



## Underpaid and exploited

### Pay-related employment concerns experienced by young workers

Despite a considerable amount of research indicating 'serious deficits in the treatment of young people in regard to their financial arrangements at work', there has been little research conducted into the specific nature of pay-related workplace conflicts experienced by employed young people. This issue is explored in 'Underpaid and exploited: Pay-related employment concerns experienced by young workers', a paper published in the September 2007 edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.26, n.3).

Written by Queensland University of Technology researchers Paula McDonald and Sandra Backstrom, and Aaron Allegretto, the former Coordinator of the Young Workers Advisory Service (YWAS) in Brisbane, the paper outlines the results of a study which analysed 688 'episodes of inquiry' relating to pay/remuneration concerns made by young people to YWAS between 2002 and 2005. Those who made these inquiries were all under 25 years of age and living in either metropolitan or regional areas of Queensland. Researchers aimed to identify any 'patterns of concerns' about pay/remuneration evident from these inquiries, the most common and the most serious types of complaints, and the levels of compensation received by those young people who sought legal redress as a result of their issue.

Results indicated that over half of these inquiries (58%) were related to unpaid wages or benefits, 21% related to underpayment, 18% related to dismissals, 7% related to cash-in-hand payments and 4% related to overpayment. No significant gender differences were identified in relation to these inquiries. Only 10 inquiries resulted in formal applications for financial compensation. Among those that were settled financially, compensation payments ranged from \$152 to \$15,000.

While this study was conducted before the enactment of the federal government's WorkChoices legislation in 2006, the authors contend that changes to unfair dismissal provisions contained in the legislation are 'likely to increase the insecurity of employment for certain groups of young people'. They suggest that young workers 'would do well to increase their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in employment' and that 'schools, governments and parents all have a role in shaping this heightened consciousness of employment citizenship'.

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### EXTRACTS FROM YOUTH MONITOR

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#### Why do they do it?

ACT Commissioner for Children and Young People Linda Crebbin has begun a consultation process to gauge young people's opinions on the ethics of filming events such as assaults, sexual activity or drug-taking. This follows a number of well-publicised incidents in which violent attacks on ACT students were filmed by student bystanders using mobile phones. Crebbin has established two focus groups, one with members of a youth organisation and one with clients from a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Initial results indicate a difference in the responses gained from these groups. 'Those who have been involved in violence have a more realistic experience and don't think it's right for it to be filmed; the ones who are one step removed from the action and watching from a safe distance see it as entertainment', Ms Crebbin said (*Canberra Times* Saturday Forum supplement, 2/06/07, p.3).

#### Whole-school education is the answer

A two-year study of bullying, involving 4,000 high school students from 6 schools in western Sydney, has concluded that bullying can be reduced through whole-school anti-bullying strategies in which students, teachers and parents are all educated about how to prevent and manage bullying. The study was conducted by Dr Roberto Parada from the Centre for

# Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies

## Learning about work, working life and post-school options: guiding students' reflections on paid part-time work

S. Billett & C. Ovens, *Journal of Education and Work*, v.20, n.2, 2007, pp.75-90.

Recognising the 'authentic working life experiences' that many students nowadays gain through paid part-time employment, a project was developed to use students' guided reflections on these experiences to inform their classroom learning about 'work, the world of work and post-school options and pathways'. Six schools were recruited to participate in the project: four from metropolitan Brisbane and two from regional Victoria. After the recruitment phase, teachers in participating schools were assisted to identify and develop a series of guided reflection activities which were appropriate to their particular school contexts. These activities were then implemented with students in Years 11 and 12. Student worksheets and evaluative surveys, and researchers' interviews and interactions with teachers and co-ordinators served as data sources for the evaluation of the activities. While findings indicated that the activities generally achieved their intended educational purposes, the success of the activities was dependent on a number of variables, including teachers' capacities to facilitate learning. Students' paid work experiences were found to constitute 'a potentially viable and highly accessible alternative to work experience programmes'.

## Restorative justice in schools: A New Zealand example

J. Wearmouth, R. Mckinney & T. Glynn, *Educational Research*, v.49, n.1, 2007, pp.37-49.

Restorative justice is being explored in a number of areas around the world as a positive and constructive community response to the unacceptable behaviour of individuals. This paper outlines the aims of restorative justice in a school context. It then outlines the procedure for a restorative justice conference developed by the Restorative Practices Development Team at the University of Waikato School of Education in New Zealand. This process draws on the pre-European tradition of restorative justice protocols and customs among Maori communities. The process is illustrated through the story of 'Wiremu', a 15-year-old male student at a local area school in Aotearoa New Zealand, who was engaging in challenging behaviour at school and within his community. Wiremu's unacceptable behaviour was resolved as part of a positive community discussion about Wiremu involving members of his extended family, friends and community members (including those affected by his antisocial behaviour) and Wiremu himself. In developing restorative justice mechanisms, schools need to remain open to input and support from families and local voluntary community groups.



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Educational Research at the University of New South Wales.

Dr Parada said that the anti-bullying strategies used in his study encouraged bystanders to intervene and offer support to victims when bullying occurs. Professor Rhonda Craven, also from the UNSW Centre for Educational Research, added that these strategies taught bullies 'how to empathise with their victims' and taught victims 'how to avoid being a target, how to be more resilient and how to seek help' (Sydney Morning Herald, 12/07/07, p.3).

## Alcohol education course may become a prerequisite

A number of major Australian universities, along with Geelong Grammar School in Victoria, are investigating the possibility of making all prospective students undertake an online alcohol education course as part of their enrolment process. A course used by 500 universities in the USA is currently being adapted for use in Australia. The course teaches young people about the effects of alcohol and gives advice on responsible drinking (*Herald Sun*, 30/07/07, p.12).

## Rural students missing out on uni

The cost of tertiary education is preventing many high school leavers in rural Victoria from going on to university, according to data gathered from 43,000 students who completed their Victorian Certificate of Education last year. Research conducted at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Post-compulsory Education indicates that only 33% of rural students who finished Year 12 last year have enrolled at university, compared with 52% of Year 12-leavers from urban areas (*Australian*, 4/07/07, p.23).

## » Youth Field Xpress

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