



youth
@work

IMPACT REPORT

2025

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Front cover from left:

Yanga Nqenqa (*HR & Operations Lead*); **Erica Kempken** (*Co-Founder & Industry Innovation Lead*); Hon Minister of Small Business Development, **Stella Tembisa Ndabeni**; **Jacinta Roest-Tshidzumba** (*Co-Founder & Chief Financial Officer*); **Ludi Oberholzer** (*Payroll Manager*)



01

INTRODUCTION / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Introduction / Executive Summary

In South Africa, more than half of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed. Nearly two million have stopped looking for work altogether. Behind every statistic is a young person who wanted to contribute, yet found every door closed.

youth@WORK exists to open those doors.

Since 2019, we have placed 17,155 young South Africans into structured, paid work opportunities. We have facilitated over R773 million in youth wages. We have partnered with 977 small businesses across all nine provinces. And we have maintained a 95.6% retention rate, in a country where youth retention in employment programmes is typically a struggle.

But this report is not about those numbers. It is about what those numbers represent.

It is about Litha, who arrived at his first youth@WORK session looking for direction and left with the foundation of what would become Loxion Mobile Library – an organisation that has since reached more than 1,500 children and earned international recognition. It is about Wongalethu, whose business hit its growth ceiling until youth@WORK helped him build a team and who now employs 14 people, seven of whom came directly through the programme. It is about a young woman who lost her baby during her placement and nearly lost everything else, until the youth@WORK wellness team held space for her grief and helped her find her footing again.

These are not exceptions. They are representative stories.

youth@WORK is not a youth placement programme. It is **structured employment infrastructure**, providing a continuous support system that develops young people, de-risks placements for host businesses, and stabilises entire households, all simultaneously. The difference matters. Placement programmes move people from one place to another. Infrastructure changes what is possible.

Our model is built on a simple but powerful conviction: that **success in work is inseparable from success in**

life. A young person who is financially stressed, emotionally unsupported or professionally isolated will not thrive in a placement, no matter how well matched to the role. And a business that receives a subsidised employee without ongoing support and supervision engagement will not receive the full benefit or may not even want to retain that youth. youth@WORK sits at the centre of both relationships, actively managing both outcomes.

This is what makes our retention rate possible. It is what makes **our absorption rate – 20%, eight times the B-BBEE minimum** – credible. And it is what makes the R1 billion in cumulative youth wages we are on the verge of reaching mean something beyond a financial milestone. **That billion is not a transfer. It is transformation in motion:** young people buying groceries for their families for the first time, setting savings goals within weeks of their first pay cheque, gaining the confidence to start businesses, and returning, as employers, to host the next generation of youth.

This report tells the story of how that happens. It follows the journey from placement to potential: through the structured support system that holds youth through twelve months of growth, through the data that proves the model works, and through the voices of the young people and business owners whose lives are different because of it.

We build youth who build businesses who build South Africa.

The pages that follow show exactly what that means and what becomes possible when the right partners choose to be part of it.

02

THE PROBLEM
WORTH SOLVING



The Problem Worth Solving

South Africa is one of the youngest countries in the world and one of the most unequal. Nearly half of the working-age population is between 15 and 34. In most economies, that would be a generational advantage. Here, it is a generational emergency.



As of Q4 2025, more than half of South Africans aged 15 to 24 are unemployed. For those aged 25 to 34, the rate sits at 40.6%. Behind the headline figures is a deeper crisis: 1.9 million young people have stopped looking for work altogether, and 37.1% of youth are not in employment, education or training, entirely disconnected from both the economy and any pathway into it. (*Statistics South Africa, QLFS Q1 & Q4:2025*)

The structural cruelty of this crisis is its circularity. The labour market requires experience to hire, but only employment creates experience. Nearly six in ten unemployed young South Africans have never held a job. Without a structured entry point, they cannot begin and the longer they remain outside the labour market, the harder re-entry becomes. Unemployment stops being a circumstance and becomes a condition. (*Statistics South Africa, QLFS Q1:2025*)

This crisis does not fall equally. In the North West, youth unemployment reaches 58.8%. In the Eastern Cape, fewer than four in ten young people are working or looking for work. Young women bear a disproportionate burden, with nearly half of all young women not in employment, education or training, and grant dependency among 15 to 24-year-olds has grown sevenfold in fifteen years. (*Stats SA; Afrobarometer Round 10, 2025*)

South Africa has not lacked effort. It has lacked the right architecture. Public employment programmes and skills interventions have historically struggled to bridge the gap between preparation and placement, with fewer still addressing what happens after a young person is placed: the workplace adjustment, the mental health pressures, the management of expectations on both sides.

This is the context into which youth@WORK was built, not as another training programme or simply a youth placement programme, but as structured employment infrastructure. The following pages show what becomes possible when the architecture is right.



03

THE MODEL -
WHY IT WORKS

The Model – Why It Works

youth@WORK has been operating since 2019 and has built national credibility through the consistent delivery of large-scale youth employment programmes for corporate South Africa. Operating within the regulated Youth Employment Service (YES) framework, we have delivered verified B-BBEE outcomes while ensuring young people gain structured, paid work experience in formal business environments. Our delivery capability has been tested across sectors and provinces and is underpinned by disciplined execution, strong governance and real-time performance monitoring.

But credibility is not the model. It is the result of it.

The model was built in the field, through years of listening to what young people actually needed to succeed in a workplace, and to what businesses actually needed to make a youth placement worthwhile. Every refinement, every new support layer, every data system we built has been a direct response to what we heard and saw on the ground. A youth struggling to navigate a difficult supervisor. A business unsure how to integrate a young person with no prior experience. A young woman managing grief while trying to hold down her first job. These are not edge cases. They are the realities that shaped everything.

What emerged from that process is not a programme. It is infrastructure, a model built around the understanding that success in work is inseparable from success in life, and that sustainable youth employment requires continuous, intentional support for both the young person and the business simultaneously.

That infrastructure is what makes our outcomes possible. And it is what allows us, with confidence, to make the claim that sits at the heart of this report: we build youth who build businesses who build South Africa.

The youth@WORK LABOUR-TO-GROWTH MODEL



CAPITAL - PAID YOUTH WORK

- Enterprise Development
- CSI
- Impact Funding



Y@W HUMAN RESOURCE INFRASTRUCTURE

- Paid, contracted youth employment
- End-to-end HR, payroll and labour compliance
- COIDA, IR and risk management
- Performance tracking, mentoring and workplace readiness



SUPPORTED YOUTH IN GROWING BUSINESSES

- Paid youth capacity matched to operational needs



IMPACT DELIVERED

- **Businesses:** More capacity. Stronger revenue. Formalised growth.
- **Youth:** Paid work. Skills built. Sustainable employment.



EVIDENCE AND LEADERSHIP

- Data-driven insight that guides decisions and builds trust.

The delivery of our model is underpinned by proprietary digital systems that provide real-time oversight, transparency and risk control. **CoRE** is our performance and risk intelligence platform, providing us with real time visibility of the programme in its entirety, as well as ensuring efficient payroll processes across all active youth. **UPLOADER** is our secure compliance platform which streamlines administrative processes and strengthens governance across the programme. Together, these tools enable the responsive, data-driven approach that keeps the model accountable at scale.

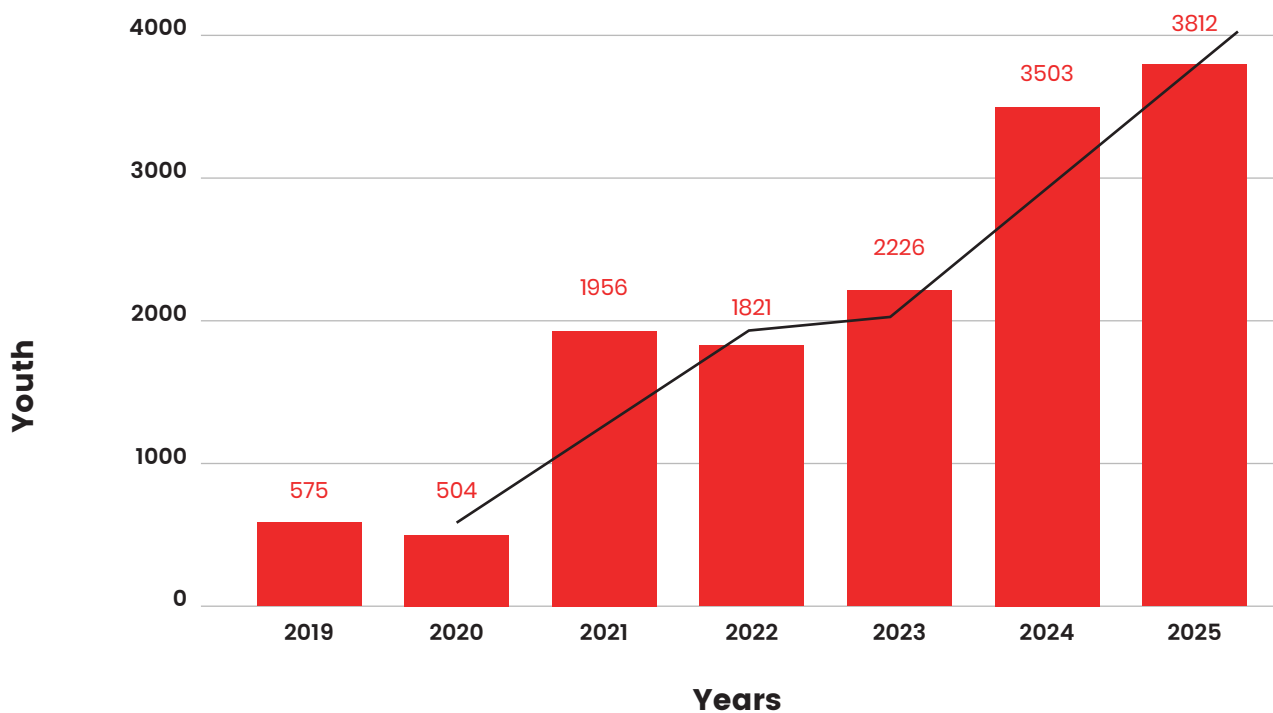
04

THE YOUTH
WE SERVE

The Youth We Serve

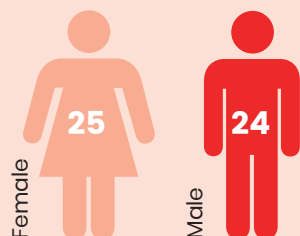
youth@WORK has supported a growing number of youth over the years, with the last two years seeing huge growth, which is forecasted to continue in 2026/27. The 2025 cohort was the largest ever, with 3,812 youth placed in new work opportunities in 2025. This is in addition to the 3,503 youth who were placed in 2024, completing their programme in 2025. That brought the total youth active within the 2025 calendar year to a height of 7,315.

Active Youth



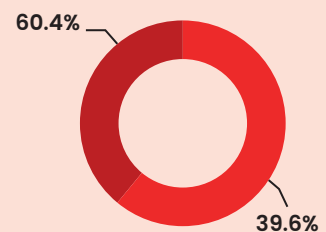
Here is an overview profile of the total youth active within the 2025 calendar year.
Demographic profile of the youth:

Average Age



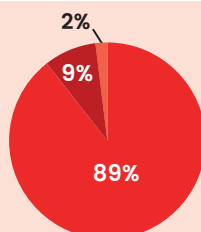
Gender Representation

● Female: 60.4%
● Male: 39.6%



Race Representation

● African
● Coloured
● Indian
● White



Disability Representation

51 youth (0.7%) reported a disability



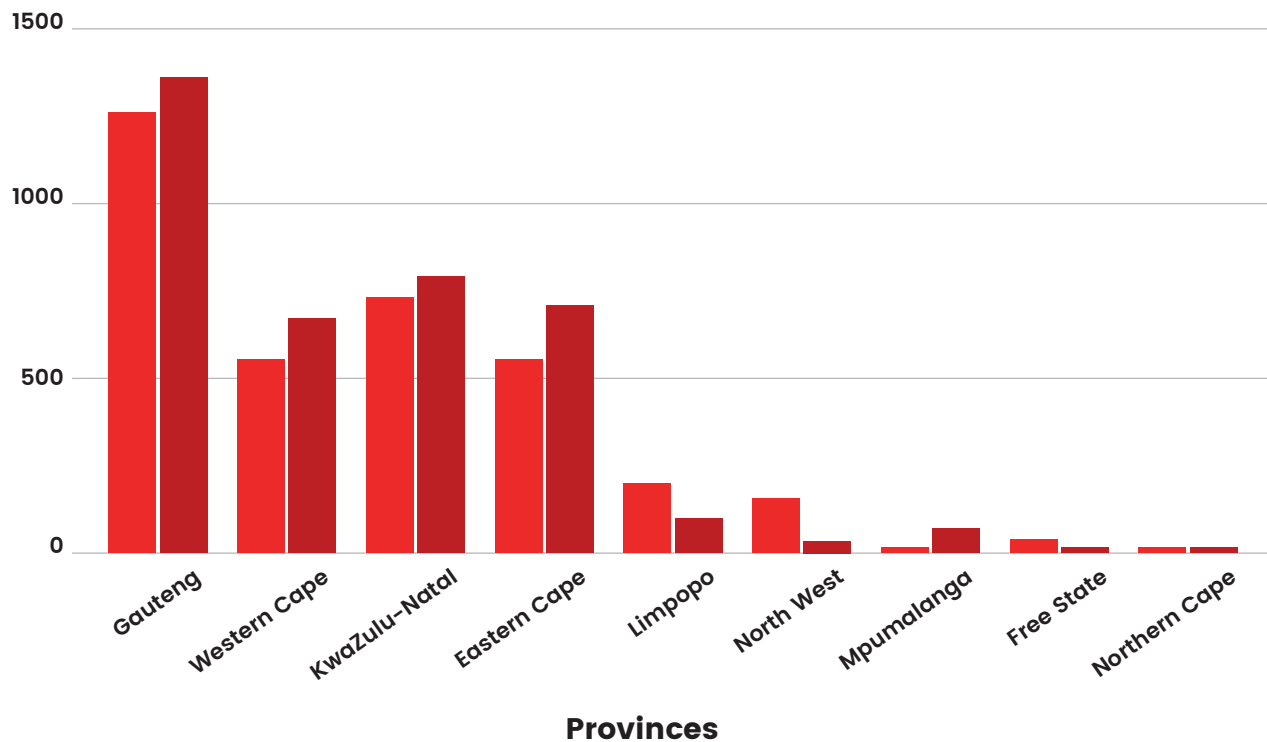
61% of all participants are female. Female participation consistently exceeds male participation at an approximate ratio of 3:2. This reflects intentional programme design and placement alignment in recognition of the compounded barriers young women face in accessing formal employment.

African females represent 53% of all participants, the single largest demographic group in the programme, directly targeting the intersection of race and gender exclusion.

Geographic profile showing the provincial distribution where the youth have/are working:

2024 vs 2025 Geographical Distribution

■ 2024 ■ 2025



youth@WORK operates across all nine provinces, demonstrating national reach. However, 75% of placements are concentrated in three high-absorption regions, a strategic approach aligned with economic opportunity rather than uniform distribution. A key aspect of youth@WORK's success is knowing where the jobs are and what factors contribute to success in various geographies and sectors.



Sector profile showing the industries in which the youth have/are working:

2024 vs 2025 Sector Distribution

2024	Sectors	2025
15%	 Education	15% 
14%	 Automotive	14% 
11%	 Human, health and social work activities	7% 
8%	 Information, communication and technology	11% 
11%	 Financial and insurance activities	6% 
11%	 Accommodation, food services activities and tourism	8% 
6%	 Manufacturing	8% 
3%	 Other service activities	5% 
4%	 Arts, entertainment and recreation	3% 
18%	 Other	23% 

Compared to 2024, 2025 shows a material shift toward productive, private-sector and skills-intensive industries, while maintaining participation in social-impact sectors. This indicates a balanced portfolio across social, industrial, service and digital economies, reducing reliance on any single sector.

A large black circle containing the white outline numbers '05'. To the right, a white circle contains the text 'THE Y' and '- FRO'. At the bottom, a red ring is partially visible.

05

THE Y
- FRO



THE YOUTH JOURNEY
- FROM PLACED TO
BUILT



The Youth Journey - From Placed to Built

The youth@WORK journey begins prior to placement and continues after the 12-month programme completion, continually looking for ways to strengthen the alumni programme and network. The journey consists of a curated set of interactions and processes that ensure quality delivery, comprehensive support, consistent monitoring and learning throughout the journey.

● The Programme Works for Youth

98%

said they enjoyed the programme "a lot" or "mostly"

97%

said they benefited from youth@WORK's support and services "a lot" or "mostly"

When asked what youth@WORK's support gave them, the top responses were:

1. Understanding what skills I have / what I'm good at: **29%**
2. Meeting new people: **15%**
3. Learning new things: **12%**
4. Learning how to be a good employee: **12%**
5. Gaining confidence: **11%**

This finding is incredibly interesting because it speaks to someone's core sense of self and self-improvement. It is empowering for young people not only to recognise their inherent skills, but also to understand that these skills can be developed and potentially translated into meaningful career opportunities. These findings also speak to how incredibly important exposure is for youth; exposure to options, people, ideas and the work environment. All of these findings are grounded in the development of self. This is a critical insight that has guided youth@WORK's success. By supporting youth in broad spectrum, intentional self-development, youth@WORK is able to increase work success, generating positive outcomes for the youth and the businesses in with they work.

96%

Youth retention across both the 2024 and 2025 cohorts

Youth are hungry for opportunities and they will go where the opportunities lies, so the fact that youth are staying in and completing the programme shows that it is working for them.

● The Structure

At a glance: youth@WORK's programme consists of three core pillars:



WORK SUPPORT



LEARNING



WELLNESS

Together, these three pillars form a support system that is greater than the sum of its parts. Work support ensures the placement works. Learning ensures the youth grows. Wellness ensures the person is held. Remove any one of them, and the model becomes something ordinary. Together, they are what makes youth@WORK's outcomes possible.

A snapshot:

WORK SUPPORT



3,834

host site visits

Reached 2,727 youth across 557 host sites, with structured goal setting, supervisor engagement and active retention work captured

LEARNING



8,321

feedback responses from 2,836 unique youth, who attended **monthly Think Tank Thursdays**, on average 2.65 times and rated the sessions good or better 97.6% of the time

WELLNESS



32,604

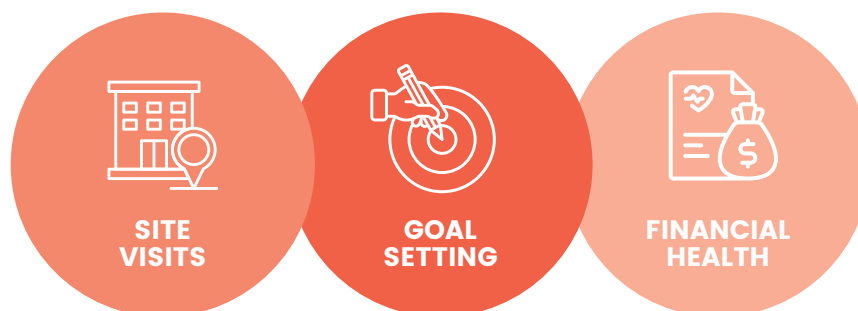
Telephonic wellness sessions conducted where participants could discuss workplace concerns, personal struggles, and emotional wellbeing

These pillars curate the journey for youth to develop themselves and to the benefit of the business in which they have been placed. That journey takes place across a structured 12-month period with intentional and consistent touchpoints throughout. Each pillar has specific tools and processes that ensure consistent monitoring, development and support are provided simultaneously. Years of implementation and data have shown that all three are critical ingredients for a productive and beneficial experience.

This report will walk through each pillar in turn, highlighting the intentionality and value of each, to cumulatively deliver impact.



● Work Support

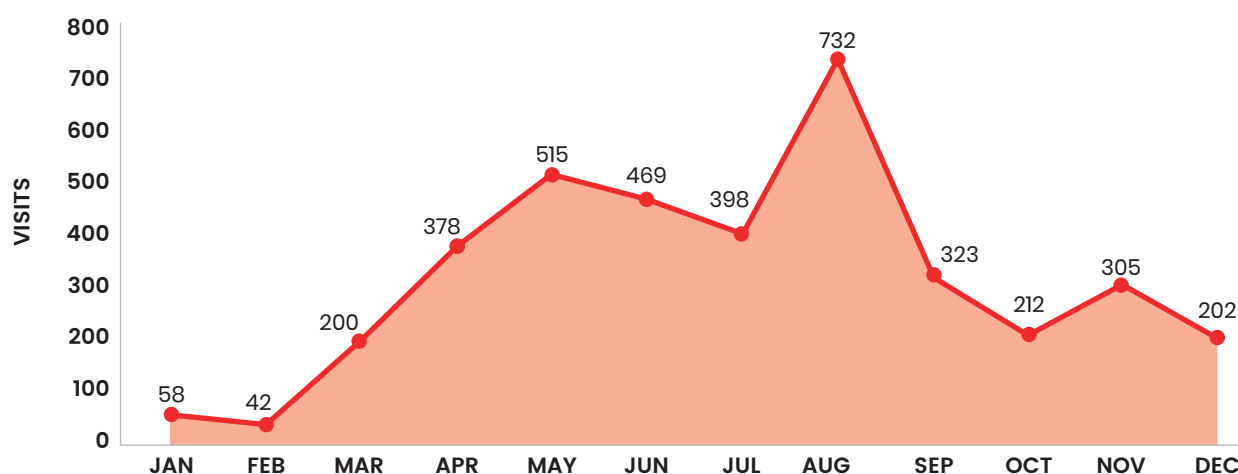


Placing youth in a business, backed by full HR, payroll and labour compliance is only the start of what youth@WORK knows it takes to make youth placements successful. That is why the work support pillar is focused beyond the functional, proactively engaging and helping youth to develop the skills needed to thrive in work and in life.



Site visits

Foundational to this support are the host site visits which take place quarterly. In 2025, youth@WORK logged 3,834 host site visits.



These visits are the operational heartbeat of the programme, providing in-person engagement sessions with both youth and supervisors at the site. The data captured throughout these visits tells a clear story about youth development and the active role youth@WORK plays at each site. Here are just a few examples that highlight the value of these interactions:

- **Industrial relations rescue work**

youth@WORK often supports with IR matters, such as disciplinary issues or grievances. In numerous instances, youth@WORK has been able to prevent a possible resignation, with youth@WORK providing corrective counseling.

- **Mentoring and on-site coaching**

Motivational, coaching or guidance sessions are a typical component of site visits, often run jointly with the host site's own managers and HR, highlighting the partnership that sits at the core of this programme, with youth@WORK and the host site co-developing the youth, while ensuring better results for their business.

- **Engaged employers, not passive ones**

Host sites and supervisors are consistently consulted and supported to ensure their needs are met. Each visit allows the supervisor to pose any questions and, for youth@WORK to capture their feedback. This process ensures that youth@WORK provides tailored support to each site.



Goal Setting

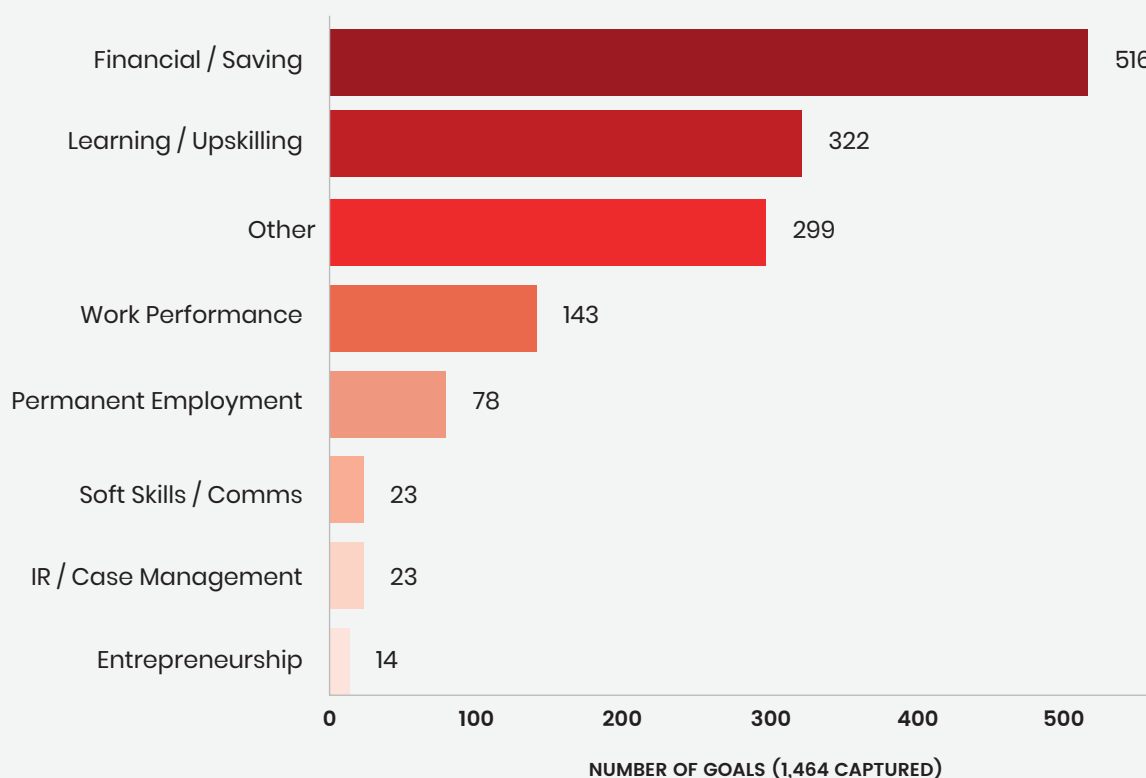
Goal setting is a useful tool for any aspiring professional, but this is a learned skill, which youth@WORK has found extremely important to help the youth grow and stretch. In doing this, they've seen two clear trends stand out in the goals that the youth set.

Trend 1: Goals are about money and growth, not just keeping a job

The single largest theme was financial / saving goals, expressed in about 35% of the recorded goals. This was followed by learning / upskilling, expressed in approximately 22% of the recorded goals.

Somewhat surprisingly, goals explicitly about job security were a much smaller share. This is the picture of young people who already have an income and are using the placement as a platform to build the next thing, whether that be savings, a driver's licence or a qualification.

What youth set as their main monthly goal during host site visits, 2025.



Trend 2: Goal maturity rises over time

The share of youth answering "I don't have goals yet" falls sharply as a cohort progresses, from about 14% initially, down to roughly 0 – 5% only two months later and sustaining throughout the remainder of the programme. The structured monthly check-in appears to move youth from "no plan" to a concrete savings, study or career goals within a couple of months. That shift is an outcome, in and of itself.

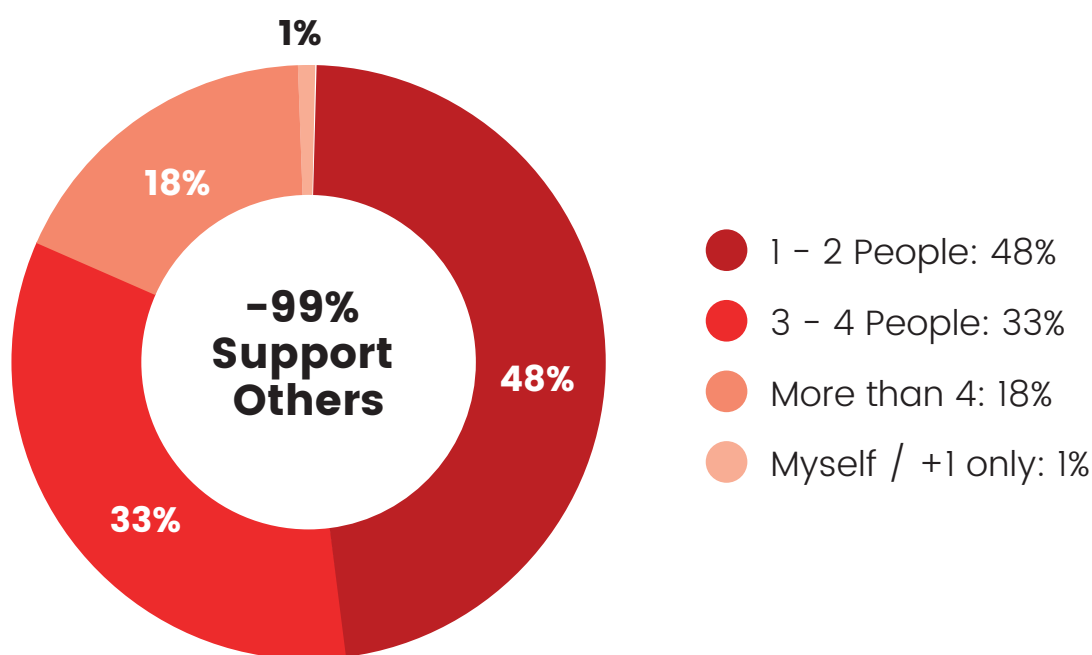


Financial health and wellness

Helping youth to earn a wage and have money in their pocket is a big step, but it is only one step in the journey for financial health and agency. youth@WORK conducts the first pay check survey, within weeks of the youth receiving their first pay check to understand how youth are spending their hard-earned income.

Youth salaries paid to the 2025 cohort totalled R231.7 million

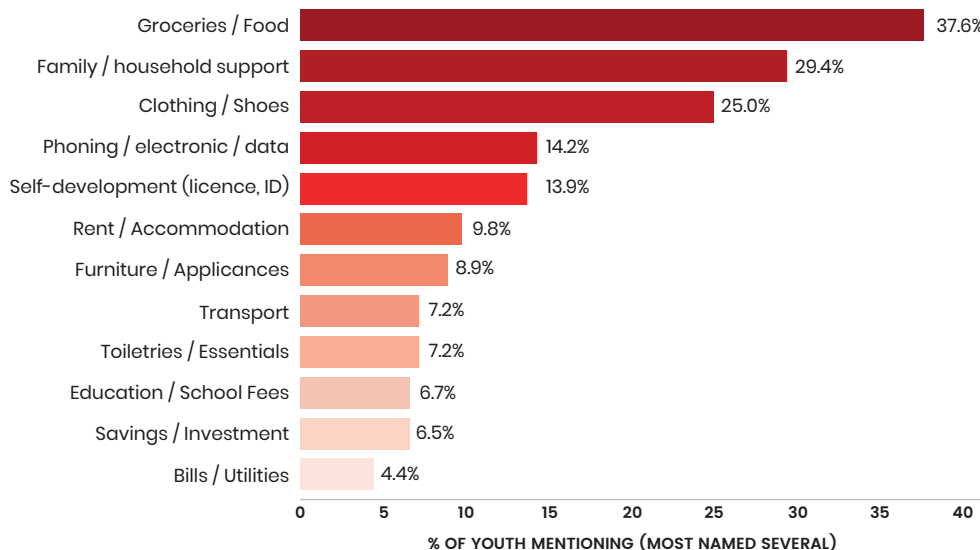
Findings show the first salary going overwhelmingly to food, family support and work-ready clothing — with ~99% of youth supporting at least one dependent and 51% supporting three or more.



“The programme played a huge role in our lives and it also made huge difference to our families. I really appreciated the opportunity that you gave us.”

Aaron Fanafuthi Bongane Mdluli, 25

Spending is overwhelmingly about needs and family, not splurging. The clear top three are groceries and food, family and household support, and work-appropriate clothing and shoes.



Key insights:

- **Needs and family come first.** Groceries (38%), family / household support (29%) and work-ready clothing (25%) dominate. Combined, food and family support mean a large majority of first salaries are effectively household income.
- **The spending is quietly strategic.** Clothing is mostly framed as work-appropriate attire, such as uniforms, "shoes I can work comfortably in," formal outfits. Phones, data and driver's licences (each ~14%) are reinvestment in employability: staying reachable, being able to apply for jobs, and removing the licence barrier that blocks many roles.
- **Saving appears, realistically.** Explicit saving / investment shows up at about 7%. While this is modest in amount, it is significant in meaning, as youth are exhibiting financial agency and responsibility.

The programme is teaching young people to manage money and invest in themselves, not just handing them an income.

When you combine "groceries" and "family support," a large share of first pay cheques are not disposable income at all, rather they are relief for a whole household: food for parents and grandparents, siblings' and children's school fees, rent, and money sent home before youth spend anything on themselves.

This financial agency has a strong emotional dimension, which consistently showed up in the results. The dominant feelings reported after that first purchase were happy, proud, excited and relieved, with recurring notes of independence, responsibility and "peace of mind." A common thread in the "why it mattered" answers is being able to provide for family for the very first time.

"I felt independent, unstoppable, and a hero to my family."

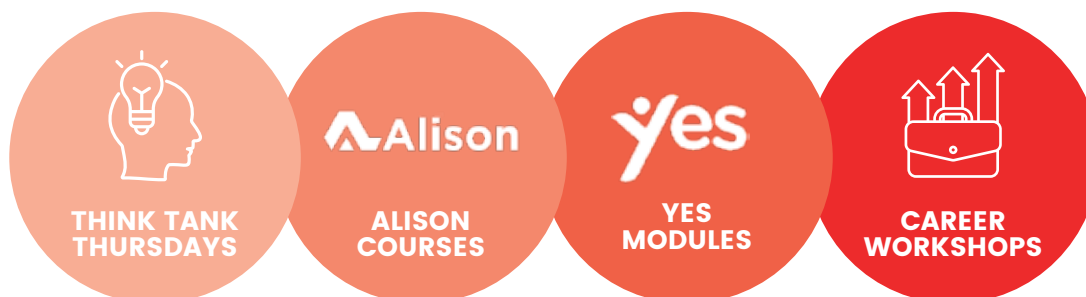
"I had never been able to help out at home before - this was the first time I could."

"It was meaningful because it covered our everyday needs, and most importantly my daughter's needs."

Work Support: Where the placement succeeds or fails

youth@WORK's work support pillar delivers consistent, practical, on-site presence, for both the youth and the business, ensuring that placements don't just begin well, but sustain. From goal-setting and financial skills to IR intervention and supervisor engagement, this pillar actively manages the placement so that youth develop, businesses benefit and nothing falls through the cracks.

● Learning



Think Tank Thursdays

Think Tank Thursdays are monthly online development sessions for youth. In 2025, nine sessions ran from April to December, each captured by a post-session feedback survey. The programming deliberately alternates between wellbeing and identity, hard employability, and civic awareness. youth@WORK is focused on developing the whole person, not just job skills.

9
Sessions held

8,321
Feedback responses

2,836
Unique youth reached

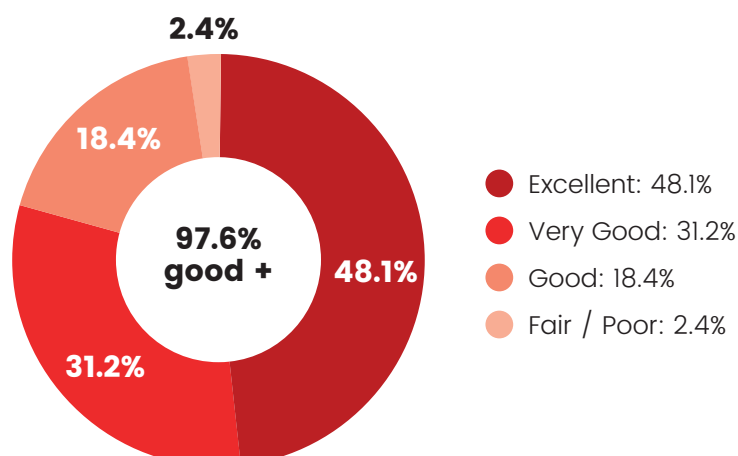
2.65
Average session/youth

#	Topic	#	Topic
01	Mental health – stress, anxiety, depression and coping	06	Civic participation – voting, leadership and community
02	Artificial intelligence – AI tools for the workplace	07	Future-proofing your career and skills for the future of work
03	Entrepreneurship – starting a business, founder's story	08	Growth mindset – embracing change and personal growth
04	Zlto and earning / learning opportunities for youth	09	The G20 and its impact and opportunities for youth
05	Women's empowerment, identity, faith and purpose (Women's Month)		

Engagement is sticky.

Youth attended 2.65 sessions on average, and attendance was repeat rather than one-off, with a handful of youth attending all nine sessions. This repeat behaviour indicates that youth find value in these sessions.

Satisfaction is very high and stable across all nine sessions. 97.6% of responses rated sessions good or better, with nearly half rating sessions "Excellent."





Alison Courses

In 2025, youth completed 2,293 courses. youth@WORK actively promote Alison courses as an avenue for upskilling and learning. These are free online courses, with over 6,000 short courses to choose from, across a variety of fields and disciplines, including health, management, English and much more. Youth can choose between online certificates, diplomas, and learning paths.



YES Modules

As part of the YES programme, all youth are encouraged and expected to complete the work readiness, entrepreneurship and digital skills modules provided on the educational app. These modules are designed to enhance professional and personal skills.



Career Workshops

These are facilitated specialized group coaching sessions for youth placed at major funders. In 2025, events included:

- **The Value of a Side Hustle**
Fostering entrepreneurial thinking and financial resourcefulness
- **The Power of Resilience**
Equipping youth with emotional tools to handle corporate stress
- **HR Basics**
Teaching essential corporate literacy and office workplace norms

Learning: Where potential expands

The learning pillar is built on a single conviction: that a young person who is only prepared for today's job is not truly prepared for the future. Through Think Tank Thursdays, online courses, career workshops and skills modules, youth are exposed to ideas, tools and opportunities that reach far beyond their immediate placement — developing the whole person and instilling the habit of lifelong growth.



●● Wellness



“I was emotionally overwhelmed and struggling to cope after the loss of my baby. I felt mentally exhausted, anxious, and emotionally drained, and it was affecting both my personal life and my ability to focus on work. The wellness team gave me emotional support during one of the most difficult times in my life.”

Youth, 26

youth@WORK understands that nurturing the mental health and wellness of the youth is critical to success in life, not just success in this programme. They also recognizing that life throws challenges sometimes where a person might need a bit more support and it is that support that can make the difference.

That is why youth@WORK has a dedicated wellness team that ensures the youth successfully navigate their new corporate environments, maintain their mental well-being and complete their work contracts.

youth@WORK's wellness team conducts phone check-ins, mental health counselling, structured workplace questionnaires, and in-person mediation, when needed. This allows the team to proactively identify youth who might be struggling, as well as consistently give youth the reassurance and opportunity that additional support is available.

“Thank you for the emotional support, the wisdom, the patience, the consistent check-ins across every aspect of life, and for holding space for my growth in ways that went far beyond work. I'll carry those lessons and that care with me always.”

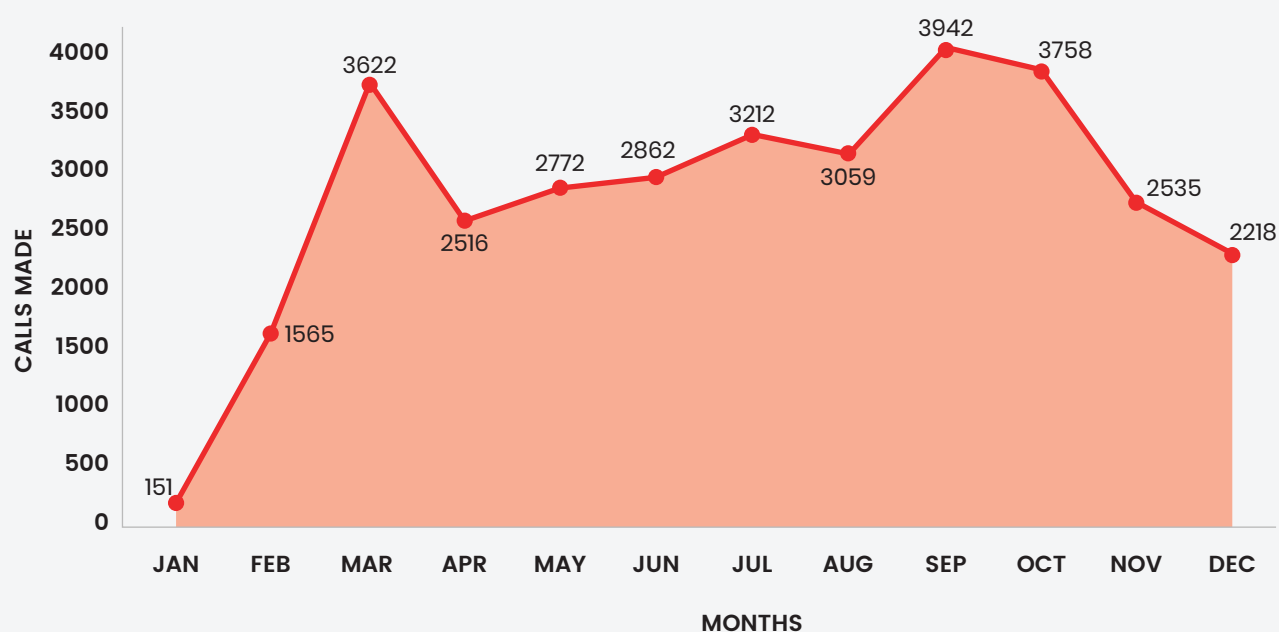
Sibulele Stuurman, 28



Mental Health Support

The wellness team provided 32,604 telephonic support sessions in 2025, with support remaining consistent throughout the year.

Monthly Wellness Calls Conducted



While the numbers are large, the true impact of those calls is what emerged through those discussions. These are a few of the themes:

- Youth described the workplace as their first professional environment.
- The wellness sessions were a safe space for open discussion.
- Stress, anxiety, and workplace adjustment were common areas where youth needed support.
- Participants who felt supported by supervisors demonstrated stronger motivation and emotional resilience.
- Youth expressed increased confidence and independence as a result of the sessions.

“Before engaging with the wellness team, I was feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and unsure about how to cope with both work and personal challenges.”

Blessing Marawu, 21





Workplace Questionnaires

The wellness team uses structured questionnaires that provide consistent wellness monitoring throughout the youth's placement journey. This data-driven process of wellness tracking provides proactive identification of youth who might be struggling and pinpoints issues that might otherwise go unnoticed, ensuring better experiences for both the youth and the host site.

OVERALL WORK EXPERIENCE



3.69/5

Majority of youth reported positive workplace experiences

SUPERVISOR ENGAGEMENT



3.61/5

Supportive supervision strongly influenced motivation and retention

HOST SITE EXPERIENCE



3.59/5

Majority of youth felt welcomed and included in their placements

The questionnaires showed some positive reinforcement trends, with these factors contributing significantly to their confidence and emotional wellbeing:

- Supportive supervisors
- Respectful workplace cultures
- Opportunities to learn new skills

Additionally, the data showed some trends across sectors:

• Education Sector:

Strong emotional support, welcoming workplace environments, and positive relationships with staff members

• Corporate and Administrative Sector:

Improved professionalism, communication skills, workplace etiquette, and confidence

• Manufacturing and Operational Environments:

Skill development through practical work exposure and structured routines



Mediation

In many cases, the proactive phone calls and workplace questionnaires identify issues before they escalate. However, when the need arises, youth@WORK provides mediation on a case-by-case basis, in partnership with the host site.

In one instance, youth@WORK successfully deployed a structured, multi-session counselling and professional development intervention. This support successfully resolved the conflict, stabilised the placement and concluded with highly positive feedback.

Wellness: Where people are seen

youth@WORK knows that work is not lived in isolation from life. The wellness pillar exists to ensure that when life becomes difficult, as it inevitably does, no young person faces it alone. Through proactive check-ins, mental health support and workplace mediation, the wellness team focuses on the human being doing the work.

●● After the Programme: Alumni Growth and Next Steps

20% absorption

youth@WORK has achieved a 20% absorption rate, meaning youth who have been offered permanent employment with their host site after their 12-month placement. This is **8 times larger** than the 2.5% absorption rate needed to improve on the B-BBEE scorecard through the Youth Employment Service (YES) initiative.

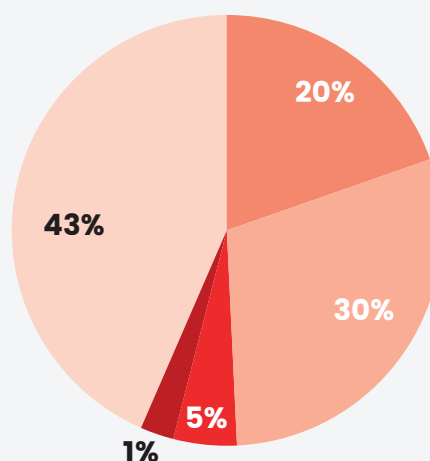
This is the result of a carefully curated journey, the strength of the partnerships built in the process and the remarkable youth we have in this country.

Absorption is only one of many possible outcomes, with many youth choosing to study further or start their own business. youth@WORK is continually seeking to understand the aspirations of youth after the programme and looking for ways to enhance and support the growing alumni network.

This work begins before the youth become alumni, as exiting the programme can be a stressful experience for many youth, so helping them prepare is critical. This is both a practical exercise, as well as an emotional one.

How do you feel about what comes next for you after the program ends?

- Positive
- Somewhat Positive
- I don't know how I feel
- Somewhat Negative
- Negative



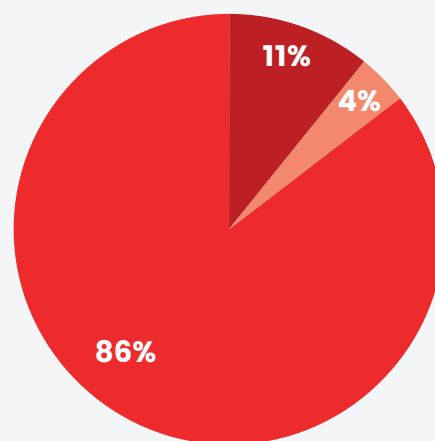
73% of the respondents report a 'positive' or 'somewhat positive' outlook at exit, which is a meaningful finding, from a cohort where many are still job-seeking. The 20% who don't know how they feel reflects the reality of re-entering a difficult labour market and speaks to why post-programme support is so critical and ripe with possibilities.

"I am grateful for this opportunity, I have gained skills and improved as a person."

Qhawekazi Angel Ndoro, 25

Would you like to stay in the same line of work after the YES programme?

- Yes
- I'm not sure
- No



Data has consistently shown that this journey is critical to help youth learn what they're good at and what they are interested in, so to see 86% of the respondents interested to stay in the same line of work after their placement allows them to set goals and focus on what their next steps should be to achieve those goals in their desired line of work.

"Thank you for the opportunity, I have found my passion."

Sinethemba Lali, 35

"All I can say is thank you so much for the opportunity it changed my life."

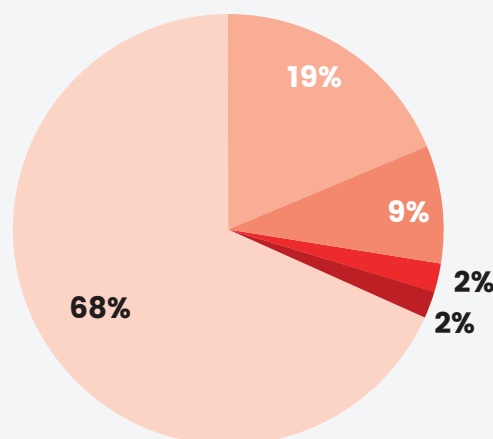
Zikhona Madyibi, 34

Alumni Insights:

As always, youth@WORK is using data to guide decision-making as it seeks to build and support alumni, thus, alumni are surveyed one month after leaving the programme.

How are you feeling about your ability to earn an income to support yourself now and in the future?

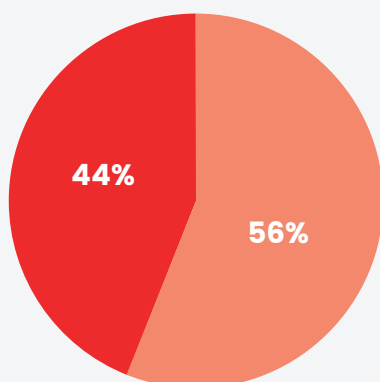
- Positive
- Somewhat Positive
- I don't know how I feel
- Somewhat Negative
- Negative



When asked how youth feel about their ability to earn an income to support themselves now and in the future, 87% responded 'positive' or 'somewhat positive'. This is significant, not only because less than half of the respondents are not employed, but that data is showing an upward trend in positivity from the time youth are asked prior to exiting the programme. This speaks to the fact the confidence, resilience and hustle of the youth. The data also shows that youth are actively achieving, seeking and creating opportunities:

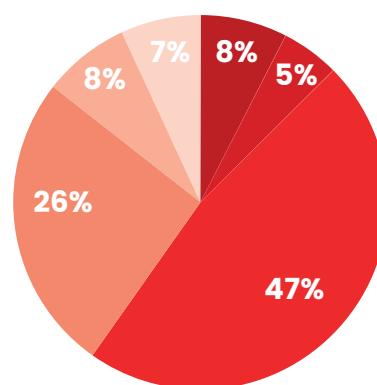
Are you Employed?

● Yes ● No



Employment Status

● Contract ● Seasonal ● Full Time
● Part Time ● Self Employed
● Program/Internship

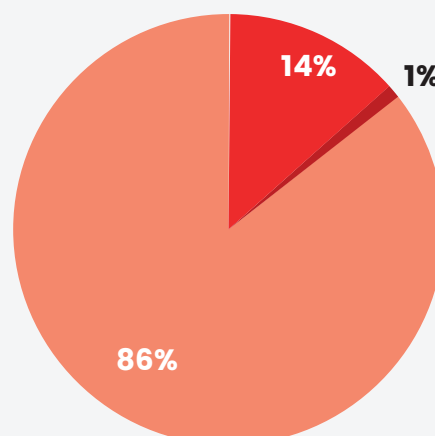


It is worth noting, that while only 8% of the respondents stated they are self-employed, youth@WORK is not only seeing a growing trend in youth entrepreneurship which presents numerous opportunities to support and grow these youth businesses, but it is also important to note numerous youth@WORK alumni have now become employers and host sites for future youth placements.

The positivity and resilience of the alumni is an outcome of the programme itself, as the data shows that 86% of the respondents saw the programme as far more than just a job for 12 months, but an opportunity to learn and grow, which they are using to propel and build their futures and their goals.

Which statement describes how you look back on the program?

- The program gave me a job for 12 months and provided me with tools and information which I am continuing to use.
- The program gave me a job for 12 months.
- The program didn't work for me.



06

THE BUSINESS
IMPACT - YOUTH
WHO BUILD



The Business Impact – Youth Who Build

The results and stories contained in this report are very much a shared success and would not be possible without the remarkable host sites and supervisors who are co-creators in shaping the experience for the youth. In creating this benefit for youth, youth@WORK is also steadfastly committed to a simultaneous benefit for the businesses themselves.

● The Programme Works for Businesses

youth@WORK again uses data to prove that this is true. Of the site hosts that responded to the survey in 2025, the results overwhelming show that this is a programme which is working for businesses.

98%

say youth placements contributed considerably or significantly to growth

89%

confirmed they viewed this programme far beyond just a youth work placement programme

92%

indicated they would host another youth through youth@WORK

100%

already had or would recommend youth@WORK to another business

“The candidates have taken huge responsibility in our finance Department. They have taken learning very seriously. Perfect time management and attention to detail. They have been upskilled to know legislative requirements and continue applying themselves and confidentiality take on responsibility.”

Mtobisi Mlungisi Aubrey Hlengwa, Hoopers Suzuki Durban Central

When direct supervisors were asked about the quality of the youth placed under their supervision:

93%

Good match for the position
excellent or good

96%

Good match for your company
excellent or good

94%

When asked if they would promote the youth within their own company if they had a position available.

“The youth have shown a lot of courage, positive attitude towards their work, are accountable and always willing to learn.”

Siyanda Mbonamb, Ndukwenhle High School

When supervisors were asked what the top skills the youth in their companies exhibited, these were the top ones that surfaced:

- Ability to work under pressure
- Honest
- Reliable
- Taking pride in their work
- Active learning
- Seeking knowledge
- Works well with others
- Adaptability and flexibility

What they describe is a portrait of an ideal employee. These are not attributes that can be taught in a classroom, listed on a curriculum, or conferred by a certificate. They are the qualities that determine whether a person will succeed in any role, in any sector, at any level. And these are the qualities that hiring managers say are hardest to find and most impossible to train into someone who doesn't already have them. That supervisors across industries, from automotive to financial services, from manufacturing to education, independently surfaced the same character profile speaks to the heart of youth@WORK. youth@WORK is not just preparing young people for a specific job, it is building the kind of people that businesses actually want to keep.

In a labour market where employers routinely cite attitude, reliability and coachability as bigger hiring barriers than qualification gaps, this is not a soft outcome. It is a competitive advantage for the youth, for the businesses that host them, and for any funder who wants their investment to produce durable human capital rather than temporary placement statistics.

● The Programme Grows Businesses

Over the last seven years, youth@WORK has increasingly seen youth growing their own businesses. Some of these youth are programme alumni, some are youth-led business who found partnership with youth@WORK a critical step in their entrepreneurial journey, allowing them to not only grow their business, but also to support other youth through placements in their own businesses.

There is no better way to understand this than to hear from the youth entrepreneurs themselves. Wongalethu and Litha's journeys showcase what is possible when youth entrepreneurs are supported and invested in.

● Youth as growth engines: **Wonga Technologies**

Wongaletu didn't set out to build a company.

He set out to solve a problem nobody else was solving. Working as an IT support technician for one of South Africa's large internet service providers, he noticed something consistently frustrating: when clients needed on-site support, providers sent them away to find their own contractors without any referral or recommendation. Wongaletu filled that gap. In 2018, he founded Wonga Technologies, offering Wi-Fi support and troubleshooting directly to clients. The service was good, so word spread quickly and the business grew.

By 2020, Wonga Technologies was thriving. Then COVID hit and almost everything stopped. Rather than fold, Wongaletu pivoted. Listening closely to clients who were frustrated with unreliable service from large providers, he began selling Wi-Fi connectivity directly. Starting within his personal network and offering referral incentives, he rebuilt momentum. He brought in young people to support sales, trained them on IT basics, and structured their pay around commission, keeping his overhead manageable while growing his reach. The model worked and demand grew, but turning demand into revenue at scale meant being able to pay more people than he could currently afford. Growth had hit its ceiling.

This is where youth@WORK made the difference. Since June 2024, Wonga Technologies has had 14 youth placed through youth@WORK across sales, marketing, finance, IT support and operations. The results speak for themselves: six are active placement and eight have successfully completed the programme, with seven of



those eight being hired into permanent employment at Wonga Technologies. What began as subsidised capacity became a talent pipeline, as youth@WORK effectively funded the growth phase that allowed Wongaletu to identify, train and convert reliable young employees without carrying the full cost of doing so during a critical period of expansion.

Many entrepreneurs navigate the gap between early growth and sustained business alone. Wongaletu didn't have to. Eight years ago, Wonga Technologies was a one-man operation. Today, it employs 14 people and is still growing.

“It was more than just employment. It was an opportunity to learn, adapt, build confidence and understand the value of responsibility, teamwork and consistency in the workplace.”

Ziphile Mahanda, alumni employed at Wonga Technologies

● Youth as growth engines: **Loxion Mobile Library**

From a Box of Books to a National Platform.

Litha arrived at his first youth@WORK onboarding session as a young person looking for direction. He left with something he hadn't expected: a sense of purpose. Placed as an assistant teacher and trained in the Shine Literacy Hour programme, he discovered that helping children learn wasn't just a job, it was a calling. At that point, Loxion Mobile Library existed only as an idea. youth@WORK supported Litha to bring it to life.

When COVID-19 shut down schools and community programmes in 2020, youth@WORK made a decision that would prove pivotal, continuing to support young people financially while encouraging them to serve their communities. Volunteering at a local soup kitchen, Litha overheard children describing how hard it was to keep up with schoolwork without resources or contact with teachers. That conversation became the founding moment of Loxion Mobile Library. Armed with literacy training from youth@WORK and Shine, he began visiting ECD centres, playgrounds and community spaces with a drum and a box of books.

youth@WORK provided Litha with a contract extension that allowed him to save and plan until he could formally register Loxion Mobile Library as an NPC. Innovation grants and competition prizes funded branding and operations. A partnership with HP, facilitated through youth@WORK, brought donated laptops and introduced him to digital learning platforms. By 2022 and 2023,



youth@WORK was creating employment opportunities for three young people from his own organisation. Today, Loxion Mobile Library has reached more than 1,500 children through literacy, homework support and mobile reading programmes. It holds partnerships with multiple organisations including Shine Literacy, The Learning Trust, ChangeX and Book Dash, and has received both local and international funding.

Litha has presented his work at national and international conferences, been recognised through awards and honours, and built an organisation that employs and uplifts young people from the same communities he once volunteered in.

“Without youth@WORK, I honestly do not believe Loxion Mobile Library would have developed into the organisation it is today. They invested in me as a young person, and through that investment, hundreds of children and young people have benefited from opportunities that continue to grow year after year.”

Litha Sam-Sam

07

THE BIG PICTURE



The Big Picture

Since 2019, youth@WORK has placed 17,155 young South Africans into structured work opportunities. Over R773 million has been paid directly into their hands. With the 2026 cohort now active, that figure will cross R1 billion.

We call it one billion in motion, not because of what it represents on a balance sheet, but because of what it represents in the world. One billion rand in groceries bought for families who were struggling. In school fees paid by children who became breadwinners. In savings accounts opened by young people who had never had reason to open one before. In businesses started, in teams built, in communities changed by the presence of a young person who was trusted, trained and supported at exactly the right moment.

That is what one billion in motion looks like. And it is only the beginning.



What seven years proved

youth@WORK has spent seven years answering a question that most people assumed had no good answer: can you create meaningful, sustained employment for South Africa's most excluded youth, at scale, with rigour, with measurable outcomes for both the young person and the business and do it consistently, year on year, in a country where the structural barriers are immense?

The answer, demonstrated across nearly 18,000 young people, 977 businesses and nine provinces, is yes.

We proved that a 95.6% retention rate is achievable when the support architecture is right. We proved that youth with no prior work experience can become the employees that supervisors describe as reliable, honest, hard-working and indispensable. We proved that small businesses can grow, not in spite of structured youth employment, but because of it. We proved that the same young person who arrives uncertain of their own value can leave with the confidence, skills and self-knowledge.

We did not prove this once. We proved it every year, on a growing scale, with improving outcomes.

What the next chapter requires

The model works. The infrastructure exists. The demand from youth, from businesses, from a country that cannot afford to leave another generation behind, has never been greater.

What the next chapter requires is partners who understand that the most powerful investments are not the ones that solve a problem once, but the ones that build the capacity to solve it permanently.

Every additional cohort of youth placed is not just more of the same. It is more businesses stabilised, more households supported, more alumni who become employers, more young entrepreneurs who return to the ecosystem and host the next generation.

This is how transformation scales. Not in single interventions, but in systems that grow stronger with every cycle.



The invitation

South Africa does not have a youth problem. It has an infrastructure problem, a gap between the potential that exists in abundance and the structures needed to unlock it. youth@WORK is that structure. Tested, proven and ready to grow. If you are reading this report, you are exactly the kind of partner we are looking for. Not someone who wants to write a cheque and move on. Someone who wants to be part of a story that is still being written and who understands that the most important chapters are always the ones ahead.

Litha is building a literacy organisation that is changing what childhood looks like in his community. Wongalethu is building a technology business that is employing and developing the next generation of young South Africans. These young people did not arrive at these moments alone. They arrived here because funders chose to act. Because businesses chose to open their doors. Because youth@WORK chose to build infrastructure instead of programmes.

Now, we are asking you to join us.

The next cohort is ready. The next Litha is sitting in an onboarding session right now, not yet knowing what he is capable of. The next Wongalethu has an idea and no resources to pursue it.

Together, we build youth who build businesses who build South Africa.



“ Thank you for all you do for South African Youths. We love you. I love you. Thanks for the wonderful opportunity you have offered me. ”

Phat'uxolo Manziya, 24



“ I am so grateful for the opportunity I got to be under this internship. I have learnt a lot, one day I also want to have my businesses and help end the issue of employment in our country. ”

Nombuso Nqobile Mbokazi, 24



To find out how to become a funder, host site or strategic partner, contact us at info@sayouthatwork.com or visit sayouthatwork.com