An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress programme for unemployed youths

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(PPHPAM001)

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List of Acronyms

AVA	Action volunteers Africa
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DWYPD	Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disability
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LMIC	Low- and Middle- Income Countries
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NYP	National Youth Policy
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SCM	Success Case Method
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UCT	University of Cape Town
YEP	Youth Employment Programme

Abstract

This evaluation assessed whether the Work 4 Progress programme, a youth employment programme implemented by Action Volunteers Africa achieved its intended short-term and long-term outcomes. The programme is designed to improve the employability of young people aged between 18 to 25 years who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), by providing them with work opportunities, life coaching and career guidance. The evaluation used a mixed-method exploratory sequential design to collect data. To measure the outcomes of the programme, 29 alumni completed an online survey designed to assess their attainment of the programme outcomes namely: work-related skills and competencies; personal growth and career orientation. Eight participants also took part in semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the evaluator. The programme's Executive Director was also interviewed to promote triangulation of the results. Results of the analysis of the survey data revealed that the Work 4 Progress programme is likely to improve the employability of youths and the participants were overall satisfied with the experience. Results from the analysis of interview data revealed three overall themes. The emerging themes were: 1) Understanding backgrounds, 2) Career guidance is crucial and useful and 3) Programme praxis and knowledge in the real world. Overall, the informants felt that the programme equipped them with the skills and competencies needed in the world of work. The triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative results revealed both the economic and social benefits of engaging in the Work 4 Progress programme. The findings of this evaluation reinforce the importance of multi-component interventions as essential in improving the employment outcomes of youths with socio-economic disadvantages.

Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation presents the findings of an outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress programme, a Youth Employment Programme (YEP) implemented by Action Volunteers Africa (AVA). This chapter begins by introducing the social problem that the programme intends to address, followed by a brief description of the AVA organisation and its Work 4 Progress programme. The programme theory is presented and the plausibility of the assumptions underlying the programme theory are investigated and reported. The chapter concludes with the evaluation questions that the research addressed.

Background on youth unemployment in South Africa

The youth population (ages 15 to 34 years) in South Africa is estimated at 20.6 million, representing a third of the country's population (StatsSA, 2022). Modi and Vivek (2018) argue that youths are an important asset for a country's development as they contribute to the total labour force. The National Youth Policy (NYP) of 2020-2030 asserts that the youths are the foundation of the country, and its goal is to build and enhance the capabilities of young people so that they are responsible members of their communities, and society (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities [DWYPD], 2020).

The potential of youths can be harnessed if they are provided with meaningful opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities. This entails providing them with work opportunities so that they contribute to the development of the country. However, 45% of youths in South Africa are not employed and more than a third of the unemployed youths have never been employed (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). About 4 to 8% of unemployed youths have given up hope of finding employment (Yu, 2013). The above arguments show that youth unemployment is a serious challenge affecting the development of South Africa.

There are many explanations for the possible causes of high youth unemployment in South Africa. The general view is that the legacy of apartheid and the poor education system has contributed to persistent poverty, inequality and unemployment (De Lannoy et al., 2020; see also Chibba & Luiz, 2011; Lam et al., 2009). Researchers also suggest that the 2008/2009 global recession severely affected South Africa and the rate of unemployment has remained high (De Lannoy et al., 2018; see also Rena & Msoni, 2014; Saylor, 2021). Other researchers

underpin slow economic growth as a key driver of high youth unemployment (Leshoro, 2013; see also Meyer, 2017; Oluwatayo & Ojo 2018). Literature on youth unemployment identifies population growth, lack of skills and experience, inappropriate job searching and lack of career guidance as possible reasons for high youth unemployment (Baah-Boateng, 2016; see also Lam, 2009; Yu 2018). A systematic review by Radebe (2019) posits that most youths lack entrepreneurship skills to facilitate self-employment. The arguments show that youth unemployment is a complex societal issue, arising from many interacting factors.

There have been a lot of discussions about lack of work experience and skills mismatch as the main contributing factors to high youth unemployment (Baah-Boateng, 2016; see also Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2014; Yu, 2013). The general view is that young people who are entering the job market do not have work experience and the skills needed in the world of work. Marock (2008) argues that the South African formal education system fails to address the needs of the labour market as youths lack relevant and marketable skills. The World Bank (2021) also suggests that there is a gap between the education system and the industry as youths do not have the quality and level of skills required in the labour market. The situation has been exacerbated by a highly competitive job market, where young people with no advanced education, work experience or social networks find it difficult to secure employment (Graham & Mlatsheni 2015). Youths living in disadvantage communities are mostly affected by unemployment (Yu, 2013), which further increases their vulnerability.

Global research has shown that youth unemployment can cause serious and long-lasting repercussions on the individual, the family, the broader community and the country (Baah-Boateng, 2016; see also Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017; Udiin, 2013). Young people who do not have social support and few employment opportunities tend to develop negative outcomes such as substance abuse, violent behaviour, unwanted pregnancy, crime and mental health disorders (McBride Murry et al., 2011). Other manifestations of psychological effects of unemployment include increased anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression and stress-related health disorders (Cloete, 2015). In recent years, there has been an increase in socio-political unrest and experts warn that the situation can worsen if high youth unemployment is not addressed (Vhumbunu, 2021; see also De Juan & Wegner, 2019). It is, therefore, imperative to come up with initiatives that reduce youth unemployment to safeguard the wellbeing of youths and society.

According to the NYP of 2020-2030, employment programmes that provide meaningful work opportunities should be implemented to curb high youth unemployment (DWYPD, 2020). Over the years, the government of South Africa has provided initiatives and policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment. Some of the initiatives include learnerships, internships and other government-funded programmes that help unemployed youths gain access to formal employment and further learning opportunities. Despite all these interventions, the government has not been able to fully address the challenge of high youth unemployment. Efforts to tackle youth unemployment require participation from a range of stakeholders including the government, private sector and non-governmental organisations.

The private sector and Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) are also implementing various youth employment programmes (YEPs). These programmes aim to provide meaningful employment experiences that can lead to better opportunities for marginalised youths. This stems from the recognition that the major underlying causes of rising unemployment are poverty and inequality, where youths from high-poverty neighbourhoods are exposed to high crime rates, drop out of fail in school and consequently have few job opportunities. The Life Choices Academy, Rhiza Babuyile, Ubuntu Pathways and Lulaway, are some of the private sector-led initiatives in partnership with NPOs that are being implemented to address the country's youth unemployment (Momentum, 2023).

Action Volunteers Africa (AVA) is another NPO that aims to address youth unemployment by providing work opportunities. AVA also provides support to the participants including mentorship and career guidance to help unemployed youths overcome personal challenges and navigate their first work experience. This evaluation aims to investigate whether the Work 4 Progress programme implemented by AVA has successfully achieved its goal of upskilling youths and improving their employability.

Introducing AVA[1]

AVA is a registered NPO, based in Wynberg, Cape Town. The organisation was established in 2012 by the Action Appointment Recruitment Agency as an initiative to

[1]The information contained in this section and the section on the programme description was obtained from AVA's annual reports (AVA, 2019-2020), the organisation website (http://www.avafrica.org.za) and personal communication with the Executive

address high youth unemployment and it became an NPO in 2013. The organisation is funded by various sponsors and partners, but its main funder is the Western Cape Provincial Government. AVA enables young people who are not employed to gain valuable skills and work experience by providing work opportunities. Currently, the organisation has three social development programmes, namely the Khanyisa, YearBeyond and Work 4 Progress. All the AVA programmes have a common goal of improving youth employability by providing work opportunities. The model of the Work 4 Progress programme is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

A simplified model for AVA programmes

Note. Adapted from AVA's 2019-2020 annual report.

This evaluation aims to investigate whether the Work 4 Progress programme has successfully achieved its goal of improving youth employability. The Work 4 Progress programme (the evaluand) is described in the next section.

Description of the Work 4 Progress programme

The Work 4 Progress programme was piloted in 2017 and is aimed at youths between the ages of 18 and 25 years who have not managed to find employment. The youths typically reside in different disadvantaged areas in Cape Town. A total of 89 youths have so far

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Director, Janine Hansen and Director of Programmes, Charnre Taylor (J. Hansen and C. Taylor, personal communication, July, 2021).

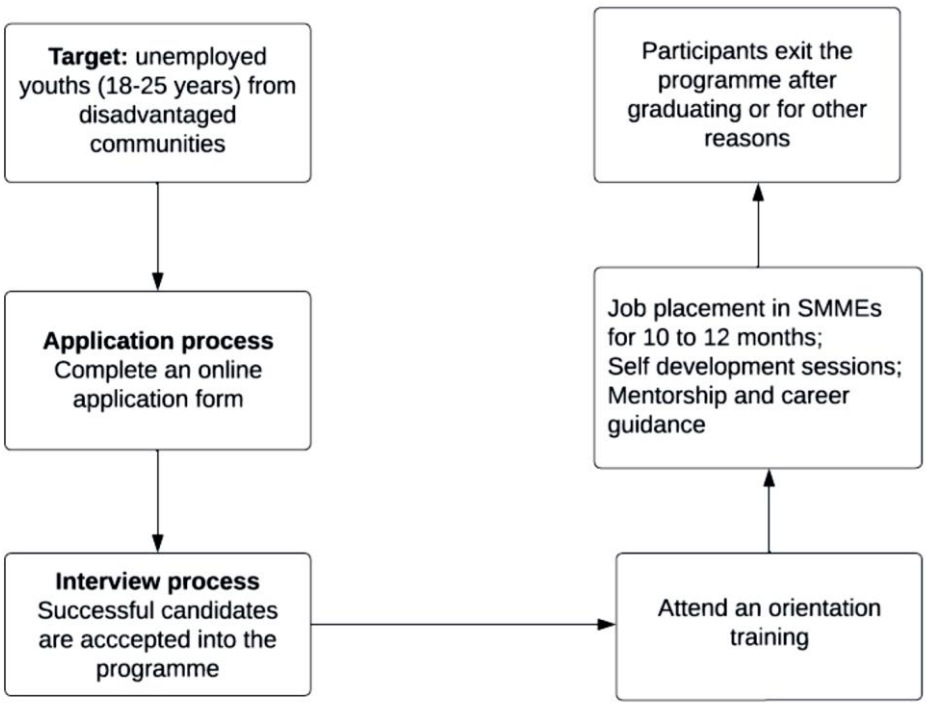
benefitted from the programme since its inception in 2017 to 2020 with anecdotal evidence suggesting that more than 90% of the participants have either found employment, are studying fulltime or are completing learnership programmes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, an intake for 2021 has not been possible.

The Work 4 Progress programme provides participants with training, skills development, work experience and social networks needed to progress in life and achieve their full potential. The programme also enables youths to identify future career opportunities which help in advancing their careers. Unemployed youths from all academic levels including those without a Matric qualification are recruited into the programme. In this way, the Work 4 Progress programme provides an opportunity for excluded youths to gain valuable work experience and progress in life.

Interested youths apply through an online application system and they are selected through a stringent interview process. AVA recruits about 20 to 30 participants each year. The participants are not paid, but they are provided with a transport allowance for the duration of their job placement. The workflow of the Work 4 Progress programme from recruitment of participants to exiting the programme is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Workflow depicting the sequences of steps followed in the Work 4 Progress programme

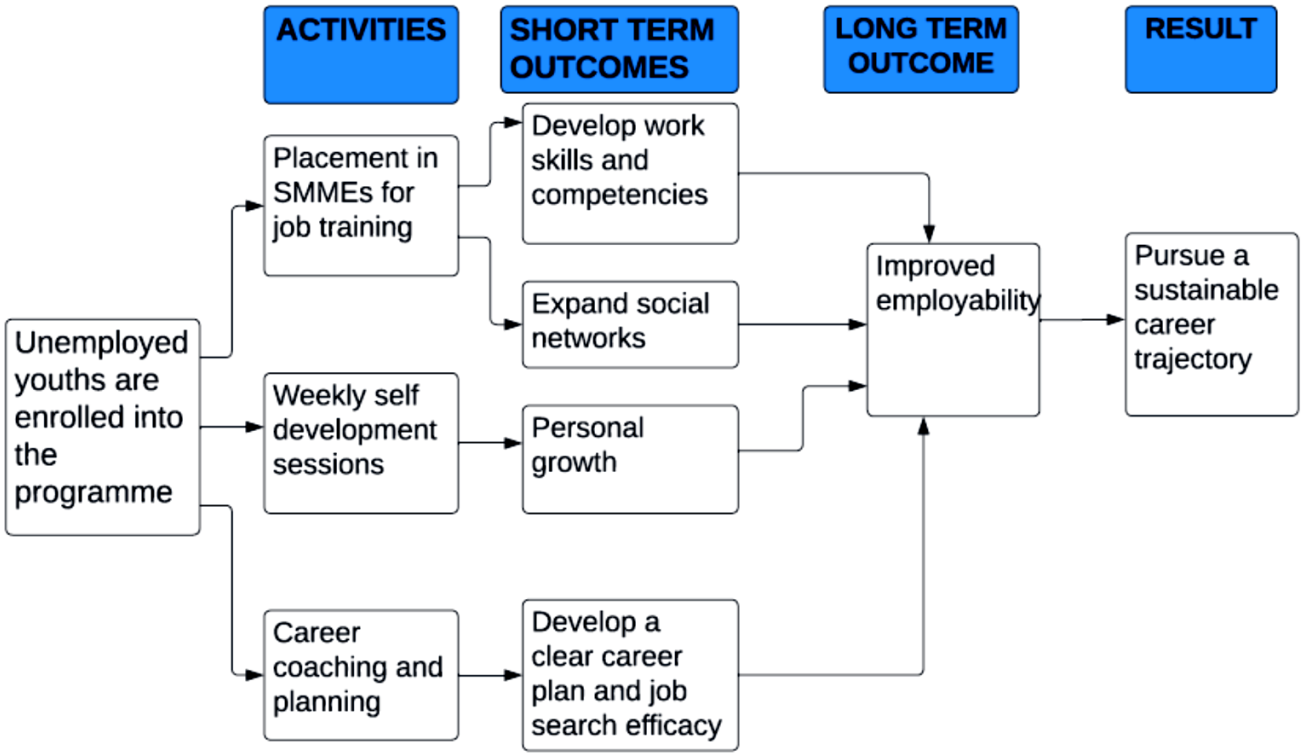


Programme theory for the Work 4 Progress programme

According to Rossi et al. (2004), "a programme theory explains why the programme does what it does and how it will achieve the desired results" (p. 134). Similarly, Fraser et al. (2010) postulate that programme theories "make explicit how an intervention is supposed to function" (p. 48). The Work 4 Progress programme theory is embedded within the theory of change shared by all the AVA programmes (see Appendix A). According to Bickman (2000), a programme theory is used to outline critical elements of a programme and can help in tracking the link from programme activities to expected benefits. Figure 3 is a simplified programme theory for the Work 4 Progress programme showing the causal pathway through which the programme is expected to bring social change. It is envisaged that the activities of the Work 4 Progress programme will provide the participants with valuable skills, work experience, personal growth and social networks needed to improve their employability.

Figure 3

Simplified Diagram Illustrating the Work 4 Progress Programme Theory



Programme activities

The Work 4 Progress programme has three main activities namely job training, weekly self-development sessions and career planning and coaching. Each activity is briefly explained below.

Job training

The recruited participants are placed into Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) where they receive job training from a host organisation for a duration of 10 to 12 months. The goal is to expose participants to work so that they gain valuable work experience and enhanced skills and expand their social networks. Some of the participants are employed by the host organisation after completing the programme.

Weekly self-development sessions

The participants attend weekly self-development sessions at the AVA offices in Wynberg, Cape Town. These are life coaching sessions consisting of different modules that are designed to build a positive mind set and help the participants navigate difficult challenges preventing them from achieving their full potential.

Career planning and coaching

As part of the progression activities, AVA hosts and attends fairs from potential employers where the participants may attend. AVA also provides support to participants including professional development planning, limited counselling and referral to counselling resources. The goal of self-development planning is to support the participants in planning their career goals so that the pursue a sustainable career trajectory.

Programme outcomes

The programme intends to upskill and improve the employability of youths through multiple activities, including job training in a host SMME, weekly self-development sessions and career coaching and planning sessions. The programme theory outlined in Figure 3 shows

the causal pathway through which the Work 4 Progress programme is expected to bring these intended outcomes.

There are several short-term outcomes expected from the programme participants. Skills such as 1) job-specific skills 2) professional skills i.e., work ethic, computer literacy, telephone etiquette, problem-solving, analytical skills, and 3) social skills i.e., self-efficacy, and interpersonal skills. These skills are gained through exposure to work, life skills coaching and career guidance.

The programme expects that the participants will use the skills obtained to find decent work or purse further education and training. The programme further intends to produce long-term social change in the lives of unemployed youths such that they pursue a sustainable career trajectory in their chosen fields.

Plausibility of Programme Theory of the Work 4 Progress programme

The goal of the Work 4 Progress programme is to improve the employability of youths by providing work opportunities. Published literature on exposure to work as an antecedent of skills and competencies leading to employability was thus reviewed. The focus was on the empirical evidence to support the underlying causal assumption of the Work 4 Progress' programme theory. Below are the presumed causal pathways leading to youth employability.

1. Exposure to work will improve the employment outcomes of the youths.
2. Exposure to work will help unemployed youths expand the social networks that will connect them to work opportunities.
3. Programme participation contributes to personal growth that will help youths cope with life challenges.
4. Career guidance will help unemployed youths develop a clear career plan which contributes to career readiness.

This section first discusses the concept of employability and the skills and competencies which underpin this concept, in the context of inexperienced youths who are entering the labour market. Then, the effectiveness of global YEPs is explored to assess the plausibility of the Work 4 Progress programme theory.

Literature search

Electronic databases and search engines such as Google scholar, EBSCO Host, Taylor and Francis Online, JSTOR and Scopus were used for the literature search. Search terms related to the study population, interventions that are perceived to improve youth employability and the research designs were used in various possible combinations. The publications were selected based on their relevance to the topic and year of publication. All relevant literature published in the last three decades, except for seminal works that were included to help understand the scope of programmes that improve youth employability.

The following search terms related to the study population, interventions and research designs for methodologically rigorous studies were used:

Population: "Youth" OR "Young people" OR "Adolescent*" OR "NEET"

Interventions: "Employment" OR "Exposure to work" OR "job training" OR "work training" OR "vocational training" OR "skills training" OR "job shadowing" OR "career guidance" OR "career coaching" OR "life coaching" OR "personal development" OR "YEP*" OR "PYD"

Research design: "RCT" OR "randomised controlled trial" OR "impact evaluation" OR "outcome evaluation" OR "effectiveness" OR "meta-analysis" OR "longitudinal" OR "systematic review"

Understanding the concept of youth employability

Employability is variously described in the literature, but the frameworks generally have similar elements. Seminal work conducted by Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 1) defined employability as "having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required." Hillage and Pollard's (1998) definition included four main elements of employability namely:

1) Employability assets, which comprise knowledge, skills and attitudes,
2) Deployment, which is linked to career management skills,
3) Presentation, which is the ability to present oneself to get a particular job and
4) Personal and external factors include personal circumstances and the labour market environment.

The employability framework by Hillage and Pollard (1998), has been used as a foundation of subsequent studies for defining the concept of employability (Clarke, 2008; see also Knight & Yorke, 2003; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Knight and Yorke (2003, p. 5) define employability as a "set of achievements, understanding and attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen occupations." Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) also define employability as a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes that make an individual more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they are satisfied and successful. For Clarke (2008), employability is having skills and abilities to get employed, remain employed and find new employment when required. In a nutshell, employability is the possession of skills, knowledge, attitudes and experiences that enhance the capacity to secure and maintain employment and find new employment when required, as stated by McDonald et al. (2020).

Employability skills framework

Frameworks for skills and competencies that enhance youth employability generally have common features. A study conducted by Griesel and Parker (2009) for Higher Education South Africa and South African Qualification Authority interviewed 99 employers to establish their perceptions and what they expect in young people who are entering the job market. The research developed four constructs of employability skills notably:

1. Communicative competence in English and an understanding of the world of work.
2. Subject or discipline knowledge and intellectual ability.
3. Proactive approach to problem-solving.
4. A strong sense of self and ability to work in a team.

In a study commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Brewer (2013) found four constructs of employability notably basic/foundation skills, which include literacy and numeracy skills acquired in school; vocational/technical skills, which are skills and knowledge to perform specific duties or tasks, professional skills which are the individual attributes that impact on work habits such as honesty, integrity and work ethics, and personal skills which include the ability to learn and adapt; effective communication, creative thinking, problem-solving, self-management, ability to work in teams, handle basic technology, lead effectively as well as follow supervision. Curtin, (2004) argues that it is the

personal attributes of an employee other than technical competencies that make them an asset to the employer.

Many YEPs emphasise the development of personal skills as they are strongly correlated with labour market outcomes (Heckman et al., 2006; see also Gibbons-Wood & Lange, 2000; Heckman et al., 2006). These skills are defined as cognitive and non-cognitive skills and abilities connecting behaviour, attitudes, and knowledge (International Youth Foundation, 2014). These also include workplace readiness skills, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills (Heckman et al., 2006). A systematic review by Lippman et al. (2015) identified five critical skills most likely to increase workplace success in the 15 to 19 age group namely: social skills, communication skills, high-order thinking skills (problem-solving and decision-making); self-control (directing and focusing attention, managing emotions and behaviour) and positive self-concept. Most of these skills are best developed in early childhood and they can still be malleable through adolescence, but much harder to develop in adulthood (Borghans et al., 2008).

In summary of the above, the skills required by employers in young people who are entering the labour market range from basic and technical skills to the possession of personal/professional skills. Similarly, the main assumption of the Work 4 Progress programme is that participating in the programme will help unemployed youths develop technical knowledge and personal/professional skills that are required in the world of work.

The next section explores the effectiveness of YEPs that focus on interventions associated with job training, fostering social capital, personal development and career planning and management, to assess the plausibility of the Work 4 Progress programme theory.

Assessment of the Work 4 Progress programme theory

In line with YEPs, the Work 4 Progress programme works with the assumption that the programme will improve the employability of youths. This evaluation focuses on four presumed causal pathways leading to youth employability as follows:

1. Exposure to work through programme participation will improve the employment outcomes of the youths.
2. Exposure to work will help unemployed youths expand the social networks that will connect them to work opportunities.

3. Programme participation will help unemployed youths to enhance their personal growth, which will help them to cope with life challenges.
4. Career guidance will help unemployed youths develop a clear career plan which contributes to career readiness.

This section assesses the plausibility of each of these causal pathways through a review of the literature on global YEPs and Positive Youth Development (PYD) programmes.

Causal Assumption 1: Exposure to work through programme participation will improve the employment outcomes of the youths.

Like the Work 4 Progress programme, many job intervention programmes target less educated youths from disadvantaged families, by providing them with meaningful work opportunities (Ibarraran et al., 2014; see also Kluve et al., 2017; OECD, 2013). The main objective of these programmes is generally to improve the employability of young people through skills development for the labour market and connecting them to prospective employers (Mayombe, 2022). The interventions typically include job training, vocational training and internships (Betcherman et al., 2004), where youths learn and acquire job-specific skills by performing the work. These YEPs are anchored on Kolb's experiential learning theory which states that people learn best when they are personally involved in the direct learning experience (Kolb, 2014).

The ACCESS BladeRunners in Canada has been successful in improving the employment outcomes of high-risk youths (OECD, 2013). The programme supports youth between the ages of 15 and 30 years, who face multiple barriers to employment. Similar to the Work 4 Progress programme, ACCESS BladeRunners provides life skills, job readiness skills, on-the-job training, job coaching and ongoing support to unemployed or precariously employed young adults at risk (OECD, 2013). The programme aims to help youths overcome the difficulties and barriers in their lives that prevent them from obtaining, and maintaining, meaningful long-term employment. One of the key strengths and unique features of ACCESS BladeRunners is that it targets Aboriginal youth, who have faced increased barriers to employment, such as inadequate housing, family breakdown, addiction and/or mental health issues, involvement with the criminal justice system, and/or educational disengagement (OECD, 2013). ACCESS BladeRunners works directly with the construction industry in

Canada to provide participants with potential sustainable opportunities. About 75% of participants completed the training and gained employment (OECD, 2013). The key to ACCESS BladeRunners' success has been its ability to support high-risk youths through training, education, and employment opportunities.

Evaluation studies on youth employment programmes have indicated mixed outcomes in terms of the magnitude and longevity of the effects of a job training intervention on youth employment outcomes. For example, evaluation evidence from a study conducted by Popescu and Roman (2018) on a job training programme in Romania targeting young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years (similar to the Work 4 Progress programme) showed that YEPs do not always lead to positive employment outcomes. The study was based on a sample of 392 participants and an unemployed person who attended the programme had a 15% higher chance of finding a job compared to someone with similar characteristics who did not follow the training. However, a heterogeneity analysis indicated a small effect of training on employment, with slightly more positive effects for females than males.

Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Tripney and Hombrados (2013) on 20 different Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) programmes in 11 Low-to-Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) indicated positive effects of the TVETs on labour market outcomes such as overall paid employment, formal employment and monthly earnings, but the effect size was small and the observed heterogeneity was significant, indicating that studies disagreed on the magnitude effects.

In addition to the small and heterogeneous effects of YEPs on employment outcomes, longitudinal evaluation studies have shown that the benefits of job training programmes are not sustained in the long term. For example, Perry and Maloney (2007) evaluated the impact of subsidy work and training programmes in New Zealand using difference-in-difference matching. Their results indicated that job training programmes have beneficial effects on the unemployed with no formal education. However, by the third year after the interventions, the beneficial effects of the programme were non-significant, implying that the outcomes were not sustained over time.

Corseuil et al. (2019) evaluated the impact of a Brazilian YEP, which aims at helping youths transition from school to formal employment. The results of the evaluation showed that the programme increased the probability of having a formal job by 7.9% after 2-3 years and by 6.9% after 4-5 years. Heterogeneity analysis revealed that the effects were low and

non-significant for those in low-skilled occupations. The findings of the evaluation studies above are crucial in the context of the Work 4 Progress programme, which targets low-skilled individuals. Evidence presented by Corseuil et al. (2019) suggested that job training programmes do not always lead to positive employment outcomes, especially for low-skilled individuals with low levels of education.

In a similar notion, a meta-analysis review by Betcherman et al. (2004) on 19 evaluations of job training programmes in developing countries indicated that youth training rarely improves employment and earning prospects for less educated individuals. The researchers recommended that earlier interventions at the schooling stage are likely to be more effective than trying to remedy education failures through YEPs (Betcherman et al., 2004).

To assess the effectiveness of YEPs on employment outcomes, it is necessary to consider the different contexts or labour markets. Many job training programmes, including the Work 4 Progress programme assume that jobs are available on the market, but youths are not trained enough to get the jobs. However, a meta-analysis of a sample of 172 evaluation studies indicated that programme success is not determined by the type of intervention but by the flexibility of the labour market (Puerto, 2007). Job interventions tend to be more successful in countries with higher employment opportunities (Fox & Kaul, 2018), which is not always the case with developing countries, South Africa included.

As discussed in the employability skills framework, whether an individual is employable or not is the result of interaction between their skills, personal circumstances and the condition of the labour market. Therefore, it should not be assumed that YEPs like the Work 4 Progress programme will have the intended effects. Evidence presented shows that there are mixed results on the effectiveness of job training interventions on the employment outcomes of the youths. In cases where evaluation studies reported positive effects in terms of employment rate and earnings, the effects were small or not sustained in the long term. Moreover, programmes which target low-skilled individuals, like the Work 4 Progress programme may not always lead to positive employment outcomes, due to personal circumstances and scarcity of employment opportunities. Therefore, a cost-benefit analysis of such interventions should be considered as the costs of the programme may outweigh the benefits.

Conclusion: There is mixed evidence in evaluation studies to support the assumption that exposure to work through programme participation will improve the employment outcomes of the youths. This is especially relevant in countries like South Africa, where high unemployment continues to be a significant problem.

Causal Assumption 2: Exposure to work will help unemployed youths expand their social capital/networks that will connect them to work opportunities.

The Work 4 Progress programme offers work opportunities that entail social interaction with different types of people. The formation of social relationships between youths and responsible adults has been purported to strengthen the job readiness of youths and is an entry point into the labour market (Zeldin et al., 2013). Literature suggests that when youths engage with people outside of their families and peer groups, they have access to a new and different web of influential and developmental relationships with individuals who can facilitate career opportunities, including opportunities for scholarships, awards, internships and employment (Dill & Ozer, 2019; see also Jarrett et al., 2005). Yet, most disadvantaged South African youths do not have social networks to connect them to work opportunities. Thus, programmes like the Work 4 Progress, are seen as a potential avenue for enhancing the job readiness of youths and securing employment. Presumably, the social networks secured by youths by participating in such programmes determine the extent of finding valuable resources such as information, skills building, social support and financial support to help them during the transition into adulthood (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). The ACCESS BladeRunners' longevity has been attributed to a team of highly dedicated staff, as well as an innovative programme and support model, emphasising the importance of positive relationships with adults in improving the employment outcomes of youths (OEDC, 2013).

Few methodologically rigorous evaluation studies of YEPs are designed to promote skills development and positive relationships through social interaction with an adult. A longitudinal study involving immigrants in Germany showed that finding a new job results in higher earnings only when immigrants have high levels of human capital, suggesting that bridging social capital can lead to better employment outcomes (Gericke et al., 2018).

In a New Zealand-based study, Sanders et al. (2020) assessed the role of early engagement in work, skills development and supportive relationships in employment outcomes for vulnerable youths aged 17 to 21 years. The results of their survey indicated that

access to adults' support increased the chances of finding full-time employment. However, the studies of both Gericke et al. (2018) and Sanders et al. (2020), lacked an experimental or a counterfactual group providing weak evidence to support the claim that social networks lead to positive employment outcomes.

The Work 4 Progress programme has some elements of a PYD programme. However, there is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of social relationships with an adult on facets of PYD, which are closely linked to youth employability. For example, a meta-analysis of three studies on PYD programmes designed to build social connections with an adult to improve developmental outcomes, and positive transition to adulthood revealed that there is insufficient evidence from rigorous evaluation studies to substantiate the claim that PYD programmes have an impact on the development of social assets and youth empowerment (Morton & Montgomery, 2013). The study reported that none of the three reviewed studies showed significant intervention effects on self-efficacy, self-esteem, social skills, emotional intelligence, and academic performance, all of which contribute to greater job readiness. In contrast, a meta-analysis of 30 studies that examined the presence and quality of the relationship with an adult on youth outcomes in four domains namely academic and vocational functioning, emotional development, physical health and psychosocial development reported small to medium effects with the presence of a relationship (r = .105) and quality of relationships (r = .24), indicating that quality adult-youth relationships are associated with positive youth development (Van Dam et al., 2018).

Conclusion: Despite considerable literature promoting positive employment outcomes of YEPs that foster social capital, there is limited empirical evidence to support this claim.

Causal Assumption 3: Programme participation contributes to personal growth, which helps youths cope with life challenges.

The Work 4 Progress programme offers weekly self-development sessions which are designed to promote self-growth that help participants navigate difficult challenges preventing them from achieving their full potential. Similarly, many YEPs are becoming popular in promoting personal growth particularly when such programmes are designed to nurture life skills and to provide psychosocial support (Paver et al., 2020). This is because psychological distress is recognised as a serious problem among unemployed youths (Linn et al., 1985). Bandura's social cognitive theory argues that people with psychological distress

tend to magnify “their inadequacies, worry about the consequences of failing, imagine perturbing scenarios of things to overcome and otherwise think themselves into distress and emotional performance” (Bandura, 1997, p. 235-236). In essence, unemployed people with psychological distress can become obstacles to their success as they convince themselves that they are unable to accomplish the task at hand. Bandura argues that interventions that promote self-efficacy, that is a person’s belief that they can be successful, should be used to reduce psychological distress and improve work performance (Bandura, 1997). Baldwin and Hoffman (2002) posit that self-efficacy changes dramatically during adolescence and emphasise the importance of interventions that foster higher and more stable self-efficacy through this precarious period. Similarly, the Work 4 Progress programme aims to enhance personal growth by enhancing the participant’s self-efficacy which a potentially important in the transition to adulthood.

The ACCESS BladeRunners programme has been successful in helping youths overcome the difficulties and barriers in their lives that prevent them from obtaining, and maintaining, meaningful long-term employment (OEDC, 2013). The programme recognises that emotional and psychological barriers may still exist following the training programme, so having access to job coordinators who are trained in coaching and supporting youth through potentially difficult situations is an important element of the ACCESS BladeRunners programme (OEDC, 2013).

Evaluation studies of YEPs prioritise employment and earning outcomes as indicators of programme success. However, as pointed out by Patel et al. (2020), there is a need for more studies that focus on non-economic indicators of success to predict the success of an intervention. Evidence from Siyakha Youth Assets, a South African-based YEP, confirms the importance of the inclusion of non-economic indicators such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and future orientation to measure the success of YEPs (Patel et al., 2020). The study used a cluster randomised controlled longitudinal study, with 1892 youths between 18 and 25 years, like the Work 4 Progress target age group. The intervention significantly improved self-esteem and self-efficacy scores, but the scores for future orientation remained the same. It was concluded that YEPs have a role to play in fostering some noneconomic outcomes such as self-esteem and self-efficacy which are conceptualised as short-term outcomes that can help youths manage the difficult transition to work.

Another South African social programme, Qhubekela Phambili, a career enhancement programme, also showed the importance of interventions targeting personal development

(Paver et al., 2020). The programme is specifically designed to help affected people cope with the psychological effects of unemployment and increase self-efficacy. A two-group pre- and post-test quasi-experimental design was used for the evaluation. The sample size consisted of 130 individuals (test group = 69; control group = 61). The individuals were from the age of 18 and resided in two disadvantaged communities of Boipatong and Orange Farm in Gauteng. The intervention consisted of five 4 sessions in one week with a return day four weeks after the programme. The test group reported higher levels of self-efficacy (F= 18.62, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.22$.) and self-esteem (F = 31.91, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = 0.33$) but the F test of amotivation was not statistically significant (F = 0.44; $p > .05$). The results of that study indicate that fostering beliefs of personal control may significantly contribute coping and overcoming unemployment psychological effects. However, the study did not measure the long-term effects of the programme to assess the longevity of the intervention.

Seddon, et al. (2013) evaluated a UK-based YEP for youths aged between 16-24 years, like the Work 4 Progress programme. The programme was delivered by work-integrated learning in an area of high unemployment in the Southeast of England. Analysis of one group pre and post-test self-reported data showed a statistically significant increase in general self-efficacy score of 4.0% after engagement in the programme. The study also used participant interviews to understand the additional impacts of the programme. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative results of this study revealed the psychological benefits of the programme to the youths.

The evidence presented suggests that YEPs can enhance self-efficacy. High self-efficacy is often thought linked to positive behavioural outcomes while lower self-efficacy on the other hand is presumably associated with higher levels of depression, higher alcohol use, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Bandura, 1999). Despite the considerable amount of literature promoting YEPs to develop positive attitudes and behaviours, there is limited evidence to support this claim. For example, a meta-analysis by Morton and Montgomery (2013) on three YEPs measuring indicators of personal growth, found no significant improvement in self-efficacy and high heterogeneity for some secondary outcomes across studies. Programme implementers should consider engaging experts when designing interventions that target positive behavioural outcomes.

Conclusion: There is strong support in the literature for the short-term effects of interventions that promote self-growth, particularly self-efficacy. However, there is limited evidence on whether YEPs can lead to positive behavioural outcomes.

Causal Assumption 4: Job search interventions and career guidance contribute to the career readiness of the youths.

Globally, studies have shown that youths who join YEPs lack a clear vision of what they want to do in life as such are well-positioned to benefit from interventions linked to career development (Holland & DeLuca, 2016; see also Lindstrom et al., 2022). Like the Work 4 Progress programme, career interventions offer job search assistance and career guidance services, where activities such as career inventory, self-exploration, preparing Curriculum Vitae (CV) drafting, completing job applications and preparing for interviews are included (Kay & Fretwell, 2003). Other programmes sometimes include job placement services and/or financial assistance (Trekson et al., 2021), however, these elements are not included in the Work 4 Progress Programme.

The case of Youth Competence Centres (YCC) in Antwerp, Belgium provide some evidence that job search interventions and career guidance can improve employment outcomes of precarious youths. The YCCs focused on reducing the negative consequences of dropping out of school and youth unemployment (Froy & Pyne, 2011). The Centres focused on 16 to 25-year-olds in vulnerable socio-cultural or socio-economic situations. The target groups for the YCC were:

i. Early school leavers older than 16, who dropped out from
ii. Disoriented youths still at school and older than 16 who followed a programme that does not match their interests or talents, or does not offer future perspectives.
iii. Unqualified, unemployed young people between the ages of 18 and 25.
iv. Low-skilled school leavers aged between 18 and 25 years old, who had a degree but lacked work experience and did not know how to apply for a job, which reduced their chances of finding employment.

Work-related acquired competence counselling was an important part of the YCC's success and was aimed at improving the educational and labour market outcomes of young people (Froy & Pyne, 2011). The YCC trained counsellors and sent them out into local communities to meet young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are not in employment, education or training. The counsellors developed relationships with these young people, provided them with advice on applying for a job or course and helped them identify which courses matched their interests. An outcome evaluation of the programme showed that of the 129 young people who received intensive coaching, 41% found a job, 16% started a

training course and 26% returned to education (Froy & Pyne, 2011). In total 83% achieved either an employment or training outcome, emphasising the importance of career guidance and counselling in positive employment outcomes. The Flemish Employment Service noted the importance of hiring counsellors who had an understanding of disengaged youths and knowledge of employment programmes and the education system. The success of the YCCs emphasises the importance of educational and labour market counselling, as this may also lead to increased social participation (Froy & Pyne, 2011).

Scholars such as Baptista et al. (2014) argue that individuals with lower education levels lack proper job search skills, which hinders their integration into the labour market. Programmes that teach job search skills and offer support in finding a job may have important benefits for unemployed youths. According to Barber et al.'s (1994) learning model, job seekers who learn more efficient job search techniques are likely to change their job search behaviours in ways that generate positive employment outcomes. A South African-based study by J-PAL Africa showed that job search interventions do not lead to improved outcomes per se, but they improve the participant's job search intensity and efficiency leading to higher employment (Abel et al., 2019).

A meta-analysis conducted by Lui et al. (2014) on 47 experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations, reported that job search interventions increased chances of finding employment by 2.67% times for job seekers who participated in the programme, compared to those in the control group. Moderator analysis suggested that job search interventions that included teaching job search skills, improving self-presentation, enhancing self-efficacy, promoting proactivity, encouraging goal setting and providing social support were more effective than interventions which did not contain such components. These components are all delivered by the Work 4 Progress programme in their job search intervention. Since job search interventions are typically low-cost interventions, they are likely to be cost-effective. However, it should be noted that these job search interventions promote employment, when both skills and personal development components are included in the programme (Lui et al., 2014), like the Work 4 Progress programme.

The career guidance component of the Work 4 Progress Programme exposes these youths to different career options. As they become more aware of opportunities in their field of interest, they develop a clear plan to reach their career goals. There are few studies which attempt to link career guidance to a sense of direction in career planning. A qualitative evaluation of an Australian career guidance programme for long-term unemployed

individuals included post-programme interviews where 32% and 22% of the respondents said the most valuable aspect of the programme was greater self-knowledge and improved sense of direction (Donohue & Patton, 1998). However, the study of Donohue and Patton (1998) lacked a counterfactual group against which change can be compared providing weak evidence to support that career guidance helps in developing a clear sense of direction in career planning.

Evidence presented shows that career development interventions that contain components linked to job search skills, improving self-presentation, boosting self-efficacy, encouraging proactiveness and promoting goal setting are effective in obtaining employment. However, it is unclear if career guidance and mentoring services can foster a sense of direction in the career planning of the youths, due to limited empirical evidence.

Conclusion: There is strong support for the effectiveness of job search interventions in improving employment outcomes. However, there is weak support due to limited evidence on the effectiveness of career guidance in developing a clear career plan.

Overall assessment of programme theory

The Work 4 Progress programme has a unique design that integrates multiple interventions. Similar YEPs although in different contexts have produced positive employment outcomes (Kluve et al., 2019). This is attributable to the fact that youths have diverse needs which are better catered through a complex approach. These positive outcomes are observed within high-quality programmes that emphasise skills development balanced with psychosocial support and career enhancement (OECD, 2013; see also Fox & Kaul, 2018).

In this review, I provided empirical evidence to support or rebut the underlying causal assumptions of the Work 4 Progress' programme theory. The first causal assumption tested is that exposure to work will improve employment outcomes. It is assumed that through work exposure, the youths will develop skills and competencies that will enhance their employment outcomes. The ACCESS BladeRunners programme showed positive employment outcomes for precarious youths (OECD, 2013). Other methodologically rigorous studies and systematic reviews have also shown positive employment outcomes, in terms of employment rate and quality of employment especially earnings and job stability with job training interventions (Popescu & Roman, 2018; see also Tripney & Hombrados, 2013).

However, it is important to note that the size of these effects was small in every case and differed with personal circumstances. Furthermore, longitudinal studies have found no significant differences in employment outcomes over time, meaning that the positive effects of job training are not sustained in the long term (Perry & Maloney, 2007), especially in low-skilled individuals with low levels of education (Corseuil et al., 2019).

The second causal assumption tested is on social capital/networks. It is presumed that exposure to work will help unemployed youths expand the social networks that will connect them to work opportunities. Despite considerable literature promoting positive employment outcomes of YEPs that foster social capital (Jarret et al., 2005; see also Dill & Ozer 2019; Zeldin 2013); there is limited empirical evidence from evaluation studies to support this claim. On the other hand, there is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of social capital in enhancing non-economic indicators that determine programme success such as self-efficacy (Morton & Montgomery, 2013; see also Van Dam et al., 2018), which potentially contributes to career readiness.

The third causal assumption tested is on personal development, meaning that programme participation will help youths enhance their personal growth, particularly self-efficacy, which will help them cope with life challenges. There is strong evidence to support that YEPs, like Work 4 Progress can achieve the desired short-term outcomes linked to personal growth (Patel, 2020; see also Paver et al., 2020; Seddon et al., 2013), but not on long-term behavioural outcomes (Morton & Montgomery, 2013). Continued psychosocial support has been an important element of the ACCESS BladeRunners programme as emotional and psychological barriers may still exist after the training programme (OEDC, 2013).

The fourth causal assumption tested is on improved career readiness through job search interventions and career guidance. Evidence presented shows that job search interventions are effective in obtaining employment (Liu et al., 2014). The YCCs in Belgium emphasise the importance of career guidance and counselling in positive employment outcomes (Froy & Pyne, 2011). However, it is unclear if career guidance and mentoring services can foster a sense of career direction in youths, due to limited empirical evidence from methodologically rigorous evaluation studies.

Overall, there is limited evidence in the reviewed literature to support that the Work 4 Progress programme will achieve its intended impact of reducing youth unemployment. Most

importantly, there are gaps in the literature due to a lack of vigorous studies on some components of the Work 4 Progress programme, including linking social capital to employment opportunities and the connection between career guidance and a sense of a clear career plan. It should, therefore, not be assumed that the Work 4 Progress programme will achieve the intended effects. Nonetheless, there is evidence that YEPs similar to Work 4 Progress yield small positive short-term outcomes. Therefore, it is suggested that the Work 4 Progress programme should focus on achieving realistic short-term outcomes.

Evaluation questions

Outcome evaluations assess the changes in the lives of individuals that can be attributed to a particular programme (Rossi et al., 2004). This evaluation sought to objectively determine whether the Work 4 Progress programme has adequately upskilled the participants and improved their employability. This is deemed an outcome evaluation, as the research assessed the effects that a programme had on the participants or "the extent to which [the] programme produce[d] the intended improvements in the social conditions" (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 58). The outcome evaluation covers the period from inception (2017) to 2020. The key evaluation questions are:

1. Did the programme target the right population in need of the intervention?

2. Did the Work 4 Progress programme achieve its intended outcome of upskilling and improving the employability of youths?
    a. Did the Work 4 Progress programme adequately equip the participants with work-related skills and competencies?
    b. Did the Work 4 Progress programme participants use the skills and competencies they gained to find decent work?
3. What factors contributed to or hindered the attainment of the programme outcomes?
4. Can we attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect?

This chapter introduced the problem that the programme intends to address, followed by a brief description of the AVA organisation and its Work 4 Progress programme. The programme theory was then presented and the plausibility of the assumptions underlying the

programme theory were investigated and reported. The chapter concluded by outlining the evaluation questions that the research addressed. The next chapter describes the method in terms of research design, evaluation approach, data collection methods, data sources and overall data analysis that I used to conduct the evaluation.

Chapter Two: Method

The objective of this evaluation was to assess the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme. The aim was to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the programme and to assess if it managed to upskill unemployed youth and improve their employability. This chapter discusses the research design, evaluation approach, data collection methods, data sources and overall data analysis that were used.

Research design

Three main methodological approaches are commonly used in programme evaluation studies. These approaches include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Quantitative research is based on the collection of numeral data to address questions about causality, generalisability or magnitude of magnitude of effect (Leavy, 2017). Quantitative research "can be used to measure attitudes, opinions, behaviours and other defined variables by collecting numerical data that are then statistically analysed" (Podems, 2019, p. 94). Quantitative research is best suited when the evaluator seeks to answer causal questions and/or generalise findings from a sample to a large population (Podem, 2019).

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with the point of view of the respondent (Leavy, 2017). The evaluation designs gather data in words and visual images (Patton, 2015), and the analysis and reporting of findings take a narrative format (Weiss, 1995). According to Patton (2015), qualitative research can be used to:

1) Illuminate meaning;
2) Study how things work;
3) Capture stories to understand people's perspectives and experiences;
4) Elucidate the ways systems function and their consequences on people's lives;
5) Understand the context;
6) Understand how and why identifying unanticipated consequences matters and
7) Make a case comparison to discover important patterns and themes across cases

Mixed-method evaluation designs incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods either concurrently or sequentially, in a single evaluation study (Doyle et al., 2016). Mixed methods are widely used in programme evaluation because of the benefits that can be achieved when both quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined. According to

Podems (2019), evaluations may be strengthened by having the perspectives brought by both quantitative and qualitative data even though one type of data can answer the evaluation questions.

Based on the above understanding of different approaches, an exploratory sequential mixed method design was used to determine the effectiveness of the Work 4 Progress programme. The exploratory sequential design consisted of a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase with an interpretation of how the qualitative data explained the quantitative results (Doyle et al., 2016). An exploratory sequential design is conducted when researchers 'have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity or situation they want' (Doyle et al., 2016, p. 6). The exploratory sequential design was deemed appropriate for this study because the evaluation sought to gain a deep understanding of how well the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme were achieved, from the participant's point of view.

Evaluation approach

Phase 1: Quantitative phase

A one-group experimental design was used to assess the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme. This design was deemed suitable for this study because time was limited and baseline data was not readily available at the time of the evaluation (Steiner et al., 2017). Quantitative data was collected from the alumni utilising an online survey. While all 91 Work 4 Progress programme alumni were invited to participate in the survey, the final sample was made up of those who had completed the survey.

Procedure and data collection tool

A memorandum of understanding was signed between UCT's knowledge Coop, the evaluator (student) and AVA. In this MOU AVA agreed to provide the evaluator with any data required for the research. Once ethical approval had been sought and obtained from the Commerce Faculty's Ethics in Research Committee, the evaluator contacted AVA to request the contact details of the Work 4 Progress programme alumni. The evaluator sent an email to

each alumnus, asking to participate in the survey. The email contained the consent letter for the research (See Appendix B).

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics, an online survey software. The survey included demographic items and a scale that was able to measure the variable of interest. The demographic information collected included age, gender (with a prefer not to answer option), year of completing secondary education, year of participation in the Work 4 Progress programme and employment history. Demographic information (gender, age, education and employment status) of programme participants is presented in the results section given that this information is useful in answering one of the evaluation questions.

According to the Work 4 Progress programme theory, providing young people with work opportunities helps them develop work-related skills and competencies; life skills, a clear sense of direction in career planning, and social networks. A scale that assesses the attainment of these four areas was included in the survey (see questionnaire, Appendix C). Participants indicated their level of agreement with the items on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree.'

The alumni who submitted a complete survey were asked to provide their cell phone number and service provider. This was to enable the evaluator to incentivise them with a R50 airtime voucher. The use of an incentive was deemed necessary given that the sampling frame was small and the evaluator needed as many data providers as possible. The survey remained live for two weeks, with prompts sent every three days. Once the survey results had been collected, they were analysed according to Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method (SCM) (Brinkerhoff, 2003).

Phase 2: Qualitative phase

Brinkerhoff's (2003) SCM is an evaluation model that uses quantitative and qualitative data collection phases to assess the effectiveness of an intervention. In our case, to establish the extent to which the programme achieved its intended outcome of upskilling and improving the employability of youths. The quantitative phase comprised a survey sent to all programme alumni, completed as part of Phase 1 of this research. Following the survey, the evaluator analysed the data to identify two extreme groups namely the success cases and non-success cases.

For this research, an alumni's overall score on the employability work scale determined which participants formed part of the two extreme groups as well as those who were in the 'middle' or 'average' range. In addition to the participant's overall score on the survey scales, successful cases were also those participants who had progressed to better opportunities after the programme i.e., they had either found employment, studying full time or were in learnership programmes. Unsuccessful cases were those who had not progressed after completing the programme. According to Brinkerhoff (2003) model and the underlying logic, evaluators then purposively interview only those participants in the extreme groups.

The researcher interviewed five participants in the success group and two participants in the non-success group. This sample size was determined during data collection using the saturation approach. This approach is where the researcher continues interviewing the participants until no new insights are presented (Hennick & Kaiser, 2022).

In addition to the alumni, the Executive Director of AVA was also interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to promote triangulation of the results. In other words, not only getting the perspectives from the alumni of the programme but from the implementers of the programme too. The interview with the Executive Director focused on what they believed were the factors that contributed to or hindered the attainment of programme outcomes.

Procedure and data collection tool

Every alumnus who formed part of the extreme groups was contacted and requested to take part in a short 30-minute interview. The informed consent letter as well as the semi-structured interview schedule can be found in Appendices D and E respectively. The Executive Director was contacted via email and the informed consent letter and semi-structured interview schedule can be found in Appendices F and G. Permission to record the interviews was sought and granted before the interview sessions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted remotely via videoconferencing tools i.e., Microsoft Teams. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using Express Scribe Transcription software.

Overall data analysis

Other than using the survey data from Phase One to identify success and success cases, descriptive statistics, using IBM SPSS statistics software version 7 were computed. Fischer's Exact test was performed to investigate whether there were significant differences in employment outcomes before and after programme participation. Significant differences were considered at an alpha level of $p < .05$

The qualitative data (participant and Executive Director interview data) was analysed to identify what Brinkerhoff refers to as success stories. Transcripts from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis. This is a method of analysing qualitative data by searching across data sets and reporting repeated patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following steps were followed in a thematic analysis of qualitative data:

1. In the initial phase of the thematic analysis, all the interview transcripts were read repeatedly. This is known as data familiarisation or immersion (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and it allows the researchers to have an overview of the data and write up summary notes for each interview.
2. The interview transcripts were read again, highlighting important text and generating initial codes.
3. Fragments of data with similar meanings were collated together. The codes were reviewed and those with similar meanings were merged. Codes not answering the research questions were collapsed.
4. The next step involved turning codes into themes and subthemes. This was done by grouping similar codes and establishing a connection between themes and subthemes.
5. The themes were continuously reviewed and modified to reflect the overall story that the analysis tells.

By conducting phase one and phase two of the research, the evaluator was able to answer the proposed evaluation questions, and in addition, document success stories as well as recommend changes necessary for programme improvement.

Ethical considerations

Before the research was undertaken, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Commerce Faculty's Ethics in Research Committee (See Appendix H). All research participants were either provided with informed or written consent to participate in the research. They were made aware of the voluntary nature of the research as well as their right to withdraw at any time. The consent letter also stated their approval for the interview to be recorded to allow for transcription.

There were no risks associated with this research, and no questions were triggering or sensitive. Respondents to the survey were asked for identifiable information, but this was to allow the evaluator to interview them in Phase 2. The evaluator kept participants' details confidential, and in the write-up of the results, the participants' identities were kept anonymous. Due to the likelihood of low participation in the survey, which could affect the internal validity of the design, the evaluator offered an incentive of a R50 airtime voucher.

Data management

Data was collected, shared and stored according to the UCT data management plan (see Appendix I). Survey data was transferred to Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data which consists of face-to-face interview transcripts (n = 8) in Microsoft Word was coded and stored via a secured UCT OneDrive that was only accessible to the evaluator. During the data collection and analysis phase, data was backed up each month to the UCT OneDrive. Progress reports were compiled by the evaluator and kept on the server. As a contingency measure, the data was backed up and stored in a second secure physical location.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design, evaluation approach, data collection methods, data sources and overall data analysis that were used in this evaluation. The next chapter presents and discusses the results of this evaluation study.

Chapter Three: Results and Discussion

This evaluation aimed to assess whether the Work 4 Progress programme implemented by AVA successfully achieved its short-term and long-term outcomes. The key evaluation questions were:

1. Did the Work 4 Progress programme target the right population in need of the intervention?
2. Did the Work 4 Progress programme achieve its intended outcome of upskilling and improving the employability of youths?
    a. Did the Work 4 Progress programme adequately equip the participants with work-related skills and competencies?
    b. Did the Work 4 Progress programme participants use the skills and competencies they gained to find decent work?
3. What factors contributed to or hindered the attainment of the programme outcomes?
4. Can we attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect?

A mixed method exploratory sequential design was used to gain a deep understanding of the effectiveness of the programme and how well the short-term and long-term outcomes of the programme were achieved from the perspective of the programme participants. An online survey and in-depth face-to-face interviews with programme participants, as discussed in the previous chapter, were the primary data collection tools for this evaluation. This chapter presents and discusses the evaluation results of the Work 4 Progress programme obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Relevant information obtained from the programme documents and the Executive Director was integrated with the primary data collected to triangulate the informants' interview data.

Survey data, results and classification of participants in the programme

This section presents the evaluation results of the Work 4 Progress programme obtained using the online survey.

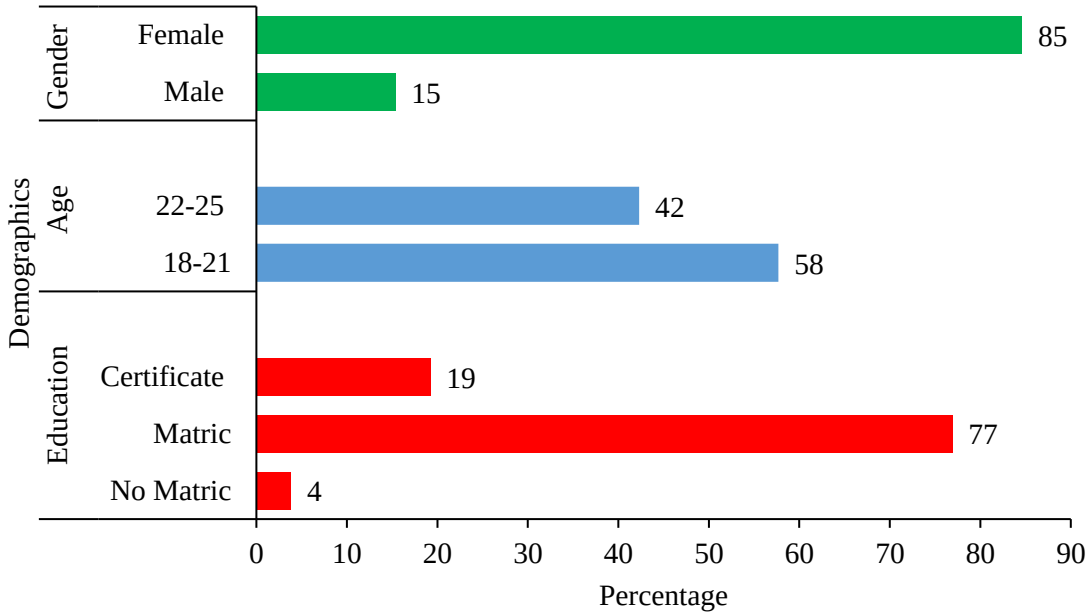
Sample Demographics

Of the 81 alumni contacted, 26 responded to the survey giving an overall response rate of 32.1%. Demographic information (gender, age, education and employment status) of

the programme participants who responded was collected. Figure 4 shows the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents.

Figure 4

Self-reported demographic characteristics of the survey respondents on enrolment into the programme



The sample comprised of 85% female respondents and 15% male (Figure 4). The age of the respondents when they enrolled in the programme ranged from 18 years to 25 years with a mean of 21.69 years (M = 21.69 years; SD = 2.45). The participants were asked about their education level when they enrolled in the programme. Most of the respondents indicated that they had a matric qualification (77%) compared to those with a college certificate (19%), while 4% had no matric qualification (Figure 4).

According to Rossi et al. (2004, p. 121), 'the nature of the target population a programme attempts to serve naturally has a considerable influence on the programme's approach and the likelihood of success.' All the youths in this sample were 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) when they were recruited into the Work 4 Progress programme. Statistics on the trends of the youth NEET rate in South Africa indicate that young people between the ages of 18 to 24 years, including young women, and youths with basic education only are more likely to be classified as NEET (de Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019). Similarly, these made up the demographics of the respondents in this evaluation.

Based on the sample's level of education before joining the Work 4 programme, the results of this evaluation suggest that the Work 4 Progress programme is targeting its intended population in need of intervention.

Programme satisfaction

Programme satisfaction is an important aspect of the participant's experience that should be studied because it may have implications on programme outcomes (Ramgutty & Sanmukhiya, 2021). According to the Work 4 Progress programme theory, providing young people with work opportunities helps them with 1) preparedness: work-related skills and competencies; 2) personal growth; 3) a clear career plan and 4) social networks. Items that assessed attainment of these four areas were included in the survey. Informants indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. Tables 1-5 present the frequencies of responses from the perceived short-term outcomes survey items. Table 6 shows the mean Likert score and standard deviation for each item.

Table 1

The knowledge and skills that I gained during the Work 4 Progress programme prepared me for work

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0		
Somewhat Disagree	0		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0		
Somewhat Agree	3	13.6	13.6
Strongly Agree	19	86.4	100

Table 2

I have developed social networks that have helped me in my career

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	4.5	
Somewhat Disagree	0		4.5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	4.5	9
Somewhat Agree	12	54.5	63.6
Strongly Agree	8	36.4	100

Table 3

I feel confident in my job search and interviews

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0		
Somewhat Disagree	0		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	4.5	4.5
Somewhat Agree	8	36.4	40.9
Strongly Agree	13	59.1	100

Table 4

I have a clear plan of what I want to achieve in my life

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0		
Somewhat Disagree	2	9.1	9.1
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1	4.5	13.6
Somewhat Agree	4	18.2	31.8
Strongly Agree	15	68.2	100

Table 5

I am happy with the progress that I have made toward meeting my overall career goals

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Strongly Disagree	2	9.1	9.1
Somewhat Disagree	1	4.5	13.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	9.1	22.7
Somewhat Agree	7	31.8	54.5
Strongly Agree	10	45.5	100

Table 6

Mean and standard deviation for the Likert scale items assessing short-term outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme

Item	*N*	Mean	*SD*
The knowledge and skills that I gained during the Work 4 Progress programme prepared me for work	22	4.86	0.35
I feel confident in my job search and interviews	22	4.55	0.60
I have a clear plan of what I want to achieve in my life	22	4.45	0.96
I am happy with the progress that I have made toward meeting my overall career goals	22	4.00	1.27
I have developed social networks that have helped me in my career	22	4.23	0.92

Overall, the descriptive statistics suggest that the participants were satisfied with the programme and perceived themselves to have attained the intended short-term outcomes of the programme. All the survey respondents agreed that the knowledge and skills that they gained during the Work 4 Progress programme prepared them for work, they had improved job search efficacy, made progress with their career planning and developed social networks during the Work 4 Progress programme.

Quality of the programme activities

To assess the quality and the overall importance of programme activities respondents needed to indicate which components of the programme helped them in achieving the short-term outcomes. The respondents indicated the importance of each programme activity on a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from "Not at All" to "Extremely Important." Tables 7-9 illustrate the frequencies of the responses to these survey items. Table 10 shows the mean Likert score and standard deviation for each item.

Table 7

How important was the job training in improving your employability?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Not At All Important	0		
Slightly Important	0		
Moderately Important	1	4.5	4.5
Very Important	6	27.3	31.8
Extremely Important	15	68.2	100

Table 8

How important were the weekly self-development sessions in improving your employability?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Not At All Important	0		
Slightly Important	0		
Moderately Important	0		
Very Important	9	47.4	47.4
Extremely Important	10	52.6	100

Table 9

How important were the career coaching sessions in improving your employability?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Not At All Important	0		
Slightly Important	0		
Moderately Important	4	22.2	22.2
Very Important	4	22.2	44.4
Extremely Important	10	55.6	100

Table 10

Mean and standard deviation for the Likert scale items assessing the quality of the Work 4 Progress programme activities

How important were the following programme activities in improving your employability	*N*	*M*	SD
Job training	22	4.70	0.57
Weekly self-development sessions	19	4.58	0.51
Career coaching sessions	18	4.26	0.93

Overall, the results show that the participants rated the job training component of the Work 4 Progress programme as the most important in achieving the desired outcomes. Albeit

the other two programme components were still found to be important with more than 50% of the sample selecting extremely important for both the weekly self-development sessions and career coaching sessions. The informants' responses affirm that the Work 4 Progress programme activities are deemed to be aligned with the overall goal of improving the employability of the youth. A systemic review reported that programmes with multiple components, similar to those included in the Work 4 Progress programme, have a significant impact on the employment rate and salary of participants in the long term (Mawn et al., 2017).

Programme success rate

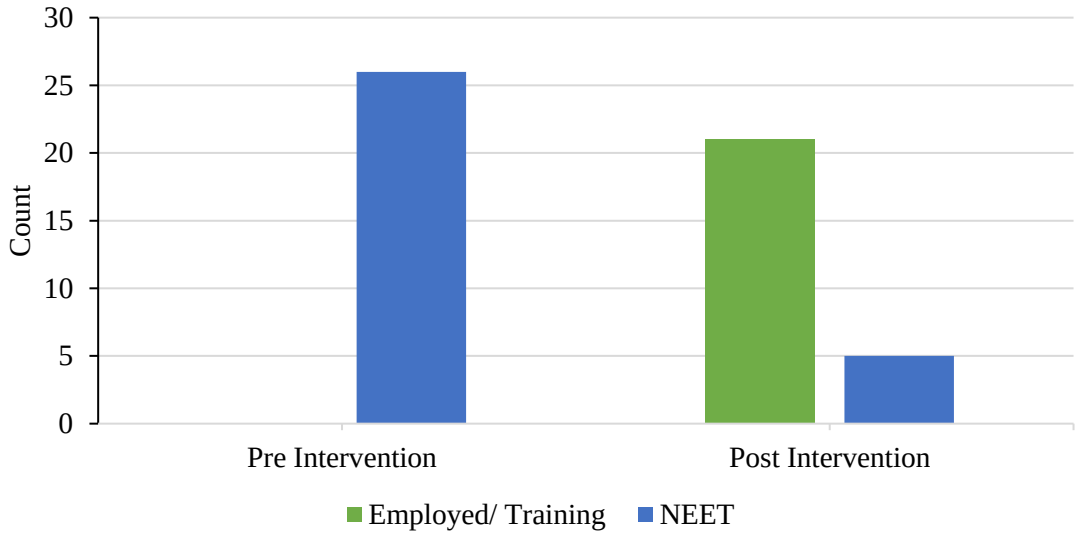
The main assumption underlying the Work 4 Progress programme is that the youths are more likely to progress to better opportunities after completing the programme. It is envisioned that programme participants either find employment or enrol in further education/training. Primary data collected using the online survey on the employment status of the participants was used to assess whether the Work 4 Progress Programme had achieved its long-term outcome of improving youth employability. A Chi-square contingency test was performed to investigate whether employment status (employed or training) was contingent upon participating in the programme. The test found that there exists a significant relationship between the two variables χ^2 (N = 52) = 35.23, $p < .001$. Cramer's V = .823, with a large effect size.

The results imply that participating in the Work 4 Progress programme is likely to lead to positive employment outcomes. It is unlikely that the difference is due to chance. The large effect size indicates that there is a large difference in the employment status of the sample before and after participating in the programme. Of course, it would have been best to have a control group to compare the results, but this was not possible.

Quantitative analysis confirmed the above. A large and significant change in the employment outcomes was observed among the sample. Approximately 80.8% of the survey respondents either found employment or pursued further training after completing the programme as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Employment status of the survey respondents pre- and post-participation in the Work 4 Progress programme



Note. There was no control group thus, one group self-reported pre-test – post-test design was used to determine the effect of the intervention on the sample.

Qualitative analysis

This section presents the evaluation results of the Work 4 Progress programme obtained after conducting a thematic analysis on the semi-structured interviews with programme alumni. Eight programme alumni were interviewed. Further, the Executive Director was also interviewed to triangulate the participants' interview data. Three main themes and eight sub-themes emerged. They were:

Theme 1: Foregrounding background and history of youth.

a. Understanding the backgrounds of the youths.
b. Backgrounds affect thoughts on stipends.
c. Backgrounds influence what youths require from such an intervention.

Theme 2: Career guidance is crucial and useful.

a. A history into the youths' past aspirations.
b. Career aspirations change as a result of the programme.

Theme 3: Programmatic knowledge: Imparting skills and enriching livelihoods

a. Personal growth as a centred intervention.
b. The world of work: learning experience and opportunities.
c. Programme praxis and knowledge in the real world.

The themes and sub-themes are presented, and evidence is provided using direct illustrative quotes from the informants. Supporting information obtained from programme documents, the Executive Director, survey results and literature is integrated where applicable.

Theme 1: Foregrounding background and history of youth

Although the focus of the evaluation is on the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme, the youths shared their backgrounds and life history which enabled a qualitative exploration of the social change in their lives during and after programme participation. This theme centres on the backgrounds of youths and the short-term benefits of programme participation. The main theme that emerged was: 'Foregrounding background and history of youth.' The following sub-themes were further developed:

1) Understanding the backgrounds of youths.
2) Backgrounds affect thoughts on stipends.
3) Backgrounds influence what youths require from such an intervention.

Sub-theme 1: Understanding the backgrounds of the youths

Early childhood parental loss provided a backdrop for understanding the backgrounds and socio-economic challenges faced by the youths interviewed. Five of the eight respondents mentioned that they lost or were separated from their parents in early childhood as evidenced by the quotations provided below:

> *"My biological mother passed away when I was 4 years old. My aunt, her sister, took me in and raised me."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 28, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

"My mother passed away when I was still a child. I think I was about six months or something like that and I was raised by my grandmother."

(Interviewee 2, Aged 23, Cohort 2020, Informal Sector).

"My mother got married when I was very young and she left me behind with grandma."

(Interviewee 8, aged 28, cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant).

The above participants speak about losing their biological parent in early childhood and growing up in the care of relatives. Poverty further compounded the impact of their loss as they grew up with extended family who had limited financial resources. Access to basic needs was difficult and some were forced to look for food. For example, Interviewee 8 uses the word '*struggle*' a lot in her narrative when describing her background. She further mentions their daily strife when she says: *"Whenever we wanted something to eat, we would go ask next door or grandma would have to do some chores in order to for us to get something for that day."*

Other informants described a life spent moving between relatives and having to worry about daily survival. For example, Interviewee 2 lost his mother when he was only 6 months old, and he was left in the care of his grandmother. Later on, his grandmother passed away and he went to live with his estranged father and stepmother. In his story, he described how his father struggled to provide for his daily needs and transport money when he was in college. He mentioned that he could not cope with the poverty and felt despondent. He said, "*I felt like this was just too much for me.*" Eventually, he dropped out of college and started "*hustling for survival.*"

The participants' descriptions of their backgrounds revealed that they suffered trauma and hardships due to childhood parental loss, poverty and low employment outcomes. The constraints observed in this study are consistent with those reported in the literature on the psychosocial well-being of orphans (Ntuli et al., 2020). Literature on youth development reveals many negative outcomes associated with early childhood parental loss (due to death divorce or separation) and poverty, such as the increased likelihood of alcohol and drug abuse (Meghdadpour et al., 2012), greater vulnerability to depression (Ntuli et al., 2020), higher

risk of criminal behaviour (Mathews et al., 2011), risky sexual behaviour (Operario et al., 2011), school drop-out (Fleisch et al., 2012) and lower employment rates (Cluver et al., 2009).

A study on the prevalence of parental loss in South Africa showed that 25% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years have experienced parental death (Operario et al., 2007). This represents a large proportion of the population at risk of developing negative outcomes associated with childhood parental loss. As noted in this study, many African cultures entrust the affected children to relatives, a social support system that is influential in moderating risky behaviour (Meghdadpour et al., 2012). Nduna and Jewkins (2012) argue that foster families are usually financially strained and there is no government support for these informal adoptions, which further contributes to the economic hardships of the youths. Research has established poverty as a key cause of distress among orphans, likely leading to emotional and behavioural distress (Cluver et al., 2009).

This sub-theme revealed the backgrounds of the participants characterised by early childhood parental loss, poverty and unemployment, potentially increasing the risks of developing negative outcomes. The youths interviewed in this evaluation viewed their disadvantaged backgrounds as contributing to their poor employment outcomes before joining the Work 4 Progress programme. Before the programme, they felt despondent about their situation. The next sub-theme discusses how a stipend provided financial relief and independence amid poverty.

Subtheme 2: Background affects thoughts on stipend

The preceding subtheme revealed some of the life struggles that the participants went through before joining the Work 4 Progress programme. This sub-theme focuses on the importance of stipends in alleviating the financial burdens of the youths. Five respondents spoke appreciatively of how the stipend provided by the Work 4 Progress programme aided financial relief and independence amid poverty. This is illustrated by the quotations below:

> *"I was using the R1500 stipend for accommodation and transportation. It was not easy but I did manage and I was enjoying it. I felt that I am now an independent lady and I can do my own stuff*."
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018; ECD Teacher Assistant).

> *"From AVA we were getting R1500. Then the top-up from the companies was R500. It was very much better because I felt like, okay. I'm working, I have my own salary."*
>
> (Interviewee 4, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Call Centre Consultant).

The interviewees above viewed the stipend as counteracting their financial and social struggles as well as providing a form of independence. The youths expressed that they could afford their accommodation, travel to work, buy food and toiletries and experience what it meant to work. Globally, it is typical for youth employment programmes to provide a stipend so that transportation is not a barrier to participation (McBride Murry et al., 2011). In South Africa and other developing countries, there is evidence to suggest that the impact of a stipend is often more than just financial aid. Information elicited from the participants supports the idea that a stipend contributes to poverty alleviation and can be seen as a strategy to earn a livelihood (Chauke et al., 2021; Hunter & Ross, 2013; Mohapi, 2016).

The extent to which stipends alleviate poverty, as the literature on stipend-paid volunteerism suggests, is still debatable. For example, Schenck and Louw (2010) using the approach of sustainable livelihoods to understand poverty, argue that an income below the minimum wage does not move individuals away from poverty. Additionally, Hunter and Ross (2013) state that stipend-paid volunteerism is similar to low-paid work and the work presents challenges of emotional stress, low remuneration and minimal support. Nevertheless, the participants of the Work 4 Progress programme were gratified with the experience, and many talked appreciatively of the stipend-paid learning opportunity.

The stipend from the Work 4 Progress programme made some difference in the lives of young people. However, due to their family background, some of the youths found themselves in a situation where they had to look after their own families with the little amount they received from the programme. The next sub-theme explores the support that the youths require from such an intervention.

Sub-theme 3: Understanding how background influences what youths require from such an intervention

The previous sub-theme revealed how the stipend positively impacted the well-being of youths. However, two informants felt that the stipend was not enough to meet all their basic needs. This sub-theme focuses on the assistance that youths require from such an

intervention. Interviewee 2, a father of one, speaks about the burden of youths like him who have additional financial and social responsibilities. He comments:

> *"That (stipend) money is not enough if you want to start your own life. It's only enough if you are still staying with your parents, you don't pay rent, you don't buy food, you don't have a child and you don't have many responsibilities*."
>
> (Interviewee 2, Aged 23, Cohort 2020, Informal sector)

Interviewee 2, shares a notion that the stipend is not always enough to fulfil crucial social and financial obligations, particularly for those with additional family responsibilities. Another informant expressed that AVA should do more, particularly in familiarising themselves with the participants' backgrounds and providing practical assistance. She says:

> *"I really think they should dig deep in the personal life of the young ones just to find a little about their background and try to assist where they can. Maybe help people in their homes…try to assist them with groceries because you find that maybe someone goes there but they don't really know them personally…maybe they are starving or at home."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 28, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

Interviewee 1 is a single parent of one, and she lives with her foster family. When highlighting the kind of additional assistance that AVA should provide, she mentions specifically food. Her narrative highlights household food insecurity that many, particularly, multi-generational families experience. Typically, many South African youth employment programmes offer wages in the form of cash payments, with the wage rate set below the prevailing minimum wage (McCord, 2012). There are no documented programmes which offer both cash payments and food parcels, but evidence suggests that programmes that offer food parcels instead of cash payments do not alleviate poverty or improve nutrition and food security outcomes (Motala et al., 2016). A cost-benefit analysis for a model that offers both cash payments and food parcels should be investigated to explore if the programme "produces sufficient benefits in relation to its cost" (Rossi et al., 2004, p. 60).

This theme drew attention to the background and history of youths and explored qualitative social change in their lives during programme participation. While it can be argued that a stipend below the minimum wage is too little to make an impact, the narratives of the youths are consistent with how YEPs contribute to poverty reduction. The next theme further unpacks the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme focusing on career aspirations and finding a dream job.

Theme 2: Career guidance is crucial and useful

Four of the respondents shared their views on career aspirations and specifically, their search for what they called their dream jobs. This theme centres on the career aspirations of youths and their ability to secure the aspired job. The main theme that emerged was: 'Career guidance is crucial and useful.' The following sub-themes were further developed notably a history of the youths' past aspirations as well as career aspirations change because of the programme.

Sub-theme 1: A history of the youths' past aspirations

After sharing resounding positive experiences about attending high school, the respondents mentioned their past career aspirations. This sub-theme encompasses aspirations before programme participation, highlighting the challenges that youths face with understanding the necessary skillset required for aspired careers. Many of the stories show a lack of a concrete career plan to pursue aspired jobs. This is evidenced by the following quotations:

> *"When I was growing up, I wanted to be so many things. I remember in primary school wanting to be an air hostess... Because I used to watch them on the TV (and saw) how beautiful they were and I always pictured myself working there. I have also wanted to be a lawyer. I have also wanted to be a doctor. You know when you are growing up you start being exposed to different careers and you see different things not even being sure what you want to do. I also wanted to be a policewoman."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 28, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

> "*Growing up I wanted to work at the office. I was inspired by the people who (have) high heels and skirts and formals. I want to be. I wanted to be exactly like that person wearing high heels and skirt and look smart. When I passed matric, I was like no. I want to be a nurse. That changed - I was like, "no, I am scared of a person who is sick." I didn't know what else I must do then… when we were at AVA at the placement. I was struggling about what I was going to choose. There were opportunities for someone who wanted to be an office admin. I was "no, I am not sure about computers. I have never learned about a computer." Then I chose to be a chef but then I enjoyed it at that particular moment. I enjoyed learning new stuff and cooking something. So now I am at a different place again. So, you see, I am not really following my dreams, but I think I will stick to this one (for) now*."
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant).

As noted above, the interviewees appeared to speak fondly about a variety of career directions requiring different skill sets but did not have the necessary guidance to cultivate the search. Studies conducted in South Africa on the career aspirations of youths indicate that high school students in marginalised communities have limited experience in pursuing educational or career opportunities and can benefit from extensive career counselling, information and guidance (Tebele et al., 2015; see also Ortlepp et al., 2002; Stead & Watson, 1998). The next subtheme unpacks how the participants benefitted from programme participation, centring on career aspirations post-programme participation.

Sub-theme 2: Career aspirations change as a result of the programme

The preceding theme covered the indecisiveness that youths previously faced when it came to their career choice in their younger years and how they may have benefitted from programme participation. Three of the respondents shared career aspirations which are quite different from what they previously wanted to do. This sub-theme covers career aspirations post-programme participation, highlighting the benefits of career guidance and exposure to work in ascertaining the career interests of youths.

Six respondents expressed having educational aspirations and some of these were influenced by their exposure to work. For example, Interviewee 8, who previously suffered from career indecisiveness, was inspired by her exposure to work and finally resolved to pursue a career in education. Commenting on her plans she said:

> *"My future plan is to upgrade my education and carry on being a teacher. I am busy with the applications right now at different colleges and universities. I want to carry on doing ECD and do BED (Bachelor of Education) at foundation phase*."
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant).

The respondent above constructed a narrative about upgrading their education as a gateway to where they want to be in life. Other participants also shared a similar sentiment. Among those with plans to pursue further education, most of them are focusing on enrolling in university for a degree. Most of these youths are using their current jobs to finance further studies so that they progress to better opportunities. These findings support the global literature on career aspirations which suggests that youths with higher career aspirations are likely to pursue further education and training and they are likely to have a greater chance of finding decent or high-paying employment (Theron, 2016; see also Staff et al., 2010). According to Baldry et al. (2019), the attempts of the youths to access further education or training programmes demonstrate a sense of urgency in upskilling and they will go to great lengths in the face of limited information and finances to access opportunities to upskill themselves, as observed in this study.

Despite programme participation being instrumental in developing a clear career plan, one informant spoke about their dream job as being a mere distant aspiration. She said:

> *I should just rather do retail or call centre or something like that, because I can say I won't always get what I want in life*
>
> (Interviewee 3, Aged 20, Cohort 2020; Unemployed)

The respondent above confirms that there are still some setbacks in pursuing her aspired job. She speaks about the realities of life, especially for herself and her community who find themselves exposed to daily financial strife and poverty, with few resources to proceed with this search. The respondents share a sentiment about the need to find any kind of employment for financial security.

This theme discussed the struggles that the respondents face in finding their aspired jobs. The respondents described their career aspirations and how these changed after completing the programme. The results above showed that exposure to work shaped the

participant's career trajectory and that some are using their current jobs to further career development. The youths also expressed the positive employment outcomes after programme participation. The narratives of participants expressing the benefits of the programme are further unpacked in the next theme.

Theme 3: Programmatic knowledge: Imparting skills and enriching livelihoods

All informants spoke positively about the social change in their lives during and after the programme. This theme focuses on the benefits of the programme. The overarching theme that emerged was 'Programmatic knowledge: Imparting skills and enriching livelihoods'. The following sub-themes were further developed:

1) Personal growth as a centred intervention.
2) The world of work: learning, experience and opportunities.
3) Programme praxis and knowledge in the 'real' world.

Sub-theme 1: Personal growth as a centred intervention.

All the interviewed youths described changes in their personal life that they attributed to the Work 4 Progress programme. This subtheme discusses personal changes that contributed to career readiness in the youths during and after engaging in the Work 4 Progress programme.

One of the key aspects that emerged from four interviewees was that the programme helped them overcome personal obstacles, that were previously preventing them from progressing. The quotation below reveals some of the previous psychosocial challenges experienced by the youths:

> *"I was so in my shell. I was so shy. I was that little girl who kept to myself. I didn't know how to open up or to start conversations with others…. Even my self-esteem, I was not confident enough in all thing"*
>
> (Interviewee 1, aged 28, cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

As noted above, Interviewee 1 spoke about the lack of self-confidence and interpersonal communication that many young people struggle with. More specifically, she mentions the struggle to express herself when she says, "*I will be short of words.*" For others

too, public speaking and entering a new social situation represented an emotional challenge that was good to overcome. For example, Interviewee 4 shared the anxiety she felt early in the programme when she had to speak in front of her peers. She says "*I was so afraid*". Some respondents recall how they used to react to stressful situations with negative emotions such as a "*temper*" or "*crying and complaining a lot*", which caused further distress.

The characteristics described above are typical of young people who are not equipped to cope with the challenges of the world of work (Wilkinson et al., 2017; see also Buthelezi et al., 2009; Ismail, 2022), and would benefit from life skills coaching. The youths further described how engaging in the Work 4 Progress programme helped them gain self-confidence, learn social skills and change negative behaviours. This is evidenced by the quotations below:

> *"I have grown out of that shell now. I have opened myself to interact with people and to speak out. If I don't like something I say it. I have learned to express myself much better now."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

> *"They taught me how to come out of my comfort zone…. I learnt how to speak in front of people, how to deal with people, how to behave, how to work with people."*
>
> (Interviewee 4, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Call Centre Consultant).

> *"It (the programme) also helped me a lot personally I changed a lot as a person, I grew as a person. I learnt how to be resilient and how to control my emotions in a workplace."*
>
> (Interviewee 3, Aged 20, Cohort 2020, Unemployed).

Interviewee 3 previously reacted to a negative situation with a temper. In the above narrative, she explains how the programme changed her attitude. She used the word "*resilient*" a lot to describe her emotional maturity. She also expressed how she learnt conflict management skills and this improved her relationship with colleagues. In describing how she handled a volatile situation with the manager at her work placement she said:

> *"I spoke to him one morning. I told him what was on my mind and how I felt about the whole situation. He was very understanding…. From there our relationship was*

much better than what it was in the beginning…. That's where I got to learn to contain myself and to be in control of my emotions, especially at the workplace."

(Interviewee 3, Aged 20, Cohort 2020, Unemployed)

In their narratives, the youths highlighted programme activities that helped them positively change. A fair amount expressed that participating in the weekly self-development sessions provided them with opportunities to express themselves and build friendships with other youths with similar challenges. Some of these relationships carried on beyond the programme and provided enriching opportunities. Commenting about the weekly self-development sessions, two respondents expressed specifically that the 'Breaking Beliefs' module helped them to develop emotional stability: This is exemplified by the quotation below:

"I am no longer the same person who used to cry and complain.... When I attended the Breaking Beliefs that's where I knew that you cannot stress about the things that you cannot change. If you cannot fix it the only thing that you can do is do your best. If you feel that you have done your best, then that's it."

(Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort, 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant)

The respondents quoted in this sub-theme co-construct a narrative that engaging in the Work 4 Progress programme helped them gain self-confidence, build positive relationships with people outside their social groups, change negative emotions and improve their employment outcomes. These positive changes are consistent with enhanced self-efficacy previously described by Ismail (2022). According to the Social Cognitive Career Theory, individuals with enhanced self-efficacy are more likely to explore and take interest in career-related activities and adapt in the face of challenges posed by their disadvantaged backgrounds (Betz, 2000), similar to what was described by the respondents. The findings of this evaluation support global studies on the contribution of positive YEPs that foster life skills in improving employability and workplace success (Buthelezi et al., 2009; see also Hull et al., 2020; Ismail, 2022). These non-economic indicators are useful in predicting the success of an intervention (Patel et al., 2020).

In terms of organisational support, the youths appreciated both the individualised support and group-based support they received from AVA, which improved their life skills. Two respondents acknowledged the help of the social worker in achieving greater emotional stability. Interviewee 8 said:

> *"The other support that they gave (was that of a) social worker when I am struggling emotionally (…). The social worker attended to me just once, then she never came as much as I wanted her to come back. She felt like I was healed of whatever was going on because I was no longer emotional. When I think about it (my previous life), I don't get emotional. I have adopted to letting go of what I may be feeling at that moment."*
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant)

In the quotation above, Interviewee 8 speaks about how the social worker helped her heal from past traumatic experiences. Having achieved greater emotional stability and understanding, the young people expressed that they were more confident and open to interacting with the outside world.

The youths also echoed a sentiment that the staff's personalities were important in achieving the programme's short-term outcomes. This is evidenced by the quotations provided below:

> *"The team leaders were welcoming and understanding they were also young like us. We were able to speak to them and not to be shy. They were friendly, playful and energetic. I liked the environment."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship).

> *"They were helpful, especially … she would say if you need anything, you can call me, Anytime, whether it's on weekend or you can call me anytime and I'll help you."*
>
> (Interviewee 2, Aged 23, Cohort 2020, Informal Sector).

The youths quoted above portray AVA staff, specifically the team leaders as being friendly, understanding and approachable, which helped them overcome some of their struggles. The Executive Director also attributes the success of the programme to the support

and commitment of the staff at AVA who have also gone through the programme. She mentions that "*we have four out of the five (staff) that done the programme. So, they know and they understand the youth that they work with*". The above staff characteristics mentioned by the youths are tenet with the notion of youth-friendly services discussed in positive youth development literature and may have significant personal and interpersonal benefits for the programme participants (Baldry et al., 2019).

This subtheme discussed personal changes that contribute to the employability of youths during and after engaging in the Work 4 Progress programme. While we believe that the Work 4 Progress programme was implemented well and improved the psycho-social well-being of the informants, the design for such a programme requires additional attention to the ongoing provision of strong role models, mentors and caring adults, to support the youths with the additional steps of securing and sustaining employment and other life growth opportunities (Hull, 2020). The next sub-theme discusses the experiences of the informants in the world of work.

Sub-theme 2: The world of work: learning experience and opportunities

The previous subtheme discussed the psychosocial changes in the lives of the youths after participating in the Work 4 Progress programme. All respondents except for one, echoed that the Work 4 Progress programme enhanced their career readiness, particularly in learning relevant skills and ascertaining their academic and career interests. This sub-theme discusses the youths' perspective on their career readiness post-programme participation.

To understand the young people's viewpoints on the barriers to employment, the evaluator inquired about the participants' motivation to enrol for the programme. Most responses were similar and to the point. For example, a lack of skills and work experience was present in all eight stories. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

"I had no skills. or experience and life skills"

(Interviewee 1, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship)

"I had no experience"

(Interviewee 2, aged 23, Cohort 2020, Informal sector)

"I needed a job and to gain work experience as well"

(Interviewee 3, aged 20, Cohort 2020, Unemployed)

The above youths aged early–to mid–20s agreed that work experience and skills are critical in securing employment. More specifically, Interviewee 8 speaks of her long and unsuccessful job search efforts and employment being difficult to get especially for herself and other youths who do not have advanced education or work experience. She said:

"Wherever I went to submit my CV, they will ask if I have related experience and I had no experience at all…. I finished Matric in 2011 until 2018 when I joined AVA. I did (apply) a lot but I didn't get any luck because I had no experience."

(Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant).

The long-term job search effort mentioned above is also corroborated by the Executive Director when she confirmed: *"A lot of them I know from my experience have battled for many years to find any kind of employment because they just don't have either a strong Matric or experience."* Lack of skills and work experience have long been recognised as barriers to youth employment in South Africa (Geza et al., 2022; see also Graham & Mlatsheni. 2015; Marock, 2008; Nattrass, 2002; Van Aardt, 2012). Literature on NEET youths indicates that accessing the first job is a major societal challenge in South Africa affecting many young people, even those with a post-school qualification (Baldry et al., 2019). Similarly, respondents of this evaluation, even those with National Diplomas shared their frustration about being unable to acquire their first job due to a lack of work experience.

The informants echo that the Work 4 Progress programme provided them with the initial experience they needed to get a job, helping in breaking the unemployment cycle. This is illustrated by the quotes provided below:

"When I joined AVA it kind of opened some doors for me"

(Interviewee 8, aged 28, cohort 2018, ECD teacher assistant)

"When I was done with the (Work 4 Progress) course. I had that experience on my CV which unlocked opportunities for me in other companies."

(Interviewee 2, aged 23, cohort 2020, Entrepreneur)

"So, Work 4 Progress helps young people to get their foot in the door"

(The Executive Director).

While the respondents speak appreciatively of how the programme helped in breaking the unemployment cycle, one interviewee remained unemployed post-programme participation and expressed frustration that her efforts are not resulting in employment. Interviewee 3 who worked in the hospitality service during her job placement has not been able to find work for two years post-programme participation. Similarly, a previous study point to the fact that the acquisition of technical and vocational skills does not directly translate into employment because of other barriers that young people face, including the financial costs of job seeking lack of information and a lack of job opportunities that match available skills (De Lannoy et al., 2015).

Interviewee 3 also brings out an important perspective on the quality of the jobs that are available for low-skilled workers. She said:

"I was offered a job. But it was based on commission, and I couldn't (take it) because I would have spent more money on travelling than anything else. So, I didn't take it."

(Interviewee 3, Aged 20, Cohort 2020, Unemployed).

At the time of the evaluation, the hospitality industry was only beginning to pick up following the COVID-19 pandemic, and this too could have affected the respondent's employment. The youth cited above speaks of unsustainable low-paid jobs, that many unskilled youths take up in an attempt to secure employment. However, low-paid jobs available for low-skilled young people can affect their psycho-social well-being (Patel et al., 2018) and the distressing effects of underemployment are similar to unemployment (Feder & Yu, 2019; see also Niyimbanira, 2016).

The youths also expressed that the job placement experience helped them learn more about careers and acquire different sets of skills. They speak fondly of the specific skills that they learned during the job placement in the Work 4 Progress programme which prepared them for the world of work. These included skills such as basic ICT, administration, data capturing, job-specific skills and managing finances, as well as soft skills such as communication, proactiveness, public speaking, problem-solving, time management and

work ethics. The importance of learning various types of skills through vocational training and gaining on-the-job experience is emphasised in the literature on career readiness (Papier, 2017; see also Taylor & Govender, 2017).

One respondent felt that their work experiences inadequately prepared her for the world of work. More specifically, she explained that technical work dominated her work placement experience and she perceived that this limited further opportunities for her to engage in other experiences. She said:

> "*It was only one work environment…. I need to get more (office work) experience because on the hospitality side. I did good. I would have liked to learned more about the office environment…. I mentioned specifically that I would like to work in a hotel environment or something close to that. But when I got there, it wasn't actually like that"*
>
> (Interviewee 3, Aged 20, Cohort 2020, Unemployed).

She expressed that the programme implementers should tailor the job placement to meet the participant's career needs and goals. The issue of job mismatches with one's career goals is not well represented in the literature on job intervention programmes. However, there is evidence to suggest that a lack of motivation for the job is the most important barrier to engagement and learning (Peele & Wolf, 2021). A study on labour-market effects of job mismatches found that youths with a non-matching job achieve a lower occupational status, and more frequently, they look for another job, and more often participate in continuing vocational training than those with a matching one (Wolbers, 2003).

In addition to learning about the world of work, the narrative of one youth emphasises the role that social networks play in securing employment. For example, when interviewee 8 who previously struggled to get a job for seven years finally got employed, she heard about the opportunity and secured it through a social connection. She says:

> *"As much as I didn't get the job through the experience that I have. I did get it through some connections. The job that I have now I got it because I was placed near an organisation that was looking for someone …. We normally went there to deliver coffee sandwiches*"
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant).

The Executive Director also speaks about the development of new social networks as an indicator of success for the participants. The importance of networking and networking competency for career success in the South African context is well-documented (Chowa et al., 2022; see also Patel, 2020; Yu, 2013) and should be promoted in youth employment programmes. The next sub-theme discusses the application of knowledge gained in real-life settings.

Subtheme 3: Programme Praxis and knowledge in the real world

After sharing positive programme experiences, many explained how the skills and knowledge gained connected to the real-world setting. This theme discusses programme praxis and the application of knowledge in the real world. Seven interviewees mentioned how the programme experiences helped them to gain employment. One youth explained:

> *"After AVA. I applied for a job and they gave me a call because I had mentioned on my CV that I was assisting on training volunteers some computers at AVA. So, they hired me"*
>
> (Interviewee 2, Aged 23, Cohort 2020, Self-Employment).

The above-quoted youth spoke about how the programme experience was relevant in obtaining employment. Some even attained 'success' before completing the programme as exemplified by the quote below:

> "*I went there seeking employment and I found employment. In my case I would say it was successful, I didn't finish the programme. I found a job while I was there*"
>
> (Interviewee 7, Aged 26, Cohort 2019; Admin Assistant).

The respondents quoted above co-construct a narrative that the Work 4 Progress programme helped previously excluded youths to get into mainstream employment. These results are in agreement with previous qualitative studies which have shown that YEPs can bridge the gap between education and employment, particularly for those with low Grade 12 results and those from marginalised communities (Graham et al., 2019).

One respondent spoke about how the programme experiences fostered entrepreneurship skills. Interviewee 2 mentions that he enjoyed the Work 4 Progress programme's job readiness training component *"where you get to learn about interviews...and how to do your CV so that the employer can be attracted and read your CV*." After completing the programme, he worked for another organisation as a training facilitator. However, he described being frustrated with the working conditions and low remuneration in the formal sector and with a feeling that he could earn more in the informal sector. He recently started a 'virtual assistance business' and said:

> *"(During my work placement) I was assisting the volunteers to (write) their CVs and train them on the basics of computers. Now. I also make CVs …. For example, if you want to apply for a job. I write your CV convert it to pdf and send it back to you so that you can apply for the job."*
>
> (Interviewee 2, Aged 23, Cohort 2020, Informal Sector)

Other informants also shared a desire to venture into entrepreneurship as evidenced by the quote below:

> *"Remember I was doing hospitality and catering course before I got this internship. I did that because I wanted to start a cooking business…. I want to open a catering business because you see there are so many places that sell junk food like hot chips.* Amagwinya *and all those fatty foods. I want to sell healthy food, like sandwiches and smoothies, something healthy to make a healthy living style…. A lot of people are obese because of the food that is sold everywhere that consist a lot of fat. I would like to do something different, maybe sell to schools and colleges even here in the street people who are passing by. For now, I don't have money to start the business."*
>
> (Interviewee 1, Aged 25, Cohort 2017, Admin Internship)

The participant above was inspired by her work experience during the job placement to venture into entrepreneurship. Fostering entrepreneurship is widely perceived to be critical in expanding employment and earning opportunities and reducing poverty (Cho & Honorati, 2014) similar to how the above-cited informants expressed their entrepreneurship aspirations.

Although the youths can develop entrepreneurial aspirations through exposure to work, Interviewee 1 speaks about a lack of capital as a key barrier to participating in entrepreneurial activities. Existing literature also alludes that the lack of access to capital start-ups is a significant barrier to venturing into business for young people (Radebe, 2019; see also Brixiová et al., 2015). Youths can benefit from low-cost entrepreneurship promotion interventions such as entrepreneurship education courses which include information on opportunities and feasibility, business plan development and credit access, as well as risk and insurance, taxation and franchising (Radebe, 2019).

Others cherished the non-economic gains linked to the programme. For example, one participant expressed their joy in simply imparting knowledge to others. She says:

> *"At the school that I am right now, they did not have a grade R teacher…. The teacher that I am assisting right now did not have any experience with Grade R. So luckily. I had experience about grade R and I had to teach her most of the things…. I am happy that I had to teach someone who is more educated that me but doesn't have experience. That makes me very happy."*
>
> (Interviewee 8, Aged 28, Cohort 2018, ECD Teacher Assistant)

The participant above speaks about imparting the knowledge that she gained to others. Knowledge transfer is rarely discussed as an outcome of youth employment programmes but other studies characterise it as a construct of leadership (Mortensen et al., 2014).

Overall, the youths were satisfied with their programme experience. However, when the evaluator probed deeper into the areas that AVA should improve, half of the informants echoed similar sentiments about the eligibility criteria. They felt that the programme was missing a crucial part of the population by their entry/selection requirements. This is as evident in the quotes provided below:

> *"They should accommodate those who are older. I felt like it was cutting to a certain age (…). We went there with my friends but because of a certain age was required one of our friends didn't meet the requirements she had to go home. Because she was*

older than us so they told her that no, we require a certain age for this job. So, she went home and that's how I got to know about it."

(Interviewee 1, Aged 28, Cohort 2017, Admin Intern).

"I think the one thing they can have look on or just add is the age. Because some other people are late in school. They also take only those with Grade 12. But I think people who failed Grade 12 should also participate."

(Interviewee 4, Aged 25, Cohort 2017; Call Centre Consultant).

"The last time I was at AVA. I was in the progress work 4 progress. That one they can improve by adding Grade 11. The entry level is Grade 12. They want someone who has passed Grade 12."

(Interviewee 6, Aged 24, Cohort 2017, Real Estate).

The above informants aged mid-to-late-20s share a similar sentiment that the programme is leaving out a significant part of the NEET by their stringent recruitment requirements. They speak of the realities of youth unemployment in South Africa where many older youths are struggling to get employment and might benefit from a similar programme. Statistics on youth unemployment indeed confirm a high youth unemployment rate in the 25 to 29 age group, particularly for women (de Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019).

In addition to age restrictions, the youth expressed that the programme recruits only those with matric or higher qualifications. However, the Executive Director pointed out that the programme is encompassing, targeting "*young people with or without matric certificate*". The discrepancy between the Executive Director's and the participant's narratives is possibly related to the large number of applications received and the screening process. Statistics on youth unemployment show that half of NEET youths exited school before completing matric (de Lannoy & Mudiriza, 2019). Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) posit that youth unemployment is as high as 55% for those without matric. Indeed, if the Work 4 Progress programme would like to make a positive impact on youth unemployment, it should widen its selection criteria and make a deliberate effort to empower young people with lower education levels.

Summary of the results

This evaluation assessed whether or not the Work 4 Progress programme has adequately upskilled the informants and improved their employability. The evaluation used a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design to gain a deep understanding of the effectiveness of the programme and how well the short-term and long-term outcomes were achieved from the perspective of the participants. The key evaluation questions are:

1. Did the Work 4 Progress programme target the right population in need of the intervention?
2. Did the Work 4 Progress programme achieve its intended outcome of upskilling and improving the employability of youths?
    a. Did the Work 4 Progress programme adequately equip the participants with work-related skills and competencies?
    b. Did the Work 4 Progress programme participants use the skills and competencies they gained to find decent work?
3. What factors contributed to or hindered the attainment of the programme outcomes?
4. Can we attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect?

This section presents a summary of the results by integrating quantitative and qualitative results to answer the evaluation questions.

Evaluation question 1: Did the programme target the right population in need of the intervention?

Quantitative results: Based on self-reported data, most of the youths who participate in the Work 4 Progress programme are women of 18 years to 25 years with only a Matric qualification, typical of NEET youths in South Africa. The results of this evaluation suggest that the Work 4 Progress programme is targeting its intended population in need of intervention.

Evaluation question 2a: Did the Work 4 Progress programme adequately equip the participants with work-related skills and competencies?

Quantitative results: All the survey respondents agreed that the knowledge and skills that they gained during the Work 4 Progress programme prepared them for the world of work

Other areas where the informants reported higher scores included, career exploration (Table 4), job search efficacy (Table 3) and development of social capital (Table 2), all these are essential ingredients of career readiness (Magagula et al., 2020). Progress toward overall career goals seemed to be rated lower mainly because a substantial number of respondents are pursuing further education to meet their career goals.

Qualitative results: Overall, the informants felt that the programme equipped them with the skills and competencies needed in the world of work. Some of the personal and professional skills gained by the respondents included skills such as basic ICT, proactiveness, administration, data capturing, job-specific skills and managing finances, as well as soft skills such as communication, self-confidence, public speaking, problem-solving, time management, networking and work ethics. All these skills are stated in the literature as critical in increasing the likelihood of employment (Lippman et al., 2015). However, two interviewees expressed that they would have benefitted more if the computer sessions were not as short as they did not have prior exposure to computers.

Conclusion: There is evidence to indicate that the Work 4 Progress programme achieved its short-term outcomes of development of social capital, work competency, self-confidence, and a clear career plan, which all contribute to career readiness This evidence supports the following causal assumptions:

- Exposure to work will help unemployed youths expand the social networks that will connect them to work opportunities. (Causal assumption 2)
- Programme participation will help unemployed youths to enhance their personal growth, which will help them to cope with life challenges. (Causal assumption 3)
- Career guidance will help unemployed youths develop a clear career plan which contributes to career readiness. (Causal assumption 4)

Evaluation question 2b: Did the Work 4 Progress programme participants use the skills and competencies they gained to find decent work?

Quantitative results: A Chi-square contingency test was performed to investigate whether employment status (employed or training) was contingent upon participating in the programme. The results showed a large and significant change in the employment outcomes of the participants, implying that participating in the Work 4 Progress programme is likely to lead to positive employment outcomes. Based on the sample evaluated, about 80.8% of the

survey respondents either found employment or pursued further training after completing the programme as shown in (Figure 5).

Qualitative results: The interviewees expressed that the experience gained through programme participation helped in breaking the unemployment cycle, indicating that the knowledge, skills and competencies gained are relevant in the world of work. In some youths, the programme experience fostered entrepreneurship aspirations, which is relevant in the context of South Africa where salary and employment are limited and many jobs are created through self-employment (Cho & Honorati, 2014). A substantial number of the respondents are using their current jobs to finance further education so that they get where they want to be in life.

Conclusion: There is evidence to suggest that the knowledge gained from programme participation helped the youths to secure employment. This evidence supports the causal assumptions that exposure to work through programme participation will improve the employment outcomes of the youths (Causal assumption 1). However longitudinal studies are needed to measure the long-term outcomes of the programme.

Evaluation question 3: What factors contributed to or hindered the attainment of the programme outcomes?

Quantitative results: The participants' responses indicated that the Work 4 Progress programme activities were suitable for achieving the desired outcomes. Overall, the results showed that the participants rated the job training component of the Work 4 Progress programme highly and as important in achieving the desired outcomes (Tables 7-10). There were slightly lower levels of satisfaction with other aspects of the programme such as the weekly self-development sessions (

Table *8*) and career coaching sessions (Table 9). Evidence in the literature demonstrates that the activities undertaken by the Work 4 Progress programme such as the on-the-job training, life skills coaching and career guidance are consistent with key components of the youth employment programme activities that have significant benefits on the programme participants (Mawn et al., 2017).

Qualitative results: In the interviews, the quality of relationships between programme staff and the youths emerged as critical in achieving the programme outcomes. Overall, the informants reported high levels of satisfaction with the implementation and outcomes of the programme. However, it should be noted that one participant reported programme inhibitors within the job placement component of the programme. The informant expressed that the programme implementers should tailor the job placement to meet the participant's career needs and goals. This is particularly important as a job mismatch with one's career goals may have a dire impact on participants' engagement in the programme and can contribute to poor programme outcomes (Wolbers, 2003).

While programme participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the programme, some also indicated that they felt improvements could be made to the recruitment criteria. These informants felt that the Work 4 Progress programme was missing a significant part of the NEET youth population by their stringent eligibility requirements. Given that the organisation aims to improve youth employability, the Work 4 Progress programme should widen its selection criteria and make a deliberate effort to empower young people with lower education levels who have a lesser likelihood of employment.

Conclusion: There is evidence to support the programme design as appropriate for the attainment of programme outcomes, although the implementation can still be improved. There is also a need to clearly define the curriculum of the weekly sessions.

Evaluation question 4: Can we attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect?

Quantitative results: Due to the absence of a control group, we cannot fully attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect. However, using a hypothetical counterfactual approach (Rogers, 2014), it is sufficient to demonstrate that about 81% of the sample population found employment after completing the programme (Figure 5)

and it was reasonable to assume that in the absence of intervention, their employment status would probably not have changed.

Qualitative results: The participants perceived that the programme produced significant social changes in their lives and contributed to breaking the unemployment cycle. Using the counterfactual self-estimation of programme participants approach, based on the premise that participants can estimate the hypothetical state they would be in if they had not participated in the programme (Mueller et al., 2014), we can presumably attribute the outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect.

Conclusion: There is inconclusive evidence to attribute any outcome achieved to the Work 4 Progress programme and its effect due lack of a rigorous methodology, but the data collected suggests a strong likelihood that the programme was influential in the attainment of participant outcomes.

Chapter Four: Concluding Thoughts

This evaluation aimed at assessing whether the Work 4 Progress programme implemented by AVA successfully improved the employment outcomes of disadvantaged youths. Despite being small in scale, the evaluation provided some insight into the social lives of excluded youths and the importance of job intervention programmes in South Africa. This chapter presents some concluding thoughts on the evaluation.

Implications of the study findings

Despite the limitations of using self-reported data, the results of the study revealed the benefits of YEPs in the context of South Africa. This is the first evaluation of the Work 4 Progress programme and it provides feedback to the programme implementers on how well the programme achieved its intended outcomes. Therefore, it is hoped that the information generated from this evaluation will help programme implementers to make informed decisions on the future of the programme or other programmes with a similar design.

Additionally, there are limited published evaluation studies of YEPs in South Africa that focus on marginalised youths with low skills and low educational levels. Thus, this evaluation will contribute to the evaluation literature on YEPs in the context of disadvantaged youths with no skills or advanced education. The evaluation also contributes to the literature by giving researchers some insight into short-term outcomes associated with YEPs and how these short-term outcomes could potentially lead to long-term positive employment outcomes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the findings of the evaluation:

- Job placements should be based on the individual's capabilities and be matched with their career needs and goals.
- The effects of poverty, long-term unemployment and other traumatic events manifest differently in individuals, ranging from undetectable to overwhelming problems. Therefore, psychological support could be provided to all programme participants, even those who may not exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress.

- If programme participants experience serious workplace conflict at the host organisation, team leaders may need to intervene and resolve the conflict. The programme should ensure that the workplace is youth-friendly and that it produces positive learning outcomes.
- Based on the sample collected, a large percentage were women. The programme could consider making a deliberate effort to target men to ensure gender balance.
- The selection criteria for programme enrolment should be widened to include older youths with lower education levels who equally need to get into mainstream employment.
- Future programmes should collect monitoring data and conduct mid-term evaluations to ensure that the programme is being implemented as intended.

Limitations

The present study had several limitations most of which are common to low-cost evaluation studies.

- The evaluation lacked a control group against which the social change can be compared. Of course, it would have been best to have a control group to compare the results, but this was not possible. We could not get comparable data on NEET youths in the Western Cape; therefore, the study had limited scope in attributing the outcomes to the intervention. In this case, the validity of the research and the findings on causal attribution must be taken with caution.
- The evaluation was conducted in a very short timeframe which limited data collection. As a result, we had a very small sample, and providing an incentive of R50 airtime voucher did not help in increasing the sample size. However, our scope of data collection included all four cohorts (2017-2020), such that we captured the perceptions of youths who participated in the programme over the four years.
- In addition, the evaluation was designed during the Covid-19 pandemic and the programme was already completed. This affected the evaluator's access to more information on the programme since there were travel restrictions and the closure of non-essential services. During the data collection phase, the evaluator could not conduct observational studies to better understand how the programme works since the programme was already completed.

- The evaluator relied on the contact details the participants had provided when they were still in programme. However, many of them had since changed their contact numbers, which impacted access to the alumni. We took additional steps to increase the response rate by using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to reach the alumni. We used a mobile-friendly survey, followed by WhatsApp messaging to prompt participants to complete the survey. Those who had partially completed the survey were reminded to complete the survey to receive the airtime incentive.
- The evaluation used self-reported data from alumni who had graduated from the programme. It would have been interesting to get insights from those who did not complete the programme.
- There are very few evaluation studies on YEPs in South Africa, thus the plausibility assessment of the Work 4 Progress programme was based mostly on international studies which may not apply to the South African context.
- It was impossible to measure impact, given the programme is only six years old. A longitudinal study is required to measure the long-term outcomes and to assess the longevity of the programme outcomes.

Conclusion

The evaluation assessed the outcomes of the Work 4 Progress programme, an intervention targeting unemployed youths from disadvantaged communities in Cape Town. Based on the online survey and in-depth interviews with the alumni, it appears that the programme benefitted youths in many of the ways it intended to. The participants in the programme seemed to have gained job readiness skills including job-specific skills and soft skills. The respondents also reported greatly improved social skills which allowed them to interact with the outside world. They used the skills and knowledge they gained during the programme to find decent employment. Several respondents have plans to pursue further education and most of them are focusing on enrolling in university for a degree. The programme design and activities were deemed appropriate for the attainment of programme outcomes, and there was overall satisfaction with the Work 4 Progress Programme. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to assess the long-term outcomes of the programme.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Detailed theory of change drawn from AVA annual report

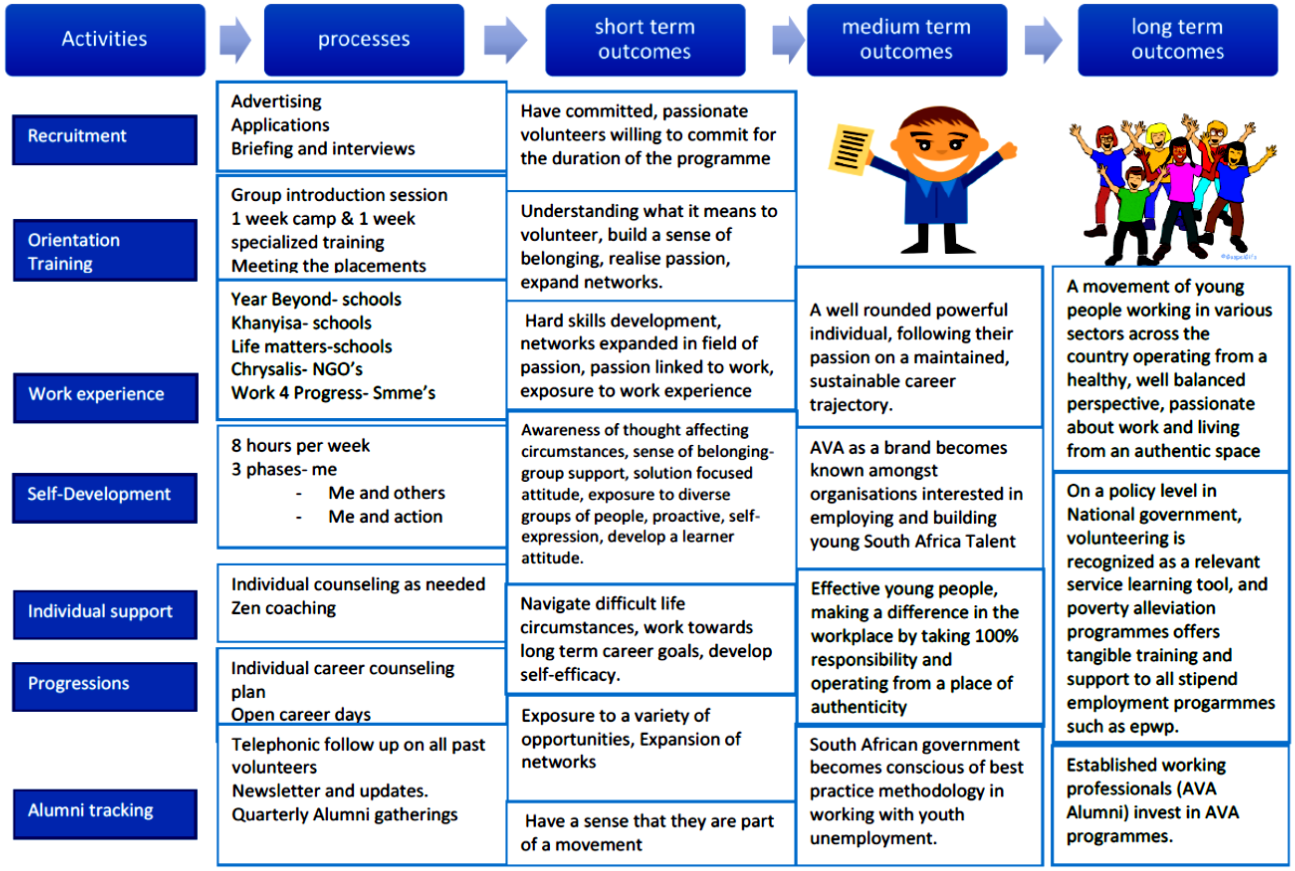

Figure 2. Detailed theory of change drawn from AVA's 2017 Annual Report.

Appendix B: Participant survey

Participant survey

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths

Hello,

My name is Pamela Pophiwa. I am doing a Masters in Programme Evaluation at the University of Cape Town. I am evaluating the Work 4 Progress Programme, specifically investigating whether participation in the programme has helped youth to become employed or to continue studying. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as you are an alumnus (graduated participant) of the Work 4 Progress Programme.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. There are no questions that pose any risk to you. By continuing with the survey, you are consenting to your participation as a data provider. A R50 airtime voucher will be offered to every alumnus that submits a fully completed questionnaire.

The survey does ask for your name. This is so that we can contact you for a follow-up interview after we have reviewed the results. However, your survey responses will be kept strictly confidential.

The research and data collection tools (e.g., survey) have been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Should you have any questions regarding the research please feel free to contact the

researcher (Pamela Pophiwa – pphpam001@myuct.ac.za) or her supervisor: Dr Carren Duffy (carren.duffy@uct.ac.za)

Appendix C: Participant survey

Section A: Demographic information of the participants

<table>
<tr><td>1. Name & Surname (Provided so that the research can contact you for an interview, if necessary):</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>2. Email Address or Contact Number:</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>3. What gender do you identify with?</td><td>Male</td><td>Female</td><td>Prefer not to answer</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. What is your age?</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>5. In what year did you participate in the Work 4 Progress Programme?</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>6. What was your highest qualification when joining the Work 4 Progress Programme?</td><td colspan="3">☐ No matric
☐ Matric
☐ Certificate
☐ Diploma
☐ University degree or higher</td></tr>
<tr><td>7. Did you pursue further studies following the programme</td><td colspan="2">Yes</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>8. If you answered yes to Q7 what did you study and where?</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>9. What qualification was obtained?</td><td colspan="3">☐</td></tr>
<tr><td>10. Did you find employment following the programme?</td><td colspan="2">Yes</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>11. If you answered yes to Q10, please provide information on current and previous employment following the programme</td><td colspan="3"><table><tr><td>From</td><td>To</td><td>Role</td><td>Organisation</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table></td></tr>
<tr><td>12. If you are employed, what is your monthly take home (i.e., your salary after deductions)?</td><td colspan="3">☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Less than R2 000
☐ Between R2 000 to R5 000</td></tr>
</table>

	☐ Between R5 000 to R7 000 ☐ Between R7 000 to R10 000 ☐ More than R10 000

Section B: Employability of programme participants

Please read through each statement below and rate the extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
1. I have clear goals of what I want to achieve in my life					
2. I am happy with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals					
3. I feel confident of success in job search and job interviews					
4. The knowledge and skills gained during the programme prepared me for the world of work					
5. I developed social networks to support career building					

How important were the following in improving your employability?

	Not at all important	**Slightly important**	**Moderately important**	**Very important**	**Extremely important**
Job training					
Weekly self-development sessions					
Career coaching sessions					

Appendix D: Participant interview

Participant interview

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths

Hello,

My name is Pamela Pophiwa. I am doing a Masters in Programme Evaluation at the University of Cape Town. I am evaluating the Work 4 Progress Programme, specifically investigating whether participation in the programme has helped youth to become employed or to continue studying. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as you are an alumnus (graduated participant) of the Work 4 Progress Programme.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. There are no questions that pose any risk to you. By continuing with the interview, you are consenting to your participation as a data provider. If it is fine with you, I would like to record the interview. This is only so that I can transcribe the conversation for analysis later. I will not share any of your details. If I use any quotations from our interview they will be anonymised. The interview should not take longer than one (1) hour.

The research and data collection tools (e.g., interview) have been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Should you have any questions regarding the research please feel free to contact the

researcher (Pamela Pophiwa – pphpam001@myuct.ac.za) or her supervisor: Dr Carren Duffy (carren.duffy@uct.ac.za)

Date:

Signature:

Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Interview framework with successful programme participants

1) What was the motivation to enrol for the Work 4 Progress Programme?
2) If you think about yourself and your life before the Work 4 Progress Programme and now, can you describe what is different?
3) To what extent did the programme account for these differences?
4) What skills and attributes did the Work 4 Progress Programme provide you with?
5) If I was wanting to participate in the programme, would you recommend it to me, and if so, why?
6) What suggestions, if any, would you give on how the programme can be improved?
7) That covers all the things that I wanted to ask. Is there anything that you would like to add, or anything that you would like to ask me?

Interview framework with non-successful programme participants

1. What was the motivation to enrol for the Work 4 Progress Programme?
2. What skills and attributes did the Work 4 Progress Programme provide you with?
3. Did you experience any obstacles or challenges during this programme?
4. What suggestions, if any, would you give on how the programme can be improved?
5. That covers all the things that I wanted to ask. Is there anything that you would like to add, or anything that you would like to ask me?

Appendix F: Programme implementers interview

Programme implementers interview

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths

Hello,

My name is Pamela Pophiwa. I am doing a Masters in Programme Evaluation at the University of Cape Town. I am evaluating the Work 4 Progress Programme, specifically investigating whether participation in the programme has helped youth to become employed or to continue studying. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences as an implementer of the Work 4 Progress Programme.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. There are no questions that pose any risk to you. By continuing with the interview, you are consenting to your participation as a data provider. If it is fine with you, I would like to record the interview. This is only so that I can transcribe the conversation for analysis later. I will not share any of your details. If I use any quotations from our interview they will be anonymised. The interview should not take longer than one (1) hour.

The research and data collection tools (e.g., interview) have been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

Should you have any questions regarding the research please feel free to contact the researcher (Pamela Pophiwa – pphpam001@myuct.ac.za) or her supervisor: Dr Carren Duffy (carren.duffy@uct.ac.za)

Date:

Signature:

Appendix G: Interview framework with programme implementers

1. What has been your experience working with Work 4 Progress programme participants?
2. Suppose I am a new person who has joined the programme, how would you define success and what can I do to succeed?
3. Take a moment to reflect on the participants who have participated in this programme, what changes did you observe in these alumni?
4. How do you know that these changes are as a direct result from the Work 4 Progress Programme? Could there be rival explanations for the results?
5. What in your experience contributes to the attainment of programme outcomes?
6. What is your experience hindering the attainment of programme outcomes?
7. Do you think that the programme can be improved? And in what ways?
8. That covers all the things that I wanted to ask. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix H: Ethics approval letter

Faculty of Commerce
Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701
2.26 Leslie Commerce Building, Upper Campus
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 4375/ 5748 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 4369
E-mail: jacques.rousseau@uct.ac.za
Internet: www.uct.ac.za
@Commerce UCT UCT Commerce Faculty Office

20 01 2022

Pamela Pophiwa

School of Management Studies

University of Cape Town

REF: REC 2022/01/011

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths

We are pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. Unless otherwise specified this ethical clearance is valid until 31-Dec-2023 .

Your clearance may be renewed upon application.

Please be aware that you need to notify the Ethics Committee immediately should any aspect of your study regarding the engagement with participants as approved in this application, change. This may include aspects such as changes to the research design, questionnaires, or choice of participants.

The ongoing ethical conduct throughout the duration of the study remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

We wish you well for your research.

Signed by candidate

2022.01.20
16:03:18 +02'00'

Jacques Rousseau
Commerce Research Ethics Chair
University of Cape Town
Commerce Faculty Office
Room 2.26 | Leslie Commerce Building

Office Telephone: +27 (0)21 650 2695 / 4375
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Website: http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/com/Ethics-in-Research

Appendix I: UCT data management plan

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths - Student Outline DMP

1. General guidelines

PURPOSE OF THIS TEMPLATE - The purpose of the Outline DMP is to indicate your initial plans for how your data will be collected, shared and stored, and to give you a chance to think about these data-focused aspects of the research process. As your begin doing your research, your data process may change, and it is perfectly acceptable to change your data management plan to accommodate the changes in your research process. Indicate below that you understand the purpose of completing this Outline DMP template.

- I understand the Outline DMP template is a projection of my anticipated data management planning requirements and should be updated as my project develops.

2. Authors and supervisors

PROJECT NAME - Replicate the title of your project, dissertation or thesis exactly as it appears in your proposal document.

An outcome evaluation of the Work 4 Progress Programme for unemployed youths

PERSONAL DETAILS - Indicate the name(s) and student number(s) of the student(s) who will be involved in this project, dissertation or thesis.

Pamela Pophiwa
pphpam001

SUPERVISOR(S) DETAILS - Indicate who will supervise this project, dissertation or thesis. If you do not yet have a supervisor, leave this section blank.

Dr Carren Duffy

3. Data Collection/Generation

COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL DATA - Indicate whether or not you intend to gather/produce original data for your study, and provide a brief description of the kind of data you think you will collect. If you are unsure at this time, indicate what you think you are most likely to collect. If you are not intending to gather or collect your own data, declare that here.

I intend to collect a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will be collected using a survey on demographics and volunteer experience (n= 54 respondents) and transferred to MS excel. Qualitative data will consist of one-on-one interview transcripts (n= 20) in MS Word. I anticipate my data will be between 100MB and 1GB.

USE OF EXISTING DATA - Indicate if you intend to re-use existing data, either from online searches or from datasets provided by your supervisor, lab, or funder. If you are not intending to re-use existing data, declare that here.

Action Volunteers Africa will provide existing data to reuse in the research, as agreed in the signed MOU

DATA SHARING - Indicate whether or not you are intending to publish your research data. If you are, indicate where you are intending to

publish your data and under what licensing conditions, such as Creative Commons. If you are not intending to publish your data, provide reasons and reference the appropriate ethical considerations, commercial applications/patenting ambition, or data re-use agreements that prevent you from publishing your data.

- I intend to share my data (details below).

Under Creative Commons license

4. Data Storage

ANTICIPATED DATASET SIZE - Indicate the estimated size of your completed dataset, and indicate whether or not you will need to access additional data storage facilities. If such storage is not provided by your unit or department, you may need to factor in the cost of purchasing additional storage space.

- 20GB or less

DATA BACKUPS - Indicate how you plan to ensure your data is secure and retrievable in case of errors or hardware failure. Describe what procedures you will put in place to back-up copies of your data and where they will be stored.

- I intend to backup my data using a service provided by UCT (UCT GoogleDrive, UCT OneDrive, Netstorage, ZivaHub etc.).

During my data collection and analysis phase, I will backup my data each month to my UCT GoogleDrive account. I will do a final backup when submit my final draft for examination.

5. Data Centre(s)/Repositories

DATA CENTRES/REPOSITORIES - Once your project, dissertation or thesis is complete, it is advisable to curate and archive your completed dataset with an established data centre or repository. Note that you should archive your data even if you are not intending to publish it. Check with your supervisor or funder if you are required to deposit your data in a specific repository, or declare that you will deposit the data in ZivaHub (see the Guidance section).

- At the end of my study, I will deposit my data on ZivaHub.

METADATA - Metadata is descriptive information that others will need to make sense of your dataset. Metadata includes things like study descriptions or abstracts, study instruments (sample collection schedules, codebooks for variables, survey instruments, etc.), subject codes, and keywords. Indicate what metadata will accompany your curated dataset.

The completed dataset will be accompanied by keywords, a short description taken from my dissertation abstract and relevant paragraphs on the data process taken from my methods section.

6. Budget

BUDGET - Indicate any costs specifically relating to the management and curation of your data, such as purchasing additional storage space, digitisation of physical media, data storage or curation charges, and data audits. Most student research will be able to make use of free options provided by UCT and will not have to budget for data costs.

- I do not anticipate any data costs as my data is less than 10GB, and I will be using a storage system provided by UCT (UCT GoogleDrive, UCT OneDrive, Netstorage, ZivaHub, etc.) to curate my data.