

# Supporting **Young People's** Journey to Economic Independence

*Insights on Game Changing Practice*

Prepared for Vodafone New Zealand Foundation  
August 2014



# Overview

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**innovate change** is a social innovation agency that identifies and implements new and creative ways to design, deliver and review health and social care programmes, services and policy.

**The Vodafone NZ Foundation** is a charitable trust with a strategic focus on enabling healthy development and positive outcomes for young New Zealanders aged 12 to 24 years. Recently it has become even more focused on young people not engaged in education, employment or training (YNEET) and those at risk of losing their connection to meaningful work or learning.

In June 2014, the Vodafone NZ Foundation contracted innovate change to carry out a scan of the YNEET sector in New Zealand, in particular focusing on “game changing” practice and leadership. In this context, **game changing means innovative practice that has demonstrated success.**

This document presents the key insights from the scan, which centred on 24 interviews with key players in the youth employment and education space. The scan aimed to capture broad ranging perspectives and diversity amongst the key players interviewed, both geographically and in terms of working with different groups of young people and across different sectors.

A key pattern emerging from the insights is the importance of a positive youth development approach. Four key principles of positive youth development, which are based on evidence of demonstrated outcomes, are: focusing on young people’s strengths; enabling youth participation; facilitating positive connections to social environments; and building capacity in the youth sector.

innovate change has chosen not to use the label “YNEET” in the presentation of the insights as it is not strengths-based and frames young people in a problematic way. Many game changers prefer a strengths-based approach, building on young people’s culture – their identity and creativity – to improve their social connections and help them on their journey to economic independence.

# Methodology

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The insights have been generated from interviews with key players. This is not an exhaustive scan or comprehensive summary of game changing practice. Rather, it highlights some innovative and effective approaches and leaders that connect young people with meaningful work and learning.

innovate change and The Vodafone NZ Foundation identified many potential interviewees, including young leaders as well as a range of roles in central government agencies, charitable trusts, iwi organisations, local government, universities, private training establishments, and alternative education centres. Selected individuals were each invited to participate in a half-hour interview.

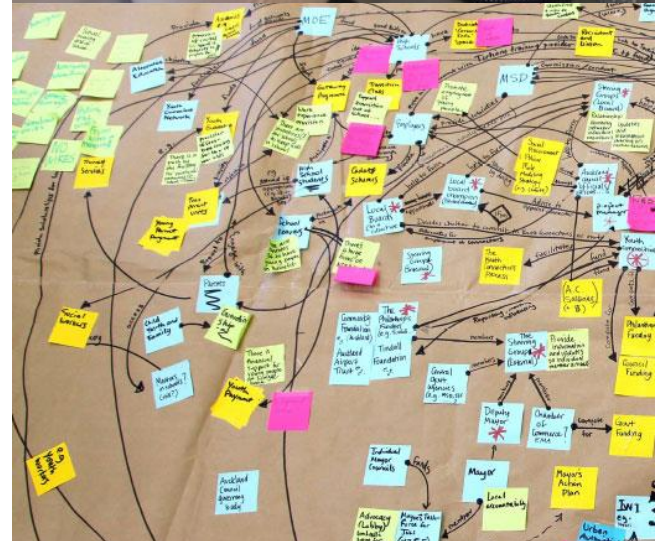
A total of **24 interviews** were conducted in person in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and by telephone from Whangarei to Dunedin during a two-week period in mid 2014. Time, budget and availability constraints limited the number of people who could be interviewed and excluded some key players. In addition to the list of interviewees in the appendix, innovate change has provided the Vodafone Foundation with a list of other individuals and organisations who could be included in future discussions.

The interviews explored:

- Effective and game changing practice in youth employment, education and training
- Leading approaches, individuals and programmes that are helping young people on their journey to economic independence
- Innovative practice that shows promise of improving outcomes for young people who lack positive connections to education, employment or training.

The interview notes were analysed thematically and clustered into key ideas. These ideas were then refined to generate the **11 key insights** presented in this document.

# insights about: the big picture



# 1. Supporting game changers helps them keep punching above their weight





***“There’s no magic bullet. We can’t pull rabbits out of hats. It’s a lot of hard work over a sustained time with young people.”***

Adrian Schoone – Alternative Education National Body

A useful way to improve outcomes for young people is to support key individuals who are making a positive difference to young people’s connection to employment or education. Intensive development programmes that provide funding for a year or more for professional development, capacity building, possible overseas research and project development can make a significant difference for game changers.

Many of the individuals whom interviewees identified as leaders in this space are current or former Vodafone Foundation World of Difference recipients. Jennifer Gill from the ASB Community Trust suggests, the “Vodafone Foundation plays a very important role in supporting key individuals to travel overseas, learn, develop their idea [at an early stage].” The Vodafone Foundation is therefore “a very important part of the pipeline... in game changing practice” for young people not engaged in employment or education.

It can be easier for individuals to express and try innovative ideas than for organisations. Having access to professional development and inspiration, an increased profile, and building a community of peers can make a big difference for people taking an innovative approach to social change. Game changers like Guy Ryan of Inspiring Stories Trust reported that this helped if they were feeling isolated or struggling “to get people believing in them and backing them”.

To achieve sustainable change and secure longer term investment, leadership development programmes must work closely with participants and other partners (e.g. other philanthropic trusts). Game changers often require additional support to develop sustainable and scalable business models, tell their story well and use evaluation to effectively demonstrate their impact. Noting that, “A lot of stuff that people think is successful is not,” Secretary for Education Peter Hughes recommends, “Spend money on evaluation. It doesn’t need to be a huge thing at the end - it should be more of an action research approach.”

## 2. The mismatch between education and employment is a key issue





***“The education system does not seamlessly join young people with the workplace.”***

**Dave Richards - The Tindall Foundation**

Some young people lack economic independence due to a gap between education or training and employers’ needs. A stronger focus on transferable skills and diverse employment opportunities could enhance the relevance of education for many young people. As Guy Ryan of Inspiring Stories says, “there are big gaps between what our young people are learning at school or through tertiary studies and the real world... We need to place a much stronger emphasis on learning by doing.”

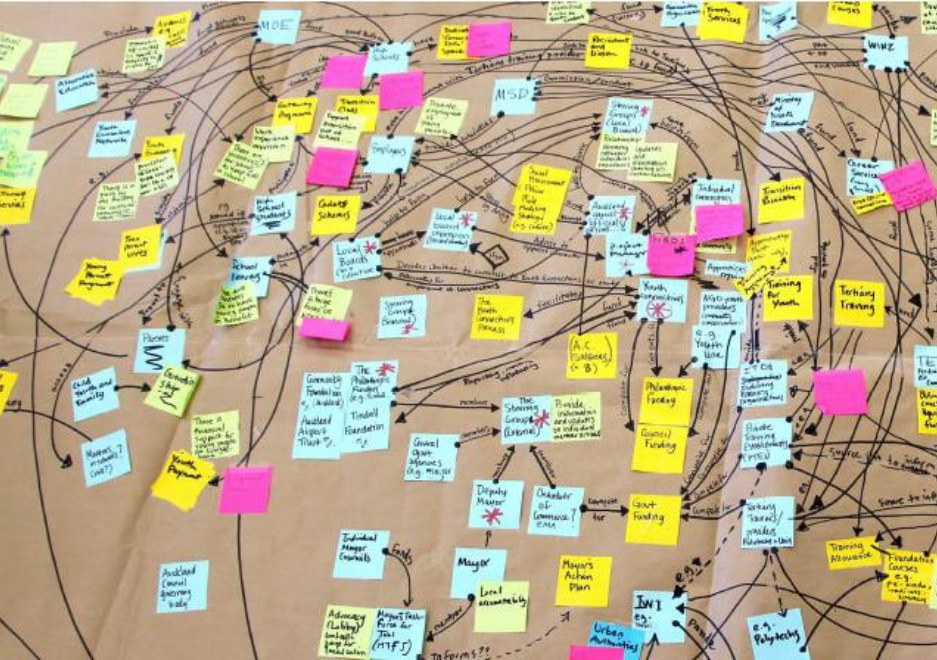
Family philanthropic organisation the Tindall Foundation is a leader in this space, framing their approach as helping young people on their journey to economic independence. The Tindall Foundation starts by thinking about what jobs there are or will be for young people in their area and helps to create pipelines for young people to employment.

There are numerous other game changers working to enable young people to take part in work placements, trades academies at high schools, practical training and apprenticeships. As Core Education’s Mark Osborne points out, schools like Albany Senior High, which allows students to do work placements or apprenticeships, enable young people to “test drive a career” before they commit to it. These approaches have an impact firstly by engaging young people in hands-on learning and secondly by increasing work opportunities in response to the current job market and employers’ needs.

The most effective training and work placement programmes have strong connections with employers. Examples include the Mayor’s Taskforce for Jobs model, which has worked well to increase youth employment in small towns like Otorohanga, and which inspired Youth Connections Across Auckland. ‘Youth Connectors’ in each Local Board area now work closely with employers to understand their needs and with young people to support them to be ready for work. According to the Tindall Foundation’s Dave Richards, this is working especially well in South Auckland, where “the connectors have particularly good connections with employers.”







***“Multiple sectors need to come together to affect some of the changes we are talking about. It’s not just about dealing with part of the issue, it’s about looking at the whole.”***

Shalini Pillai - ASB Community Trust

The youth employment and education sector is a complex ecosystem dealing with a “wicked problem”. There is only so much that one person or one programme can do. Recognising this, game changers are working together in innovative ways in towns and cities across New Zealand.

A leading example is He Toki ki te Rika, which is seeing large increases in the number of Māori enrolling in trades training in Canterbury. This unique workforce development model, hosted by Te Tapuae o Rēhua, is a partnership between Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) and industry partner Hawkins Construction. These partners work well together thanks to their “shared agenda, ... loyalty and trust.” Manager Eruera Tarena explains, “Our values and principles are underpinned by a respectful relationship that is about inspiring Māori leadership.”

Also based in Christchurch, the Youth Employment Workstream arose out of the Strengthening the Youth Sector project. It now includes 18 organisations sharing information and taking action together. For Project Manager John Harrington, “The work stream is one of the most inspiring groups... I’ve seen so many positive things happen.” For instance, seven organisations from this group worked together on the Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority Youth Wellbeing Survey. This collaborative approach enabled local young people to not only answer the survey in large numbers, but to design and administer it, creating meaningful and useful results.

Youth Connections Across Auckland is another innovative and collaborative approach that appears to be working well to connect Auckland’s young people with employment opportunities. Championed by Mayor Len Brown and Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse, Youth Connections is supported by Auckland Council, the Tindall Foundation, the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, the Hugh Green Foundation and the Auckland Airport Community Trust. Its steering group, which includes employers and trainers, looks at big picture issues and provides a regional overview of the “transitions sector” ecosystem (as pictured).

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in youth employment



## 4. Game changing employers are ready or can be supported to employ young people



Image: He Toki ki te Rika students at Te Kōhaka o Kaikai-a-Waro, Tairutu Gully Pā Site, North Canterbury



***“It’s been transformational for participants and consortium partners. It’s not just about brown people showing up on time. It’s about what the employer can do to make their environment more appealing ... Partners have to come on board understanding this means change.”***

Eruera Tarena - Te Tapuae o Rēhua

Some employers have a genuine interest in social change, youth employment and/or Māori leadership. These socially concerned and culturally aware individuals and organisations can be game changers. A number of these employers are already working collaboratively with other organisations to improve youth employment outcomes.

Vocational education that has strong connections to industry can offer good opportunities for young people and for employers. In Whangarei, private training establishment People Potential seeks to employ its own students whenever possible. This means they understand the challenges of supporting new workers first hand, as well as from the perspectives of the young people and the employers that they meet and work with. In Canterbury, Hawkins Construction are the key industry partner for He Toki ki te Rika, offering not only employment opportunities but also pathways to leadership roles. A key player in this partnership is Nancy McConnell of the Hawkins Group, who “lives and breathes social change” and “has the ear of Hawkins Board of Directors”.

Te Aratika Drilling is a private Māori company keen to play a role in addressing youth employment issues by offering good opportunities for young people. The company is part of the cadetship programme facilitated by Te Puni Kōkiri, which provides employers with \$10,000 of support to employ Māori for a six month period. Te Puni Kōkiri also offers an annual peer learning and networking event for employers on this programme. As Hēmi Te Hēmi and Eruera Tarena of Te Tapuae o Rēhua say, “It’s not just about getting people into jobs. It’s about sustainable employment.”

More employers could take on apprentices, make their work environment more appealing to young employees, become second chance employers, or create pathways for Māori leadership. Some employers may need to be challenged to make significant changes in their workplace culture or systems, but they can be supported to make these changes. When Stephen Tindall holds a breakfast meeting for local businesses to encourage employers to offer young people jobs and mentoring, The Tindall Foundation often finds they are offered more opportunities than they can fill.

## 5. Programmes connected to community and culture are the most effective



Image: Students of new partnership school Te Kura Hourua o Whangarei Terenga Paraoa, which grew out of the Leadership Academy of A Company.



***“Māori and Pacific educational success is a fundamental issue for New Zealand.”***

Jennifer Gill – ASB Community Trust

***“What’s unique about He Toki is it’s celebrating Māori being Māori. Culture has to come with you in work readiness.”***

Hēmi Te Hēmi and Eruera Tarena - Te Tapuae o Rēhua

The most successful approaches to engaging young people in employment or training are culturally responsive, embedded in their local community, and take a holistic approach to the young person within their social environment. Engaging with families and being flexible to the needs of the individual are things that the leading organisations mentioned below do well.

Te Whāngai Trust is a social enterprise that assists unemployed young people and adults into employment through training and work experience in their nursery and a significant amount of mentoring. Purposefully using an intergenerational model and whole person approach, it has assisted over 200 people into full employment since it started in 2007.

Based in Snells Beach, Springboard Community Works is one of four ASB Community Trust Catalyst for Change Recipients. Its programmes for people at risk include alternative education, youth offender intervention, work readiness programmes, and mentoring for at-risk children. Akina Foundation’s Shona McElroy suggests that Springboard have had “such good outcomes” due to their effective use of a community facility and their holistic, strengths-based approach: “They see a young person not a bunch of behavioural challenges. They’re very flexible to the needs of the individual, interested in their personal wellbeing.”

A disproportionate number of Māori and Pasifika young people are not engaged in education, employment or training. The programmes that demonstrate success with these groups of young people are typically created *by* people from these communities not just *for* these groups. C-Me Mentoring acts as a catalyst for direction, hope and purpose for young people at secondary school. Its Year 11 to 13 mentoring programme has achieved significant success in keeping young Māori and Pasifika people in school and increasing their achievement levels, with a particular focus on mechanical engineering. Also supported by the ASB Community Trust, the Leadership Academy of A Company achieved 80% of its participants leaving school with NCEA Level 2 or better.

## 6. Young people often need personal and social support to transition to employment



Image: People Potential students Ashton Adams (left) and Hayden Olsen participating in a fundraising activity.





***“If young people have a bad experience [in their first job], it has a massive negative impact.”***

Gael Surgenor - Auckland Council

***“I have met so many amazing young people here at the Kōkiri and other PTEs who simply have not had the access or support.”***

Pip Laufiso - Arai te Uru Kōkiri Training Centre

A crucial time to provide support to young people is when they start their first job or when they transition from alternative education or training to a more mainstream learning environment. Pastoral care, coaching and advice can help young people cope with their transition to education or employment.

The Auckland City and Christchurch Alternative Education Consortiums have a transition advisor who spends time with young people who return to the mainstream when they are 16 years old. By brokering relationships and opportunities, a transition advisor can make a real difference for students.

Organisations already mentioned such as People Potential in Whangarei, Youth Connections Across Auckland, and He Toki ki te Rika in Christchurch provide support to young people in their first three to six months of employment. Managing Director Andrea Ross explains that all of People Potential’s programmes have after-care follow-up built into them. “This is because the first month employing someone is so hard. There are so many barriers to being successfully employed. Young people don’t know what to do if they’re sick, if they need to deal with tax,... and these barriers can mean they don’t turn up or do what they need to do, so we need to keep up coaching or support to deal with these and get them embedded in employment.”

Some young people face multiple challenges in their lives and need strong support to develop as young adults before they are ready for the transition to employment. Practical support like coaching on budgeting skills, managing debt, and drivers’ license programmes (such as those provided by People Potential) can make a big difference for these young people. Accommodation is also a challenging issue for some young trainees, apprentices and workers. Interviewees from training organisations such as Te Tapuae o Rēhua, Arai te Uru Kōkiri and People Potential suggested that these young people could benefit, for instance, from youth hostels with pastoral support.

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## 7. Young people are more engaged when learning plays to their strengths





***“The majority of teenagers in school are bored. They are not actively engaged in co-designing their learning. We have to find ways for young people to be leaders in their own learning. This is a game changer.”***

David Hanna - Wesley Community Action

Some game changers offer young people the respect and agency they need to direct their learning based on their strengths, needs and interests. Empowering young people to develop personal goals can help them to find a sense of purpose and become more engaged in their learning.

At private training establishments such as Horowhenua Learning Centre each student develops and follows an individual learning plan. These plans identify a young person’s personal and educational goals alongside their skills and passions. Pip Laufiso of Arai te Uru Kōkiri Training reports that their individual learning plans help to achieve course completions by ensuring young people do what is needed to get into courses and by linking them to support services.

Another innovative approach is project-based learning and alternative timetabling. As Core Education’s Mark Osborne says, “45-minute timetabling destroys innovation and does not allow for meaningful learning, projects or work experience.” At Albany Senior High School, students work on their own projects one day a week. Students who are often absent and uninterested start to re-engage through these activities and this has positive effects that spill over into their other classes. Academies and Trades in Schools also offer students a practical career focus while gaining NCEA credits for their work. As Christchurch Deputy Mayor Vicki Buck, who was involved in founding the Unlimited and Discovery<sup>1</sup> schools, says, “Learning is allowed to be fun in a state school.”

Some innovative programmes disrupt young people’s patterns of dependency or low self-esteem. “Sometimes what is needed is a disruption to the mental model young people and those around them have,” says David Hanna of Wesley Community Action. Examples that are seen to be effective include Limited Service Volunteer – a six-week hands-on motivational and training programme for young people run by the New Zealand Defence Force on behalf of Work and Income – and Wesley Community Action’s ‘Good Cents’, which provides practical community-based support and education so that people facing high levels of debt can gain more control over their personal finances.

## 8. Quality relationships make a huge difference to young people's learning



**Image:** Tutors at the Creative Learning Scheme learn a numeracy game as part of their professional development.



***“It’s important to deal with and remove barriers to learning while retaining boundaries.”***

Sharon Jamieson - Horowhenua Learning Centre

***“When will we start thinking of care as innovation? To have a caring person, that’s innovation for these young people.”***

Adrian Schoone – Alternative Education National Body

Caring, respectful relationships between teachers or tutors and students can effectively remove barriers to learning. A good relationship with a tutor, teacher or other educational leader who goes the extra mile can make all the difference for a young person who is struggling to stay engaged. The interviewees from People Potential, Horowhenua Learning Centre, Arai te Uru Kōkiri and Creative Learning Scheme all reported that caring and understanding tutors were the key to their students’ success.

Young people at risk of becoming disengaged often need additional support to stay connected to education. Tutors and caseworkers who can support young people to deal with the personal, social and economic problems they are facing can help them overcome these barriers to learning. For an alternative education centre or private training establishment, this sometimes means providing breakfast and offering transport to the place of learning.

Life to the Max Horowhenua is seen to be having a massive impact by supporting young people not engaged in education, employment or training to attend private training establishments. This Social Sector Trial has involved the creation of eleven Youth Coordinator roles in Horowhenua to provide a wrap-around support service for young people.

Supporting key individuals within leading schools and other places of learning can therefore be an effective way of helping to keep young people engaged in education. The Creative Learning Scheme (an alternative education centre in South Auckland) supports their staff by providing professional development, with relevant and interesting topics like “dealing with difficult people” and “geocaching as a learning context”.

Leading educators around the country could benefit from leadership development programmes that support them to improve outcomes for young people at risk of disengagement. David Hanna of Wesley Community Action suggests that supporting game changing individuals working within selected schools could make a big difference by helping to keep young people engaged in mainstream education.

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approaches that  
show promise



## 9. Alternative economic models have great potential for youth employment







***“Offer a proposition to young people to make money ... with scope for growth, a sense of autonomy and purpose.”***

Guy Ryan - Inspiring Stories Trust

Some young people are gaining work experience and strengthening their social connections through youth enterprise, social enterprise and volunteering. A particularly promising model for youth employment is micro-enterprise. Operating on a very small scale, some micro-enterprises can be led by young people, especially if they are offered wraparound support.

Not-for-profit youth organisation Zeal supports youth micro-enterprise by hosting the Zeal Markets and Zeal Coffee Shop at their Auckland venue. Two young people raised funds through Givealittle to establish the Zeal Coffee Shop. They benefited from Zeal West’s encouragement, business advice, cheap rent and in-kind support, such as financial management and equipment.

Another example of micro-enterprise is InZone Education’s ‘Handy Boys’ employment preparation project. By allowing low-income students to live and learn in a supportive, culturally sensitive and welcoming environment, the InZone Education Foundation actively helps young Māori and Pacific Islanders to maximise their full potential. One of InZone Education’s ventures is Handy Boys, which involves Auckland Grammar students from challenging backgrounds doing odd jobs in Epsom, managing their workflow and learning financial literacy.

Young people with ideas for business ventures often need business advice and small grants. Business skill development and incubators, like the University of Canterbury’s UC Innovators’ summer start-up programme, and Spark, the University of Auckland Entrepreneurship programme, as well as small business management courses, like those offered by Arai te Uru Kōkiri, can make a big difference for young people with limited work experience.

These business models offer an innovative form of employment and income that affords young people more agency than the traditional jobs on offer. They also provide an opportunity to develop transferable skills and positive social connections – which can help with finding future employment.

# 10. Young people and parents could be more radically engaged in education





***“The creativity and thinking of children and young people should be systematically included in decision-making.”***

Vicki Buck and Sam Johnson - Ministry of Awesome

***“Power up the parents!”***

Peter Hughes - Ministry of Education

An innovative approach to improving outcomes for young people is enabling them and their families to participate more meaningfully in the education system. Decisions about educational models and programmes are typically made by teachers and public sector officials - not parents and families, or young people themselves, who are the ‘users’ or ‘consumers’ of education. Some schools, as mentioned on page 20, are working hard to put young people, as learners, at the centre of education and growing their agency.

Supporting and enabling parents to be better informed and more involved in their children’s education is key. Pasifika Power Up is a joined-up approach led by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. It is having long term benefits for Pasifika young people through increasing parents’ knowledge about how they can support their young person. NCEA Level 2 rates for Pasifika students’ whose parents have participated have increased significantly.

Young people could also be engaged and empowered to participate more radically in educational decision-making. Young people are likely to have relevant ideas and experience but may need to build up confidence to more actively engage in agenda-setting, service design and policy development.

An example of how to achieve youth participation is offered by Sam Johnson, founder of the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) at the University of Canterbury. A student-run organisation that founded following the 2010 Christchurch earthquake, SVA has created opportunities for meaningful engagement in the community through volunteering. Now also working with UN group Youth Beyond Disasters, Sam Johnson runs youth workshops that recreate crisis situations, using a youth participation model to mobilise and activate young people. He states, “You need to break down the perception that young people do not know or understand.”

**11. It makes sense to intervene before young people become disengaged**



**Image:** Participants at a whānau dinner event organised by innovate change as part of a parenting innovation process.



***“Good support and attention in the early phase, for example encouraging parents to play with their young children, lays the foundation for future attachments to school or work.”***

David Hanna - Wesley Community Action

Several leaders highlighted the need to intervene earlier to help prevent young people from disengaging with education or employment. Young people with little experience of positive attachment to their school, family, peers or community typically struggle to form a positive attachment in the labour market. Investing earlier in engaging young people and their families in their education is one way to increase the likelihood of them having a positive learning experience and staying involved.

“You can often see at a very early age the children who might struggle,” says Robyn Pope of Wesley Community Action. “We need to have the resources and intelligence to support each and every one of them in a way that they need to be supported, rather than expecting them to fit into one-size-fits-all interventions.” Children who are at risk of later dropping out of school or struggling with the transition to employment can be identified, then they and their families can be provided with additional support to maintain a positive connection to education. Effective parenting programmes that target families with younger children may therefore be game changers for youth employment and education.

As John Harrington of the Canterbury Youth Workers Collective points out, innovation for young people not engaged in education, employment or training is challenging without first addressing their basic needs. “You’ve got to meet their basic needs – nurturing, caring first, then they’ll thrive. Most ‘YNEET’ are stuck at the bottom. Unless those needs are met, you’ll struggle to innovate because they’ll see no hope.”

Mentoring programmes can work well for children whose family situation suggests they could later lack positive connections to education or employment. This can help to disrupt cycles of disadvantage and counter parents’ negative experiences of education and employment being passed on to their children. The “Check & Connect” mentoring programme that is part of the Prime Minister’s Mental Health Programme is reported to be demonstrating positive outcomes related to student engagement and school achievement.

# Appendix: List of Participants

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The following people participated in interviews with innovate change in June-July 2014:

- **Jennifer Gill**, Chief Executive, ASB Community Trust (with **Shalini Pillai**, Senior Advisor Catalysts for Change)
- **Dave Richards**, Project and Strategy Manager, Tindall Foundation
- **Adrian Schoone**, General Manager, Creative Learning Scheme; Chairperson, Alternative Education National Body
- **Shay Wright**, Head of Māori Development, The Icehouse
- **Levi Hohua**, Founder, Zeal Coffee Shop
- **Afra Abdeen**, Organisational Development Manager, Home Owners and Buyers' Association
- **Mark Osborne**, Senior Consultant, Core Education
- **Shona McElroy**, Venture Manager, Ākina Foundation
- **John Harrington**, Project Manager, Canterbury Youth Workers' Collective
- **Nathan Durkin**, CEO, White Elephant Trust
- **Eruera Tarena**, Manager, Strategy & Relationships, Te Tapuae o Rēhua (with **Hēmi Te Hēmi**, Programme Leader)
- **Sam Johnson**, Chair, Youth Beyond Disasters
- **Vicki Buck**, Deputy Mayor, Christchurch City Council
- **Pip Laufiso**, Executive Officer, Arai te Uru Kōkiri Training Centre
- **Sharon Jamieson**, Manager of Youth Guarantee Programmes, Horowhenua Learning Centre
- **Andrea Ross**, Managing Director, People Potential (with **Rachel Shaw**, Youth Manager)
- **Patsie Karauria**, Director Social Policy, Te Puni Kōkiri
- **Kate Frykberg**, Executive Director, Todd Foundation
- **Peter Hughes**, Secretary for Education and Chief Executive, Ministry of Education
- **Cathy O'Malley**, Deputy Director General Sector Capability and Implementation, Ministry of Health (with **Hilda Fa'asalele**, **Gary Tonkin**, **Hingatu Thompson**, and **Richard Taylor**)
- **Guy Ryan**, Chief Executive, Inspiring Stories Trust
- **David Hanna**, Chief Executive, Wesley Community Action (with **Robyn Pope**, Manager Practice and Development, and **Te Amo Parata**)
- **Josh Forde**, Director, Enspiral; Founder and Director, Rabid
- **Gael Surgenor**, Manager Community Development and Safety, Auckland Council

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