any, while others found the career guidance they received to be inadequate (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy, 2016; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a).

> "There is little career guidance and support, so we feel ill-prepared to make the right choices. This starts in grade 9 when we have to choose subjects that we will take in matric, yet we have no idea what we would like to study after school." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

In essence, career guidance should address the following three questions: Who am I? Where am I going? And how do I get there? Without this guidance, learners and school leavers are often unclear and ill-informed about their futures. They have little to no information on careers, further education application dates and processes, bursaries and pathways to employment.

> "It can be really difficult for young people to navigate the systems in our society, as we often don't have the information and support we need to make the right choices. We may not know where to study, how to get a bursary, how to start a small business, or what opportunities are available to us." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "When I got the results in January I realised I should have applied previous year, I nearly applied for a course that I did not have an interest in, called NCV; I didn't even know what it was … initially I wanted to study IT [information technology] so pressure pushed me to apply for NCV course at [a TVET college]." (Graham et al., 2017)

> "So like I am taking a gap year not because I chose to but because I didn't have a career guidance." (Graham et al., 2019)

Often the career guidance that learners receive are from friends and family:

> "Before I completed my matric one of my cousins gave me UJ [University of Johannesburg] application forms so I checked the requirements and realised my points didn't meet them."
> (Graham et al., 2017)

In addition to these problems at school, it is not uncommon for relatively poor South African children to change school numerous times during their school career. Several of the qualitative studies indicate that each change causes a disruption to the continuity of their education and can result in retaking grades and poor performance (De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). The moves are often related to the death of a household member and/or to the loss of income of a family member.

> "It started being hard when my father died as he was the breadwinner at home, he died in December after I got my report for that year and the following year when I was in grade 8, my uncles came and took me from my father's house in Malamulele and brought me and my brothers here to Tzaneen and I only studied half the year."
> (Graham et al., 2017)

The combination of these problems contributes to poor academic performance, leaving young people feeling unequipped to proceed with the educational trajectories they might have originally envisaged for themselves. This is evident in the many narratives of young people about their attempt to improve or 'upgrade' their high school marks either by redoing certain subjects, or by taking new subjects that were not offered to them at school (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al., 2017). This is done through adult basic education and training (ABET) service providers. Asked why young people would like to upgrade their results, they report not meeting the entry requirements to access further education and training, and importantly bursaries. While some do upgrade their results through ABET, many receive the same symbol after one, or multiple attempts, to improve their results (Graham et al., 2019). The failure of many to upgrade through ABET needs further investigation as is revealed in the quote below.

> "I completed my matric in 2013 with a symbol C, which is diploma, I didn't get good marks in mathematics and life sciences; so in 2014 I went to ABET to upgrade my marks but they stayed the same and when I went for my second year in 2015, I re-wrote the subjects again and I only passed life sciences as I passed with a level 2 in matric but after rewriting I was on level 3."
> (Graham et al., 2019)

Existing literature on educational outcomes and young people's employment opportunities points out that a better functioning school system will in turn improve young people's employment prospects and well-being in general, and young people themselves have been found to request better quality education (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018c; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2019; Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

Young peoples' suggestions to improve basic education include ensuring that the school is equipped with the basic necessities to support teaching and learning, but also with computer labs and a functioning internet connection, that the school curriculum is broadened to cater for less academic

learners, that more practical and arts-related subjects are included, and that a real and effective second chance is provided to learners who fail or who would like to improve their grade 12 results (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a).

> "I would like government … to bring change to my community and to our school as well. And the subjects that we don't have, we would like them because they will help in the future … we also like the sponsorship … for computers" (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Youth and researchers propose additional training and support to teachers, principals and other school staff (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Youth Lab & PII, 2017). Additional skills training is expected to result in motivated and knowledgeable teachers who are competent in both their pedagogic skills and subject matter; it is also hoped that schools can then offer remedial teaching for those learners who are not performing as well as they could, and deliver the career guidance syllabus more thoroughly. Additionally, some young people have asked to review teacher qualifications and ensure that they are of the highest standard, and to raise the pass mark to 50% (De Lannoy et al., 2015). In addition, young people have suggested psychosocial support and counselling at school, both for staff and the learners, in the form of professional counselling and support groups. In Bishop Lavish in the Western Cape, girls spoke about setting up study groups and friendship groups where they could bring their sorrows and questions and help one another:

> "Just a small group … so that we can help each other in subjects that we don't know. Maybe someone knows something that I don't know then she can explain to me and I also know something that she doesn't know and we can explain to each other." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Youth taking part in conversations hosted by the PII and partners pointed out that these support services should be driven and designed by – or with strong input from – young people themselves. In addition, they propose providing an "empowerment package" to learners at critical stages in their educational decisionmaking. These packages would seek to empower youth with crucial information on subject choices, careers, bursaries, volunteering etc., at the right time in their learning trajectory. Furthermore, they propose that youth form clubs at schools whereby older youth mentor younger ones (Youth Lab & PII, 2017; corroborated in De Lannoy et al., 2018a).

Tertiary education institutions, businesses and professionals could be more visible in schools in order to expose learners to higher education and job opportunities. Importantly learners request information on funding and bursaries, and exposure to role models who can show them various pathways to independence and employment.

> "We need businesses to reach out and help us gain work experience through job shadowing or internships. We also ask businesses to come to our career guidance days and give us ideas of new careers and opportunities. Let us know what you expect in an interview and help us be prepared. Have some faith in us, hire us and give us a chance to gain experience." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "We need role models. So those who have made it in our communities, please come back and tell us how you have done it. Show us a pathway that perhaps we can't see." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

This exposure and knowledge sharing could also be in the form of university open days, career days, job shadowing, volunteering, and mentorships (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a; Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

2. Post-school education

Upon completing high school, it is common for young people to report that they are unclear about what to do next (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a). Nevertheless, there is a strong awareness that they need to gain some form of post-secondary education and there is ample evidence that young people have high educational aspirations (Bray et al., 2010; De Lannoy, 2008). Most, therefore, aspire to study further but are uninformed about how to do so. Their (poor) high-school results together with their limited information and financial resources make this a particularly stressful period, full of uncertainty and turmoil. The qualitative data reveal four themes related to post-school education:

- Struggles to access formal post-secondary education options (university and college)
- The value of accessible skills development programmes
- Evidence of agency in "upskilling"
- Disappointment in continued unemployment despite skills

We consider each of these separately.

2.1. Struggles in accessing university and college

Even those who may do relatively well in their matric examinations often struggle to access further education and training due to lack of information; a realisation that their subject choice does not lead them to study towards their desired career path; or a lack of finances to support application, registration fees and associated studying costs.

Many young people express frustration at not knowing what to apply for and how to apply for university or college courses, and often they apply late because of a lack of awareness of closing dates. The limited information they have is usually received from friends and family, most of whom themselves are not well informed (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham & Geerars, 2018; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a) as expressed in the following quotes:

> "The only thing that makes it more difficult is just the lack of career or education festivities in our areas, because maybe one should move from a certain area to another area at least to get to study, to further the education, so maybe … that's the only thing that makes it difficult, because it becomes more … like, when you go and register, they tell you that you should register for the next semester due to there is no space; that's what makes it more difficult." (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

> "How it [applying for university] works and what to do – I searched and researched and asked people about it, but still I don't know what to do and when to do it." (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

> "In the end, only 8% of us make it to college or university. There are many reasons for this. It is difficult to access information about higher education: what to study and where to study, and how to make sound decisions about our futures. A lot of information is now online but we are not always taught how to find it or even how to use computers. In rural areas, many of us do not have access to the internet." (De Lannoy et al., 2015).

Furthermore, during this period almost all young people are financially dependent on family and extended family, for whom paying for post-secondary education is often impossible.

> "The moment you think about college, all kind of stuff runs through your head … in order for you to go to college, you need money, and in order to have money, you need a job … If I didn't get a bursary I wouldn't know what I could do because I really didn't have the money to pay." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

While young people who qualify should be able to access the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to support their studies, there are a range of other costs that prohibit them accessing further education. Graham & Geerars' study (2018) showed that, for most youth, these costs were the application and registration costs at institutes for higher learning, which needed to be paid regardless of whether or not they would get NSFAS funding. Many were unaware of these costs and their families were not able to afford the fees.

> ''It's [applying for university] too demanding. Because for people who, like, don't have the means, like, to get finance, that means there is no further education for them.'' (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

> ''My father will give money for me [to pay application and registration]."
> Interviewer: "Do your parents have the amount of R3 280 for your application?"
> "Oh, they save it to pay for it. They both work.'' (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

But the impact of income poverty persists beyond application and enrolment: among young people who are able to access post-school education, some drop out of such education due to a lack of finances. This is experienced as losing a bursary and being unable to afford the cost of living (Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al. 2019a). Even among those accessing bursaries or financing from the NSFAS, additional expenses range from payment for books, transport, housing, care for dependants and "other living expenses". Many only realise that additional costs will prevent them from studying after having managed to pay for the application and registration cost:

> ''Like, I've got … I don't know. Like, maybe my only problem is finance, because I did get enrolled in a college and then … now I can't go to school, simply because I don't have money to travel. And then another thing: they expect us to type our assignments and then print them out, and then … that also requires money. And then I can't submit, simply because I don't

have a computer and I don't have the money to print all those assignments. So that's why I decided to drop out.'' (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

For these reasons, many young people are simultaneously looking for work as well as further education and training opportunities (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham & Geerars, 2018), but with equally little guidance on how best to go about this search or how to combine work and study.

Qualitative work that investigates the way in which young people go about applying for post-school education indicates that applications are often sent in late. Young people also indicate not receiving any feedback on their application status. The reasons for this is unknown to them and the lack of a feedback loop denies them opportunities to submit better applications (Graham et al., 2019a).

"I applied at Turfloop campus at Vaal University of Technology, at Tshwane University of Technology, and at University of Johannesburg and only God knows why I didn't get a response as the post office was working fine." (Graham et al., 2017)

"I filled in forms they used to give us; but I don't really know where they ended up."
Interviewer: "Those forms, did you hand them in somewhere?"
"Yes, in a box; there was a box."
Interviewer: "And you never heard of it again?"
"No."
(Graham & Geerars, 2018)

''I think it is difficult. It is difficult because sometimes you apply and they don't call you. And the person that you apply with get called but you don't. And they don't say what made your application not to be approved. They don't mention that.'' (Graham & Geerars, 2018).

The consequence of barriers to entry to further education and training is that young people become 'NEET'. Some young people who have completed school but are not in further education or training, explain that they are taking a "gap year". As mentioned earlier, unlike common notions of a gap year – that is, choosing to take a break from education to weigh up one's options about what to do next – these young people are forced into a gap year due to low grade 12 results, uninformed and late higher education applications, insufficient funds to study further and inability to find work (Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a).

''I've tried, but now I am just relaxing for a while…I'm just waiting for my parents to have the money.'' (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

"Yah myself, I had planned that this year I would take a gap year to have a job so that I would have money to go to school next year although till now I have not had much luck." (Graham et al., 2019)

"I think right now to make a decision that you going to do your whole life is really hard. That's the fact why most people are thinking of taking a gap year. Because you still not sure exactly

what you want to do. Because you keep on changing. You think now I want to do law then the next day you want to become a chef … so it's quite hard picking." (Graham et al., 2019)

2.2. The value of accessible skills training programmes

While formal further education pathways remain difficult for many young people to access, there are opportunities in youth employability programmes that some youth take up. These are low-to-no-cost (to the young person) bridging programmes aimed at preparing youth, who have left high school, for study or work opportunities. These programmes commonly consist of skills training (personal, interpersonal and technical skills) and work experience in the form of apprenticeships, volunteering, and learnerships (Graham et al., 2017, Graham et al., 2019a). Some programme also offer participants a stipend. Often, these programmes are heard about through social networks.

> "I heard about it [employability programme] from a next-door neighbour who was a participant there, and I decided I would send my CV and apply."(Graham et al., 2017)

The Siyakha Youth Assets Study (Graham et al., 2019a), which evaluated eight large youth employability programmes, gathered qualitative information on the participants' experiences during and after the programme, in particular relating to jobseeking and employment. The wider Siyakha Youth Assets Study (which also assessed the programmes quantitatively in a pre- and post-test study design) revealed positive influences on young people's emotional well-being, particularly increased resilience, but also increased self-confidence, self-care, self-insight and self-esteem. The overall positive impact these programmes had on a participants' personal growth, emotional well-being and (often soft) skills was corroborated in a recently released in-depth study on the impact of entrepreneurship training (Yiannakaris, 2019) and is evident in the following quotes:

> "I enrolled in the programme for the money but when I started I realised that it's so interesting and it broadens your mind and helps you build confidence." (Graham et al., 2019a)

> ''It really refines you, the potential that you have, [from] the rough diamond that you are to being the shiniest and the most valuable, it kind of puts things into perspective and defines you and what you can offer the world.'' (Yiannakaris, 2019)

> ''If I could tell you a story about where I was and where I am now after the program, I'm a totally different person. It's amazing how 6 months can teach you everything from managing personal relationships, greeting someone with a handshake all the way to management.'' (Yiannakaris, 2019)

Participants across various programmes were clear that they really valued the supportive, person-centred environment that the programmes offer:

> "[Staff in the programme] listened to us. … I felt important because they did make time for me. I only felt important at the [programme]." (Yiannakaris, 2019)

> "I will tell people out there that the [programme] is one place that will change your life if you want it to – other places won't do that, they don't even know you, you are just a student number but in the [programme] you have a name, a surname and a face." (Yiannakaris, 2019)

> "They [programme staff] were more like family to me … they called to find out how I'm doing, have I found anything yet … they helped me in so many ways". (Graham et al., 2019)

The results suggest that a positive youth development approach to training and employment intermediation, and especially ongoing check-ins and support are highly valued by young people.

2.3. Evidence of agency in "upskilling"

Across various studies, the attempts of the participants to access further education or training programmes demonstrate that they are aware of the skill–employment quandary; that is that they need skills and qualifications to qualify for employment:

> "… without education, you have to hustle to get there [employed] but with education you already have that key." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "Without skills you are nothing, matric is nothing so that['s] why I am here now because I do not have skills." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "We know that education increases our chances of finding work" (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

As a result, many young people exercise significant agency and go to great lengths, in the face of limited information and finances, to access opportunities to "upskill" themselves (De Lannoy, 2008; Bray et al., 2010; Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al., 2019).

Corroborating findings from the various qualitative studies, the Siyakha report highlights that many of the participants who were enrolled in youth employability programmes had attended other skills training courses and that they have various certificates and qualifications (Graham et al., 2019a). The courses young people have attended vary greatly and include bookkeeping, security guarding, dental administration, basic ambulance assistance, motor mechanics, agriculture, marketing, fashion design, human resource management and mine assistance. Amongst the participants in the various studies, many unemployed youth are in fact highly and diversely skilled. The following short case study from the Siyakha Youth Assets Study tells of a young man who has skills in building, electrical work, security, mining, sales, customer service, cleaning and welding; yet he is still training further:

> Sifiso completed Grade 12 in 2011. The following year he worked for six months at a construction company, assisting with the building of a rural school. Thereafter he moved to Vereeniging and completed a three-week course in security. He then found contract work in which he changed lights in multi-story buildings. After nine months, when the contract ended, he moved to Welkom. Here he attended a seven-day course and received a certificate as an assistant mining engineer. He then found work in a general trading store, where he sold household appliances and clothing. After being mistreated by the store owner he resigned and moved back to Vereeniging. There he obtained a contract with a construction company

> that was building a school. During this contract, he did roofing for new buildings. This contract appears to have been of six months' duration. Thereafter, he moved to Boksburg where he enrolled in a three-month welding course. Mid-way through the course he got his driver's license. Thereafter he moved back to Vereeniging where he secured a contract doing cleaning work. While on this contract he received a phone call regarding an 18-month welding apprenticeship. At the time of the interview he was still enrolled in this apprenticeship, which is in Johannesburg. It is a full-time apprenticeship and upon completion he will be qualified as an artisan welder. (Graham et al., 2019)

The desire to "upskill" themselves in order to access employment also means that many of the participants are vulnerable to being exploited.

2.4. Disappointment in unemployment despite skills

Although the participants expressed a desire for and agency towards upskilling, many remained unemployed and expressed frustration and disappointment that their efforts did not result in employment (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; De Lannoy et al., 2015). For example, one student who had studied welding was certified as an artisan assistant – and unable to find work. Another, trained as a plumber, said that he didn't have the tools required to do plumbing work and therefore was not using the skills he had acquired. Another who had a driver's license, and qualifications as a boiler maker and ambulance assistant, remarked that "these are not useful because I didn't get a job" (Graham et al., 2019).

These experiences point to the fact that the acquisition of technical and vocational skills does not directly translate into employment because of other barriers that young people face, including the financial costs of work-seeking and lack of information (dealt with earlier in section 3), and a lack of job opportunities that match to available skills. It also demonstrates that, very often, the skills training that youth access does not necessarily lead them onto a pathway towards either higher level training or employment. This may well be because of the many "disconnects" in the education pathway available for young people and supports the idea that there is a need for more targeted guidance that would help young people to "put together the pieces of their training experiences" so that it fosters a forward trajectory on their pathway towards a better life rather than the current frustrating "trial and error" approach.

Taken together, the qualitative evidence indicates that many young people experience difficulties and discontent upon leaving the school system (which provided structure and purpose). It also highlights the resilience many possess in their continued efforts to better their lives through various means, and their willingness to do almost any work or course that they are offered in order to upskill themselves on condition that they are able to cover their basic living expenses (Graham et al., 2019). It is the norm for young people to enrol in numerous education programmes, take various part-time and piece-work opportunities and move households; the common goal being to access better education and employment, and ultimately to earn a decent living.

2.5. What services can support youth to access PSET?

Given the above, what do young people feel they need to help them in the process of accessing post-secondary education and skills training? Support and interventions that young people require to navigate the transition out of school and into employment or training are those aimed at providing clear and comprehensive career guidance to school-leavers, including guidance and assistance with applying to university and college; and increased, comprehensive financial support for university, technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Many young people express a sense of not being able to access the available opportunities (of college and university) and therefore ask for more, and more easily accessible options.

> "I want the government to open up more opportunities for people that are no longer in school … just more opportunities." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Youth employability programmes attempt to provide comprehensive support to those who have left school but who are not enrolled in any education or training, neither are they employed. These programmes can bridge the gap between education and employment, particularly for those with low grade 12 results and those from rural areas (Graham et al., 2019a). These programmes also increase the emotional well-being and resilience of young people by providing a person-centred approach that provides a sense of belonging and that supports young people's agency as they continue to look for educational and work related opportunities – something youth evidently value.

Young people indicate that they require encouraging spaces and opportunities to engage and in which to be active citizens (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Youth Lab & PII, 2017). These could take various forms including youth clubs, mentorships, internships, apprenticeships, volunteering, job shadowing or community work. There is also a need to ensure that existing skills training programmes are linked to the workplace as many young people are skilled but not utilising their skills as the connection between skills training and work is not easily navigated (Newman & Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al., 2019a; Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

3. (Un)employment

The qualitative studies find that most young people report looking for work, or if not actively looking then are open to work, in the years after school (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al. , 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a). This is often done in conjunction with upgrading results, applying for further education, studying or working. This is not surprising as almost all young people speak about their need to earn money. Asked what it means to be employed, two fairly distinct responses were given; first, that employment is anything done in exchange for money; second, that employment means the opportunity to grow, develop and progress.

Quantitative analyses point at the high numbers of unemployed young people who remain with an "orientation" towards the labour market, despite the difficulties of finding work (De Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019). The qualitative studies consulted for this report confirm this and highlight nuances in the desire for work. First, across all of the studies, young people express a desire to make something of themselves and to be able to support or contribute towards their family financially.

> "Obvious I want one of my careers either the one in education or music. I want to be stable and working in a company even if I'm not the CEO [chief executive officer] but I must be something in a company and I must be permanent. I must be able to support my family and this job must be something that won't disappoint me, I must be able to survive on it and be able to do anything I want. Buy a car, a house or get a loan from the bank; you know something like that. A job that is alright, even if it might be a job from the government. So I believe that in five years to come I must be stable." (Graham et al., 2017)

> "[I want] a strong financial situation. ... Working and giving your parents what they were lacking when they were younger. Making them happy. ... giving back to them for what they did for you when you were younger. So, for example, if you [are] staying in a wendy house, one day you can buy your parents a big house. Everyday telling them: 'there's always going to be food ... luxuries, there's going to be trips for you, you can go on holiday'." (De Lannoy et al. 2018a)

Second, the experience of unemployment is continuously described as one of dependence. Without an income, young people are unable to become financially independent – a social marker of adulthood, also in their own minds. When one of the participants in the After Freedom study, after a long stretch of unsuccessful job search and discouragement, finally gained a short-term contract – even one that required far less than her own skills level – she reflected that "this is what it feels like to be a real adult" (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014). Unemployment, on the other hand, and the sense of constant dependence and poverty, led her to feelings of depression and self-disdain.

An unemployed respondent living in rural KwaZulu-Natal too reflects these tensions and also highlights the problem of being dependent on other people such as family, friends and "sugar daddies" in the following quote:

> "Like me I finish matric 2012 and my mother is a single parent of five, working as a cleaner at Ultra City and she has to take care of us all. Like participant two has said we need toiletries and lots of things and it's hard to be dependent because people will take advantage of you. They will make you do things that you do not want to do, just because you want that person to buy you something then you have to do that thing. Like me I had this person and I will not say the names and that person has power over me because she has done a lot for me. Now I owe it to her and every time she wants me to jump I must ask 'how high?' So it's not good, not working. Then the other thing when you do not work you end up dating sugar daddies because you want to fit in a society. Ok let me tell you something as we are here wearing this jackets it means you have money and you are trendy, but when you wear the T-shirt alone people will say 'wow that girl is not trendy' and that can make you become a prostitute just because you want money, and just because you want to be independent, and just because you want to shine like other people that is my intake; that not working is a stress and its nagging." (Patel et al., 2016)

From the above we see that being dependent on others causes stress and is viewed as negative. This sentiment is mirrored in the following quote, and furthermore is shown to relate not only to "big

things" but "small things" as well. This indicates that dependence influences all aspects, big and small, of life.

> "… you depend on someone and every time (you need something) you have to beg … even for small things you have to ask (for money) all the time." (Patel et al., 2016)

Previous sections mentioned the low levels of education and skill that young people leave the schooling system with as barriers to their ability to find employment. However, both the quantitative and qualitative literature repeatedly point out additional barriers such as the lack of qualifications, lack of work experience, lack of information, lack of industry and opportunities, and lack of finances to look for work. Mentioned as often, but perhaps less well understood through the existing studies, are scams, nepotism and corruption in recruitment practices (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018c; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a; Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

3.1. Costs of work-seeking

The remarkable cost of work-seeking is cited by many young people as prohibiting the extent of their job search and in some instances as putting a strain on household finances (Patel et al., 2016). Job search commonly includes accessing the internet to find and apply for work, printing and scanning curricula vitae (CVs) and application documents, postage, and the travel required to undertake these activities.

> "… if you ask a lot of people why you don't have a job they will tell you about that they don't have money to go look for jobs, transport money."(Graham et al., 2019)

> "And sometimes when you find something on the internet and you have to fax your CVs and stuff and go to Cullinan and you, sometimes, you don't have money for some of the things." (Graham et al., 2019)

Many young people across studies report that their household relies on the income of only a single breadwinner, and that they loan money from family and friends to look for work (De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). Often these loans go unpaid as their job search is unsuccessful. They report that when several job applications have failed, the spending on applications comes to be seen as wasteful, and contributes to discouragement as many young people stop their efforts in job-seeking. Furthermore, they report that in some cases the discouragement is better understood as fear, for example, many jobseekers borrow money and get into trouble with family and friends when they are unable to repay their loans (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Patel et al., 2016).

3.2. Salary expectations and scams

Across the studies we see that most young participants have done some work for payment at some stage in their life, and commonly they have held a number of short-term positions (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a), corroborating the churn between NEET-state and employment-state found also in quantitative data analyses (Branson et al., 2018). However, a prominent feature of this work is its part-

time, temporary and contract nature; overall very few permanent full-time jobs were mentioned by the various study participants.

A commonly held belief is that youth unemployment derives from young people having unrealistic salary expectations. Yet this is not supported by the existing qualitative studies. The qualitative evidence expressed in the national minimum wage study (Patel et al., 2016) indicates that their salary expectations are calculated as the amount of money they require to cover the basic cost of living, plus a little in addition. While participants' desired salary is R5000p/m, all youth in a study reported that they would accept R2600p/m (the proposed minimum wage at the time of the study), on condition that this covered their basic expenses (Patel et al., 2016). In some instances, young people quit their job as their salary does not cover the cost of transport, food and accommodation. A few had stopped work or dropped out of their studies due to falling pregnant. The authors stressed that only two unemployed respondents indicated that they had ever turned down a job offer on the basis of low wages.

There is widespread belief among the respondents of all the consulted studies that they ought to take whatever job they can, given the low probability of another offer being made. In fact, in the Minimum Wage study most respondents said that they would accept even lower wages than what they consider to be their lowest acceptable wage, if they were absolutely desperate or "if there is no food in the cupboards". Given the cost of food, accommodation and travel, working close to home and living with family members greatly influence a person's salary expectations (and the salaries that they accept) by minimising their basic expenses (Graham et al., 2019a). Young people reported they would mostly accept lower wages if the corresponding job were located close to where they live, thus obviating the need to cover large travel-related expenses. Importantly, young people would like the opportunity to work and earn an income, and are not turning down jobs. This is evident in the following short quotes from the Siyakha Youth Assets Study: "I'll take anything I can get", "I'm not going to be choosey. I'll take whatever God gives me" and "I'll take what comes". (Graham, 2012; Graham et al., 2019a)

Unfortunately, this means that young people may be particularly vulnerable to being exploited when they are able to find work, or to being drawn into scams aimed at soliciting money in return for work, which some participants had experienced (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al., 2019). In a number of studies, young people have spoken about recruitment scams, or the need to bribe someone in order to secure a job in recruitment practices (Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). Participants in these studies have spoken about how they didn't have the money to pay bribes to ensure that their CVs were considered or jobs secured, that sexual favours are also solicited in the job-search process, and that they perceive nepotism to favour those who are well known or connected.

> "Hospital, cleaning, people are getting in there but even there and that kind of job, it has bribery connections to it. You get there to submit your CV, and while you still there, you will hear people saying, we paid so and so this much and we are getting the job." (Patel et al., 2016)

> "…they say give me R10 000 or R5 000 then I will get you this position." (Patel et al., 2016)

"…uuum sex in order for you to get a job. I remember, I went somewhere in Joburg I won't mention the office name and then there was a guy there and he said I am cute and if I'm willing to do some little things for him he can definitely give me a job." (Patel et al., 2016)

3.3. The role of social networks and experiences of limited social capital

Young people across the studies demonstrate a keen awareness of the role that social networks play in securing work; when they did find work, it was often learned about and secured through a social connection of some form.

"I got a job, like, one of my guardian's is friends with the lady; she has her own company. The lady wanted a personal assistant, that time I didn't even know how to use the computer so she taught me how to use the computer and I learned the filing system. In essence, she trained me how to file. I used to get there sometimes and do absolutely nothing and every month I used to get paid R1 000. I used to spend that money." (Graham et al., 2017)

But many spoke negatively about this, equating the leveraging of social networks to access work to nepotism. This may be because they themselves did not have the social capital that could help them secure work.

"There's a lot of nepotism that exists here, like in our municipality you need to have a popular surname or be a well-known comrade to be employed." (Graham et al., 2019)

4. What support do young people indicate they need to help them secure work?

The solutions suggested by young people align closely with the identified barriers to employment. Youth request more career guidance and information regarding employment opportunities. They suggest that, in addition to at school, these could be provided through Youth Cafes (in the Western Cape), community centres or some type of career days (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019). Young people contributing to the Youth Matters publication put it this way:

''We … ask government to provide us with information and training facilities in our communities that will upskill us for the real world – including skills to set up our own businesses. Teach us how to fill in application forms and prepare for a job interview.''

''We need businesses to reach out and help us gain work experience through job shadowing or internships. We also ask businesses to come to our career guidance days and give us ideas of new careers and opportunities. Let us know what you expect in an interview and help us be prepared. Have some faith in us, hire us and give us a chance to gain experience.''

'' … mentors could help give us direction, and NGOS could provide motivational workshops and one-on-one guidance.'' (De Lannoy et al. 2015)

Digital platform and "apps" are also identified as means to provide guidance, information and facilitate job searching (Youth Lab & PII, 2017). Young people also ask for efforts to be made to investigate and eliminate nepotism, bribery and other unfair recruitment practices.

But most importantly, there is a need to create more industry and work, particularly in rural areas.

> "There are not enough job opportunities. Education alone, or a different attitude to life, is not enough to solve the problem." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

In this regard, the Youth Lab and Poverty and Inequality Initiative report speaks about the need for government and businesses to create more opportunities for youth to connect to the physical spaces of work opportunities, specifically internships, and particularly to create an environment conducive for manufacturing. Furthermore, they highlight the need to promote small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and move away from policies that are biased towards large firms (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

Young people are skilled, and are willing and able to acquire new skills, but they need the opportunities to express and harness these skills. Assuming that there are jobs available, they would also benefit from interventions that reduce the (financial and emotional) cost of looking for work and money to assist with their job search process. In this respect, the Youth Lab and Poverty and Inequality Initiative have discussed the provision of a "job-seekers allowance", although there is an ideological barrier against "handouts". Young people taking part in the conversation also suggested providing a "once-off 'jump start' package" for young people who leave the education system and enter a stage of job search. This could include "a small amount of cash, a bank account, pathway information, a transport voucher, an airtime voucher and access to a digital job search platform" (Youth Lab and PII, 2017).

In the absence of paid work, increased volunteering opportunities are requested to at the very least provide young people with activities to engage in rather than "sitting at home".

> "Ja, like, in Bishop Lavis, there isn't a place where you can volunteer, or do stuff to keep busy. Like if there were places, whatever, it may be now … I believe that I would be basically volunteering all over but there's nothing." - Bishop Lavis, Western Cape (De Lannoy, 2018)

In essence, young people are willing if not desperate to have a chance to work and demonstrate the contributions they can make. But they require the support and opportunities to do so.

5. Family and parenting

In general young people felt that they came from supportive and loving households. They generally described their home as a place of happiness, comfort, safety and support (De Lannoy et al., 2018a) and many spoke about how they have relied on the support from close family members to continue searching for work despite failures (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al. 2019). However, they are also from households where parents and caregivers experience immense stress in caring for children under circumstances of poverty, and where changing households and living arrangements is a prominent feature. This has consequences for young people.

Research has shown how this household fluidity, which refers to shifting household boundaries and resource sharing within and between households, is a critical strategy for survival for many poor households and can, in fact, result in better education, employment and income (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). The household members with which young people reside can change numerous times over their childhood, as can the geographic location of their home. Unfortunately, however, the fluid nature of poor households is often driven by "shock events", such as death of a family member or loss of income, and results in household members experiencing stress and/or trauma (De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). This is in addition to the stress resulting from sustained poverty.

> "I was staying with my grandfather and grandmother. My mother took me because there was family conflict so I left and moved in with my mother in Rustenburg. Then they said I must come back and stay with my grandparents so that I can take care of them. I had grown up by that time I was able to cook and do house chores." (Graham et al., 2017)

For young people who are still at school, moving schools has been reported as stressful (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Graham et al., 2019). Some young people move school numerous times through their schooling. This causes a disruption to their education, often resulting in repeating years and being forced to change subjects when their previous subjects are not available at their new school.

> "When I changed schools from [school X] to [school Y] they said they have space in the agriculture stream. [School X] was a great school I knew I would pass well but I was not able to stay there because circumstances were not good at my aunt's place. My paternal aunt didn't treat me well." (Graham et al., 2017)

In the case when a young person receives the CSG, death of their primary care giver often results in a break in receiving the grant due to onerous and bureaucratic processing to transfer the grant to be received by the new primary caregiver (Graham et al, 2017).

Many other challenges experienced at home are not related to household fluidity but rather feature in the quality of parenting and role modelling. We see that parents themselves are also struggling and are likely burdened by the ongoing pressure of living in poverty. Participants speak of the financial constraints that cause parents to worry about providing food, transport money or educational support. Young people are aware of these financial pressures at home, and whether living with direct or extended family, they have reported feeling like a burden and being forced to find ways to earn an income.

> "Some [parents] are married, yes, but they're not interested. [They] don't know the children and the children feel like their parents don't understand them. Because they need to have that mother/father-daughter/son kind of relationship. We need more dedicated parents who will actually take interest in their child's life. So that their children can be on the right paths." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

> "Communication is supposed to start at home. We know our parents often want the best for us but they are from a different generation. They may not know how to communicate with us or how to provide us with the information we need to do our best." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

Young people are also at a stage in their lives where they are not just dependent, but may also have responsibilities for caring for others, including children (their own and others in the household) and older parents or grandparents. These are often overlooked aspects of being young but qualitative evidence suggests they do impact on the life chances and ability of young people to take advantage of opportunities. Quantitative analysis too indicates the burden of care among young women who are NEET (De Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019).

Having a child as a teenager has a negative effect on chances of finishing school. The additional family member also increases the household expenses, and requires time and attention. A person who could be working in the household may have to stay home and look after the child. However, young people have said that making well-informed decisions around pregnancy is not easy, with contraception not easily available, unsupportive – and unprofessional – nursing services, and difficulties negotiating sex (De Lannoy et al., 2015).

> "Contraception is not always easy to access. Young women who try to get contraception at a clinic are often judged. Some of the nurses in the clinics are rude, they gossip and they tell our mothers, regardless of confidentiality they are supposed to upkeep." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "Also, relationships are not easy. As young women or men, we may find it difficult to say no when our partner wants unprotected sex, as we don't want to lose them … we also need to talk more openly about rape. Rape affects everyone, but especially young women who are being raped by men in their communities, even by family members." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

As a result, the types of family support that young people are asking for speak to the need for psychosocial and counselling services. General counselling and support to all household members relating to common challenges such as relationship difficulties, stress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and addiction are required. In addition, there is a need to ensure that family planning is provided in a professional and confidential manner and that young people have easy access to contraceptives. Support to those who abuse alcohol and drugs, assisting them to overcome their addiction, and support to family members living with addicts have been discussed amongst these youths.

> "Youth have asked for more accessible family planning, and access to condoms at schools. They ask that they are not judged by their community and health care professionals when they visit clinics. Support groups to deal with situations that lead to teenage pregnancy have also been suggested." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "We also need more rehabilitation centres that are affordable and easily accessible – places in our community where we can be supported to stay on track after we exit the centres." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

6. Financial exclusion

Across the themes of the studies, from challenges with post-secondary education to the struggles of finding work, young participants repeatedly mention how financial exclusion exacerbates the challenges they face. In the Siyakha Youth Assets study (Graham et al., 2017) we found that average monthly costs of work-seeking exceeded average per capita monthly household income, meaning that looking for work was a poverty exacerbating process. And the multi-dimensional deprivation study (Frame et al., 2017) demonstrates statistically how income poverty is connected with so many other forms of deprivation. We see this reflected in the narratives of young people too.

> "I am unemployed because my parents didn't save money for me to go to varsity." (Graham & Geerars, 2018)

> "On the point of lack of financial assistance, you cannot learn or further your education without money and that is why the rate of drug abuse and alcoholism within the young people in our communities. People are not getting jobs because they don't have qualifications and the same qualifications that are expensive for most of us." (Patel et al., 2016)

> "She, my grandmother, passed away in 2016 and it became even harder for me as she helped me with rent money, I missed a few payments and sometimes I couldn't go back to school on time as I didn't have the money." - Tzaneen, Limpopo (Graham et al., 2017)

The financial burden of studying, even when one has secured a NSFAS grant or bursary, is a theme that is repeated many times as was discussed in the section on post-secondary education above. The corollary of this issue is that there is some evidence to suggest that financial capability programmes that teach young people about money management and savings have positive effects on employment chances (Graham et al., 2019a). The mechanisms by which this works are yet to be assessed but the finding is a promising one suggesting that supporting young people's financial capability and ensuring they are able to access income where they are eligible (for instance if they are caring for children who are eligible to receive the CSG) are critical to helping them along their way.

7. Health and safety

Across the studies, most young people describe themselves as physically healthy, and mostly able to access clinics and hospitals (De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). There are, however, some participants who are concerned about food insecurity (De Lannoy, 2018; Graham et al., 2019). This is spoken about among prior recipients of the CSG and the National School Nutrition Programme (Graham et al., 2019).

However, health and well-being go beyond the physical and encapsulates subjective well-being; that is, how people feel about their lives, their sense of safety and life satisfaction. In this respect, South Africa's youth do not fare well.

In almost the studies consulted, young people spoke about their exposure to crime and violence in their communities, at home and at school (De Lannoy, 2008; De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019). Almost all young people faced traumatic experiences whilst growing up. Many mention that they have experienced or witnessed violent crimes

such as rape and assault or have lost close family members to violent crime. Some youth also speak of experiencing substance abuse at home or of using substances themselves. Young men especially are said to abuse alcohol and drugs, which in turn negatively impacts a range of outcomes in life, including education. The following quotes indicate the range of crime and violence experienced.

> "This other day I was with my mom and dad and we were travelling to Jo'burg in town and this woman got hijacked, like, in front of us. And we just chilled, like, yeah … go ahead, take her car, and everybody around just moved on like nothing happened." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "I agree with number six [another respondent in the group] that drugs, alcohol and resorting to prostitution are challenges facing youth." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "[Our community is] not actually a nice place; there's lots of crime and gangsterism and people on drugs." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

> "Yes, it's dark … in the house there is no electricity. You get inside while you are busy trying to put electricity [in the pre-paid meter of the house you are sharing electricity with]; before you even finish, he close[s] the door and rape you." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

In all the studies, the majority of youth recognise that this almost daily exposure to crime is one that causes severe trauma. Some speak about being scared in their community, at times even scared to leave home. Young women in particular often speak of fearing rape and sexual assault and link this fear to turning down work that would necessitate them coming home late at night. The need to strategise about how to keep themselves safe has been mentioned in several studies and for some, this fear for a lack of safety influences their choices around job search or opportunities for education and training. In a study on educational decision-making among young people in Cape Town, one young women rejected the option of returning to night school to finish her matric year, because there was no transport that could safely get her to the school and back at night (De Lannoy, 2008).

Importantly, despite the high levels of exposure to crime, violence and trauma, very few if any of the participants knew about or had managed to access psychosocial support to help them cope with these experiences. This speaks to a dearth of mental health support services in local communities, particularly poor communities where the burden of crime and violence is so much higher.

In addition to trauma and violence, unemployment and poverty have a strong negative influence on subjective well-being. Youth commonly talk about how being unemployed and not (being able to continue) studying lower their self-esteem, make them feel inadequate and like a burden to their family. They feel frustrated, angry and isolated (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014). In response to what it is like to be unemployed the following sentiments are expressed "you have no life", you are "like a failure", "no one even listens to you", and "you are a nobody" (Graham et al., 2019).

Young people are clear about the interconnectedness of deprivation and hopelessness on one hand, and the inappropriate use of substances, crime and violent behaviour on the other (De Lannoy et al. 2018a; Graham et al., 2019). Some young men are driven to engage in gang-related activities, and

young women in transactional sex in order to support themselves and contribute to their household (De Lannoy et al. 2015; Graham et al., 2019).

In response to these challenges, again youth raise the need for more psychosocial support. This support should encompass all members of the family and community; including children and adults, healthcare professionals, school staff, police, and other community leaders, for example churches and sports organisations (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy, et al. 2018a; Youth Lab & PI, 2017). The design and implementation of such support should furthermore involve youth themselves (Youth Lab and PII, 2017). There is also a need to develop the skills of healthcare staff, particularly in dealing with youth and their families (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Youth Lab & PII, 2017). Ideally, all children and adults in a society should be able to access guidance and support and, in turn, many more should feel equipped to offer it to others.

> "Everyone needs someone to talk to; that's why I suggest therapy … you [may] feel like something is wrong. You don't [know] what … you don't know how to fix it … so to have someone professional, that actually studied psychology … that could help you. I think that is what we need in our community." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

There is a specific need for trauma counselling and rehabilitation facilities.

> "Like the NGOs that help … ChildLine, like giving advice. A rehab centre or something because we have a lot of drug abuse in our area … a local therapist … a place they can go to; [where someone says] 'we are here for assistance … we can get you to a facility, you know'." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

> "We also need more rehabilitation centres that are affordable and easily accessible – places in our community where we can be supported to stay on track ..." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

Provision of services needs to go hand in hand with ensuring that such services are youth friendly. Young people who have accessed the support services available speak about feeling judged by the services providers, commonly nurses and teachers. For this reason, it has been suggested that young people inform the design and delivery of services such as youth-friendly health care, and that civil society holds service providers accountable for the delivery of quality services (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

In addition to psychosocial support, youth report that there is a need to address poor policing and corruption. There is a need for more reliable policing and security services, regular and stronger police presence and the need to hold perpetrators to account.

> "People in the communities often know who sells the drugs but they turn a blind eye. There is also a lot of corruption. Police get bribed and drug dealers get off the hook easily." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "I think corruption is behind everything. I mean if we had that community centre that was supposed to be built five years ago then we wouldn't be going to Rhodes Park to smoke weed.

> And if people were actually taking care of Rhodes Park the way they supposed to we wouldn't be going around doing things we are not supposed to do."(Graham et al., 2019)
>
> "The police should be around here in the squatter camp because the police [security guards] here in the squatter camp, they are not forceful. They should be forceful for people who are drunk in the street … there are children who are sent for errands at night…then they meet with drunk people. A drunk person can't control himself. He may end up raping a child." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)
>
> "Corruption has become second nature to us. It's not even appalling to slip R50 in your ID to give to a cop." (Graham et al., 2019)

8. Information and connection

Due to their lack of clarity on pathways to follow in their search for opportunities, or the outcomes of certain decisions and choices, many young people use a trial-and-error approach (De Lannoy et al., 2018c). This is not unlike the situation described in Mamphela Ramphele's "Steering by the Stars" (2002), as far back as the time of the transition to a democratic South Africa. The approach is problematic both because of the wasted financial resources and the emotional strain of "wasted effort".

> "It can be really difficult for young people to navigate the systems in our society, as we often don't have the information and support we need to make the right choices. We may not know where to study, how to get a bursary, how to start a small business, or what opportunities are available to us." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

As youth rely on word of mouth for much of their information regarding employment and education opportunities, the extent and quality of their social networks are of paramount importance and have a strong bearing on the type and quality of information young people can access. In households with few employed people, and where employment is in low-level jobs, youth are not exposed to the information and networks that they require to gain access to opportunities related to training, education and employment.

The absence of connection and information becomes evident from grade 9 when learners are required to make subject choices at school. In some instances, these choices are based on what is available at the school, not on careful consideration of their interests, abilities, study options and careers (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a). Upon graduating from high school there is a lacuna of information with regards to what opportunities are available to young people. Some participants talk about how they apply for education and work in an ad hoc and haphazard way, often not receiving any response from these applications (Newman & De Lannoy, 2014; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2019). Some young people rely on knocking on doors to drop off CVs, applying for jobs advertised in newspapers or on the internet, that is, some of the least effective methods of applying for work (Patel et al., 2016). In this regard, an "empowerment package" at critical stages had been suggested. These packages would seek to empower youth with critical information on subject choices, careers, bursaries, volunteering, etc. (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

Those who live far from an internet café and places of employment are more heavily affected by the cost of looking for work. For example, in Luka in the North West province, there is one internet café servicing the entire village, and this monopoly allows the owners to charge R1 per minute for internet access and R10 per page for printing (Patel et al., 2016). Similarly, one participant in the Siyakha Youth Assets Study relayed how she would pay for transport into town and when she got to the internet café she would find that it isn't working (Graham et al., 2019a). This generally results in job applicants only being able to make one or at most two applications per month (Patel et al., 2016). Suggestions to regulate practices around (abusive) data pricing have been discussed (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

Patel et al. (2016) report that young people are bombarded with false information in the form of scams – job adverts which appear genuine but are aimed at stealing young people's money, and that they lack information that could help them to identify such scams.

> "I also got a message, last year, the guy told me, at least give me R2 500 and I will give you a job at the mine. I said 'wow'! I'll see what I can do." (Patel et al., 2016).

Besides connection to educational and employment opportunities, young people speak about their need for social and recreational activities and facilities as they are bored in their spare time (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a). They have requested youth-friendly centres in which they can enjoy leisure time participating in arts, sports, various interest groups and clubs, as well as where they can access credible information regarding their future options available to them (De Lannoy et al., 2015). Ideally these facilities need to be within walking distance, they should run programmes with prolonged lifespan and offers a diversity of services (De Lannoy et al., 2018a). Interestingly, across the studies very few youth speak about using local municipal youth desks, labour centres or libraries as sources of information, even in communities where such services are available. This is not explicitly stated in these reports but is evident by the absence of their mention throughout the focus groups discussions and interviews. Graham et al. (2017) report that very few youth access, or even know about, the services offered by the National Youth Development Agency.

> "We are often bored. So we ask government, NGOs, schools and communities to build sports and recreation centres or to introduce community services so we have something constructive to do that gets our adrenaline going in a positive way … ask us what we need and involve us in the process.'' (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

> "Let me accompany her by saying really there's not much going on here. Like we do have youth or used to as most have left this place as it was mentioned that it is quiet and there are no activities." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "Government, businesses and NGOs, please come talk to us … we need information and resources that are easy to access. For example, would it be possible to have Wi-Fi at taxi ranks, in bookstores, youth centres, community halls, schools, clinics, trains and bus shelters?" (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

9. Transport and mobility

As indicated in previous sections of this report, households in the context of poverty in South Africa are highly geographically mobile, frequently moving to access better health services, education and employment (De Lannoy et al., 2018c; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a). As such, young people within these households often move location and reside with various direct and extended family members.

Those who are working relay how cumbersome the expense and time spent on travel is for their already tight family budgets. For example, contract cleaners living in Soweto report spending up to three hours per day travelling, with a return trip between Soweto and the northern suburbs costing around R40. For unemployed respondents in the rural village of Luka, North West, the only potential employers nearby are two mines or Rustenburg, the nearest town, which takes 30 minutes and also costs around R40 for a return trip. Similarly, in Vrygrond and Langa, respondents cited around R40 for return trips into central Cape Town (Patel et al., 2016). Therefore, youth speak about how they would accept lower wages for work that is closer to home (Patel et al., 2016).

The cost of transport influences everyday activities:

> "Well, if kids want to go far in life and achieve their dreams, they can't do it without money. How are you going to go to university? Taxi fare? Everyday? And the 25th [payday] is still far … by the 15th the parents start worrying where the money for transport and taxi is going to come from, so they have to borrow money from somewhere or someone…" (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

In all of the consulted studies, potential solutions that have been recommended by young people centre around the need to increase industry, training and work opportunities overall, thereby enabling young people to work and earn an income, and by extension afford the costs associated with transport (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a; Youth Lab & PII, 2017). A transport voucher was also discussed as part of an "empowerment package" (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

10. Belonging and social networks

There is a sentiment among some young people of feeling unsupported in their transition through school, and from school into post-secondary education and (un)employment. The transition out of school had been described as fluid, non-linear and often erratic (Graham et al., 2019a) and based on an ad hoc approach (De Lannoy et al., 2018c). The lack of support they receive during this transition is reported across the studies consulted (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019; Youth Lab & PII, 2017).

In spite of this, young people are resilient and would like to "get back on track to a better future" (De Lannoy et al., 2015). They are also grateful for the work that is done to support them.

> "We are grateful for all the people who make a different in our lives: the teachers who go the extra mile; the parent, who even despite their lack of education, are involved in our education;

> the government who protects us and builds facilities for us; the businesses who reach out to us; and the volunteers who mentor and support us." (De Lannoy et al., 2015)

Graham et al. (2019) found that those young people who have access to clubs and others activities outside of school frequently participated in these activities, and this contributed to their personal development and well-being, and also to positive community cultures. The most-commonly mentioned activities were sports and religion based.

> "After school I come back home, change and go to brass band practice, there after I go to … church choir practice." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "Sunday is church day and I will be in church." (Graham et al., 2019)

> "We do a lot of cultural activities. I do public speaking. I do debating. I do cricket scoring ... but there is also drama, we have a band and there is yoga." (Graham et al., 2019)

Perhaps the strongest qualitative evidence, to date, on how youth can be supported through their transition from schooling to independence, is provided in the Siyakha Youth Assets report (Graham et al., 2019). This report shows the social value of youth employability programmes.

Looking at the descriptions of these programmes we see that they are multifaceted in that they provide psychosocial support and guidance; technical skills training; connections to educational institution such as TVET colleges; connections to the labour market through job-matching, internships and apprenticeships; and some provide a stipend. Together these activities increase young people's well-being, skills, social capital and work experience.

In addition to youth employability programmes, NGOs, community centres, libraries, clinics and other communal places can positively contribute to young people's sense of connection and belonging. These contributions should be informed and driven by youth (Youth Lab & PII, 2017) and include activities such as sports and recreation, counselling and support groups, skills training, volunteering and mentorships (De Lannoy et al., 2015; De Lannoy et al., 2018a; Patel et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019a). The important impact that NGOs can have on creating a supportive environment is relayed in these sentiments about "Mr. K" who runs a NGO study group in Tafelsig, Western Cape:

> "When I come to Mr. K., I feel safe. He will always guide you and give you advice … Brother K is one of those people that go the extra mile. He will come to your house … He will come to speak to your parents about what we do here on the programme. And tell them about your capabilities and how you can improve. That motivates you a lot." (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

Through the qualitative studies, young people also encourage higher education institutions, employers and government to be more present in their schools and communities and to link them to relevant information and opportunities.

Conclusion

Just imagine there's a place that I could actually go to for help. ... for resources, where someone will tell me, they'll take my hand, and they'll help me. That would make my mom very happy. Because all of our moms don't necessarily know the answer or know where to go. (De Lannoy et al., 2018a)

The picture that emerges from the narratives of young people across a range of qualitative studies and their involvement in consultations is primarily one of agency and resilience. Young people show immense "grit" in their repeated attempts to make something of their lives. Yet at almost every turn they are faced with obstacles and hurdles, most of which are structural in nature. From poor-quality basic education, lack of career guidance, limited access to information, high costs of work-seeking, low job growth, and exposure to crime and violence, the odds are stacked against them. We also therefore find, emerging in their narratives, a frustration that results from repeated failures in accessing opportunities or jobs, or of training and job opportunities not leading them to a better outcome. And although young people are aware of the structural nature of many of the challenges, there is also the significant risk that they individualise the blame for not being able to make progress in their lives. They question what they themselves have done wrong and point to their own failures to achieve their goals. This in turn can lead to mental ill-health and a sense of social exclusion.

A second theme that emerges is that being in a state of NEEThood does not refer to a linear process of trying to progress, but rather to a constant state of churn as young people seek and perhaps even manage to connect to opportunities, but then fall back out of those opportunities and back into a state of NEEThood. It is the norm for young people to enroll in numerous education and training programmes, take various part-time and piece-work opportunities, including taking up self-employment opportunities, and to move households as they repeatedly attempt to earn a decent living or access opportunities that will put them on the path to a decent living. In essence, young people are left to navigate the transition from school to a viable, longer-term economic opportunity through repeated trial and error, much of which is characterised by failure, and with little to no support or feedback along the way.

Given this reality that emerges so clearly from the narratives of young people, what intervention can best serve their needs and what do they themselves suggest is necessary? The youth that have participated in the studies reviewed speak most clearly about the need for support as they exercise agency. Such support includes guidance on how to access services and opportunities, and feedback about how they are doing and what they can do better. Young people who contributed to the Youth Matters publication talked about "circles of support" where their agency is at the centre, and is supported by parents, teachers, mentors, religious leaders and the like, who themselves are well-informed and able to give direction. They discuss a "whole person" and "whole of society" approach that is supportive but which also expects young people to play their part.

Theoretically speaking, a positive youth development approach is what young people are in fact asking for. Such an approach to young people "shifts our practice orientation away from dealing with problems after they have occurred towards implementing policies and programmes that work to enhance the agency and capabilities of young people. Such an approach is promotive and

preventative. Applied to employability for example, it shifts the question from "how do we address youth unemployment?" towards "how do we support young people to make a smoother transition to the labour market?" It asks us to consider not just the young person's labour market related skills and potential, but to work with a young person in a holistic manner – connecting with their interests, agency, and dreams; emphasising their talent and energy; and supporting them to overcome any personal, household and structural barriers they face." (Graham et al., 2019a). A positive youth development approach has at its core young people's agency and capabilities, but also recognises the need to support and help to direct this agency in a direction that is beneficial to the young person and the realisation of their goals.

What does such an approach practically look like, given the narratives and lived realities of the young participants of these studies?

1. First, it is holistic, multi-dimensional and high-touch. It engages young people face to face, perhaps supported by technology, and begins where they are, with an understanding of their capabilities and their goals. In doing so it requires a component that is proactive in reaching out to young people; both prior to dropping out of existing systems (such as schooling), as well as once they are already out of systems to encourage them to reconnect.
2. It has as its end goal that young people feel supported in their agency and that their navigational capacity as well as their well-being is enhanced.
3. It may involve providing young people with a "starter pack" of basic information and services. This could include "a small amount of cash, a bank account, pathway information, a transport voucher, an airtime voucher and access to a digital job search platform" (Youth Lab & PII, 2017).
4. It recognises that there are a myriad of opportunities and services that young people can access, but that such services and opportunities are often not known to young people or are difficult to access for various reasons. The narratives reveal repeated attempts to participate in available opportunities as well as the real struggles with attempts to do so. Any intervention to support such youth must therefore be able to guide them to take advantage of available services and opportunities at the local level and to ensure that doing so enables them to build towards a better life and to see their progression.
5. Information about and referral to such services might include assisting young people to set goals that are realistic, identifying appropriate and accessible training opportunities and providing information about how to apply for such opportunities and support to follow up on applications. It may include referral to psychosocial support services or to sexual and reproductive health services if necessary. It may include providing advice about what young parents or caregivers are able to access including social grants and early childhood development facilities. And it may also involve supporting young people's financial capabilities. It therefore requires "local intelligence" – an understanding of available local services and opportunities that are available, but which can also support their pathway.
6. Finally, such an approach requires ongoing support. Too many programmes support young people to access an opportunity and then leave them on their own to navigate their pathway further. A positive youth development approach seeks to walk alongside a young person over a period of time, allowing them to connect back into the intervention when they complete a particular opportunity or engage a particular service in order to work with a support person

to assess what the next step in their trajectory is. Certainly, the narratives show that ongoing check-ins and support are highly valued by young people.

Although South Africa has invested significantly in services and opportunities for youth to progress, it has not done enough to support the agency of young people to break down the barriers they face to making a better life for themselves and their families. This is demonstrated clearly in the narratives presented in this report. But the narratives also highlight the agency that young people have and how they use it, as well as what they themselves see as an enabling intervention to help them achieve their goals.

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About this working paper

This working paper is one in a series of reports and working papers by the project "Towards a Basic Package of Support for Young People who are not Employed, in Education or Training (NEET) in South Africa". The BPS project, which commenced in November 2018 and runs until March 2020, explores the feasibility and design of a South African intervention to provide more comprehensive support to young people, aged 15 – 24 years, who are NEET.

Based on research and consultations, the project has put forward a detailed proposal for a programmatic intervention that can provide well-targeted, individualised and long-term support to young people in South Africa, while building a local community of practice to support both youth and the services and opportunities that exist for them. The proposal carefully sets out the various building blocks of such an intervention, founded in a review of best practices. It concludes with a proposal for a pilot that can be implemented at the local level across different South African municipalities. It also proposes an approach to develop an overarching, national institutional framework that can both ensure sufficient resource allocation and safeguard the quality, integrity and coherence of the intervention when rolled out at scale.

The project builds on earlier work, led by the Poverty & Inequality Initiative and the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), both at the University of Cape Town, in partnership with a coalition of partners in government, academia and civil society, to conceptualise a more comprehensive approach to support South Africa's youth.

The 2018 – 2020 phase is led by SALDRU and conducted in partnership with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) Africa; the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), University of Johannesburg; DG Murray Trust; and The Jobs Fund. The work was funded and provided with technical support by the Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion (CBPEP), funded by the European Union and based in the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) in the National Treasury.

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SALDRU

Southern Africa Labour and
Development Research Unit

The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) conducts research directed at improving the well-being of South Africa's poor. It was established in 1975. Over the next two decades the unit's research played a central role in documenting the human costs of apartheid. Key projects from this period included the Farm Labour Conference (1976), the Economics of Health Care Conference (1978), and the Second Carnegie Enquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa (1983-86). At the urging of the African National Congress, from 1992-1994 SALDRU and the World Bank coordinated the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD). This project provide baseline data for the implementation of post-apartheid socio-economic policies through South Africa's first non-racial national sample survey.

In the post-apartheid period, SALDRU has continued to gather data and conduct research directed at informing and assessing anti-poverty policy. In line with its historical contribution, SALDRU's researchers continue to conduct research detailing changing patterns of well-being in South Africa and assessing the impact of government policy on the poor. Current research work falls into the following research themes: post-apartheid poverty; employment and migration dynamics; family support structures in an era of rapid social change; public works and public infrastructure programmes, financial strategies of the poor; common property resources and the poor. Key survey projects include the Langeberg Integrated Family Survey (1999), the Khayelitsha/Mitchell's Plain Survey (2000), the ongoing Cape Area Panel Study (2001-) and the Financial Diaries Project.

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