

October, 2006

Saulwick Muller Social Research



## Fearless and Flexible **VIEWS OF GEN Y**

A qualitative study of people aged  
16 to 24 in Australia.

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REPORT PREPARED FOR THE  
Dusseldorp Skills Forum

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## INTRODUCTION

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This study was commissioned by Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) and conducted by Saulwick Muller Social Research.

It represents the first stage of a two-stage study designed to analyse what young people are thinking in Australia today.

It is based on eight focus group discussions conducted among young people in July 2006. Young people were defined in two cohorts, namely those aged 16 to 19 years of age and those aged 20 to 24.

The second and quantitative component of the study will test and quantify the hypotheses developed in this qualitative stage of the investigation.

The Research Brief stated:

'DSF is seeking a comprehensive piece of research and investigation into the attitudes and experiences in learning and work of young Australians in mid 2006.'

The Brief also stated:

'The sample survey and (where possible) qualitative fieldwork must represent

- teenage and young adult women and men
- young people living in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas
- most mainland states and territories
- teenagers at school and out of school
- young adults in the main post-school pathways – further education (TAFE and university), the labour market (apprenticeships/traineeships, work and unemployment), and those not in either.'

'.... we are keen ... to gain a sense of young Australian thinking, and especially the views of those most affected, around issues such as

- satisfaction with schooling, areas of engagement and disengagement
- satisfaction with post-school life and the transition from school
- the extent to which career plans have been formulated and followed
- exposure to the work force; satisfaction with work, and among part time workers: the extent to which part time work is the right option vs. the only option

- experiences / feelings among school leavers, teenagers and young adults who are neither in full time employment or full time study. These are significant target groups.
- perceptions about the impact of relevant government policies, including industrial relations reforms, education costs and priorities, migration, and career pathways.'

As will be seen, the research was set around young people broad attitudes to Australia and Australian society.

The eight focus groups were conducted in July 2006, in major metropolitan cities and in regional and provincial centres. The groups were segmented by age (teenagers and young adults), and by participation in work (part-time and full-time; white-collar and blue-collar), study (full-time and part-time), a combination of these, and by unemployment and those not in the labour force.

Irving Saulwick and Denis Muller jointly facilitated each group discussion and jointly wrote this report.

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## MAIN FINDINGS

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### THE BIG PICTURE

This is a study of the morale of young Australians and their expectations concerning the future.

The main focus is on education and work, but these aspects of life cannot be sensibly discussed in isolation.

For that reason, our discussions with young people were placed in a wider context:

- What did they think about Australian society?
- What did they want out of life?
- How confident were they of realising those dreams?
- What, if anything, did they think might get in their way?

This generation have their feet firmly on the ground. They are not, for the most part, idealists. Their ambitions are material (the car, the house) and conventional (marriage, children).

In these ways they are not perhaps very different from earlier generations, but in one important way we think they are different.

Not only has this generation been born into a prolonged period of economic growth, but they have come too late to experience the severe economic restructuring brought about by globalisation and the information revolution.

The insecurities wrought by these forces in their parents' generation are not to be found in them. They have grown up understanding and accepting that the future is all about mobility, adaptability and change. For the most part, they are preparing for it and they embrace it.

Thus we hypothesize that the attitudes of this generation reveal a fundamental shift in outlook towards education, work and the future which suggests Australia is entering what we might call a post-Settlement phase.

The old certainties of the Deakinite Settlement created by arbitrated wages, protected industries and regulated markets -- so painfully relinquished over the past 20 years -- are not part of this generation's expectations and are probably not even known to them.

They reveal not a trace of awareness of these antecedents, nor a trace of fear about what might lie ahead.

### **A caveat**

This study covered young people across what might be thought of as the broad middle of Australian society, including some who were economically marginalised. To that extent it provides a sound basis for the conclusions we have reached.

However, it did not cover those who have been marginalised by other factors, in particular by race or isolation. We would not pretend that what we have said here could be applied with equal force to the disadvantaged among the Indigenous peoples, nor to those racial, ethnic or religious minorities who may be suffering from prejudice. Their view of Australian society and of the outlook for the future might be entirely different.

With this overview in mind, we summarise our main findings.

### **REFLECTIONS ON AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY**

1. To young people Australia is the desirable land. It is beautiful, spacious, full of sunlight and beckoning beaches and it is free. Australian society is 'laid back' which, to young people, is a very attractive attribute. It is a society where one can do what one wants and reap the rewards, particularly if one's expectations are not too high and one does not want too much.
2. When pressed to describe the nature of Australian society, the single most commonly offered characterisation is that it is "multicultural". In some respects, they are all for it. They like the idea because it suggests tolerance, a virtue they like to think Australian society possesses. They like the benefits it has delivered – particularly the wide range of food and food outlets it has brought. In other respects, they are discomfited by it because it has confronted them with what most regard as an ugly side of the national character, racism. Most deplore this in the abstract, but many reveal intolerances of their own. They want immigrants to fit in, to conform to 'our' ways: to speak English, to behave like 'us', even if they do not look like 'us'. Who 'us' is, they find difficult to articulate.
3. Australia is also a land of opportunity. Although many see the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, most young people argue

that, barring accidents or unexpected misfortune, they can make their own future if they set their minds to it.

## **VIEWS ABOUT EDUCATION**

4. These young people had a strictly instrumentalist view of education. It was there to provide you with the skills and knowledge necessary to get a job, at whatever level suited you.
5. Some of our respondents were still at school. Some were engaged in tertiary studies at University or TAFE. Some were apprentices. Some had finished schooling or were resting from further study and some were in the workforce. All had received most of their education in Australia. As we have implied above, most were not curious. They did not look to education to expand their minds or their horizons. Education was, to them, a practical process. Essentially, education was required to provide them with the skills necessary to find a congenial place in the workforce. In the main, they were satisfied that it did. And if they had not yet found such a place it was not the fault of the education system.
6. Some were prepared to have a few bites at post secondary education so that they had a bigger skills base to launch from or because their initial interests were not their current interests. But few, if any, were interested in scholarship, in learning for its own sake. In this they were not inconsistent with the broad culture that had nurtured them.

## **ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FUTURE**

7. Some have yet to think much about the future. Many under 20 males have yet to contemplate it. To them it does not exist – or does not do so beyond tomorrow or next weekend. They are relaxed about this – there is time, they imply, to get serious. Until then, they will live for the moment.
8. Many young people do set their minds to it – particularly females twenty and over (our study only took in young people up to twenty-four years of age). The future they see and hope for, tends to be a very conventional, and a very Australian, one. It is certainly not one inspired by flights of fancy or by the wild hopes of youth. Nor, in general, is it idealistic or directed to remaking the world or scaling the heights of science or the arts. It tends to be centred on getting a

'reasonable job', of accumulating some assets, of acquiring a car and then a house, and of getting married and having a family. And, in the main, these goals are seen as entirely achievable, although their timing may be somewhat uncertain.

9. Some young women, and particularly young unmarried and unpartnered mothers, are not so hopeful. Although they are delighted to have a child or children, they often see themselves caught in a cycle of poverty where it is difficult to have enough money to acquire the education and the skills necessary to get a job that will free them from this cycle. It is even more unattainable if they have to do all this while paying child-minding fees. Some live with family and so mitigate the financial hardship, but others do not.
10. Change as it affects their careers or direction in life appears not to worry these young people as it worries their parents. They are adaptable. They have grown up at a time when changes of this kind have become the norm. They have assimilated this aspect of life and regard it as a liberation from what they see as the imprisonment of the "job-for-life" era in which their parents lived.
11. They have grown up in an era of economic stability and relative prosperity. This appears to have contributed to a sense of invincibility where work and future are concerned. They have not experienced economic recession and have had no reason to think that the present cycle of economic growth is not the normal way of the world. As a result, their morale is, with a very few exceptions, robust. While they do not believe that the world owes them a living, they do believe that it will provide one, particularly if they are prepared to work for it. They placed a high value on self-reliance.
12. If an economic downturn did come it would almost certainly come as a shock to these young people. Whether they would take it in their stride or be quite disoriented by it is uncertain. Their resilience and self-reliance could be put to the test by what to them would be a most unexpected change in the social and economic environment.
13. Work is seen as a means to an end. Very few of the young people we spoke with got a real 'buzz' out of their work. Most were doing the job for its money or to gain skill in their chosen occupation so as to climb the work ladder. They expected to move from job to job over time. They will use whatever networks they have established or tapped into to help them find jobs. Certainly they could not see themselves working for the same employer for year after year. Not that they were



critical of their employer. Most felt that their employer would treat them reasonably. Often, however, they did not have the same benign view of their immediate supervisor or 'boss'. Here they often saw petty power being exercised to their disadvantage. Most had little knowledge of unions or the history of unions. They tended to lump unions with other large institutions, many of which they distrusted, perhaps mainly because they felt they had no power to influence their actions.

14. As well as distrusting institutions, they distrusted politicians. Many did more than this – they dismissed politicians and politics from their radar. They lived as though politics did not exist. They certainly did not follow the national or international political issues, let alone the political machinations. Although some had some idea about how they would vote, others did not.

#### LIFE IN THE WORKFORCE

15. The one political issue that had got through to them was the industrial relations changes introduced by the Federal Government. The reason it had engaged them had much less to do with ideology than with the possible material effects on them personally. As we point out above, they had little time for trades unions, and no sense of the historical struggle to establish employees' rights. But they did see how the IR changes could work against them in concrete and direct ways. They identified with some of the cases publicised in the media, and could easily see the same things happening to them. Even so, some could still contemplate voting for the Coalition because they had delivered, in their view, an economically stable environment.
16. Beyond the IR changes, however, they were political ingénues. When we asked them what 'globalisation' meant we were usually confronted by blank faces and silence, or a tentative suggestion that it was somehow the same as global warming. Despite the media attention this subject has received over recent years, it had not penetrated the consciousness of most of our respondents.
17. They were experienced in finding work and in using the job network system. Some were critical of job network providers whom they saw as more interested in making money than in looking after their client's interests. An example of this was placing people in dead-end or unpleasant jobs (shit jobs, as they called them) such as kitchen hands. This is a reflection of comments we have heard in other studies, where some unemployed were more inclined to stay unemployed than to

accept unpleasant or dead-end jobs. But even unskilled jobs, some said, did require some skill and were thus not always able to be accepted.

18. Most of these young people expressed reasonable levels of satisfaction with their current experiences in the workforce, but many had had unpleasant experiences in the past. There was no sense that these young people felt imprisoned in their jobs. They would leave if they needed to, confident they would get something else, if not straightaway then soon enough.
19. Very little comment was made about preference for part time or casual jobs. As much as anything else, this was a lifestyle decision. Those who were not career-oriented or ambitious regarded work as a necessity only insofar as it was needed to allow them to live the life they wanted, which tended to be a simple one. Our sense is that both part-time and casual work were attractive when flexibility was required, provided they brought in enough earnings to make them more attractive than social welfare. Flexibility, particularly for young men, was often desirable, particularly when the weather was good and other activities were attractive.

#### **RACE AND MULTICULTURALISM**

20. We have said that multiculturalism featured large in their definition of Australian society. Although positive about this society, they were not without the ability to criticise it. In particular, they are critical of multiculturalism where they saw
  - minority groups acting aggressively, as many believe youths of Middle Eastern background did at Cronulla
  - minority groups gaining economic power, as some believe the Japanese have done in Queensland
  - minority groups being offered special treatment and special privileges, as they believe Aboriginal groups are offered. In this case some are appalled at what they see as the trashing or destruction of valuable assets, such as cars and houses, by their Aboriginal recipients. They have little tolerance of or empathy for people who have grown up in an entirely different culture to their own, or for people whose society has been damaged by its clash with the dominant culture.
21. Some are without prejudice. Some would like to shed their prejudices but are not sufficiently self-knowing to know how to do so. And some,

perhaps a minority and perhaps mainly males, are overtly racist and see themselves as such. Some believe that certain minority groups, both immigrants and indigenous, are themselves racist.

22. We have noticed over the years that while Aboriginal people are consistently the object of racial prejudice, other minorities come and go according to circumstance. During the years of Hansonism it was Asians, especially Vietnamese. Nowadays it is people of Middle Eastern origin.
23. They were aware that drugs were easy to access. Some were users, some had used, some had not. Attitudes to drugs did not seem to have a moral base, but rather a pragmatic one. This was consistent with their general pragmatism on many questions. For some speed and ice were drugs of preference. Smack was dangerous.
24. While some young people had become alienated from their parents for one reason or another, most of the young people we spoke with said that their parents had influenced them more than any other person. Where this was not so, their peers tended to have had most influence on them.

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## IMPRESSIONS OF THE GROUPS

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### **ADELAIDE, WORKERS AND STUDENTS**

This group consisted of four young men and three young women aged between 18 and 23. All but one were still living at home. Four came from blue-collar and three from white-collar households.

One young man worked part time as a real estate assistant, another part time as a landscaper, a third was an apprentice plumber working for his father, and the fourth was an apprentice electrician.

One the women, one was a permanent casual cleaner studying office administration part time at TAFE, another worked as a permanent part time administrative worker while studying commerce at university, and the third was a fulltime administrative worker studying disability care part time at TAFE.

Fortuitously, the major themes which had emerged during our discussions over the course of the study emerged again spontaneously in this group in quite vivid form. Without any order of precedence they were:

Support for multiculturalism but anger at what they saw as racism shown by Aborigines and some ethnic minorities. Thus there was an ambivalence towards multiculturalism: support for the ideal and for some of its more material manifestations such as diversity of food, but resistance to what they saw as the ugly reality of prejudice coming from others, exemplified by the Cronulla race riots.

Resentment at any form of special treatment for Aborigines.

Vigorous opposition to the new IR laws from two or three participants. Certainly there was no defence of the law by the other participants, and among another one or two scepticism that the trade union movement had any constructive role to play in the working lives of ordinary people. Certainly there was little sense of the historical role of trade unions in establishing pay standards and working conditions.

Despite the fact that they were happy with their current employers, all had had many jobs in menial occupations and had felt badly treated, especially by their immediate bosses in large organisations, rather than by the corporation itself.

In this group we saw the visionaries and the pragmatists. We also saw amongst the whole group a determination to find their own path to happiness through

achievement of their goals. While the visionaries clearly intended to reach for ambitious achievements, all had their eye on achieving some material comfort, financial security, a home to live in, a car to drive, a family, and an interesting job.

Many had struggled in the transition from school. They had felt either too constricted in their education or unguided by their teachers in preparing for the world of work or further education. Where life had separated them from their parents, the problem was exacerbated. Experience had now taught them the importance of education and some were determined to obtain more.

They all dismissed conventional politics, distrusted most people in power, and hence were disengaged. They had little grasp the concept of globalisation. It was as though the word had never been used in public dialogue.

Like most of the people in all of the groups, they felt confident in their ability to control their own destinies by planning, setting goals and working determinedly towards achieving them.

#### **BATHURST, TERTIARY STUDENTS**

This group consisted of five women and four men aged 18 to 25, although most were 20 or 21. Four lived at home, but the others had come from Sydney or towns in the region to attend university or TAFE.

Four of the five women were at university. One already had a double degree in human movement and psychology and was undertaking post-graduate study. The others were studying public relations, marketing, and teaching. The fifth young woman was studying child care at TAFE.

Two of the young men were apprentice carpenters attending TAFE but working fulltime. The other two were at TAFE fulltime.

Five came from blue-collar and four from white-collar backgrounds.

These young people were cheerful optimists. Although they were tertiary students, they were neither intellectuals nor contemplative. The university students – all female -- were practical and directed. They had chosen, in the main, vocational courses that would give them a career they felt comfortable with, and they fully expected to be able to find jobs in their chosen field.

The young men too looked to their courses to provide a base for work. Some had already embarked on their working lives and two were studying their second or third course so that they would be more adaptable and thus better equipped for what they saw as the job market of the future, where there would be no gold watches and jobs for life.

Most had adopted a humanist outlook and the ideals that went with it. For example, they expressed support for concepts such as multiculturalism based not on religious principles but on a sense of the essential equality of people. Some expressed concern about poverty both in Australia and overseas and some expressed passionate concern about the future of the planet.

Despite this they were not activists. A certain realism or even a certain cynicism led them to believe they could do nothing. One person stood against this whole pattern, saying it was a matter of individual responsibility and that if sufficient people shouldered those responsibilities, something could be done.

One young man saw the world completely differently from the rest. He declared himself a racist – and he was. He objected to people excluding him by talking a language other than English; he thought they should conform to the norms of his culture – Anglo-Celtic. He was outspoken in his condemnation of the behaviour of people of Middle Eastern origin in Sydney. He was critical of Aboriginal people getting special welfare, as were a number of others in the group, whose view of the issue of Aboriginal inequality was different from their view of inequality generally.

Moreover, this young man supported the Howard Government's industrial relations laws. In this matter he was clearly influenced by the fact that his father was an employer in the building industry. He was clearly one out against the rest who had little interest or knowledge of politics but who had been aroused by specific cases of what they saw as injustice to employees under these new laws. The fact that he was alone against the rest did not daunt him at all. His goal was to be a millionaire in the construction business within five years – "no ifs or buts".

This group thought the future would look after them. They considered themselves fortunate to have been born into a generation that would have choice in careers and had no doubts about their future security. They looked upon the job security of their parents' and grandparents' generation as a form of imprisonment.

Although they had been trained for specific occupations, they contemplated change and were preparing themselves for it.

**BRISBANE, UNEMPLOYED AND NOT STUDYING**

This group consisted of five women and four men. While they were all unemployed at this time, only one had never worked. Most had had jobs of a menial nature and one had had short-term contract work in a state government department.

All but one were living at home or, in one case, with grandparents.

One young woman had a university degree, a second had completed a fashion design course at TAFE, and a third had completed a multi-media course at TAFE. None of the young men had completed secondary school, having left in Years 9, 10 or 11. Three had worked as labourers and the fourth had owned his own fruit shop but had sold out after tiring of the long hours.

These young people were down but not out.

Most had moved into and out of employment over the past few years, interspersing considerable periods of employment with relatively short periods of unemployment. The exceptions were two young women, one of whom had been out of work for three years and the other for one year.

Their reasons for being unemployed varied. One or two were not prepared to accept what they regarded as unreasonable behaviour on the part of the employer. Two or three others were not prepared to compromise their idiosyncratic appearance or individuality in order to appease what they saw as straight-laced employers who stereotyped them rather than accepting them for who they were. One of them wore punk jewellery in her nose and lips, had blue-streaked hair and liked to wear long leather boots.

With a single exception, they were neither depressed nor fearful of the future. Their expectations were modest. Their ambitions were in their view attainable. They were not reaching for the stars, but many of them wanted to follow their own path, even if that meant short-term hardship. One such woman was a clothes designer who wanted to own a chain of retail shops to sell her own lines. She was determined to achieve this, even if it meant that in the here-and-now she would struggle to find work which would contribute to the attainment of this goal.

As a group, these young people didn't attach as much importance to education as others we spoke to. Instead they thought they would make economic progress by using their modest networks. It's not what you know but who you know, they said.

The exception to all this was one young woman who had been unemployed for a year and saw no prospects for herself. She had worked as a kitchen hand and in her view seemed forever condemned by Centrelink and other job-finding schemes to work only as a kitchen hand. This seemed to imbue her with a sense of hopelessness. She could see no way of breaking out of this impasse. She came across as depressed. We do not know if she was, nor if it was caused by her sense of entrapment or had contributed to it.

To the extent that they had thought about the future – and some had not – it was bound up with their own fortunes and did not encompass thoughts about the future of society or of the planet or any of the big-picture issues taken into account by some of the better educated young people we had spoken to.

They found it hard to conceptualise about the society they lived in. The two social issues which engaged them were what they saw as the preferential treatment given to Aboriginal people, which they deplored as unfair, and the recently introduced changes to industrial relations laws which they also saw as unfair. The concept of globalisation baffled all but one of them.

Perhaps because they were generally uninformed, the future did not worry them. They saw no reason, in general, why they should not attain the modest ambitions they held. This confidence might also have been grounded in what seemed to be their own resilience and sense of self-worth, and the support that most of them drew from their families. Many were living at home because they could not afford otherwise, but most also had good relations with at least one parent.

### **MELBOURNE, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

This group consisted of four boys and three girls, all at school. They ranged in age from 16 to 18. Two were at Independent schools, two at Catholic schools and three at Government schools. They came from a broad range of suburbs across the south and east of Melbourne.

Their parents had a range of occupations only one of which – school teaching -- required a university education. The others included an antique dealer, a gardener, a bookkeeper, a clerk, an electrician and a chef.

This was a lively group. They tended to have thought more, and were capable of expressing opinions more, than other groups we had encountered to this point.

At least five were quite loquacious, which appears to be an unusual characteristic among the cohort we have been researching.



Like most people in the other groups, they saw Australia as a land of opportunity and its people as laid back and easy-going.

They celebrated what they saw as the multicultural ideal in Australian society but were aware of deficiencies.

They believed that they could achieve their goals in this free society, even though some of them did not quite know yet what their goals might be. Some did. One wanted to be a chef; one wanted to be an airline pilot; one wanted to be a police officer or in the Army, and wanted to be a medical practitioner or physiotherapist, depending on what score she achieved in the VCE.

They were optimistic about their ability to fashion their own future. The young men who wanted to be a chef and a pilot had already taken concrete steps towards that goal and had their medium to long-term plans well laid out.

This group more than most were critical of some aspects of Australians society. They debated the fairness of the tax system, the school-funding system and the HECs arrangements, and one was critical of the justice system. This criticism drew a sophisticated and detailed response from a young man whose VCE program included Legal Studies.

The breadth and depth of engagement in issues like these was unusual, as was their ability to think about abstract ideas, when compared with any other group in this study.

#### **MT GAMBIER, CARERS NOT IN WORKFORCE**

These six young women were all carers of young children, living in or around Mt Gambier. Five of them were battlers and one of them was better-placed, but all of them celebrated their role as mothers and carers of young children.

Two of them were raising their children without partners, another two had partners but not spouses, and two were married.

Of the two who were without partners, one was a minimalist and was managing quite well on very limited means. The other had a car and seemed to be burdened by debt.

Except for the young mother who was a graduate and came from a more well-to-do family, they all had been raised in a working-class culture, and although they

had limited horizons, they were confident and at times ebullient about their lives and the future.

All of them had work experience of one kind or another, mostly in menial and unskilled jobs such as fast-food dispensing, waitressing, and mill work.

They were ferociously protective of, and committed to, their children, and their sense of future was tightly bound up with this imperative.

Their dreams went no further than financial security, represented by a house – or a better house – and a partner with stable employment.

The two without partners in particular found the future hard to contemplate, and found the idea of moving away from the area almost impossible to contemplate.

One young woman captured what for the battlers in the group was a vicious circle. Having left school in Year 8 or 9, these young battlers had discovered how under-educated they were, but finding a way to overcome this was very difficult. Work required education; education required money for course fees and child care, but money required work. Thus they felt trapped and found it difficult to see a way forward.

Life had taught them a few things about society and had awakened a level of interest in issues that impinged directly on their lives or the lives of their partner. These included the industrial relations laws, which they roundly condemned, and various policies concerning welfare payments. They showed an understanding of the rationale for these policies, even though they found them oppressive.

This sense of oppression led them to question the overall welfare system. In particular they felt Aboriginal people were being treated better than they were. Among the most outspoken on this was a young woman who was part-Aboriginal and who explicitly said she did not want to avail herself of what she and the others saw as special privileges.

They acknowledged the multicultural ideal but said too many immigrants, especially from Japan, were coming and taking jobs which, in the future, might mean their own children would not be able to find work.

The majority had modest ambitions and were confident of realising them. One young woman really could not see how she was going to move forward in the face of the various difficulties in her circumstances.

## ROCKHAMPTON, WORKERS AND STUDENTS

This group consisted of five men and three women. With one exception, they had grown up in Rockhampton or Yeppoon. The exception had lived in Rockhampton for 13 years. One had travelled overseas and another had spent two years working Brisbane, but otherwise their whole lives had been lived in the local area.

Of the young men, one was a fourth-year auto-electrical apprentice, one was a journeyman butcher working for a large retail chain, one was studying computer engineering fulltime and working part-time in a bottle shop, one was a bakery hand and the other was a third-year carpentry apprentice.

Of the young women, one worked fulltime in a child-care centre and was studying in that field part time, one was working fulltime in event management and studying business part time, and the third was working part time as an office assistant.

They ranged in age from 20 to 23.

It seemed that, in the main, the horizons of these young people were bounded by their experience of growing up in this regional centre. The one who had travelled overseas spoke enthusiastically of how much she had seen, and was keen to travel again. The young man who had worked in Brisbane couldn't wait to finish his apprenticeship and get out of Rockhampton. The others, however, all intended to make their lives there, and were confident of doing so.

Like so many other young people we listened to in this study, they had their feet firmly on the ground. They were neither dreamers nor visionaries, but pragmatic and self-reliant, with the conventional ambitions for financial security and a happy family life.

They saw absolutely no reason why they should not accomplish this. The future was in their own hands.

On the whole they were politically disengaged, except for a couple who had been galvanised by the Howard Government's industrial relations laws which they could see being turned against them personally or against others. These two – one woman and one man – were savvy and alert to what life in the workforce could dish out to those who were not vigilant about their rights. The woman had become alive to this through her business management studies, and the man through his experiences on various building sites.

Most had given some thought to the future. The young man who was a butcher planned to move into real estate as a buyer and seller (not as an agent), and the carpentry apprentice had plans to do well in the city. Only the bakery hand seemed not have given much thought to the future. He was happy going to work when called in and otherwise being free to do what he wished with his time. As usual, the women had given more thought to this than the men.

### **SYDNEY, TERTIARY STUDENTS**

This group consisted of four men and four women, aged 16 to 19, all living at home. Half came from blue-collar households and half from white-collar. Six lived in the western suburbs of Sydney, one in the inner west and one on the north side.

The men included a commerce-law student at Sydney University, and three TAFE students, one studying for a fitness certificate, one studying film and television production, and one studying for an air-conditioning certificate.

Three of the women were at university, one studying chemical engineering, one studying a course in financial planning and the third studying science. The remaining woman was in Year 11 at a high school for at-risk students.

These young people had hardly been touched by life and certainly had not been touched or troubled by ideas.

In the main they were dependent on their parents for economic support. It seemed that at this stage their parents were their major influence.

Most of those at university were there because their parents had pointed them in that direction and because they had achieved the required matriculation mark for entry to their courses, rather than because they were fulfilling a personal ambition. They saw university as a meal ticket.

Although they did not expect university education to set them up in a job for life, they were confident that it would lead to secure employment which, in its turn, would bring access into the conventional Australian adult world: a house, financial sufficiency and eventually a family.

One or two had no plans -- and one had no thoughts -- for the future. The youngest of the men, at 16, could not see beyond his sitting on the beach and enjoying himself. One young woman, of Afro-American and European parentage, fantasised about going to Africa to help people after she had gained the necessary educational skills.

Perhaps only one participant, a female science student of Greek origin, had any formed political views. She thought Australia was an unequal society where the gap between rich and poor was too wide and where the new industrial relations laws were unfair. The others seemed to be living in a world divorced from day-to-day political issues.

All saw Australia as benign. Some tended to wish to see immigrants conforming to an Australian norm which they found it difficult to define.

Whilst they weren't ebullient about the future they had a quiet, perhaps uninformed confidence, that it would look after them or that they would have enough determination to survive.

### **WARRNAMBOOL, WORKERS AND STUDENTS**

This group consisted of five women and four men. Most had grown up locally, but others had moved to the area from Melbourne or other parts of Victoria. They ranged in age from 15 to 19.

The 15-year-old was in Year 9 at school with an unswerving ambition to be a journalist, for which she was already studying. Another of the young women was studying for a hospitality certificate while working fulltime as a kitchen - and, a third was a fulltime student nurse while working part time in retail and in a bar, the fourth was working fulltime as a real estate agent, and the fifth was studying fulltime for a hospitality certificate while working in a café part time.

Two of the young men were apprentice plumbers, one worked fulltime in a metalworking factory, and the fourth was an apprentice carpenter.

Most of the young women were purposeful and thoughtful, and most of the young men were not.

They all saw Australian society as benign, laidback and open to them.

If there was one blot it was racism in different forms. They recognised that immigrants were needed to build and defend the country, but some were worried that in a generation or so, the immigrants would take over from "us". "Us" implied the Anglo-Celtic majority. In a sense they were not intolerant of difference, but they wanted immigrants to learn English and behave like "us".

The Cronulla race riots had disturbed them, and to the extent that they expressed explicit racism, it was directed at people of Middle Eastern origin, particularly

the men who they thought flouted acceptable attitudes and behaviour towards women.

They were tolerant of Aboriginal difference, and some were sympathetic to the impost on Aboriginal society of European settlement, but they were intolerant of the special benefits they saw Aborigines receiving. In their eyes all citizens should be treated equally.

The women – even the 15-year-old – had clear goals. They were solid and realisable goals but they were not goals that reached for the stars. They defined success and fulfilment in material terms – a good job, a car, a house, and a marriage to someone who could give them material security, perhaps in that order.

The men, for the most part, were happy to live for the day. Their dreams were centred largely on establishing a secure place in the workforce. Beyond that, they had hardly considered what the future might hold.

They all thought their ambitions were realisable, that Australia was a land of opportunity and that it was up to them to work to make their ambitions real. If they could be helped by whom they knew along the way, so much the better. The one exception to this was a young single mother who thought that big and unexpected events could change your life in ways that were beyond your individual control.

Although one or two of the women were interested in, and had some knowledge of, the socio-political environment, most of the group did not. We spoke to them on the day that the leadership crisis between the Prime Minister and the Treasurer blew up, but only two – both women – knew anything about it. The rest knew nothing about it and did not seem interested.

Nor did a single person in the group know what “globalisation” meant, let alone have an opinion about it.

Their attitude to education was of a piece with this general lack of interest in matters outside their own material welfare. They had views about their own courses, but were not able to make a general assessment of the way in which education was preparing them for life. They saw school and post-school education purely in vocational terms. Anything extraneous to that was considered irrelevant.

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## DETAILED DISCUSSION

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### Theme 1: Reflections on Australian society

This generation of young people see Australian society as a benign setting in which people who are prepared to buckle down and work hard have the opportunity to make their dreams come true.

In this society people are laid back, informal, keen to see the underdog triumph, and generous to people in trouble. It is a view of Australian society that is hardly original. Indeed it is stereotypical.

They exhibit a mixture of complacency and gratitude that they are part of a society that they see as secure, peaceful and economically robust. Only one used the phrase “the lucky country” – revealing absolutely no awareness of the irony intended by its author – but many might easily have done so, and meant it literally.

Even those doing it tough – the unemployed and young carers on pensions – show scant evidence of feeling marginalised. A few do, but most believe that they will cope and build fulfilling lives. Some of the unemployed in fact regard their status as a signal to society that they will not be bullied into conformity; for others unemployment is a strategic retreat from the active economy while they prepare themselves for a new or bolder future.

*More casual than most.*

*Laid back lifestyle.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*Cruisy. Laid back. Easy-going.*

*Put a great deal of emphasis on mateship and camaraderie.*

*Rally around the underdog, like the miners.*

*And like the tsunami. We sent millions overseas.*

*But we've got a tall poppy syndrome, and we tend to cut down those who achieved.*

*We're pretty accepting if someone's worked hard. We place a lot of emphasis on striving.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*People stereotype you and, if you don't fit in, people look down on you. By your appearance, people judge you. If I dress all in black and dress my daughter in black, you can tell by looking them in the eye that they disapprove.*

*People think I'm bad on the inside because I don't fit in on the outside. I prefer pants over skirts, boots to high-heels, and I don't dress particularly femininely. But I'm going to do what I want anyway. (This young woman had some punk metal in her nose and lips, and blue-streaked hair).*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*Proud of the country, competitive in sport.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*They call us the lucky country.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*If someone's in trouble they lend a hand.*

*Mateship: Trust, loyalty.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*Down-to-earth.*

*Uncomplicated.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

*Very supportive of our own country, sport-wise.*

*Most people work or study. Not a lot of poverty.*

*Opportunity for everything.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**



## RACE AND MULTICULTURALISM

Racial tolerance and multiculturalism are sources of dissonance in their reflections about Australian society.

Many young people mention multicultural diversity as one of the defining characteristics of Australian society. This suggests to them that Australia is a tolerant society. But this view was invariably challenged, usually by reference to the Cronulla race riots in Sydney in the summer of 2005-06.

In the face of this challenge, those wishing to cling to their view of multiculturalism as a positive aspect of Australian life tend to resort to a celebration of what might be called "folkloric multiculturalism" – the variety of food, art and culture that they see (or had been taught) had enriched Australian society.

Usually a rough consensus emerges, based on the idea that if people of other cultures are to be acceptable, they have to "be like us". That means speaking English, not taking jobs from "Australians", and generally conforming to the norms of the Anglo-Celtic culture. Most of our groups contained people whose families were from Mediterranean or Asian backgrounds, but few of them spoke out against this line of argument.

In regional areas there is still to be heard a view that Australia is being overrun by foreigners and that even though the nation needs immigrants to keep the economy going, there is a risk that "they" are out-breeding "us".

Occasionally there is unbridled racism, expressed in genuine hostility to people who do not speak English or who are seen to behave in an unacceptable way. The current targets of this are people of Middle Eastern origin.

There was one reference to a case of genuine multiculturalist integration in which a young man of Anglo-Celtic background had been virtually adopted into a Greek family.

Racial tolerance had two aspects – assimilation by immigrants, as described above, and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

A very widely expressed view about Indigenous people is that they are the undeserving recipients of special treatment in the form of government benefits more generous than those available to everyone else. This is seen as a violation of the "fair go" and "equal treatment" principles which these young people see as additional defining characteristics of Australian society.

Moreover, it is not uncommon to hear the racist tag applied to Indigenous people or to immigrants, based on perceptions that these groups exclude others.

*Quite accepting coming from the whole multicultural thing.*

*With exceptions. There's still quite a lot of racism.*

*I think black people are more racist than white people.*

*I went to school in an area that was very multicultural but some people like the Aborigines wanted to be treated equally but were asking for different things from everyone else.*

*I come from a very multicultural school and if anyone was racist it was the Asians.*

*They called everyone round-eyes.*

*There's no bad group. It's individuals.*

*I have three adopted yia-yias (Greek grandparents) (this from a young man of Anglo-Celtic background). I get invited to big gatherings.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*I really love our ideals about multiculturalism and that there be no barriers, whether it be race or religion or even species.*

*We had a race riot about six months ago.*

*Yes, but generally you can go to Newtown and see an Indian curry place next to a Thai place.*

*I'm racist. Try living with those people. They won't talk to you, talk their own language, speak own language and food and religion and they'll overrun cities and live in their own groups.*

*I like to believe Australia is understanding and accepting.*

*Being multicultural allows us to label groups and exclude them.*

*Our history is not too crash hot. The whole Aboriginal problem and the way we dealt with it.*

*I grew up with Aboriginals in Kakadu and they were really good and I never had any problems at all, but on the South Coast they were more violent.*

*They can hand back half their Centrelink allowance and it'd even it up.*

*Just give them a fair go.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*If people see you're different, they treat you different, especially older people, if they don't know much about you or where you come from. They stereotype you as a wog (young man from a Greek background).*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*Many different types of people. Different cultural backgrounds.*

*We have a lot of immigrants from places like Timor and Asia.*

*We accept people for who they are.*

*That's an ideal but it doesn't always happen.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Racism is a big problem. We're a multicultural society but people still tend to stick in their own groups. People try not to be racist but it comes out every now and then, as in Sydney.*

*My stepbrother was walking home and he got picked up and bashed because they thought he was Aboriginal and then they realised the next day (that he wasn't) and they let him go home.*

*Aborigines get everything handed to them and they don't look after anything they're given.*

*I've got Aborigine in me and I say get off your arse and do something.*

How do you feel about multiculturalism?

*More good but also not so good. In Melbourne and Adelaide you see all the Japan people. It's good to have them here but it's taking Australian jobs for Australian people.*

*You have to remember we're here because of constant immigration.*

*Yeah but they're breeding quicker than we are.*

*I hate the detainee situation and that's changed our image to the rest of the world.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*Racism. People get perceptions of other people that may not be true. Like Bondi (Cronulla).*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*Accepting of differences like race, in general.*

*I don't think we're as tolerant as other people think.*

*Half society is multiculturally aware but that other half don't agree.*

*If you're an Arab in Cronulla you won't be accepted. Different races and religions.*

*If you come here you should abide by our rules.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

*Multicultural. A very good feature of this society.*

*It has its ups and downs.*

*Racism. It was all over the news not long ago about Cronulla. I was pretty happy the wogs were getting beaten up, the Greek people.*

*In the cities like Sydney you see a lot of racism. We're comfortable in our own country and don't like other people taking it over. I don't like that. Moving in on us.*

*We need immigrants to keep production running but because we need these people we'll be wiped out, and it'll be a multicultural country without us.*

*We're multicultural already.*

*The Aboriginals – different laws and elders. Our system is a lot different from theirs. They're not disadvantaged. They get a lot of stuff given to them. I don't think people should get handouts, and it's unfair on those of us who struggle to keep our head above water.*

*They can't let go of what our ancestors did to them, and it's a big struggle. I think if they'd done to us what we've done to them, we'd be like them.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## **BEST FEATURES OF AUSTRALIAN LIFE**

Aside from issues of race and multiculturalism, the best features of Australian society are seen as peace, security, and a reasonable welfare safety net.

There is also a fairly widely held view that the education system is fair and provides a reasonable preparation for life, although access to higher education is seen as less fair than it used to be.

*Crime rate's low.*

*Social security and unemployment so you don't die.*

*We have a fair education system.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*You get support from the Government when you're older. Good social security.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*We can communicate without tearing each other apart. Peaceful.*

*It's more of a caring society – as soon as a country needs support, it pours out.*

*Most of the time you feel safe.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*Freedom. Compared to a lot of other countries we can do a lot more, under the law.*

*We've got a lot of opportunities to do what we like.*

*Pollution levels aren't as high in places like Japan.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*We can be generous and selfless, like people who start up charities, places for refugees to come.*

*Innovative. Medical research.*

*Sport.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

## **WORST FEATURES OF AUSTRALIAN LIFE**

Asked to say what are bad things about Australian society, these young people swiftly focus on the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, citing specifically his perceived propensity to tell lies, his perceived closeness to the United States of America, and the changes to industrial relations laws enacted in 2006.

The Prime Minister has his defenders, but they appear to be relatively few.

Among young people of lower socio-economic status, the justice system is seen as weak on serious crime and biased against people on the lower rungs of the social ladder (like them).

*The Government. John Howard. Enough said. The lies and the eyebrows.*

*The job thing: you get permanent and it's just the same as being casual.*

*Apprentices get fired at the drop of a hat.*

*The GST.*

*The nuclear weapon lie to do with going to war.*

*John's better than the Labor Party. They're there for the workers but he's there to try to get Australia right into the good books with the money. It's hard to say.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*University places should be free. HECS is a big pressure. It puts people off going.*

*And people who would be good lawyers can't get in because they can't afford to go to a good school and get in, but a rich kid can get there but he's got there because his Dad's got the money.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Our justice system is bad. A person killed a baby and got jailed for five years. Stuff-all.*

*Paedophiles go to jail, get TV and everything, come out and re-offend.*

*And some people who get charged with a serious offence get a bigger sentence than others. If they're wearing a suit they'll get a warning but if they're wearing a singlet or something, it's "come with me".*

*It's bad we keep selling our companies off to America. We're not thinking or striving for ourselves. We are going to end up more in debt than ever before.*

*Everyone's in debt. My brothers and sisters at high school were sent a credit card through the mail and they didn't have a cent to their name.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*John Howard. He's got to be the single worst thing about this country at the moment. He's trying to make Australia into a mini-America. The whole war in Iraq thing.*

*Most people think the war in Iraq is a joke but Australia has to prove itself defensively and that's one of the reasons we sent troops to Iraq, because terrorism is a global issue and we had to prove to the world we could defend ourselves.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*We're probably not independent enough from the likes of America. We can't stand on our own feet.*

*It's just that we need our allies and we've got America to depend on.*

*It's more cultural. Everything Americans do we end up doing here.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## **AUSTRALIA AS A FAIR SOCIETY**

Asked whether they see Australia as a fair society, many young people assert that the gap between rich and poor is widening. No one can cite data in support of this, but it is a very widely held perception.

*The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.*

*But if you want to earn a dollar you can.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*With the Aboriginal payments there are a lot of poor white people who don't receive the same benefits and I think we are generally a fair society but that upsets me.*

*Dispersing government money, not just to Aboriginal people, but families that are extremely rich and their children go away to uni and they can claim Centrelink benefits when their parents are millionaires. But generally we are a fair country.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*The legal system doesn't work on a case-by-case basis. I was assaulted, but the charge was dismissed when the police said I wasn't telling the truth. So I don't trust the police.*

*Yeah. My cousin got severely bashed by a group of Aborigines and they went to the police and were told there was nothing they could do because they were Aborigines. It wouldn't go anywhere. It has happened a few times in that area. I thought our society was meant to be equal.*

*In Centrelink, how come people with drug addiction and alcoholism get paid more than the normal person?*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*In the sense it's democratic, yes.*

*Yes and no. Some criminals get off really easily. A teacher who had sex with a minor only got three years' jail.*

*I don't think you can blame the judicial system because they follow precedents.*

*It's all relative. In comparison to many countries, it is fair. In many countries the police are corrupt, so there's no where to go.*

*Freedom of political communication, freedom of speech.*

*We're not under a communist system. You don't have to fear.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*The GST was unfair. Some of the stuff they taxed – tampons – but for males, condoms were fine.*



*The stuff that's come in for the single mums has been good.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*It's fair in the way the laws are equal for everyone, but Australia is getting more and more segregated between rich and poor.*

*Our judicial system is a bit of a joke. In comparison to punishments in other countries a lot of criminals here get let of with a slap on the wrist and go on and commit other crimes. And the bartering that goes on between prosecution and lawyers.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*I don't think so. If you work hard you get ahead but if you start off on the wrong foot there is always going to be this inequality.*

*A testament to the fairness of the laws – look at Redfern and Alice Springs. Would the same laws always be applied to them? It's got to do with who instigates the crime and how they are dealt with is a lot different.*

*Segregation – wealth issues. You've got your high-status people who live in certain areas.*

*Absolutely. Too much gap between wealthy and poor.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

*There are more loopholes for the rich, like at tax time, than someone who works hard because they can't afford the accountants.*

*I think it's unfair that you're eligible for the dole, but now they've changed it so that your boss can pretty much fire you whenever they like. You can get fired with a click of the finger.*

*They're unfair. They push people to look for work but as soon as you get work you get trouble. It's a pain.*

*One thing I don't think is fair is the youth allowance system. I've been out of home since I was 16 and the whole time I've worked and tried to get some money behind me and recently I had to have an operation and Centrelink seems to be trying to punish me for saving money.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## **Theme 2: Views about education**

These young people had a strictly instrumentalist view of education. It was there to provide you with the skills and knowledge necessary to get a job, at whatever level suited you.

Thus, those who had gone on to apprenticeships and vocational training or had gone straight into the workforce spoke dismissively of their schooling as having been largely irrelevant in preparing them for work. They were also critical of the perceived lack of career advice and transitional arrangements at school. For some, this meant they had plunged into a tertiary course without much thought for why they were doing it, and subsequently had had to change courses.

Those at university were generally more appreciative of their schooling.

While the university students were on the whole satisfied with their university education – they were doing courses which they could see would lead them to a career -- there was some dissatisfaction about the quality or commitment of lecturers.

*The transition from high school and education into the workforce is a real problem. People can train and train and train but when they come out, there is no work.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*I thought I'd be trained in as many vocations as I can while I'm young so I can pick and choose. So I did a certificate 4 in music and now in media and I've done event management. So I've done all this stuff not looking towards using it but I can switch and change if I have to.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*I just planned to get a degree; I didn't plan for the next part. I don't want to go down that path any more. I want to set up an Internet-based business like MySpace.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*They are just interested in trying to push everyone to get a higher ENTER score and that's as far as they go.*

*They don't tell you what to do when you get that ENTER.*

*We have mid-year and end-of-year discussions with principals and they'll help you choose subjects for VCE that will best suit you. You set goals for yourself*

*and they try to help you get there. Once you're at uni or wherever, you're on your own.*

*In our school the VCE is "the world". It's pressure. Some thrive on it. Some don't, but it's stressful.*

*It puts a lot of pressure on. They do it because they think it is best for you.*

*And it makes them look good as well.*

*It doesn't really prepare you for what happens after school if you choose not to go to uni. There's nothing there to help you with everyday needs.*

*Or how to manage your bills and taxes and mortgage. There's nothing to prepare you for it.*

*You don't need things like trigonometry unless you're going to be a rocket scientist or something.*

*You need to learn life skills.*

*I disagree. School is about academic education.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*I learn a lot more at trade school than I do on the job because people get impatient with you.*

*Terrible. Teachers don't want to make the effort. They shrug you off.*

*They don't really set you up.*

*I'm learning a lot more out of school than I was in.*

*Algebra and all that – useless.*

*Later in your high school you choose the subjects you need.*

*I left school in Year 9. It didn't teach me anything.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

### **Theme 3: Attitudes toward the future**

Young women and young men show an extraordinary contrast in their preparedness to think about the future. Perhaps it is a question of differences in maturation rates, but whatever the cause, in general terms young women think about the future and young men do not.

There are exceptions to this, of course. Some of the young men we spoke to had thought long and hard about the future, had planned it carefully and had set about making that future happen.

However, they were the exception rather than the rule. Many young men – especially the less well educated -- had not got past next pay day and, for a few, even that was considered long-term.

A few young women gave the future scant attention, but this was very rare. Most had thought a great deal about it, and were systematically and purposefully working towards making it happen.

Do you think about the future?

#### **Young women**

*Every day. I look at what I've studied and what I want to study and what job I want. And my partner and I have been talking about buying a house.*

*I worry about the future as well. I've been in this job almost a year and I absolutely hate it sitting in front of a computer and how many more jobs do I have to jump to before I find something I want.*

*I don't live without my diary. I want a house soon.*

#### **Young men**

*I think about the future because I work for my Dad and I think what happens when he retires in five years. How do we match up with the plumbers in the city etcetera, and the courses I've got to do to get ready.*

*I think about the future quite a lot because I consider myself an artist (sculptor) and I've got an exhibition coming up and I wish to pursue my creative ideals. But I'm a realist and I need to keep a roof over my head and be happy within myself.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

#### **Young women**

*I think about the future.*

*It scares me. When I think about the future I don't think about my own personal future. I think about the future of the country or society or the world. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, the baby bonus scares me, the children it is creating, the reasons people are having children – to get that money – and things like the drought, we're in the worst drought ever at the moment, apple trees are blooming two weeks earlier. There's temperature change, we're getting less rain, days are hotter. And I just think, where's all this going? I'm more concerned with poverty and things we can help with. I don't think about my own future too much and that worries me a bit.*

*I don't know if I want to have kids that way it's going.*

### **Young men**

*Go with the flow. If you spend all your time thinking about the future you won't enjoy the present.*

*I saw my Mum as an example of someone who trained and worked at something all her life and then became unhappy with it but couldn't switch vocations because of age. So I thought I'd be trained in as many vocations as I can while I'm young so I can pick and choose.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

### **Young women**

*I still have my dreams and plan to work towards them but life is full of surprises so you can't hold on to one thing. I'd like to run my own shop and sell my clothes.*

*I did a three-year course and hated it and discovered I liked graphic design and I've taken on that path. It's not an easy career to get into but I've worked in that field for the past three years. I work today for tomorrow. I'm not stressed about the next few years. I need to live day by day and I enjoy what I do.*

*I plan everything. My whole life, and take into consideration what will I do if this happens, what if that happens?*

### **Young men**

*Every day at a time.*

*Something can change drastically in a week.*

*I'm a drifter. I just float my way through it.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

### **Young women**

*I think about what career I want to do and what ENTER score I need, all the time. I want to be a police officer and I've been looking up what subjects I need to do.*

*I think about the future and what I want to do, but I want to take it one year at a time. You've got a rough outline but not a full picture. Every day is a mystery and you don't know what's going to happen and I want it to unfold.*

**Young men**

*I don't know what I want to do and I should start thinking about it.*

*I know what I'm going to do, fighter pilot. I've started flight training for my private licence. I've got it all planned out.*

*I'm thinking about something to do with law. Live for the moment.*

*You've got to take every day as it comes. You could walk out of here and get hit by a car. You've got to think.*

*You need to have dreams. If you haven't got dreams you've got nothing. But you've got to be realistic in setting your goals. You can't be a lawyer and go to the moon!*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

**Young women**

*All the time.*

*Every day.*

*If the job situation carries on, my child will be a dole bludger because people are coming in and taking jobs. They are bringing over a whole new lot of people because the people here were not fast enough or skilled enough.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

**Young women**

*All the time.*

*I think about the future a lot. It doesn't always go to plan. Where I hope to be.*

*Yeah, all the time.*

**Young men**

*I think about pay day and where I'm going to go.*

*Yeah. Where I'll be in five, ten years, where I want to be.*

*Yeah, I think about the future. I'd like to think that when I got older I'd want to have a nice life for myself and my family so we won't struggle.*

*I find it hard enough to plan for two hours.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

### **Young women**

*I think about my future a lot. My Mum had a hard life and I don't want to end up doing the stuff she was doing.*

*I do in a way because of my parents' struggle to give us a good life so they felt they did their struggle for a reason.*

### **Young men**

*I don't think about the future. Have fun, do what you've got to do. I'll finish my studies and go at it.*

*The same. Take every day as it comes.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

### **Young women**

*I want to go overseas, the UK, New Zealand. You've just got to have the money to do it. And you need connections.*

*I think about it a lot. I plan for my future. I want to establish myself here, get some assets behind me, and then travel.*

### **Young men**

*Let it take its own course.*

*I haven't really thought about it heaps.*

*I want to go up to the city and get on big building sites. As soon as I get my certificate, I'm off.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## CAPACITY TO MAKE THE FUTURE HAPPEN

In nearly all the young people we spoke to, we found a robust self-confidence that if they worked hard, with ordinary luck they could make their future happen.

They revealed a strong streak of self-reliance and determination, with one or two exceptions who seemed beaten before they started. These were young people living on the margins of the economy and who seemed to lack hope in their ability to find a more secure life. They saw themselves caught in a vicious circle. To augment their insufficient education they needed to undertake courses and this would cost money. Those with children would also need child care. They did not have this money and had no prospect of acquiring it without work, and no hope of acquiring work without education.

A few – particularly among the women – expressed concern about whether global forces such as terrorism or climate might render all their planning futile. When these matters came up, there was a degree of helplessness among young people generally. They had little confidence that the Australian Government could be trusted to deal with these major issues, even if it had the power, which they doubted.

Can you plan for the future and make it happen?

*The harder I work at it and not give up, the bigger the chance I'll get there.*

*If we don't get blown up before the future happens.*

*After Bali I feel threatened because I have no power.*

*You set your goals and I'm going to do whatever can in my power to get there. You can't worry about what other people are doing.*

*Or what is happening around you. You might as well have been hit by the bus yesterday because you're not going to reach your goals.*

How well prepared do you feel to face the future?

*I've had to work for my money since I was 14. So I have learnt the value of money and how important it is to set things up for yourself.*

*I have two things to go by: luck is when preparation meets opportunity. I've been preparing for what I want to do in TV since I was four. I don't believe in luck.*



*The second thing is we're born crying but let's die smiling. I'm not going to let threats change my day-to-day. If something happens I'll deal with it then and in the meantime make the most of life.*

*If you're pushed hard enough, you'll hang on. You know that when you're pushed to your limits, you'll hang on.*

*I've had a fairly hard road but I like to think that through that experience I can make it easier for other people to make that same road.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*One thing I've learned is that it's not what you know but who you know. I have got so many opportunities through networking and meeting people. You might be sitting there asking for a job, and you might know my uncle's sister's brother's cat's dog or something, but you'll be given the job. So we might have the training but we might not get where we want.*

*It's not always down to how shit-hot you are. There are people in positions that I know for which other people are much more qualified. You can go to uni for five years and go for the job of your lifetime and some guy'll get it because he's the nephew of the chairman.*

*I was looking for an apprenticeship and I couldn't find one and my uncle knew someone up here who wanted an apprentice so that's how I ended up here.*

*To a degree but it's not all who-you-know. Sometimes you know those people because you've gone out and done that networking. It's not necessarily that you're the nephew of the chairman. You've had the personality to get out there and meet the people, so you've got that connection because of you. If you can network for connections, good luck to you.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*You've got to have dreams. What has changed society was "unrealistic" before it happened.*

*Without dreams there's nothing. You need to set goals in life. But you also have to be realistic. Push yourself but think realistically.*

*If you plan and it turns out, great. If it doesn't . . .*

*For every success story there's a thousand failures.*

*If I don't become a police officer, I'll go in the army.*

*It's in your own hands.*

*What happens with you depends on what choices you make. If you make bad choices and drop out, that is your choice and you have consequences.*

*Your life is your responsibility and what happens is up to you.*

*It's about the risks I take to do what I want.*

*You might be crushed but you've got to get up and make something of yourself. Find another way to get to the top.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Doing it right now. We've bought our first house which is a stepping stone to a better house and sell it and give our money to our kids so they can have a start in life.*

*Still too early for me to start planning to get out.*

*It's a vicious circle. I can't do study because I need a job, need child care, need money to pay for child care, and can't do the job without education.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*You can plan to go overseas but in ten minutes' time you could be hit by a car.*

*I'd like to buy a house and invest my money in something stable. It's possible, especially while you're young and without children and responsibilities.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*You can set goals even if they're not big goals.*

*The closer you get to it the more confident you come.*

*Yeah, I think so. I'm determined to get where I want to be.*

*Yeah, in some ways, but sometimes my parents make decisions for me.*

*I think I'm pretty driven.*

*Yeah, I'm pretty determined.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

*You can't plan the future. I wanted to be a hairdresser but it all changed. We moved to Queensland and I've got a child now. It's out of your control what happens, sometimes.*

*I'm confident I can achieve anything I put myself to.*

*I reckon it's how you deal with life. You reap what you sow. It's up to you to control your own life.*

*I've planned for my life but there's something in me that says, what if I can't get there. You have to think I'm going to have to try. You need to have another pathway.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## **DREAMERS AND GOAL-SCORERS**

There were few real dreamers here, but plenty of people with goals. Most of these young people revealed themselves to be pragmatic, materialistic, and conventional.

This emerged most starkly in their responses to a question about what they would do if they could have all their dreams come true.

There were a couple of genuine dreamers. One wanted all the atmospheric pollution to be magically converted into fresh air. Another wanted to be immunised against grief and hardship. In this, these young people – both women – were expressing a dream solution to issues or experiences that clearly troubled them. Their dreams sprang from deep sources.

Some also emerged as very generous-hearted in relation to their families, and hopeful of non-material benefits, such as family reconciliation.

*Travel the world.*

*Have a nice family.*

*I'd pay off my mum's mortgage. The family broke up she has been my support all this time.*

*I would love for my family get along and to be able to have a conversation with my mum.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*I'd buy an island, somewhere it's warm all the time.*

*Wipe out poverty, fix the ozone layer and make the perfect world and all the pollutants would turn into fresh air.*

*I'd get an insane recording studio and breed clones of myself.*

*Stick to what I'm doing now. I want to be a primary school teacher. Just basic.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*Supercross – riding super bike.*

*To open my shop.*

*I love racing cars. Doesn't matter where. For a living.*

*Travel, everywhere. I've been to Japan.*

*Mine is just money, because I want freedom to do what I want, buy cars . . .*

*Mine wouldn't be anything outrageous because the way I plan isn't anything that is unbelievable: get married, have three kids, have a nice house. It's just a matter of time.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*You could have your dream car, but not without work, because there's no sense of achievement.*

*I'd like to snap my fingers and be apprenticed to a great chef.*

*I'd be a pilot or a property developer. I love houses and architecture.*

*Probably play golf. US Open.*

*I wouldn't mind being Oprah. She helps people. The fame, the power thing.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Win Tattslotto.*

*I want \$25 mill and work in real estate.*

*Just looking after my son at my happiest. We are struggling on his wage but I'm enjoying it. When we had more, the more we had the more we spent. I'm lucky with what I've got.*

*There's a house just near the beach and I'd love to live there and have lots of kids.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*Be rich and sleep late.*

*But not have any pressures to be anywhere at a certain time. Complete freedom.*

*Travel the globe. Africa, the Middle East.*

*Immunise me against grief and hardship.*

*Have a perfect government. All humans are imperfect, so how can you have a perfect government? If we were perfect we'd live forever. And that's only our physical aspect.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*An island of my own.*

*No work and heaps of money.  
No money – forget money altogether.*

*Didn't have to pay for petrol.*

*Be on a travel show on TV.*

*Be Superman.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

Similarly their hopes for what they would be doing in five years' time were, on the whole, realistic and materialistic.

*Playing at the Big Day Out.*

*To be buying a house, know what my career is going to be.*

*Having my first child, with the career happening.*

*Have a show up and running on commercial TV.*

*Running my Dad's business.*

And in reality what do you think you will be doing?

*Saying I want to be playing at the Big Day Out!*

*I will be building a house. It's a goal I've set, and you can work towards them if you really want them.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*University doing my teaching degree.*

*Married and being a clinical psychologist.*

*Just moving up in my public relations career in Sydney.*

*I've got three. Working as a mixing engineer for live or recorded music; being in a graphic design firm in a metropolitan area or working as a promoter, event management, festival, live arts.*

*I just want to be happy, I don't what job I'll be doing.*

*I want to be financially secure and halfway through creating an empire in the construction industry, maybe using my parents' money to invest. No ifs or buts.*

*I just assume I'll be happy, have friends. That's what it's been like all my life.*

And in reality what do you think you will be doing?

*I don't now. Hopefully still building. Still going with the flow.*

(Most thought they would be doing what they planned.)

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

In reality what do you think you will be doing?

*Sailing around the world. My friend's nearly finished building his boat and he's offered for my daughter and me to go around the world.*

*I want to be studying again. Probably marketing or advertising. Or in IT. I'm addicted to advertising. I channel flick to watch the ads!*

*I'll be running my shop and have finished a business management course hopefully.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*Medicine or physio at Melbourne or Monash. But I really don't know. Otherwise I'll be doing science.*

*I've still got lots of school left.*

*I hope to have an apprenticeship as a chef. I applied to go on the Jamie Oliver Show but I couldn't get on but I hope to be an apprentice of his over in London.*

*Something to do with law or TV entertainment or something to do with sport. Not to sure. Take every opportunity I get.*

*I don't know. Hopefully have my own business selling products people actually want.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Moving into a new house. I can't stop thinking about it. I'm determined and I don't let nothing get in my way.*

*Married.*

*More kids. Two more.*

*Three kids.*

*Have a good job. Something I loved doing. Real estate.*

**And in reality what do you think you will be doing?**

*Buying a house. I've told him there's no way I'm stay in that house longer than five years. Plan now or we're stuck here for ever.*

*We'll still be renovating.*

*I still be sitting on my own with Holly (daughter) doing my thing. Whatever we do together. May be working by then.*

*I'll be married. I love being a mum. It's the best thing in the world. You can't imagine your life beforehand. You can't remember what it was like before.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*It'll definitely be different. I'll be self-employed buying and selling real estate and I won't be working for Woolworths and I'll be happy.*

*By then I'll be a tradesman. The world's pretty much open then once you've got a trade. I won't be in Rocky in five years' time.*

*Hopefully I'll be finished my study, be working where I am and getting more pay.*

*I haven't a clue. I'll be out of here by then.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*Something I enjoy, but I don't know what.*

*I want to own property, specialise in gasfitting and roofing, at least own one house to live in.*

*Have my degree in nursing and paramedics and own a house or close to it, have a really nice car, hopefully be engaged.*

*I want to be engaged with a big rock and to own my own house and own an investment property.*

*And to buy something out of Vogue magazine.*

*To finish a hairdressing apprenticeship and have my own shop later on.*

*Have a TAFE diploma in journalism, have my own house, be independent, be my own person.*

*Finish my traineeship and had a taste of overseas life and be running my own business.*

And in reality what do you think you will be doing?

*100% that I'll finish my course, 60% to have the car, 100% I'll be engaged, but the rock – maybe 50%.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**



## Theme 4: Life in the workforce

Most of these young people expressed reasonable levels of satisfaction with their current experiences in the workforce, but many had had unpleasant experiences in the past.

Those working for large organisations generally said that the organisation looked after them quite well, but that petty tyrants in the form of supervisors and managers could make life difficult.

Those working for small organisations or for individuals generally were happy in their work, although some said that had had bad experiences in the past. This was especially true of apprentices.

There was no sense that these young people felt imprisoned in their jobs. They would leave if they needed to, confident they would get something else, if not straightaway then soon enough.

There was widespread concern at the implications of the industrial relations legislation enacted by the Federal Government in 2006, the effects of which were beginning to be publicised as this research was being done.

Although these young people did not take a close interest in current affairs, many had heard anecdotes on the radio about individual cases of unfair treatment under the new laws, and they could easily picture themselves caught in similar circumstances.

They were not enamoured of the trade union movement, seeing it as no more concerned about them as individuals than any of the other loci of power in society.

Big-picture issues that affect employment, specifically globalisation, are not on their radar. Except for one university-educated group, their ignorance about the meaning of the term itself bordered on the comical.

To the extent that they have any sense of what globalisation means, it is exemplified for them by McDonalds: the big people eating up the little people, as one participant put it.

Perhaps liberated by a broad disinterest in these matters and emboldened by having never known anything other than sustained economic growth, they hold few fears for the future. Indeed they are bullishly confident about it.

They have assimilated the shift in expectations of what a working life may hold, from the job-for-life-and-gold-watch expectations of yesteryear to the expectation that one must be adaptable and prepared to move in order to survive and prosper.

Here we believe we see a paradigm shift. These young people are assailed by none of the agonies induced in their parents' generation by three large and inter-related forces:

- the dismantling of the Deakinite Settlement, whose defining characteristics included industry protection, arbitrated wages, and a regulated financial sector;
- relentless and widespread corporate "downsizing", restructuring and closure, with the consequent shifting of many jobs offshore, and
- the rapid changes brought about by the ICT revolution.

For these young people, this is the world they have grown up in. Adjustment has not so far been necessary.

Moreover, they celebrate this reality. They see the old model as a form of life imprisonment.

#### EXPERIENCES AS WORKERS

*I'm pretty well looked after where I am now but at my previous place I was just a number.*

*I worked for one of the biggest tuna fisherman in Australia and he was the nicest bloke.*

*I did a lot of Pizza Hut and Hungry Jacks and there you're just a number unless you join the union. But the people I work for now are a family business and they treat you better.*

*The manager I've got now is probably the best I've ever had. But previously I was treated like shit, even though I worked hard.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*They treat me well. I love my work. The people there, we're so close.*

*Same with me. We socialise after work and everything.*

*I'm not interested in the power trips these women are on. (Woman working for a large supermarket chain).*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*When I wasn't pregnant they treated me just fine.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*My boss is very supportive. I work for a quite large company. There are five part-owners which enhances the support because there is always someone around you can ask questions. I really enjoy working for them. It's a great job.*

*My boss is pretty laid back. He pretty much runs on trust.*

*My boss is really easy to get along with and gives you a fair go. He has helped me out a few times when I needed a hand.*

*I don't like the thought of staying in the one place all my life, but as long as I'm loyal to him, he'll be loyal to me.*

*I think my boss would be loyal, but I don't think head office would be. Where the manager is owner is where the loyalty comes in. In big companies, because they don't know me as a person, they wouldn't think anything of it.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## THE UNEMPLOYED SPEAKING ABOUT THE JOB MARKET

*Tough? Oh yeah! I've just been door-knocking factories.*

*For a job that's just down the road you have to go to the Job Network and back again.*

*I just walk around the areas.*

Are there plenty of jobs?

*There are but you've got to have qualifications to get that job. To be a labourer you've got to have experience in sheetmetal.*

*It's easy to get a job as a kitchen hand but it's just bullshit. You go into a Job Network place and they just want to put you into a kitchen hand job and take*

*their money from the government.*

*It's who you know. I never look for a job, I look for people to can find me a job.*

*That's so true. Every job I've had is from work experience. Every job is given in-house these days.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

## THE NEW INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LAWS

*I don't know where it puts me.*

*You can be fired if your boss feels like it.*

*Unless you're in the union.*

*I worked at Mitsubishi but I didn't join the union and got the union rep fired for firing a nail gun at people.*

*The ideal of the union is very useful but has been corrupted through personal gain. What is it any more?*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*One thing that is worrying me is the new labour laws. I don't know too much about them, but they might mean you don't have the choice. I heard on the radio today a woman was asked to sign a thing saying that if she didn't give 12 hours' notice of being sick, she was going to have to pay the company \$200 for that day so they could get someone else, and she refused to sign it. It's going to court now. So it might not be your choice in the future.*

*I'm against it in that instance, but if you look at the management's point of view, if they don't get 12 hours' notice from that lady that she's feeling sick and won't be in for the next shift, if they can't get someone to fill her position, the mine's production will be reduced and it'll cost them millions of dollars an hour.*

*But how do you know 12 hours in advance that you're going to be sick?*

*I don't think that should be the employee's fault. They (the company) should have safeguards in place for emergencies like that if they are going to lose a lot of money.*

*But why should you be paid if you're not going to work? Your boss is not making money off you. How can he afford to pay you?*

*Well then, you might as well say why have annual leave?*

*Regardless of the money, workers have rights and things have to be put in place to protect these rights, and sick leave is one of those rights of having a permanent job, regardless of how much you're getting paid. Paying it back is ridiculous.*

*But can you see it from the employer's side?*

*Yeah, but if you want to retain good staff, you need to give them incentives to stay. Because it's a changing society. People don't just go, "I love this company so I'm going to stay here". Your staff are your biggest asset and you need to give them benefits. So if you're going, "You should feel lucky that I'm even giving you sick leave, then . . ."*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*Not as much stability for the worker.*

*Where I was working prior to my last job, 10 positions were taken down to four and six people lost their job and nine had been there over 20 years and didn't get anything.*

*I don't like the fact that small business can fire you without reason. What do you do?*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*At work they told me to stop paying for the union because they won't be able to do anything for me and I get sacked for a crap reason.*

*Yeah, they could.*

*All this union stuff sounds so serious. I just get my money.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Look at the last 10 to 15 years, you've always been able to get a job and I can't see that changing in the next five years.*

*I think we have to question job security with the new IR laws.*

Talk to us about those.

*Doesn't affect me because I'm an apprentice.*

*If you work hard you should be pretty right. Most bosses are pretty fair. My boss is fair. We don't have a union so you pretty much work for yourself anyway.*

*One place it's real bad is wanting to get mothers back in the workforce, and bosses demand they come in and they can't and the boss gives her the sack. It's pretty crappy.*

*Also not enough child care places.*

*The IR laws affect mainly the younger generation because a person just starting out is going to get screwed over. They don't know what their rights are and they have no negotiating power because they have no experience.*

*They will affect me because I have a small child and I think there is a real possibility that I will lose my job if I can't go to work.*

*Woollies have been pretty fair about pay.*

*But their agreement ends at the end of the year and it'll be interesting to see how the new agreement pans out.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

## GLOBALISATION

*I'm sure I learnt about that in international management (university commerce student).*

*I'll have stab at most things but I'll leave that alone.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*To me it means multi-billion dollar companies taking over small ones and actual countries taking over other countries. I was one of three in a class of 30 against globalisation. What it does to the people who get screwed over and paid a dollar a day to pick coffee beans. Others argued good for the economy, creates jobs. I think it's inevitable but I personally am against all aspects of it.*

*It's like a cancer, like McDonalds. Eats up small people.*

*Creates a monopoly and you don't have choice.*

*There are a lot of advantages. It's put Australia on the map.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*Like countries linking systems in trading or something.*

*Australia's bullshit when it comes to that sort of stuff. These countries wanted to cut down on . . . (this was a vague reference to the Kyoto protocols on climate change) and Australia wouldn't do it because it would cost too many jobs. Straight out.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*Is that when people from other countries come to Australia?*

*Isn't it where everything ends up being owned by one person?*

*There's globalisation in the bottle shops where Coles and Woolworths are buying up all the bottle shops and can drive the prices lower.*

*Like petrol.*

*And in media one entity owns a lot of things.*

*It probably won't help Australians as much because control of a lot of companies is in America.*

*Everything comes from China these days.*

*But all the money goes back to America.*

*I don't go that deep into it, but everything you pick up is made in China.*

*Cheap labor.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*Reduction of tariffs and global trade (university student studying commerce and law)*

*Businesses like McDonalds operating in Australia and all over the world.*

*This is biased: the Queensland cane-growers with the importation of sugar you get the larger companies taking over and the little people being pushed out. It's going to happen and can't be fought. Like GM food coming into Australia.*

**-- Sydney, tertiary students**

*Global warming. We're taking over the planet, building bigger things but ruining the planet.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## **FUTURE OF LIFE IN THE WORKFORCE**

*There is much more choice for our generation. Not like our parents who were more than likely going to stay where they were until they retire. I'm not going to be in my first job when I'm 50.*

*But if I get into a job where I love it and there's room to grow in that company, I would stay there for 50 years and get the gold watch. But if somewhere along the line this wasn't interesting me any more, then I'd be more likely to try other places.*

*Change is healthy.*

*To get where I want to go I have to do a few different things, but when I open my own practice and deal with youth depression and suicide, I see myself doing that until they make me retire.*

**-- Bathurst, tertiary students**

*Today people change. The majority don't have a job for life.*

*You get sick of a job.*

*Pilots are probably going to be phased out soon because of autopilots (this from a young man already undertaking pilot training).*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

## **Theme 5: Sources of influence**

With some poignant exceptions, these young people had good relationships with their parents. For most, it was their parents who were, or had been, the most important influence in their lives.

Their upbringing had on the whole given them self-belief and, in some cases, had exposed them to a wider view of society than was usual.



In this part of the discussion they showed another side of themselves: a natural decency, a gratitude for what others had done for them, and a capacity to empathise, be respectful of others, and be open to learning from others.

*Mum, pretty much because she's a battler and has supported me, and my Pappa is in the Salvos and every time there has been a world disaster he has gone out and helped people and he'd make me go on the soup run in the city and brought me up to accept more by understanding first.*

*I know I have the ability within myself to overcome any hardship I may face.*

*Hardship, life, has taught me you are either going to step in that pile of shit or step over it.*

*Big families. They've been the biggest support in my life.*

*Probably my uncle. He has always put us first. Everything he makes, he uses to bring happiness to us and the rest of the family and that's been a big basis for me in a lot of things.*

*Big families. My Mum and my Granddad.*

*My Mum and Dad, but also life and the people I've met along the way. I believe things happen for a reason and every person I've met has taught me something. If I lose my job there's going to be something better waiting for me.*

**-- Adelaide, workers and students**

*My sister. She's four years older and she's always been there. My parents split up. She helps me through work and all the troubles I've had.*

*Family as a whole.*

*My parents split. My Dad then my Mum.*

*My great-grandma, my grandparents and my brother and sister. My great-grandma was an artist, did what she loved, sold her paintings. My grandparents taught me my morals and standards. And my brothers and sisters because of the way they turned out as people.*

*My parents, I guess. Helped me make my own decisions and follow my own path more than being influenced by someone else.*

*My mother. We have really good relationship. We're good friends and she's always there for me.*

*No one. It's really good. My Dad and I only talk when we need to. He loves me but he's really cold. I'm nothing like my brother and sister.*

*My Mum.*

*My Mum and my older brother because he's always been a good support for me. My parents are divorced and he helped me pick up the pieces.*

**-- Brisbane, unemployed and not studying**

*Parents. They suggest things and it's my choice to follow it up.*

*Dad.*

*Older friends.*

*Peers.*

*My school. I don't know but they just have.*

**-- Melbourne, high school students**

*Mum.*

*Dad. He's always made me strive for my goals.*

*Mum.*

*My friends. Childhood and adult.*

*Mum, definitely, and I still rely on her.*

*My friends. I didn't have much of a relationship with my parents.*

*My parents.*

**-- Mt Gambier, carers not in workforce**

*Parents.*

*Myself. My parents have always let me do my own thing.*

*Parents.*

*I like to make up my own mind.*

*Parents, family.*

*Family definitely.*

*Family and friends.*

**-- Rockhampton, workers and students**

*Siblings. I really look up to my brother.*

*My mother and partly myself. My mother says, it'll help if you do it this way. Myself, you have to choose which road.*

*Parents and siblings.*

*Mum.*

*Siblings, three older siblings.*

*My old man. He's always been into home improvements and got me into being a chippie.*

*My Mum, even though we don't always see eye to eye now. She's done amazing things and overcome extraordinary obstacles.*

*My previous boss.*

*Mum. She's always put us before herself.*

**-- Warrnambool, workers and students**

## APPENDIX I

### DUSSELDORP SKILLS FORUM

### HOW YOUTH ARE FEELING

### QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DISCUSSION OUTLINE

During introductions, ask respondents to say: Their name, what, if anything, they do for work or study, whether they have a partner and if so what the partner does, what their father did for a living, what suburb they live in.

1. If you were describing to someone who knew nothing about Australia what it was like to live here and what the Australian people were like, what would you say?
2. What are the really good things about Australia as a society?
3. What, if anything, are the bad things about Australia as a society?
4. Is Australia fair society?
5. Do you think about the future at all? Or is it enough to live for today?
6. Can you plan for the future with any confidence? Do you feel you can make that future become real?
7. What might get in the way? (Probe: Cost of education; difficulty in finding opportunities in your chosen field.)
8. What might help?
9. What are you doing at the moment? (Probe: Full-time, part-time, casual.)
10. Imagine for a moment you were able to do whatever you wanted with your life. What would you do?
11. What do you hope to be doing in four or five years' time?
12. In reality what do you think you will be doing in four or five years' time?
13. What will your mates be doing, do you think?

14. What do you have to do to make your hopes become reality?
15. How likely do you think it is that you will be able to do that?
16. What is it like trying to get a job these days?
17. (For those studying): What is it like trying to get into educational courses these days? And is the study interesting/relevant/likely to be useful to you?
18. (For those at work): How do the people you work for treat you?
19. Will you stay or move? Why?
20. Do you feel the people you work for are loyal to you? Do you feel loyal to them?
21. There's been some talk lately about changes to the industrial relations laws. Do you know anything about this?
22. What do you think about these changes? Are they likely to make any difference to you?
23. There's also been a lot of talk in recent years about what people call "globalisation". What does this term mean to you, if anything? Is it likely to affect your life?
24. Looking ahead, what do you think your working life is likely to be like? (Probe: Stable/unstable; secure/insecure; unchanging/changeable). How do you feel about that?
25. What are the qualities you think you might need for that future?
26. How well prepared do you feel you are for that? (Probe: How well has school equipped you, or is equipping you, for the future? What has school best equipped you for?)