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The Chair, Mr Don Challen AM
Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council
c/- Department of Treasury, Tasmanian Government
secretariat.PESRAC@treasury.tas.gov.au

5 June 2020

Dear Chair,

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) - Stage One Consultation

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council on the key issues and challenges faced by young Tasmanians and the Tasmanian youth sector as a result of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic.

YNOT is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 years and the Tasmanian youth sector. Our mission is to work with young people, the Tasmanian youth sector, the community and all levels of government to increase the participation and contribution of young people in the State.

COVID-19 is presenting unprecedented challenges and uncertainty for many young Tasmanians. Whilst some young people are flourishing and doing well there are many young Tasmanians who are not. Job losses, disruption to education and training, learning online, social isolation, financial stress, housing insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty about the future are issues affecting young people currently. Many of these issues are interconnected and are having a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of young Tasmanians. For young people already experiencing systemic inequality and exclusion, the impact of COVID-19 has been felt more acutely.

Early reports from academics and economists across the nation suggest that young people are among those to be hit hardest by the economic costs of COVID-19 and will bear the burden for decades to come. This is not surprising given the significant economic cost of containing the spread of COVID-19. However, it is young people who arguably have the most to gain or lose from our efforts to minimise the social and economic fallout from this virus, particularly longer term.

Young people need to be placed at the heart of our social and economic recovery and play a central, meaningful role in decision making about their needs. Young people are not homogenous, they come from widely diverse backgrounds and experiences, and are the experts in their own life. Complex and nuanced solutions will be required to mitigate the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on young Tasmanians.

Our submission outlines some of the priority issues and challenges facing young people and the Tasmanian youth sector following state-wide consultations.

ynot is the peak body representing the voice of Tasmanian youth



1. **What impacts are currently being seen by your sector or members (including clients/households/individuals as relevant in your context) and what impacts are anticipated in the coming weeks and months?**

Employment

Despite Tasmania experiencing fewer job losses compared to other states and territories as a result of COVID-19, job losses for young Tasmanians aged 15-24 years have been far greater than that of older workers.¹ This can largely be attributed to the over representation of young Tasmanians in the casual workforce, and the large proportion of young people working in industries that were hardest hit by the pandemic including tourism, hospitality, arts and recreation.^{2,3}

COVID-19 related job losses for young Tasmanians is a significant concern particularly given the high youth unemployment rate in Tasmania prior to the onset of COVID-19, sitting at 13.1% in February 2020.⁴ Youth unemployment in Tasmania is expected to increase considerably in the weeks and months ahead when the full economic impacts begin to present. Underemployment for young Tasmanians remained stubbornly high prior to COVID-19 and has been further exacerbated as a direct result of the pandemic.⁵

Young people are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment. Young workers are more likely to be in precarious employment compared to older workers and lack the skills and work experience many employers are seeking.⁶ As our community begins to recover from the pandemic, employment is predicted to return first to those who are most job ready or have prior work experience. The Tasmanian labour market was overcrowded and incredibly competitive prior to COVID-19, with many young Tasmanians struggling to find entry level jobs and full-time employment.^{7,8} This will be further exacerbated with significantly more Tasmanians unemployed and looking for work.⁹

The creation of JobKeeper, the Coronavirus Supplement and temporary changes to JobSeeker are welcome Federal Government initiatives that have provided much needed financial support for many young Tasmanians. However, those excluded from these initiatives including casual employees who have worked for less than 12 months and temporary visa holders, including migrants and international students, are experiencing financial stress and are living below the poverty line. The cessation of COVID-19 related income support initiatives at the end of September 2020 is predicted to cause a 'fiscal cliff,' impacting many more young Tasmanians.¹⁰

Over the coming months, it is anticipated that unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate income support will contribute to large numbers of young Tasmanians experiencing financial hardship and living in poverty. This will undoubtedly contribute to poor physical and mental health outcomes, housing stress, homelessness, food insecurity and barriers to accessing essential services.

Education and Training

Education and training have been greatly disrupted for many young Tasmanians, particularly for young people in years 11 and 12, and those completing apprenticeships, traineeships and student placements.

Some young people have adapted well to online learning and have reported improved learning outcomes. However, online education has not been a positive experience for many. Challenges reported by young people include a lack of motivation and lower productivity, limited access to

appropriate technology, sharing technology with siblings, falling behind in course work and being in home environments that are not conducive to learning.¹¹

Digital exclusion was a significant concern and several key initiatives were announced early by the Tasmanian Government to assist low income households. However, Tasmania's internet infrastructure quickly presented as a barrier to online education with areas having limited or no internet connections and insufficient data packages to facilitate an increase in demand at home.

Young Tasmanians reported feeling anxious, worried and uncertain for their return to studies, particularly for years 11 and 12 as they prepare for their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) and Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) exams, and young people undertaking higher education.¹²

COVID-19 has also affected apprenticeships and student placements for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and University coursework. Student placements and work experience opportunities have been cancelled indefinitely, and young people remain uncertain of when and how they will complete them, or the future impact this delay will have on their studies.

Some young people are concerned about their future employment prospects and whether their current training pathways will provide them with the greatest chance of securing meaningful employment post COVID-19.

It is anticipated that in the weeks and months ahead some young people will not re-engage with education and training, complete their apprenticeships or student placements. It is predicted that some students will experience undue stress and pressure in the lead up to and during exam periods as a result of falling behind in course work, affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

Mental Health

COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact on the mental health and wellbeing on young Tasmanians. Many young people, who were mentally healthy before the pandemic, have experienced psychological distress and have reported increased feelings of anxiety, stress, loneliness, social isolation and uncertainty for their future. Young people with a history of mental ill-health have reported exacerbated symptoms due to social isolation and barriers accessing appropriate mental health services.¹³

While most young people are digitally connected, they have not been able to socialise in ways that they had previously through school, sporting and cultural activities. Subsequently young people are feeling isolated and disconnected from their friends, family, and support networks.¹⁴

Uncertainty about the future, career pathways, employment prospects and the virus itself, are issues of concern for many young Tasmanians. Financial stress due to employment instability and the cessation of government income support are also predicted to impact the mental health and wellbeing of young people.¹⁵ Vulnerable young people already living in poverty will be further disadvantaged.

As young people return to schools and community life, the symptoms of psychological distress will not suddenly dissipate. Young people will need support to overcome the impacts this pandemic has had on their lives and build resilience to cope with the unprecedented challenges they will face in the weeks and months ahead. It is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in demand for prevention and early intervention youth mental health services over the coming months.

The Tasmanian Youth Sector

The Tasmanian youth sector has proven to be highly resilient by rapidly adapting service delivery models in response to COVID-19 to ensure service continuity for young Tasmanians. However, consultations with the youth sector conducted by YNOT found that the impact of the pandemic on youth organisations has varied considerably across the State.

The closure of youth centres and the sudden disruptions to social enterprise and private revenue streams has resulted in job losses, reductions in staff hours and operational restructures. This in turn has impacted young people with critical youth programs being suspended indefinitely or cancelled altogether.

Some youth services, particularly youth Specialist Homelessness Services, are operating at a reduced capacity to comply with social distancing requirements and are unable to meet demand. Supporting young people to maintain basic hygiene practices and comply with social distancing measures in youth shelters has proven challenging and has resulted in some young people choosing to leave the shelter.

Social distancing has affected the provision of transport services to young people in the North West of the State. Some organisations have been forced to suspend services as they are unable to accommodate social distancing measures in work vehicles. The suspension of community transport services is impacting the mobility of young people in the region and is a barrier to accessing essential services.

The introduction of digital platforms and technology to deliver online services has proven effective in responding to the needs of some young Tasmanians in the absence of face to face services. Some organisations have experienced an increase in young people attending scheduled appointments particularly for alcohol and other drug counselling and support. Others are experiencing challenges engaging new clients through technology (phone, text, online), particularly highly vulnerable 'at risk' young people who are new to the service and do not have an existing relationship with staff.

The mental and emotional wellbeing of workers in the youth sector is emerging as a significant issue. Worker fatigue, stress and presenteeism, due to perceived or real job insecurity, and adapting to rapid change, has been identified as areas of concern. Youth workers are experiencing challenges working from home including sharing workspaces with family, caring for and supporting children to learn from home, and working longer hours to complete their duties. Youth workers have also identified the need for additional training and support to work with young people in the digital realm particularly in relation to online safety.

The complex and often challenging nature of youth work coupled with demanding workloads has previously been reported as issues contributing to worker burn out and stress.¹⁶ There is concern that the added stress on workers due to COVID-19, both personally and professionally, will have a deleterious impact on the workforce if it is not addressed.

2. What factors are likely to shape the medium and longer-term impacts for your sector/members?

Key factors shaping the medium and longer-term impacts for young Tasmanians and the Tasmanian youth sector include:

- Interstate and international border restrictions impacting on employment opportunities for young people;
- The sudden cessation of JobKeeper and Coronavirus supplement schemes increasing the likelihood of young people experiencing financial hardship and poverty;
- Reduced capacity of youth organisations to respond to the needs of young people due to social distancing requirements including youth Specialist Homelessness Services and youth centres;
- Additional digital infrastructure costs for the Tasmanian youth sector to maintain online platforms and provide access to appropriate technology for workers and young people;
- Increased demand for prevention and early intervention youth mental health services; and
- Workforce sustainability and service continuity due to emerging mental health and wellbeing concerns of youth sector workers.

3. What data or information can currently be provided to the Council on the nature and magnitude of impacts for your sector/members?

Items attached:

Eslake, S. (2020) COVID-19, the economic downturn and some of its consequences for young people in Tasmania. *Online Presentation hosted by the Youth Network of Tasmania, 25 May 2020.*

Grattan Institute (2020) Shutdown: estimating the COVID-19 employment shock.

YNOT (2020) What young Tasmanians have to say about COVID-19. *Survey Report. 25 May 2020.*

4. What mitigation measures are currently in place that aim to address these impacts?

The following youth specific mitigation measures are in place:

- Additional funding to support young people under 16 at risk of homelessness;¹⁷
- Payroll Tax rebate for up to 12 months for young people aged 15-24 years commencing part-time or permanent employment between 1 April and 31 December 2020;¹⁸
- Modification to the Years 11 and 12 curriculum and assessments to support young people returning to schools;¹⁹
- Federal Government JobKeeper and Coronavirus Supplement initiatives and one-off \$750 Economic Support Payments for low income households (second payment if not eligible for the Coronavirus Supplement or JobKeeper).

As of 5 June 2020, there are no other mitigation measures in place specifically targeted at young people or the Tasmanian youth sector however some will also benefit from the following measures:

- One-off relief payment to foster and kinship carers for each young person in their care;²⁰
- Rapid rehousing program to support victims of family violence, including young people;²¹
- Lending of ICT equipment from the Department of Education to disadvantaged students to study at home;
- Rapid Response Skills Initiative;²²
- COVID-19 Rental Relief Fund for those with extreme financial hardship to support four weeks rental costs;²³

- Cultural and Creatives Industries Stimulus Package;²⁴
- Extension of cashless buses and bus fare amnesty for public school bus and general access services until 5 July 2020;²⁵
- Payroll tax rebate for 2019-20 for apprentices and trainees in the building, construction, tourism, hospitality and manufacturing industries commencing employment between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2021;²⁶
- Emergency accommodation support and Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants for low-income persons required to self-isolate due to COVID-19;²⁷
- Extension of the No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS) for low-income families;²⁸
- Local Government Council Support including flexible payment options, rate discounts and hardship provisions;²⁹
- Expansion of the Private Rental Incentive Scheme and temporary freeze on rental increases;³⁰
- A Tasmanian Lifeline 1800 98 44 34 service for people seeking support due to COVID-19.³¹

It is important to note that while the Tasmanian Government was the first State Government to invest in mental health initiatives during the crisis, there is no investment in youth-specific initiatives to respond to psychological distress as a result of COVID-19.

5. What impacts are not being mitigated or for which there is no plan in place to mitigate?

Targeted youth policy responses: Targeted youth policy interventions to respond to youth unemployment and underemployment.

Temporary visa holders: Additional support for temporary visa holders, including international students and young migrants, who do not qualify for most Federal and State Government initiatives.

Youth mental health and wellbeing: Greater investment in prevention and early intervention youth mental health services to meet the anticipated increased demand.

Workforce health and wellbeing: Strategies to support the mental health and wellbeing of the Tasmanian Youth Sector workforce.

6. What responses, both within the sector and more broadly, are front-of-mind and over what timeframes – what should be stopped, what should continue and what should be started?

Immediate

- Ongoing support from the Tasmanian Government to extend the Jobseeker scheme beyond September 30, 2020 for businesses that are still impacted by the pandemic to mitigate further job losses.
- Support from the Tasmanian Government to maintain the Coronavirus Supplement beyond September 30, 2020 for people who are unemployed because of COVID-19.
- Ongoing support from the Tasmanian Government to raise the rate of Jobseeker and Youth Allowance to prevent young people from living in poverty.
- Maintain housing related initiatives for young Tasmanians experiencing significant financial hardship. It is anticipated that further rental assistance will be required for those living below minimum wage.
- Invest in prevention and early intervention youth mental health services to respond to young Tasmanians experiencing psychological distress and pre-existing mild to moderate mental ill-health.

- Additional investment in essential technology funds to support the continuation and expansion of online support services for young Tasmanians in need. Essential technology funds made available through the Tasmanian Social and Economic Support Package were oversubscribed.

Medium to longer-term

- Invest in targeted job creation for young people. Infrastructure and construction work are heavily male dominated industries. Consideration needs to be given to other sectors that can provide job opportunities for all young Tasmanians throughout the public and private sectors.
- Invest in community led solutions which address local youth unemployment and underemployment and support existing, evidence-based transition to work and social enterprise programs.

7. What would help create or build business/consumer/community confidence?

This question is not addressed by this submission.

8. What would help your sector/members re-employ where there have been reductions in jobs, or grow employment levels?

This question is not addressed by this submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to outline key issues and challenges impacting young Tasmanians and the Tasmanian Youth Sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Young Tasmanians and the Tasmanian Youth Sector have a vital role to play in our social and economic recovery as we strive to build a stronger and more resilient Tasmania.

Kind regards,



Tania Hunt
Chief Executive Officer

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- ³ Grattan Institute (2020) Shutdown: estimating the COVID-19 employment shock.
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- ⁷ TasCOSS (2019) Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Newstart and Related Payments.
- ⁸ YNOT (2019) YNOT Executive Summary: Public Hearing on the Adequacy of Newstart and Related Allowances. *Media Release 7 November 2019.*
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- ¹¹ YNOT (2020) What young Tasmanians have to say about COVID-19. *Survey Report. 25 May 2020*
- ¹² *Ibid.* YNOT (2020).
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- ²¹ *Ibid.* DPAC (2020) *Stimulus and Support.*
- ²² Tasmanian Government (2020) Helping retrenched workers retrain and connect to job opportunities. Jeremy Rockliff, Minister for Education and Training. *Media Release 26 May 2020.*
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- ³⁰ *Ibid.* DPAC (2020) *Stimulus and Support.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.* DPAC (2020) *Tasmanian Social and Economic Support Measures Update.*