

ONE IN A MILLION

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



WE SPOKE TO OVER 100 YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT...



Just over one million young people are unemployed in England today - and youth unemployment is a particular problem in the most deprived areas, where the unemployment rate among 16-24 years is over 30%. Studies have shown large amounts of unemployment have harmful effects on young people's future prospects (harm that lasts for 20 years), as well as being a huge waste of talent and productivity.

This research into young people's experience of unemployment was undertaken Frontier Youth Trust, StreetSpace and Church Urban Fund (on behalf of Churches Together England). We spoke to eighteen groups, involving over 100 young people, who were all encouraged to talk about their experiences of unemployment and identify changes that would help people like them.

THIS IS WHAT WE FOUND...

Unemployment is about much more than not having a job or surviving on benefits. It undermines young people's self-confidence and sense of purpose, and stigmatises them. At its worst, it leads to a loss of hope and dignity when young people should be looking forward to their future.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Unemployment has a deeply negative impact on how young people feel about themselves and how they are treated by others. Perhaps most disturbing was hearing about the loss of hope and dignity: "You get turned down so many times eventually you just give up all hope, so you don't even bother looking. There are only so many times you can take rejections before it gets you down."

The research also shows how personal circumstances, such as disability, lack of family support, and having a criminal record, can exacerbate these negative experiences. Young people have the same aspirations as anyone else – a family, a secure income, and somewhere to live - and they have a wide range of ambitions. Yet, many young people feel they are blamed for being unemployed and stereotyped as lazy.

"I know loads of people that don't even have a CV, don't even know what a CV is. Because they haven't had help, they haven't had family to help them. They just come out of school and that's it."

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Young people said it was important to have someone to listen to, encourage and motivate them, especially when going through a difficult time. Without this emotional support, young people can easily become demoralised and demotivated. Participants also talked about practical advice and financial assistance received from family members, such as help with reading CVs and being able to live rent-free at home; others bemoaned their lack of support.

Another issue was the benefit of informal contacts in 'getting a foot in the door'- finding employment through friends and family members highlighting job vacancies or putting in a good word with a potential employer. This is seen to be much more effective than applying in writing, particularly for those with few qualifications. The downside is that young people who do not have these contacts are at a major disadvantage.

EMPLOYABILITY

It was generally accepted that qualifications are helpful in finding employment, by demonstrating a willingness to work hard and helping to build young people's self-confidence. Nevertheless, qualifications are not always seen to be sufficient or appropriate preparation for employment; some qualifications were deemed useless, whilst in other cases, young people said they had been refused a job for being over-qualified. Many participants expressed frustration with the push to get more young people to go to university at great personal expense when "there were no jobs to go into at the end of it". Some wished there had been a greater emphasis on vocational subjects.

Voluntary work and paid work experience were generally seen as a positive step, either as a useful addition to a CV or in building confidence, learning new skills, exploring a possible career path, or simply filling in time. Work placements and apprenticeships, in particular, were seen as a good way to gain the necessary experience to secure a first job. However, concerns were expressed about 'forced' placements, which were seen as exploitative. Young people said they wanted more and better quality apprenticeships that develop their skills; are properly funded; provide recognised and useful qualifications; and ultimately lead to jobs.

EMPLOYERS

Young people feel that employers are failing to acknowledge and fulfil their responsibilities to young people. Common concerns were that employers often refuse to consider people under a certain age or exploit them by only offering temporary work, setting unrealistic targets, paying low wages and not providing adequate induction or training. There was a strong feeling that prior experience should not be required for 'basic' jobs. In terms of recruitment, young people want to be given a chance to demonstrate the contribution they can make to an organisation, and suggested that work trials would be fairer and more accurate than CVs or interviews. Many commented that the lack of feedback on unsuccessful applications is very discouraging.

JOB CENTRES AND BENEFITS

Young people's experiences of Job Centres were almost universally negative. Many of the participants felt demeaned by staff, and used words like "rude", "not bothered", "viewed me like it was my fault" and "you're just a number" to describe their treatment. What young people consistently said they wanted was an assigned advisor, who would get to know them and help them to find the right job for the longer-term; who was sympathetic, well informed and willing to listen and take account of personal circumstances.

"I've been unemployed since last April [2010]. Because it's been a long time my confidence has got low. I've been trying to get work trials where you go to an organisation and offer to work for them for free for two weeks. But they just don't want to know. They treated me like it was a hassle to them. I think it was a lot to do with stereotyping. If you're young and you've been out of work for a long time, you must be lazy. But not everyone out there just sits on their backside. There are people who really try hard to get work".



WHY NOT STAY INVOLVED...

We are taking this research further – into action. We are setting up campaigns, and creating a resource pack for churches, community groups and youth workers to highlight the issue locally.

The full report is available online, along with some resources for groups looking to set up a project or work club aimed at young unemployed people. Go to www.fyt.org.uk