

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING RESEARCH PROGRAM

## RESEARCH REPORT

# Geographical and place dimensions of post-school participation in education and work

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Australian Government





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## **RESEARCH REPORT**

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# About the research

## *Geographical and place dimensions of post-school participation in education and work*

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Monash University

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of aspirations as a key influence on young people's engagement with post-school education and training. However, aspirations may be hampered by socioeconomic status and geographic location. This research explores how young people who live in the same neighbourhood may experience it differently and hold different values and aspirations in relation to further education and post-school pathways. The research was conducted in four sites: two neighbourhoods in regional and rural Gippsland, Victoria, and two urban fringe sites in South Australia. The research highlights the importance of having a nuanced understanding of the geography and characteristics of neighbourhoods in order to tailor policy responses to suit specific cohorts of young people.

### Key messages

- In all four geographic areas young people are significantly influenced by their educational and career 'inheritance', envisaging they will follow in the footsteps of their parents. By encountering educational cultures different from their own, young people are more likely to make life choices divergent from those they 'inherit'.
  - Boys behave differently from girls. Young men follow the traditions of their fathers, while young women are more likely to leave an area to pursue opportunities.
  - There was no discernible pattern of difference amongst the four areas in relation to expectations that young people progress to university, but schools that were more socially mixed and with students from families with a history of tertiary education were more likely to consider this option.
- Perceptions of place are important and 'not all bad', with many young people electing to stay in, or return to, their familiar environment. However, exposure to new ideas or experiences can 'disrupt' the strong ties of the familiar, leading to opportunities that challenge and overcome disadvantage.
- As has been identified in previous research, practical and financial constraints significantly impact on aspirations and opportunities. A particular concern for young people is access to education provision and the cost of transport. A tolerable travel-to-study distance is a key factor, especially once they finish school.
- Vocational education and training (VET) provides an essential pathway of choice to further education and work.
  - There is evidence of school retention rates increasing because of the presence of VET in Schools programs.
  - Certificate I and II courses establish an important foundation for learning not acquired in a school setting.
  - The status difference between VET and university pathways is an enduring issue and continues to perpetuate a powerfully entrenched view that VET has to do all the 'heavy lifting' in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

Dr Craig Fowler  
Managing Director, NCVER

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# Contents

Tables	6
Executive summary	7
Introduction	9
Rationale for the research	10
Structure of the report	10
Literature and contextual review	12
Geography	12
Gender	14
Ethnicity	15
Traditions and the influences of family and the familiar	16
Critical events and disruptions	17
Research methodology and design	21
Identifying the effects of neighbourhood	21
Methods	22
Analysis	24
Selection of the ‘neighbourhood’ sites	24
Findings	27
Overview	27
Pathways of engagement in education or training	27
Geographic influences	33
Gender influences	37
Traditions and the influences of family and the familiar	39
Critical events and disruptions	44
Conclusion	48
Pathways of engagement in education or training	49
Geographic and place influences	49
Gender, family influences and the familiar	50
Disrupting pragmatic rationalism and envisaging new imaginaries	50
Suggestions for policy and practice	51
References	54
Appendix	58
NVETR Program funding	63

# Tables

1	Selected neighbourhoods	24
A1	Young people's career aspirations and pathways summarised by career category, neighbourhood and pathway	58
A2	Most popular career categories	58
A3	VET pathway preferred career categories	59
A4	University pathway preferred career categories	59
A5	Women's career aspirations and pathways	60
A6	Men's career aspirations and pathways	61
A7	Men's parents' careers and qualifications	61
A8	Women's parents' careers and qualifications	62
A9	Stakeholders and organisations in South Australia and Victoria	62
A10	Young people's education and geographical location at point of interview	62



# Executive summary

Understanding the factors that drive the educational aspirations, choices, life chances and imagined futures of young people in different geographic settings is important for designing appropriate policy responses. The role of ‘geography’ in the deliberations of young people is a key aspect. In this instance ‘geography’ encompasses the influence exerted by neighbourhood and school characteristics in determining the aspirations, choices and chances of young people who live in places characterised by socioeconomic disadvantage. We look specifically at the influence of geography on young people in urban fringe, rural and regional areas in Australia and its effect on their post-school labour markets and education and training opportunities. This was one of three topics that comprised a three-year program of work: *Geographical dimensions of social inclusion and vocational education and training (VET) in Australia*, a research partnership between the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training at Monash University and NCVER.

In this study, we aim to understand the processes that shape young people’s aspirations and post-school educational participation. In particular, we investigate the following two questions:

- What are the specific mechanisms through which the characteristics of neighbourhood might affect an individual?
- How do individuals manage their lives in neighbourhoods of socioeconomic disadvantage, make decisions about where, how and with whom they spend their time and imagine their education and work futures?

The study uses data from qualitative research conducted in four sites: two neighbourhoods in regional and rural Gippsland, Victoria, and two urban fringe sites in South Australia, in the north and south of Adelaide. A qualitative methodology was utilised to investigate the mechanisms that enable some people in low socioeconomic status (SES) neighbourhoods to overcome neighbourhood effects and participate in post-school education and training. This methodology also enabled a detailed exploration of young people’s life worlds in different geographic contexts.

The data that emerged from this study provide an understanding of some of the geographical aspects of social exclusion. They also provide an understanding of the role that education and training can have in reducing the risk of social exclusion and in improving labour force participation. These data provide needed insights into engagement in education or training for young people in urban fringe, rural and regional places; they also provide rich information and exemplar cases of the critical factors and influences that facilitate different post-school outcomes for such young people.

These critical factors and influences fall into three categories. The first category involves geographic factors and influences – both the physical and structural geography of the places in which young people live and learn and the accompanying psychology attached to those places. The second category encompasses social influences. These include the influence of gender and gender-based family traditions and expectations; the influence of family lifestyle, values and dispositions; and the influence of the social networks with which young people and their families are involved. The third category is concerned with the influence of what we have called ‘critical events and disruptions’ on young people’s experiences, choices and aspirations; these disruptions can often prompt the development of new aspirations and capabilities.

The body of this report describes important differences in young people’s experiences, perceptions and aspirations across the four study sites, but it also identifies a number of common themes in this

experience. Across all four sites, vocational education and training (VET) was found to offer an important pathway for young people's entry into education and training as well as being a significant mechanism for the re-engagement of young people not in education, training or employment. When it came to other or further pathways and possibilities, however, our study found that numerous factors combine to constrain some young people's aspirations and choices. Popular culture and policy might celebrate mobility and dismiss the notion of staying local as a less attractive option, but our study found that numerous geographic and social factors force many young people to remain in the local place.

These geographic and social factors include the practical and structural aspects of place, such as distance from centres of learning, lack of transport, lack of broadband, costs of travel, limited education providers and programs, and the unintended consequences of funding policies for education and training. These factors also include what we have termed 'the social perceptions of place' or 'the psychology of place'. Even where schools encouraged young people to consider university study, the influences and expectations of families, friends and other social networks often meant that young people chose to stay in the local place, adapting their aspirations in ways that were gendered and which replicated family and local traditions. This was found to be the case for young men in particular.

This is not to suggest that the local place had a negative or limiting impact on all young people. A number of young people described the inherent attractiveness of their local place, as well as the value of a close-knit and supportive community and its ability to ameliorate the isolation of distance and lack of local opportunities. It is also not to suggest that these young people are locked into fixed trajectories. In many instances, a specific experience or the influence of an individual or encounter served as a turning point, enabling them to navigate complex choices and circumstances or to imagine a future different from that of their family and friends.

Our findings in this study reinforce those of previous studies: they suggest that geography and place continue to be powerful influences in shaping young people's career aspirations, imaginings and choice. They also reinforce the finding of earlier studies – that there is no single determinant of education aspirations. Instead, the aspirations and choices of young people who live in socially disadvantaged urban fringe, rural and regional places are the product of a complex interplay of factors. These include specific local factors that encourage young people to remain in their place, as well as state and national education policies that expect them to be willing to travel in search of wider opportunities for education and employment. This means that young people, and the places in which they live and learn, cannot be reduced to simple or deficit explanations of rural location and socioeconomic disadvantage. Having said this, policy attention must continue to be paid to the practical and structural factors such as distance, transport, access to information and communication technologies and education provision that influence such young people's outcomes.

# Introduction

This project explored the influence of neighbourhood factors, including access to education and training and other aspects of community, on education and training outcomes. This was one of the three topics that comprised a three-year program of work: *Geographical dimensions of social inclusion and vocational education and training (VET) in Australia*. The aim of the program has been to provide an understanding of the geographical and place aspects of social exclusion and the role that education and training can have in reducing its risk and in improving labour force participation.

Concern about the geographical dimensions of social inclusion is illustrated by findings of the Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008), commissioned by the Australian Government, which recognised that socioeconomic factors are often associated with a particular geography and are crucial in determining post-school participation in higher education. The review recommended that a target be set at federal level: that, ‘40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds will have attained at least a bachelor-level qualification by 2020’ (p. xiv). This is in contrast to the 29 per cent at the time and the equity target of 20 per cent participation from low socioeconomic groups. Bradley et al. found that, while there were high participation rates in further education and training among metropolitan students, between 2002 and 2007 the already low rates of participation amongst students from regional locations had declined (Bradley et al. 2008). The report’s recommendations for regional Australia highlighted both the difficulties and deficiencies of current provision outside metropolitan locations and argued for greater attention and funding. The report also emphasised the importance of engaging local communities in developing appropriate strategies. According to the Bradley Review, geography and socioeconomic status are two major factors affecting the educational outcomes of young people.

With increasing evidence and concern about the spatial concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage, place-based policy responses, sometimes in combination with people-based policies to ‘improve’ both place and residents, have emerged across different levels of government in Australia (Baum et al. 1999; Baum, Mitchell & Han 2008; Byron 2010; Randolph 2004). These policies have highlighted many factors affecting the participation of students from regional Australia in education and training (Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee 2009), including the significant access barriers of distance and costs. Geography can therefore have far-reaching effects on people’s lives and opportunities, but generally people accommodate spaces and places according to the ways they live their lives. Less well understood is how these processes work and whether place-based, people-based strategies, or a mixture, will address geographical and social and educational inequalities (Griggs et al. 2008). Smyth and McInerney (2013, p.2) contend that:

the effect of neighbourhoods and places on the lives, educational opportunities and life chances of young people from contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage ... is not well understood, and invariably reinforces deficit stereotypes.

Similarly, Meegan and Mitchell (2001) call for research that understands people’s ‘everyday life worlds’, because, as Lupton (2010, p.117) argues, place-based interventions have become conceptually confused. In reporting our findings of recent empirical research in two states in Australia we seek to contribute to theoretical understandings of people’s everyday life worlds. Our aim is to shed light on the conceptual confusion that often underpins place-based and people-based policies and practices and to contest deficit stereotypes of young people’s post-school pathways.

## Rationale for the research

This report discusses findings from a study in two regions of Australia, involving two sites in Victoria and two sites in South Australia. Qualitative research was used to build on and explore in depth the findings from a quantitative study conducted in the three-year (2010–13) funded research partnership between Monash University and NCVET. The project, *Geographical dimensions of social inclusion and vocational education and training (VET) in Australia*, examined the role of community and neighbourhood factors in predicting the post-school destinations of young Australians (Johnston et al. 2014). In the quantitative component of this research, Johnston et al. (2014) identified the continuing importance of the socioeconomic status of neighbourhoods in explaining variations in student outcomes, although particular neighbourhood characteristics such as residential turnover, the composition of households and the multicultural nature of neighbourhoods also play a role. The characteristics of schools were also recognised as making an important difference, including school leadership and teacher quality. However, these school effects factors are neither easily measurable nor separable from the characteristics of the neighbourhoods to which they relate.

Qualitative methods were therefore used to research in more depth the mechanisms that enable some people in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods to overcome the effects of their neighbourhoods and participate in post-school education and training. A methodology that enabled exploration of the importance of schooling and neighbourhood factors in people's lives was therefore required. While the quantitative research provided information about the average case, a closer examination of the data showed that some neighbourhoods with below-average socioeconomic status have above-average student outcomes and vice versa. In this research, the qualitative methodology enabled the identification of critical factors that may be responsible for divergences between similar neighbourhood types.

We contend that a nuanced understanding of the 'geography' and 'place characteristics' of neighbourhoods is required in order to tailor policy responses for specific cohorts of students and we use a comparative analysis to test this proposition. By examining areas with different neighbourhood and schooling characteristics and contrasting their post-school labour markets and education and training opportunities, we build an understanding of the factors affecting the educational aspirations, choices, life chances and imagined futures of young people from urban fringe, rural and regional places.

The study addresses the following broad questions:

- What are the specific mechanisms through which the characteristics of neighbourhoods might affect an individual?
- How do individuals manage their lives in neighbourhoods of socioeconomic disadvantage, make decisions about where, how and with whom they spend their time and imagine their education and work futures?

## Structure of the report

The report analyses new empirical data collected by the authors during 2013. Details of the selection of the areas for study, the methods used, the sampling frame and forms of analysis are outlined in 'Research methodology and design'. This is preceded by a review of the Australian and international literature on neighbourhood and socioeconomic effects on post-school educational outcomes. This section identifies the importance of the relationship between opportunities and the capability to follow particular options, in other words, the relationship between structure and agency. The

literature review provides an account of the concepts that have informed the framework for the research design and analysis and the focus on the role of social-cultural understandings and perceptions of opportunities. This framework uses the idea that the educational aspirations and imagined futures of young people are contextualised in localised understandings of their potential choices and life chances. These ideas have led to a focus on narrative accounts by young people of their experiences at school and their transition to life after school. However, in order to understand more fully the circumstances in which these young people are living their lives and making decisions, the study also draws on the understandings and accounts of the local policies and practices of the educational providers and personnel from key education and training networks operating in the case study regions. The analysis of these different accounts is presented in 'Findings'. The 'Conclusion' draws out important outcomes in relation to existing understandings in the literature and makes some suggestions for future policy and practice.

# Literature and contextual review

Over the last five decades or more, an extensive literature has developed that discusses the relationship between education and social mobility. Much of this research has drawn on the field of sociology and focuses on the role of social class differences in determining the relationship between neighbourhoods and families and educational and socioeconomic outcomes. Brown, Reay and Vincent (2013, p.638) claim, however, that the substantial research in the sociology of education literature developed in the last 25 years on ‘student identities, aspirations and experiences of school, college and university has been overlooked, partly because it is primarily based on qualitative rather than quantitative methods of data collection’. Brown, Reay and Vincent (2013) argue that this neglect not only points to a weakness in mobility studies but also to a failure of sociologists of education to engage with the broader policy debates about social mobility. Other disciplines have filled this research vacuum; for example, economists and social geographers who have investigated neighbourhood effects and educational outcomes (see Johnston et al. 2014 for a summary of literature in this field). However, Johnston et al. (2014) note that their findings (part one of this study on neighbourhood characteristics and the post-school destinations of young Australians) provide information for the average case only. They argue that further research, using qualitative methods, is needed to identify how neighbourhood effects work. Similarly, Harding et al. (2011) argue that most existing social science research on neighbourhood effects focuses on the macro level and fails to examine the processes and outcomes when different young people get different ‘doses’ of the same neighbourhood. As a consequence, Harding et al. (2011, p.278) urge the case for more qualitative or mixed methods research to identify the ‘sources of effect heterogeneity’. In other words, there is a call for more research that can reveal the ways by which different aspects of living in a neighbourhood, including how people relate and participate in the structures, opportunities and networks available in their neighbourhoods, affect individuals and their educational outcomes.

In the Australian context, there is considerable literature relating to the post-school trajectories of young people, often in the form of government-funded and initiated reports such as the OnTrack survey and reports based on the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data. However, such literature tends to be more descriptive than analytical, and the predominant focus on large-scale quantitative data means that in many areas the literature (and therefore our understanding) lacks the depth and texture afforded by qualitative data. This literature therefore suffers from the problem identified by Harding et al. (2011) of being too macro and lacking the complementary advantages of a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, which can give both the broader patterns of young people’s choices as well as explore the rationales and influences behind those choices.

Despite the limitations of the existing literature relating to young people’s decision-making and participation in post-school work and training, it is possible to gain a broad descriptive picture of the Australian situation and the key variables that affect young people’s post-school trajectories. The literature review in this report focuses on the key areas of geography, gender, ethnicity, traditions and the influences of family and the familiar, and critical events and disruptions.

## Geography

The physical geography and the economic make-up of Australia creates its own set of barriers and facilitators in providing opportunities for young people as they make the transition from school to work and further education or training. Australia has a highly urbanised population, centred in a small number of large cities around the coastline, with the remainder of the country sparsely populated.

This distribution means that the differences in circumstances between young people living in urban areas and those in rural areas can be significant. There is a consensus in the literature on rurality and aspirations that Australian rural communities, with their low density of population, experience more significant forms of geographic isolation than almost any other industrialised country (Alloway et al. 2004; Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013). Absent from the literature, however, is a nuanced approach to 'rurality'. Rural Northern Territory or Western Australia, where 'neighbours' may be hundreds of kilometres apart, is qualitatively different from rural Victoria, for example, where there is a denser population and a different economic structure. These differences are largely ignored by the existing literature, which tends to make sweeping statements about the experiences of 'rural' young people, often without specifically identifying their location, a problem acknowledged by Alston and Kent (2009) and Robinson (2012, p.81):

Within the Australian context, the trio of terms 'regional', 'rural' and 'remote' are used to characterize portions of the continental interior beyond the densely populated, coastal urban- and peri-urban fringes. Careless use of these terms potentially ignores enormous diversity in population size, resources, social relationships, economic status and access to services between different localities.

Welch, Helme and Lamb (2007) identify that the structure of smaller regional and rural high schools and the difficulties of attracting highly qualified teachers, means that, alongside a lack of school choice, rural students often have restricted subject choices at high school level and restricted access to vocational programs and opportunities. This in turn may limit their access to qualifications and thus restrict their labour market and further education opportunities. Walsh and De Campo (2010) note that, although government campaigns for increased school engagement in rural areas have had some success, there has been no associated increase in post-school opportunities for rural young people.

Accessing opportunities such as a university place that requires a high ATAR<sup>1</sup> score at a research-led Group of Eight university or a specialist vocational training provider typically requires that young people migrate to an urban centre (Alston & Kent 2009; Mills & Gale 2008; Walsh & De Campo 2010), with the cost of travel and accommodation creating barriers for young people who already tend to be socioeconomically disadvantaged compared with their urban peers (Hillman 2005; Polesel 2009). In a country where young people typically remain living at or close to home during their tertiary studies, distance also creates a cultural barrier to participation in post-school education and training (Mills & Gale 2008; Bryce & Anderson 2008). Hillman (2005) found that, where young people from rural areas did move away from home to access tertiary education and training, they often found that the difficulty of maintaining family responsibilities from a distance placed significant pressure upon them. This in turn impacted upon their studies, although they tended to persist with their course.

Research in the United States and the United Kingdom has identified that differences in post-compulsory education pathways have repercussions for people's labour market outcomes, to the extent that these different pathways in post-school participation; that is, university vs VET, simply reinforce social class differences and social immobility, even though vocational education may act as a safety net against unemployment for lower-status social groups (Iannelli 2013; Lucas 2001; Reay et al. 2011; Thompson & Simmons 2013). Geographic and social mobility are therefore also increasingly understood to be key factors in the continued reproduction of inequality amongst young people (Bauman 2001; Urry 2007). For some young people, this inequality is a function of immobilisation, of being 'tied to the ground' (Bauman 2001, p.40) or 'locked into the local' (Thomson 2007, p.81). Elliot

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<sup>1</sup> ATAR = Australian Tertiary Admission Rank.

and Urry (2010, pp.82–3) have described the capacity for mobility and the resulting new forms of social inequalities:

In the society of multiple and intensive mobilities, the gap between those keeping on the move and those less on the move – to say nothing of those not moving at all – is of fundamental significance.

In Australia, unequally distributed opportunities for mobility frequently translate into unequally distributed participation in post-school education in ways that particularly affect rural and regional young people (Alloway et al. 2004), although immobility is not solely a rural and regional issue, as Black's (2007) study of educational provision in urban Melbourne schools observes.

In one of the few qualitative studies to examine the effects of rurality upon young people's post-school choices, Mills and Gale (2008) paint a bleak picture of a remote ex-mining town, where high levels of chronic unemployment, the resultant poverty and geographic isolation combine to restrict young people's opportunities. The lack of locally available employment or educational opportunities means that young people have little understanding of, or access to, alternatives beyond what is presented in their community, and as Corbett (2000) describes in his study of Nova Scotia, those young people who do display academic potential are encouraged to leave the district. Mills and Gale (2008) therefore describe an 'inheritance', whereby a parental and community history of low educational attainment, followed by long-term unemployment and economic marginalisation, creates cultural assumptions for young people – that those are the only options available to them. This notion of 'inheritance' is also present in the United Kingdom work of Heath, Fuller and Paton (2008). Without the possibility of 'disruption', as described by Granovetter (1973, 1983), young people therefore tend to reproduce the status quo, and in isolated rural communities, where poverty prevents physical exit (Mills & Gale 2008), the possibility of disruptive encounters with cultural 'others' (Broadbent & Cacciattolo 2013) is extremely limited. While Mills and Gale (2008) describe an extreme situation, the factors identified above exist more frequently in rural than in urban areas and are likely to contribute to the lower levels of interest in university study among young people in rural areas, as described by the Australian Department for Education (2010).

Such studies are a reminder that the affective aspects of im/mobility, and the imagined lives/futures/possibilities that contribute to it, may be as powerful in shaping young people's post-school choices as the experience of im/mobility itself. The issue may be less whether young people are more or less geographically mobile, but whether their geographic im/mobility affects 'their *capacity to imagine certain possibilities as being desirable*' (Sellar & Gale 2011, p.121, italics in original). Alston and Kent (2009) and Drummond, Palmer and Halsey (2013) also point to the powerful role that perception of place can play in influencing young people's geographic mobility and the associated role of government policy in affecting the structures of rural economies and communities. The greatest insights into young people's post-school education participation may therefore arise from research that investigates the relationship between their geographic and social mobility, their different capacities for each of these, and their different capacities for the development of future aspirations and imagined lives.

## Gender

Gender is one 'conventional' angle of analysis of post-school transitions that is largely under-researched in the Australian literature. Gender differences in survey data are noted but the reasons for them appear to be unexplored. The academic literature that notes gender as worthy of attention appears to be so limited that only fragments of a picture of gender issues in post-school pathways are



presented. Hillman and McMillan (2005) identify gender as a non-issue in post-school transitions, finding no statistically significant differences between male and female young people in terms of immediate post-school outcomes. Harrington (2006), however, has explored the ways by which constructions of masculinity influence young men's choices with regard to early school leaving and post-school education and training. She argues that higher rates of early school leaving among boys can be linked to work attached to specific identities as they attempt to live out particular constructions of masculinity. Mills and Gale (2008) also argue, with respect to rural young people, that in the longer term constructions of gender in rural areas may limit the pathways available to young women beyond tertiary education, although this argument is not expanded. Similarly, Butler and Ferrier (2006, p.581) question the assumption that the growth in participation in vocational education and training by women is not an issue and that gender inequality has been deemed fixed. Instead, they argue that, while women are participating more in education and training than previously (48 per cent of all VET students), their participation tends to be in already feminised sectors, continuing the gender segregation which shapes the Australian workforce. Likewise, McLeod (2007) argues that young women who leave school early have less favourable further education and employment opportunities than young men, but that policy and practice communities have paid this less attention because gender equity has been considered as solved. Given the prevalence of early school leaving in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, a focus on gender and post-school pathways is much needed.

## Ethnicity

Statistics show that there is a stark divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in Australia, with Indigenous youth tending to have lower school-completion rates, lower rates of university attendance, lower levels of qualifications achieved post-school and higher rates of unemployment (Hillman & MacMillan 2005; Walsh & De Campo 2010; Underwood & Rothman 2012a, 2012b). As Hillman (2005) identifies, there is also a strong link between Indigenous background and socioeconomic status, with Indigenous young people more likely to come from lower socioeconomic groups. Walsh and De Campo (2010) identify the rural nature of many Indigenous communities and argue that the disadvantages of living in a rural community, discussed above, also impact upon Indigenous young people, placing them at a further disadvantage in terms of opportunities and access following school.

However, the complexities behind these simplistic divides are less well explored by the literature. Hillman (2005) identifies that young Indigenous Australians are more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to hold caring responsibilities in their family and community that may prevent or limit their participation in post-school education and training. These responsibilities may, for example, prevent young people from studying away from home or making a commitment to full-time study, or they may have a detrimental effect on their achievement in tertiary education. Hudson (2008) argues that wider community programs for Indigenous communities such as the Australian Government-funded Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) have had far-reaching negative effects. Hudson posits that state programs of benefits for Indigenous communities have created a culture of dependency, resulting in a cycle of joblessness and poor educational attainment. Alston and Kent (2009) comment more generally that policy schemes to encourage workforce and educational participation often actually act to further exclude young people in remote areas (who are also more likely to be Indigenous) because of the structural inequalities of access to civic amenities such as Centrelink offices or training centres.

Equally important in the context of Australia, a country of expansion through inward migration, is the impact of other ethnic backgrounds on educational outcomes. The international literature suggests that race and ethnicity intersect in complex ways with other aspects of advantage and disadvantage such as class and gender (Vincent et al. 2013). For example, research conducted in the Netherlands shows that ‘living in neighbourhoods with higher proportions of immigrants increases the educational commitments of migrant youth compared to living in neighbourhoods with lower proportions’ (Nieuwenhuis et al. 2013, p.1). Yet in stark contrast to the literature on post-school pathways in the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe, the literature on ethnicity (beyond the Indigenous/non-Indigenous dichotomy) is rather limited in the Australian context. Ross and Gray (2005) and Underwood and Rothman (2012a, 2012b) comment on the overall higher-than-average university participation rates of young people with a primary language other than English (PLOTE), attributed to the value ‘Asian’ cultures place on education, but there is no further breakdown of this observation or attempts to refine the analysis with regard to individual ethnic groups or their socioeconomic and cultural characteristics. Similarly, Johnston et al. (2014) identify that ethnic diversity is positively related to university aspirations and to application to homework. Given the vast body of literature and research on ethnicity elsewhere in the world and the role of ethnic identities in influencing post-school choices and opportunities (see, for example, Reay et al. 2001), a more detailed exploration of the role of ethnicity in the Australian context is needed.

## Traditions and the influences of family and the familiar

Throughout the Australian literature on post-school engagement runs a theme of ‘tradition’, which can be linked to the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and his concept of *habitus*. Informed by this Bourdieusian sense of habitus, tradition refers to the ways people develop a range of dispositions, often tacitly, that orientate them to the way they live their lives and embody these dispositions in the practices and decisions associated with the contexts and networks they inhabit. This use of Bourdieu’s work in Australia to provide tools for research in the field of post-school participation – as well as the conceptual framework of habitus – extends a literature well represented in many United Kingdom and European studies of education and work transitions (see, for example, Ball et al. 2002; Ball, 2006). Young people’s dispositions towards their socioeconomic-geographic location are largely inherited from their family situation and affected by their wider community, meaning therefore that parents often emerge as a key influence upon young people’s choices and trajectories.

Parents are documented in a range of survey data as a key source of advice, influence and information for young people as they make decisions about their futures (Marks et al. 2011; Bryce et al. 2007; Broadbent & Cacciattolo 2013; Bedson & Perkins 2006). Marks et al. (2011) note that even as their children step out into the ‘adult’ world, parents remain key facilitators to ambitions and educational projects. Facilitation can be financial and emotional, with parents exerting influence on their children’s post-school choices both through advice given and often ‘quiet support’ (Marks et al. 2011; Bryce et al. 2007; Bedson & Perkins 2006; Australian Department of Education 2010). Quiet support may also be associated with parental expectations, an issue well documented in the international literature relating to educational achievement. These expectations extend to students’ post-school transition choices (Mills & Gale 2008; Australian Department of Education 2010) and can be linked to the fact that young people from higher socioeconomic groups are more likely to go on to university study than those from lower socioeconomic groups, regardless of their ATAR scores (Marks et al. 2011).

The Australian Department of Education (2010) notes that where young people are enrolled in non-government schools they and their families feel that they have better access to information about post-school choices than students enrolled in government schools. Bedson and Perkins (2006) report that parents from higher socioeconomic groups tend to be more confident about understanding post-school options. Here, both monetary advantage and social confidence combine to give young people from higher socioeconomic groups greater access to information and opportunities regarding post-school participation in work and education.

There is strong evidence internationally as well as in Australia that the socioeconomic status of young people is linked to their educational outcomes (Ball 2006). Financial wealth, or lack of it, can facilitate or restrict young people's pathways in a number of ways (Hillman & McMillan 2005). Mills and Gale (2008) illustrate the effects of financial poverty starkly in their case study of one small rural community where widespread poverty not only restricted young people's access to information about post-school options but also affected their ability to attend school and access the curriculum, with families lacking the financial means to pay for basic school supplies such as textbooks. Similarly Alston and Kent (2009) note that issues of financial accessibility have a significant impact upon high school completion.

Financial restrictions continue to impact upon young people who proceed to higher education, as the cost of travel and/or accommodation may limit their choice of universities, while the need to undertake paid work while studying is seen as a significant burden which may limit their achievement, although few cite it as a reason for leaving their studies (Hillman 2005; Rothman 2005). Both Polesel (2009) and Alston and Kent (2009) found that significantly higher-than-average numbers of young people in rural communities were deferring their university places, often as a financial strategy to give them time to earn money or secure funding for their studies.

## Critical events and disruptions

It is clear that geography, tradition and family play a key role in the availability of opportunities for young people. As we have seen, socioeconomic status, geographical location, gender, ethnicity and parental influence are all interrelated to create each young person's socio-spatial location, with this specific location either opening up, closing off, or obscuring possible post-school pathways. As Bryce et al. (2007) and others (Mills & Gale 2008; Hillman 2005) point out, a young person's socio-spatial location also affects their access to information about possible post-school pathways and their confidence in seeking out such information. This reading of the literature cited above constructs an account of socioeconomically disadvantaged young people's lack of horizons and ambition and the ways by which their socio-spatial location can inhibit aspirations due to a lack of role models, experiences and opportunities (Bryce et al. 2007; Bryce & Anderson 2008; Mills & Gale 2008; Marks et al. 2011). This negative framing of aspirations has precluded exploration of the aspirations that young people making the transition from school do hold and exploration of those young people with resilient personalities who experience the constraints of their neighbourhood differently (Corbett 2000; Nieuwenhuis et al. 2013).

Aspiration is perhaps best described as 'the capacity to imagine futures' (Sellar & Gale 2011, p.122). As one recent report notes, 'there is no single determinant of education aspirations, but rather a complex interplay between related considerations which operate cumulatively to reflect how far a student hopes to progress in school, and the degree of education they seek to achieve' (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013, p.32).

The key factors in determining young people's aspirations include their experiences of schooling and level of school attainment as well as those of their peers; their knowledge and awareness of and exposure to post-school education and career opportunities; parental, family and community views on education and career; the availability of advice, support and assistance in relation to post-school transitions; and the complex constellation of conditions and circumstances that make up socioeconomic status. Ancillary influences range from parental levels of educational attainment; the cost of further qualifications, including the opportunity cost associated with further study instead of employment; the availability of transport; and local economic conditions and employment opportunities (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013). Recent reports by Homel and Ryan (2014), Gemici et al. (2014) and Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) highlight the importance of aspirations, finding that they have a statistically significant impact upon young people's future education and economic destinations.

Although Homel and Ryan (2014) and Nguyen and Blomberg (2014) do not explore how aspirations are formed, Gemici et al. (2014) found that parental influence, peers' aspirations and gender were key to the formation of young people's aspirations for their futures. This links to Mookherjee, Ray and Napel's (2010) suggestion that aspirations are 'based on the current or past achievements of one's neighbours, located within some given spatial or social window' (2010, p.141); that is, the socioeconomic and spatial milieu of a young person influences how they imagine their future. A recent report on the aspirations of young people in regional Australia also adopts this metaphor, suggesting that 'individuals have an aspirations window through which they view the possibilities that exist within their social sphere' (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013, p.27). The report suggests that the aspirations of young people in rural or regional settings are both particularly dependent on local contexts and conditions and highly subjective. They are a function of the perceptions of those young people of the opportunities that are available – or unavailable – to them in their own community. They also depend heavily on the aspirations and choices of their peers. This means that 'young people formulate aspirations on the basis of what they can "see" and experience' (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013, p.28). And the effects of this can be to limit those aspirations. Gale et al. (2013) conclude that many young people's choices and decisions about their futures, and how they should best navigate those futures, 'draw on a limited archive of experience and knowledge' (2013, p.6).

The picture that therefore emerges from the existing Australian literature is that the key barriers or advantages presented by the 'conventional' structural factors of socioeconomic status, gender, location, race and ethnicity are those relating to opportunity. In this context, notions of 'choice' become problematic, as lack of opportunity can limit or preclude choice. Young people's trajectories post school may therefore be as much a consequence of the intersection of the factors that locate them socially and spatially as of conscious 'choice'. As many have done in Europe and the United States, Nairn and Higgins (2011) in a New Zealand context raise the concept of choice as a neoliberal construct that ignores the socioeconomic, geographic and informational divides between young people. The physical space and social, economic and educational structures that shape young people's lives are more than merely a backdrop to the choices they make, but are instead instrumental to those choices. As Corbett (2000), Alston and Kent (2009) and Drummond, Palmer and Halsey (2013) have all noted, these hold significant policy implications: government policies do much to shape those surroundings and therefore also act to construct and constrain the 'choices' available to young people. There may therefore be a tension between young people recognising the value of mobility, in that it enables them to take up educational opportunities, and the lack of opportunities for them to successfully do so.

Research that has tried to understand the tensions between people's perceptions of opportunities, the structural context of opportunities and how people avail themselves of opportunities has often adopted a biographical narrative interpretive approach. Such an approach explores people's life histories and lived situations in order to understand their personal meanings and their sense of themselves and their identity/ies in their socio-historical context: it is these perceptions that can affect people's agency and their capacity to engage with so-called barriers or opportunities (Warren & Webb 2007). For example, the influential work on careership undertaken by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) identifies the way young people's perceptions of opportunities set their 'horizons for action' and provides a pragmatic rationality to justify choices and decisions that have been restricted by opportunity. Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) further developed these ideas, employing the term 'learning career', which connects Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus', 'dispositions' and 'capital' to the idea drawn from symbolic interactionism – that how people interact is crucial to the formation of meaning and their understanding of experience. Therefore, the concept of learning career is an attempt to understand how structural opportunities interact with individual agency. Consequently, research informed by this perspective has shown that, although people's dispositions are often enduring, they can change over time and in relation to the ways they live their lives. If contexts change, particularly through exposure to new social networks, new possibilities and ideas and new social capital or resources become available and affect people's dispositions or habitus.

Opportunities that disrupt patterns of limited aspirations and alter people's horizons for action tend to come in the form of 'critical events'. This notion can be linked to Granovetter's (1973, 1983) concept of 'weak ties' and disruption, whereby encounters with individuals beyond the 'strong ties' of familiar networks can form 'bridges' to ideas and opportunities which would otherwise remain unknown. Laub and Sampson's (2003) conception of 'turning points', significant events and relationships that influence life choices, is also relevant. In Mills and Gale's (2008) example, cited earlier, of an isolated rural community, the chances of making an 'acquaintance' who acts as a 'bridge' to other possibilities (Granovetter 1973) are almost nil. In a similar way Broadbent and Cacciottolo (2013) describe the idea of 'cultural convergence', whereby the interaction of different educational cultures enables young people to re-examine their assumptions and educational choices in the light of other information and attitudes.

Extensive consultation in the Gippsland region of Victoria to determine future policy directions has identified the educational aspirations of students and families as one of the most frequently cited issues for attention (Dow, Allan & Mitchell 2011). This echoes a growing international policy focus on lifting the aspirations of young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Payne 2012). It also raises the question of whether it is rurality itself or the socioeconomic profile that plays the greatest role in defining young people's aspirations for the future. Alloway and her colleagues note that 'how and why "rurality" impacts upon young people's lives is ... a complex and contested field of inquiry' (2004, p.28). Along with Robinson (2012), they note the existence of 'a deficit model of Australian rurality' (p.28), one that frequently equates or conflates a rural geographic location with socioeconomic disadvantage. This, they argue, obscures the far greater effect of socioeconomic status than geographic location on both young people's success at school and their post-school aspirations. Corbett's (2000) work on Nova Scotia is important in challenging this deficit model of rurality and also of the choice to stay in rural locations; as Gale et al. note, 'im/mobility is not strictly linked to in/equity' (2013, p.126).

We have argued in the introduction and in this review of the literature that geography can have far-reaching effects on people's lives and opportunities, but qualitative, often biographical, research has shown that people mediate spaces and places differently in the ways they live their lives. By focusing

on what Harding et al. (2011) call the 'sources of effect heterogeneity', that is, reasons explaining different post-school outcomes, this report will also address the concern raised about existing research by Smyth and McInerney (2013) that: 'the effect of neighbourhoods and places on the lives, educational opportunities and life chances of young people from contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage ... is not well understood, and invariably reinforces deficit stereotypes' (p.2). Furthermore, we would argue that biographical qualitative research into the lived experiences of young people, informed by Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, dispositions and capital, will provide nuanced accounts of the effects of neighbourhood. By focusing on young people's narratives of their lived experiences, the study has the capacity to elicit understandings of the implicitly pragmatic, rather than rationally informed, decisions that young people use to make choices and decisions. In doing so, such research will be able to explore how young people who live in the same neighbourhood may experience it differently and hold different values and aspirations in relation to post-school pathways.

# Research methodology and design

## Identifying the effects of neighbourhood

In the NCVER research report, *Are neighbourhood characteristics important in predicting the post-school destinations of young Australians?*, Johnston et al. (2014) identified the continuing importance of the socioeconomic status of neighbourhoods to explain variations in student outcomes, although particular neighbourhood characteristics such as residential turnover, the composition of households and the multicultural nature of neighbourhoods also play a role. Johnston et al. (2014) also argued that the characteristics of schools were recognised as making an important difference, including school leadership and teacher quality, but these school effects factors are neither easily measurable nor separable from the characteristics of the neighbourhoods to which they relate.

A mixed methodology was identified as the most appropriate for researching in more depth the mechanisms that enable some people in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods to overcome neighbourhood effects and participate in post-school education and training. A further in-depth analysis of the Australia-wide quantitative data (Johnston et al. 2013 pers. comm.) identified variations between low-SES neighbourhoods, with some low-SES neighbourhoods being associated with low education performance and some with high education performance. These discrepancies and distinctions within and across postcodes and state electoral divisions within and between urban and regional and remote areas suggested several interesting sites for comparative research. In addition, in the context of Victoria, these areas have been the focus of Victorian Government educational reform through the development of models of geographic ‘educational precincts’, which comprise VET and higher education providers and schools. Similarly, in South Australia, since 2002 there has been a history of community-based partnership initiatives, including, for example, Northern Futures, a not-for-profit community-based organisation that works closely with local councils and the state and federal governments to foster education and training and workforce development in the areas north of Adelaide.

This qualitative study was therefore designed to map the opportunity structures afforded by an educational precinct or co-located providers in order to investigate areas such as the VET/tertiary education and labour market infrastructure, including access to affordable and attainable providers of education and training as well as to industry and business types, and the attitudes of employers to education and training and recruitment and selection. From the perspective of young people, the focus was on understanding their aspirations and the values and attitudes and social practices of the networks in which they participated via their families and neighbourhoods. The potential opportunities developed through these structures and the attitudes young people developed in these contexts to future learning and employment (or what in the literature is called ‘habitus’ and ‘horizons for action’) reflect the resources (capital – social, economic and cultural) they are able to draw on in planning and making decisions about their post-school pathways. The research design adopted an inclusive approach to examining the social processes shaping young people’s VET/tertiary education and labour market participation and ranged from a consideration of the factors that promote (or act as bridges), to those that inhibit (or act as barriers) their participation.

The aim of this qualitative research was to provide a way by which to explore understandings of the importance of schooling and neighbourhood factors in people’s lives. A qualitative methodology was developed to investigate the following broad questions:

- What are the specific mechanisms through which the characteristics of neighbourhood might affect an individual?
- How do individuals manage their lives in neighbourhoods of socioeconomic disadvantage, make decisions about where, how and with whom they spend their time and imagine their education and work futures?

A three-level approach was developed to explore these questions – at the macro level of state policy and practice, the meso level of institutions and organisations and the micro level of the young person’s experience in these neighbourhood contexts. The rationale for seeking to answer these research questions through these three categories was to attempt to locate the accounts of young people in the wider context in which they lived their lives. By researching the viewpoints not only of young people but also those of representatives from the key educational organisations and associations involved with young people and their transition to education and work, the approach sought to collect data that could situate young people’s meanings in specific contexts and forms of interactions. In other words, the methodology drew on the work of Bourdieu and was designed to locate the habitus, dispositions and the capital of young people within the wider fields of power in which they participated (Warren & Webb 2009). Biographical narrative was selected as the main approach to the data collection, along with a thematic analysis of young people’s accounts of living in neighbourhoods identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged since they ‘offer rich rewards in making sense of self and others in social and historical contexts’ (Merrill & West 2009, p.11).

## Methods

### *Phase 1*

In this phase a desk-top analysis was undertaken to reveal the current pattern of participation in education and training and to describe the characteristics of the labour market at the sites identified for investigation. The purpose of this phase of data collection and analysis was to provide an understanding of the relative opportunities for the education and employment of young people. The sources of information included: local authority area websites describing the area characteristics; postcode level census data; and data obtained from My School websites.

### *Phase 2*

This phase involved consultations through individual and group interviews with key informants at each site to understand the provision and patterns of education and training. This phase of the research aimed to produce a detailed understanding of the supply and demand issues as they related to skill needs, employment opportunities and the provision of education and training and support for post-school participation at the selected sites. These key informants (56 people in total; see appendix table A9), identified from education providers and key personnel from education organisations and networks (hereafter referred to as stakeholders), included:

- public and private education and training providers (schools, colleges and universities)
- local learning and employment networks (LLEN)
- representatives from state departments and local government
- representatives from other local non-governmental organisations.

Through contact with these key informants, a population of young adults (16–25 years) was identified and invited to participate in Phase 3.



### Phase 3

Phase 3 explored education, training and the labour market issues from the perspective of young people and their social networks. Purposive opportunity sampling<sup>2</sup> was used to identify young people who were still engaged in school beyond Year 10 (school student group) or who were participating in VET, college or university programs (post-school group). Focus group and individual interviews were conducted with 52 young people (16–25 years old: 24 in the school student group and 28 in the post-school group, see appendix, table A10) from low-SES neighbourhoods to determine the influences on their decisions to continue with education and training at each site. A thematic analysis of the focus group interviews identified a number of different post-school trajectories and patterns of participation related to different family habitus, gender and local structures with the potential to provide opportunities for these young people. These emerging themes formed the rationale for the selection of 16 participants from the focus group sample (four from each site) for a deeper investigation of these different pathways. The focus of the second interviews with these 16 individuals was to develop case studies to identify and map the relationships between young people and the key people influential in the development of their dispositions and understandings of the education and employment opportunities available to them. The issues explored in these focus groups and case studies included young people's:

- perceptions of the available opportunities for education and training
- understanding and knowledge of the local labour market
- understanding and knowledge of local support networks available to help young people navigate the education and training opportunities and the local labour market
- understandings of their family traditions, perceptions of education and employment and experiences of schooling
- perceptions of their imagined futures, including what they would like to 'be' and how they imagine their future lives unfolding.

Of note is that, while the purposive sampling resulted in a near gender split in the group being studied – 24 males and 28 females – the cultural and ethnic background was predominantly white Australian. Only 12 of the participants self-identified with other ethnic or cultural backgrounds, including seven with European and United Kingdom parental origins; the other ethnic backgrounds were: one Maori; one Filipino; one Mexican; one white South African; and one Indigenous person. Therefore, a limitation of the study was not being able to examine the effects of race and ethnicity to any extent. The sample did not reflect the increasing diversity in one of the postcode areas in which new cultural communities are settling. Finally, as indicated above, in purposefully sampling those who were the exceptions in continuing in education and training in order to understand how they achieved this in these areas of low post-school education and training participation, the sample did not include those disengaged from education or training. Nevertheless, in interviews with education providers and key personnel working with young people (the stakeholders) all types of post-school pathways were discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> Purposive sampling is designed to select a sample of a population with the characteristics that fit the interest of the study and enable the research questions to be answered. The sample is not intended to be representative of the wider population. Combined with opportunity sampling, this selection process draws on the researcher's knowledge of field sites and their contact with local gatekeepers (such as schools and colleges) where there are young people who fit the population criteria and who might be willing to participate in the research.

## Analysis

The thematic analysis was developed:

- to bring together the insights identified through Phases 1 and 2 about the opportunity structures and practices available to young adults in these selected sites, with the insights identified from Phase 3 on how young people experience and understand these opportunities and make choices and decisions about their futures.
- to provide an understanding of the context of decision-making. In other words, by combining the qualitative understandings of how young people make choices and decisions with the knowledge generated about the opportunities structures and practices operating in the specific sites, the analysis seeks to identify the heterogeneous effects of neighbourhoods on education and work outcomes.

## Selection of the 'neighbourhood' sites

A closer examination of the quantitative data that linked the average neighbourhood characteristics, derived from the census data (and using postcodes), to the longitudinal surveys of young people (LSAY data, 2003 cohort) showed that some neighbourhoods with below-average socioeconomic status have above-average student outcomes and vice versa (Johnston et al 2014; Johnston 2013, pers. comm.). These apparent anomalies were discernible in a range of neighbourhood types across the states and territories in, for example: areas experiencing industrial restructuring and the changing role of manufacturing in the local labour market; areas of increasing population through the growth of the mostly private urban fringe residential housing market; and more remote regional communities (more than three to four hours drive from metropolitan areas). By correlating postcodes with LSAY data, four neighbourhoods in two states (Victoria and South Australia) were identified as exemplifying the different dimensions and findings of the quantitative study and needed further exploration. All four neighbourhoods were identified as 'low SES'; they encompassed both urban fringe and regional and rural areas; and two had positive and two had negative scores in relation to the norm for young people's educational 'Performance Index' in areas of low SES (see table 1).

**Table 1 Selected neighbourhoods**

State	Postcode	Place <sup>1</sup> and area description		Number of cases in postcode	Low SES index for postcode	School Educational Performance Index
South Australia	5112	Northtown	Urban fringe	4	-1.18	- 47.82
Victoria	3858	Westvale	Rural/urban fringe	6	- 0.98	- 0.05
Victoria	3888	Eastshire	Remote	23	-1.14	0.07
South Australia	5163	Southland	Rural/urban fringe	22	-1.53	0.37

Note: 1. Fictional place names.

Source: Johnston (2013, pers. comm. derived from data analysed for the NCVET report); Johnston et al. 2014.

Given an identified lack of attention to geography in the literature, the current study sought a nuanced understanding of 'neighbourhood' from the perspective of those living in and around these postcodes, given indications that educational outcomes varied across these places of low socioeconomic status. The research sought to understand how the specific features and organisation of the participant's conceptualisations of 'neighbourhood' impacted on their career and life aspirations and decisions.

## Victoria

The two Victorian postcodes selected for study are located in the regional area generally known as Gippsland, a region characterised by large distances, diverse and challenging geography, and comparatively small communities. It covers an area in Victoria of over 42 000 square kilometres and had, in 2011, a total population of only 247 710 (Dow, Allan & Mitchell 2011). Such a large area does not readily lend itself to simplification. For the purposes of this research project, however, we have characterised it geographically as West and East Gippsland. For simplicity in the discussion of the findings and to differentiate between the two areas, we call West Gippsland, Westvale and East Gippsland, Eastshire.

East Gippsland (Eastshire) is a predominantly rural area, with a dispersed population of around 44 000, where some townships are up to 550 kilometres from the capital of Melbourne. Its traditional industries of agriculture, forestry and fishing are slowly shifting towards health, education and tourism, centred on the towns of Bairnsdale, Orbost, Sale and Mallacoota, among others. This creates precarious employment or unemployment for those seeking work in primary industries.

Although West Gippsland (Westvale) is more affluent and, especially at its western edges, is almost an extension of outer urban Melbourne, particularly around the Pakenham area, it is also undergoing changes in employment patterns in the area of Latrobe valley, around such towns as Traralgon and Churchill. This follows the closure of the State Electricity Commission, a major employer, and as more small dairy farms are brought under the umbrella of large corporations. Across both West and East Gippsland, there is a predominance of technicians, trade workers and labourers and an under-representation of professionals, clerical or administrative workers. Generational unemployment remains a defining characteristic of many areas, especially in East Gippsland.

Young people's current patterns of education show little signs of disrupting this trend. Young people across Gippsland are less likely to complete schooling than their metropolitan counterparts: in 2011, the Year 7 to Year 12 apparent retention rate was 70.5 per cent, well below the Victorian average of 85.6 per cent. They are also less likely to acquire upper tertiary qualifications. In 2011, a higher proportion of the Gippsland population held certificate-level qualifications than the Melbourne and Victorian average, but a much lower proportion held higher education qualifications (Dow, Allan & Mitchell 2011). Those young people who do complete school or go on to higher education are most likely to be young women. In 2011, only 63 per cent of young men in Gippsland were still at school at the start of Year 12, compared with 78.1 per cent of young women. This gender pattern is also evident at the tertiary level: two-thirds of the student body at Federation University's Gippsland campus are female (Dow, Allan & Mitchell 2011).

## South Australia

The two South Australian postcodes included in this study are located in the wider Adelaide area: Elizabeth to the north and Onkaparinga to the south. Again for ease of discussion of the differences between these areas we have called Elizabeth, Northtown and Onkaparinga, Southland.

The urban centre of Elizabeth (Northtown) is a purpose-built suburb, part of the City of Playford, conceived in the 1950s by the South Australian Housing Trust. It was designed to provide affordable housing on what was previously horticultural and agricultural land. About 30 kilometres north of Adelaide city centre, it is now an industrial location, where the major industry is manufacturing, including the car manufacturer Holden. Holden has signalled its intention to close in 2016. While the area retains rural surrounds, a number of housing estates have recently been built around the area. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census of 2011 records the population of Elizabeth at 82 000,

with a relatively high proportion of the population being of working age. The area is also characterised by low rates of formal qualifications and intergenerational poverty and unemployment (Carson & Kerr 2010). In addition, it is now seeing a shift in demographics with the arrival of migrants and humanitarian settlers in the area. The integration of large numbers of new arrivals, often speaking little or no English, is identified as a challenge for the area (South Australian Office for Youth 2010; Spoehr et al. 2009).

Onkaparinga (Southland) is located between 25 and 40 kilometres from the Adelaide CBD. With a population of 159 583 (ABS 2011) and comprising an area of 518.3 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the largest local government area in South Australia. To the west is the coastline of the Gulf St Vincent; to the east are the picturesque rolling hills and wine-growing area of McLaren Vale. Onkaparinga is more socioeconomically diverse than Elizabeth, although it also has significant pockets of deprivation and socioeconomic disadvantage. Like Elizabeth, it has also been affected by the decline of manufacturing, particularly car manufacturing, but this occurred ten years ago and increasingly the area relies on service industries (including artisan wine and food production and tourism) and small to medium-sized businesses.

Glover et al. (2010) identify both Onkaparinga and Elizabeth as amongst the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas in South Australia. They found a strong correlation between low socioeconomic status in these areas and poor educational outcomes. Elizabeth and Onkaparinga were also noted as having extremely low levels of parental participation in school activities, at a rate of less than 50 per cent (p.140).

# Findings

## Overview

Interviews with education stakeholders in the four neighbourhood areas confirmed findings from Johnston et al. (2014) that post-school participation in these areas of socioeconomic disadvantage was lower than that from areas of social advantage, but that there were variations within and between the four neighbourhoods. At the same time, discussions with the key stakeholders revealed that the postcode boundaries did not match people's conceptual maps of these areas and the way they lived their lives in these areas. More useful for identifying which organisations and locations should be the focus of the study of neighbourhood effects was the concept of 'travel to work or study area'. With this concept in mind we undertook interviews with key stakeholders and with young people who are currently participating in education and training in the broad areas we have identified as Westvale, Eastshire, Northtown and Southland.

## Pathways of engagement in education or training

The interviews with stakeholders in all four areas identified a strong commitment to increasing the post-school participation for young people from these low-SES areas and provided evidence of some success. Therefore in mapping the patterns of participation and the career aspirations of the 52 young people, we have identified not quantitatively significant patterns, but indicators of trends in the *pathways of engagement*.

### Finding 1: The important role of VET in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Careers requiring a VET pathway were the predominant choice of the post-school focus group participants and roughly half of the school student participants were aspiring to vocational education and training after leaving school. This suggests that the majority of the tertiary education aspirations of the participants were to be realised through a VET pathway. This finding could be influenced by the fact that three focus groups were held on TAFE campuses with enrolled TAFE students; however, the finding is consistent with Johnson et al. (2014, p.8), who found 'that students living in less prosperous neighbourhoods are more likely to have aspirations for undertaking vocational education and training'.

In this research vocational education and training was considered the normal pathway for those choosing to continue with education or training post school, regardless of the neighbourhood of socioeconomic disadvantage, whether it be regional or rural or urban fringe. Thirteen of the 24 school students aspired to a career pathway through VET, although at least two of these were also considering university. (See appendix table A1, which summarises the career aspirations and actual pathways of the 52 focus group participants, broken down by neighbourhood and by university, VET or other pathway.)

Eastshire: Of the three school students interviewed in the small town in Eastshire, the two male students aspired to vocational education and training. One was hoping to secure an on-the-job traineeship as a stock agent and the other an apprenticeship as a linesman.

Westvale: Of the eight school students interviewed at a Westvale school, one of the three female students aspired to a career in beauty therapy and was hoping to secure an on-the-job traineeship in a beauty salon but had also researched VET courses. Of the five male students, four aspired to a trade through an apprenticeship in the local area and one was undecided about a trade or university to do physical education teaching.

Northtown: Of the five young men interviewed at one school, one wanted to secure an apprenticeship as an electrician; one wanted to start his own gym and indicated this might require some VET qualifications in personal training. Of the four students interviewed at another school, one of the young women wanted to pursue something related to art and had been steered into a make-up subject at school because there were no other art subjects available. She was not clear about where she might study but one of her aspirations was to be a make-up artist, which would in all likelihood require a VET qualification.

Southland: There were two participants still at school in the Southland focus group. One wanted to leave as soon as he turned 16 years and secure a pastry chef apprenticeship. The other, a young woman, cited outdoor recreation as one of several career options, although she was unclear about where she thought she might study for qualifications. The options identified by both participants indicated that the VET qualifications they were undertaking while in school provided a foundation for their transition to further study post school.

## Finding 2: VET was also the location for re-engagement in education for young adults

Vocational education and training was valuable in engaging and re-engaging young adults. The overwhelming majority of the post-school group interviewed were studying in a TAFE (technical and further education) institute or a community/employer-based registered training organisation (26 of the 28 post-school participants were studying, or had studied, through a VET pathway). The qualification pathways followed by these young adults were not always linear with vertical progression through qualification levels within one vocational area or industrial sector. Young people often tried different areas of study until they found a vocational pathway leading to the employment to which they aspired. But several participants – those who had not completed Year 12 or obtained high enough school-leaving grades for progression to university – described how their chosen pathways through TAFE had formed an access route to university study. In both Southland and Westvale there were examples of study at certificate III, or certificate IV and diploma that articulated to degree study with the universities that were co-located with TAFE institutes. For those who had left school early, certificate I and certificate II courses provided an important foundation for learning that had not been acquired in the school setting. These TAFE courses provided a bridge to becoming re-engaged in education and training and enabled those who had not been in education or work for some time to redirect their lives towards a future pathway to employment.

However, state-based policies were found to cut across the role of VET in re-engaging young adults. In South Australia, we heard from the TAFE institute of the unintended consequences of the Skills for All policy. The policy had been introduced to provide greater competitiveness in the education market and to align skills provision with employer demand. One consequence of the policy had been the withdrawal of funding for some programs deemed to be in oversupply, such as ‘nail technology’. Yet

such certificate II programs had worked well to re-engage young people in Northtown, where there are high levels of intergenerational unemployment. We heard how often students on such courses would be the first in the family to undertake post-school study and would proudly bring in family and neighbours to the college graduation celebrations. Similar unintended consequences resulted from a recent Victorian Government decision to withdraw subsidies to students studying at lower or equivalent level qualifications. This decision particularly affected students from areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, who had to work to fund their living costs while still at school and who had followed a more protracted path to university-level qualifications via certificates and diplomas in TAFE institutes. Vera (aged 18) from Westvale, who had left school without the necessary grades to apply direct to university, choose the local route, whereby a TAFE course offers a pathway to a degree with a university on a co-located regional campus. Unfortunately, the Diploma in Children's Services pathway to the degree includes the lower qualification, the Certificate III in Children's Services, but because Vera obtained a certificate III in another vocational area while undertaking paid work to fund her schooling, she has had to pay full fees for the first year of her TAFE study. Several other classmates had experienced the same problem, which is associated with changing career track prior to embarking on the diploma/degree route. Ironically, those with higher ATAR scores and less financial need while at school, who are able to enter university direct from school, would not experience the financial penalty associated with more protracted and circuitous pathways to higher skills learning.

Eastshire: Of the three post-school participants interviewed in one of the small towns in Eastshire, all had taken a VET pathway, although it had required them to travel to larger centres. Jo had achieved a Diploma of Visual Arts on campus at RMIT in Melbourne; Cheryl had achieved certificate I and II qualifications in the main regional town (90 minutes drive away), but was now studying for a diploma. DD had left school in Year 11 and completed a Certificate III in Business Administration and was now working. In the main regional town Kate was studying a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment for her dance business; Joanna had completed a qualification in graphic design; and Missy had completed certificate qualifications in fitness. And also in Eastshire, a different small town, of the three post-school participants interviewed from the Shire Youth Council, two had taken or were currently taking, on-the-job traineeships with the Shire Council.

Westvale: The five post-school participants interviewed at the local TAFE campus at one of the major towns in the area were all studying various levels of children's services qualifications. Two were undertaking or planned to undertake diploma-level study and one was on a TAFE and Federation University bridging pathway in preparation for studying a Bachelor of Primary Education at the Westvale regional campus of Federation University.

Northtown: The four male post-school participants interviewed at the Northtown TAFE campus were all studying a language literacy and numeracy program (LLNP). The three older participants, 25-year-olds, had left school at a very early age, including the one participant in the study who identified as Indigenous and who left school in Grade 6 and spent many of his teen years in and out of detention centres. Another aimed to join the Army.

Southland: Of the six participants at the Southland TAFE campus, one was a bricklayer apprentice, one had left school at 16 and was studying Certificates I and II Children's Services, one had completed Year 12 and was studying aged care but thought he might switch to disability. Further south in this area, participants identified through their Youth Centre activities revealed that one participant had studied administration at TAFE following Year 12, while another, John, who was an early school leaver, eventually managed to study a Certificate IV in Youth Work after participating in a number of programs.

### Finding 3: Localised provision, a pathway to university study with lower grades

Higher education was a pathway for 11 of the 24 school students who had made decisions to apply for and work towards achieving university entrance at a local higher education provider (that typically accepted students with lower Year 12 grades or ATAR scores). A further two were considering it as a possibility. Interviews with representatives from the schools attended by these young people revealed that progression to university study was the minority route in all but one case, in Eastshire, in Victoria (where it was equal to the TAFE pathway progression) and one case in South Australia, in Southland (where university progression predominated). School leaving qualifications from the schools attended by the participants were on average below the norm required for entry to competitive places at the research-led Group of Eight universities, with often only about 10 per cent of the cohort achieving ATAR scores of more than 80. But it is worth noting that these differences between schools in different areas support Johnstone et al.'s (2014) argument that schools can outweigh neighbourhood effects.

Eastshire: Ashlee wanted to study through Federation University to become a physical education teacher, which would involve travel to another regional town. Margaret, aged 16 years, aspired to study medicine but would settle for bio-medicine if she did not achieve the required entrance score. Molly was unsure of what she would do because she wanted to study arts – creative writing – but her father had indicated he would not support her through university if she studied arts; he expected her to study something more vocationally focused.

Westvale: Simone aims to study health sciences and complete a Diploma of Education to become a physical education teacher by studying at a university in another regional centre; and Alice aspires to become a primary school teacher through Federation University after a gap year. Ricky was considering the possibility of physical education teaching but seemed to prefer a trade.

Northtown: three of the young men interviewed at one school were set on achieving university entrance and identified the local campus of the lower-cost university operating north of the city (Uni SA at Mawson lakes). At another school, three of the four interviewed were aiming for university and the fourth was a maybe, although more likely would be doing courses in beauty treatments or similar through a VET pathway.

Three participants, all women, were currently enrolled in university:

- Charlotte (aged 21) from one of the Eastshire focus groups was doing honours in visual arts at the Westvale campus of Federation University (previously Monash University). She was considering enrolling in a Masters because she was very depressed about not being able to find work in her field in the area and did not want to move. She would like to do a PhD and for the same reasons is considering undertaking that sooner rather than later.
- Jessica B (aged 24) from one of the Southland focus groups was in the third year of a double degree in Social Work and Social Planning at Flinders University. She took up university study after spending some time in the workforce in retail.
- Kelly (aged 20) from the other Southland focus group was enrolled in psychology units through Open University, although she was on a 'pause' initiated by the university at the time of the interview and was studying 'skills' through the Southland TAFE campus.

Four other participants had previously aspired, or were aspiring, to a university qualification:



- Morgan was just finishing a diploma through a workplace traineeship at the shire offices of Eastshire and suggested he wanted to go into management and thus was considering a degree in business at some time in the future.
- Joanna and Kate from Eastshire’s main regional centre had both aspired to study at university but neither achieved the requisite Victorian Certificate of Education results. Kate was vaguely considering applying for a Bachelor of Education sometime in the future.
- Drew was enrolled in a bridging pathway between Westvale TAFE and Federation University to study primary teaching.

#### Finding 4: Localised study preferences and the concept of travel to study

In all four areas, the education stakeholders and the young people highlighted the difficulties of geography and the distance from urban centres and affordable education and training facilities. These issues were raised both in the regional rural areas, where travel distances could involve several hours travelling time and had to be by car (buses and trains were not available or did not run at appropriate times), as well as in the urban fringe areas, where public transport was generally more frequent, at least in one area (Northtown, although not in Southland). Difficulties particularly affected potential learners once they left the school system and were no longer eligible for subsidised and provider-organised transport, as the following comment from a spokesperson from Eastshire Council identifies:

The minute they leave school or do VET, VCAL or anything else, apprenticeship, their right to the school bus is gone. The policy makes no sense and that’s what we’ve been arguing for. We’re saying the way that people are educated now has changed in the last twenty years. The policy has not kept pace.

Studying locally is the preferred mode, which reduced the options available since not all education and training opportunities were available in each of these four areas. While many education providers have embraced flexible modes of delivery and online learning to provide more socially inclusive education programs, the preferred mode of study was on-campus learning.

Only one participant was currently actively studying through distance education. Cheryl, who had left home in a small township in the very far east of Eastshire aged 15 years to study in Eastshire’s main regional centre, had moved to another small town halfway between these two locations in order to live nearer to home and to find work. She was now enrolled in a Diploma of Community Services. Nevertheless, interviews with stakeholders identified that online learning was not really feasible in Westvale and Eastshire because access to broadband and the internet was costly and very limited, as a spokesperson from one of the non-government organisations (NGOs) supporting young people’s transitions to education and work stated:

I have a satellite on my roof to get my internet access, so that has improved things, but it has been acknowledged by Telstra that we were in a black hole, and that’s why we got satellite. So if you’re not in a household where you can afford that, then you are really kind of isolated, you can’t connect to the internet, you can’t connect to your network of friends, you can’t see what’s going on, you can’t do your research, your transport might be limited and you’ve got a double whammy.

Three other participants had previously studied online:

- John from the far south part of Southland had previously studied online for a Certificate IV in Youth Work but completed the last few units ‘internally’.

- Kelly was enrolled in some psychology units through Open University but was at the time of interview on a pause initiated by the university. Kelly had been dealing with family issues in Sydney and was moving back and forwards between Sydney and the Southland area. She was also struggling with the workload and requirements and had enrolled in the skills development program at Southland TAFE following pressure from her Centrelink case manager.
- Missy had attempted study via distance education but found it did not suit her: ‘So I did try and study online here to start with and I just couldn’t do it. So I just decided to move ...’

## Finding 5: Career choices clusters around lower professions, services and trades

The top categories of career choice mentioned by participants included the following: community services, trades, health, teaching, office work, the arts and being a small business owner. (See appendix table A2.)

### *Finding 5a: VET, the pathway to services and trades*

*Careers to be achieved through a VET pathway clustered predominantly around community services, trades, office work and health.*

By comparison with a university qualification, a VET qualification is in public policy terms often constructed as a more modest aspiration, given Australia’s focus, along with many other advanced economies in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on building human capital for knowledge-intensive industries and services in a knowledge economy (Peters 2001). But in the four areas of this study, the main forms of employment were largely in primary industries, older manufacturing industries, and low- and medium-technology industries and services, often with small- to medium-size employers or sole traders or in public sector services. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that the majority of young people chose a VET pathway to employment in the services and manual trades. While VET study appears to be a modest level of educational aspiration in relation to the public policy desire to expand participation in higher education, the decision can be regarded as a form of ‘pragmatic rationalism’ – implicitly pragmatic decisions – taken by the young people living on the urban fringe, or in regional and rural communities, where the alternative may be unemployment and welfare dependency. (See appendix table A3, which sets out the career types and categories mentioned by those participants aspiring to study or actually studying a VET qualification.) None of the careers listed could be said to be out of the ordinary in general, and particularly not for rural and regionally located residents. Also for some students, given the limitations of their school study as preparation for university, a VET route may have been the only option. For example, one university spokesperson for facilitating access to a Group of Eight institution suggested that for boys opting for engineering, a difficulty was the inability of schools to provide the background knowledge in mathematics to take up such courses.

### *Finding 5b: University, the pathway to the lower professions and services*

*Careers to be achieved through a university pathway are clustered predominantly around teaching, arts and health.*

Of those with higher education aspirations, most aspirations are for courses requiring moderate to mid-range entrance scores. This in part reflects the opportunities available for their acceptance at more competitive and selective universities, given the average grades obtained by Year 12 students at the schools attended. (See appendix table A4, which outlines the university career type and category aspirations and current enrolments of the participants.)

Again, young people's pragmatic approach may help to explain the very limited numbers of aspirations to higher-earning and/or higher-status and/or higher-entrance score professions such as law and the hard sciences. It is also notable that only one participant mentioned postgraduate education aspirations. The findings relating to the constraints and restraints that limit aspirations and opportunities are discussed in detail in a later section.

Also as an indicator of young people's pragmatic rationalism was the recognition amongst Westvale school students that apprenticeship opportunities were becoming increasingly scarce in the area. But instead of aspiring to an alternative which might seem even further from reach, with only one of these young people aspiring to study at the local regional university campus, they continued to aspire to a trade. They pinned their hopes on securing the increasingly scarce apprenticeship opportunities by pursuing contacts with friends and family.

Having described the young people's perceptions of the pathways to education they are following, we now turn to a more detailed discussion of their perceptions and those of the stakeholders relating to how these different patterns develop.

## Geographic influences

The discourse on mobility suggests that geographic and social mobility is commonplace and that, as travel and global communications have intensified, people, especially the young, now have mobile lives (Elliot & Urry 2010). However, many of the young people whom we interviewed identified strongly with their local neighbourhoods. In each of the research sites young people's talk about their education and career aspirations revealed the connection they had with the place where they lived. This included references to the area's natural geographic features and socio-geographic history (what can be termed 'embodied psychologies of place'), with some participants emphasising the importance of place and the natural environment to them. The neighbourhoods where the young people grew up represent a protective and supportive resource for some of the young people. At the same time, they also represent a physical and psychological boundary to outward mobility, suggesting that young people make decisions about their futures within rationalities constrained by the local opportunity structures (the objective) and the perceptions of what might be available and appropriate (the subjective); in other words, what Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p.34) call limited 'horizons for action'.

### Finding 6: The psychology of the familiar place

In the four areas of outer urban, regional and rural living, career aspirations and choices were strongly influenced both by the geography of place and by the accompanying psychology of the familiar place. This is demonstrated forcefully in relation to young people's attitudes to the work or study opportunities located outside the local and familiar neighbourhood. For many of these young people, career aspirations and choices are determined by the invisible radius of an hour: locations and opportunities within one hour's travel from the neighbourhood were considered to be relatively familiar and accessible, while locations beyond one hour's travel tended to be constructed as less familiar and less accessible for work and education opportunities. Inadequate public transport and reliance on access to a car were also significant inhibiting factors for the education and career aspirations and opportunities of young people living on low incomes.

As one teacher at Westvale TAFE noted, 'there's an emotional – not a barrier, an emotional sort of a border' that governs young people's willingness to move across Gippsland to pursue career opportunities. This lack of willingness is psychological, but it is also the result of practical

considerations that include financial cost. As our interviewees from Federation University observe, 'it's not just about time: it's about money, they're inextricably linked ... anything more than an hour ... seems to be the limit [and] if you can't afford either the car or the petrol, you're stymied'. This was borne out by numerous young people, including this young person from a small town in Eastshire: 'I personally am not that excited by travelling an hour to work or to study. Maybe for work because I get paid for it. To study: no, I don't think I would'. And the following young person from Southland used the one-hour rule when weighing up the cost-benefit of needing to travel for on-the-job training to construction sites when making a decision about whether to pursue an apprenticeship:

I'd travel probably up to an hour maximum. I don't think I'd travel any further than that. It wouldn't be worth it ... say it takes two weeks to build a house and you're spending \$100 a week in petrol and then after tax as well when you're being paid, it's not a lot of money.

(Max, aged 18, Southland)

For young people who are reliant on public transport, the physical geography of place can also have a strongly inhibiting effect on their career aspirations and decisions, as Jessica (aged 23, Southland) explains:

Public transportation from where I live is just pretty much no go, because ... I live at Sellicks Beach and it's the furthest it goes, but it's not as frequent. They come every couple of hours and you have to interchange a lot of buses. To get to Uni I'd probably take two hours.

In contrast, for the young people in Northtown, where a comprehensive network of trains and buses promotes easier access to TAFE and higher education opportunities, such decisions are less problematic. When asked about getting to university, Mitch replied: 'that wouldn't affect me. There's public transport'. Nevertheless, young people from Northtown tended to opt for post-school study in campuses north of Adelaide centre, and no one identified study at universities and TAFE campuses on the south side of the city, even though these had different vocational specialities.

Deferring the post-school education pathway was another strategy for taking time to come to terms with the difficulties of moving away from home and the costs and time factors associated with this. This strategy was particularly prevalent in Westvale and Eastshire. For Mason (aged 22), mobility for work or study is entirely dependent on his own financial context and his understanding of what is feasible (his habitus):

I think that it's important that there's no choices, there's situations. That's what leads to what you can do. I think that's why I find the most, you either can financially move or you can't financially move and then you've got what you can and can't do based on where you are.

Recognition of the role of structural factors in young people's aspirations and choices is supported by the educators whom we interviewed. As the principal of one Eastshire government school explains, some families leave the town and move to bigger towns and cities in order to give their children greater access to higher education. Other young people leave home to study but return later: 'kids might go away for 12, 18 months, two years, and then just that pull of home becomes a bit ...' This is borne out by the principal of a government school in Eastshire's main centre, who sees distance from their families and the costs of relocation as key disincentives for young people in pursuing higher education.

For other young people in Westvale and Eastshire, the effects of geography are inescapably emotional and psychological, as one staff member from Federation University explains:

Those that have got the aspect of a secondary school student going 'I'm going to university', they're striving for that, that's where they want to go. Those that haven't the self-confidence for

that sort of stuff are majorly inhibited and that's a big barrier for them. It's like, it means: 'I've got to live away from home, I've got to go there, no, too much, too scary, I'll stay here and do a traineeship or an apprenticeship or work in the supermarket'. Their aspirations are cut short because of that.

Similarly, professional staff at Eastshire Regional Health observed that those young people who remain in the area are those who 'can't handle living away from home, just can't, or couldn't cope'. A senior academic at Federation University sums this up by saying 'smart girls leave'. Such observations reflect the deficit view that policy-makers and practitioners often hold of rurality, which we mention in our literature review of young people's choices within rural settings. However, the accounts of young people do not necessarily indicate that staying with the familiar is identified as a deficit option, as we will discuss later in relation to the valuing of the environment.

Even for young people who are undertaking higher education studies, the structural nature of employment in rural or urban fringe areas represents a significant constraint. Charlotte (aged 21, Eastshire) is undertaking an honours degree at Federation University in Westvale but is visibly depressed about the lack of future job opportunities in the area:

I wanted to be working this year and it didn't happen. Not for lack of trying, but decided to apply for my honours so that at least in a year's time, if I wasn't like, 'well I'm still unemployed and never do anything', at least I've got my honours now. But coming up to the end of this year, I'm going to be in the same position, do I go do my masters next if I can't find anything?

## Finding 7: The ameliorating geographies of place

Another strong theme that emerges from each of the research sites is that people are the place. This can have different dimensions. For some young people, a pronounced identification with the local neighbourhood can bring a strong and supportive sense of solidarity and connectedness and counteracts the policy perspective that geographical distance and isolation means adopting a deficit stereotype. This theme of commitment to the neighbourhood and the people living in it emerges strongly from our interviews in Eastshire, where, as one staff member at staff at Eastshire Regional Health explains, 'you are not isolated if you are part of the community'.

In one of Eastshire's civic centres, Kate (aged 23) describes this sense of commitment to the local people who attend her dance school: 'I just wanted to make that connection with the far East Gippsland community. It just makes me feel good doing something for those who may not necessarily get a chance anywhere else'. In another town in Eastshire, Morgan (aged 22) works for the local government as a community facilities officer and is a member of the shire Youth Council. He describes these local bonds and responsibilities as a key factor in his decision to stay in the area: 'It was ... the interaction that I had with the community that really shaped that decision and that level of community involvement is what made me want to stay here'. This view is echoed by Drew (aged 22) from Westvale: 'Even despite the opportunities that the valley lacks compared to say a city like Melbourne, you could say it's morally and ethically a better foundation to have young people grow up in'.

Even those young people who do intend to leave the valley of Westvale to study, like Simone (aged 17), are keenly aware of the social support and capital that the neighbourhood represents:

A lot of the people see Churchill or even Gippsland at the moment as a hole and literally if you look at the landscape it's like right at the bottom and there are mountains around us, but it's a great place to live ... Working where I work, I see customers where they are and I see them basically every week, the regulars that come through and you make friends almost, like they see

me down the street, we greet each other. It's a close network and you find that wherever you are you're going to know somebody. You can go anywhere and you'll probably know someone. That sort of thing is encouraging, that's why I reckon a few people do stay here and don't move away because they have a family here, they have their friends and they have that network of people that they know they can rely on or see or communicate with and it's a great thing about living in such a rural area.

A number of the interviewees, including staff at Federation University and the Eastshire local learning and education network, note that many young people who leave the area to work or study tend to return because the region is considered a good place to raise a family: 'they might work overseas or have a really interesting ten years beyond a qualification, but then once they've partnered, quite a few want to raise their family in this fantastic rural environment, which has got every natural attraction you can think of'. Close social networks are also an incentive in this movement back to the region.

Similar observations emerged from our interviews with young people in Southland. Jessica B (aged 24) describes Southland as the 'southern community', an area that is 'very close connected'. This also emerges from the account of other young people interviewed at Southland TAFE:

I've got my friends and I got my school and I got my work and it's only like a short distance everywhere. So I don't know if I should like move into town or anything because there's no point in me moving there.

In all of the sites except Southland, however, a strong sense of place is also associated with concerns about young people's prospects for education and employability. In relation to her education prospects; when asked about the challenges living in Northtown, Theresa replied:

The people ... there's like some horrible people around here. But because it is like a lower, like type of community ... The more north you get in Adelaide basically is a lower, lower class ... [and your prospects are reduced because you are stigmatized by your location].

Another group of young people from a Northtown high school spoke about the issue of being stereotyped by employers because their address was in the 'north'. Jenny stated emphatically that potential employers consider that 'you are where you live'. This is also a concern for Michael, who wants to live and teach physical education in the local area but it is: 'categorised as being ... Yeah they're sort of categorised as being feral ...' In the industrial part of Westvale valley, Drew (aged 22) made similar observations: 'it's like a slow socioeconomic area and anyone else that works in, say retail, you're not going to get anywhere in life or some people have to work in retail, that's what they do to support themselves ... there's a stigma against [people who do this work]'.

For some young people, the natural local environment also offers important resources that offset or compensate them for the disadvantages of living in low socioeconomic or rural and remote locations. For the young people from Southland, the beach is a primary social and recreational resource and even adults employed in the area were seen to be taking a more relaxed approach to business and employment, as stakeholders from the economic development office of the city council noted:

They [business people] grew up here and they want their kids to grow up here, they like the lifestyle, they like to be able to shut the door and go surfing at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. So it's very hard when you're doing an investment attraction plan cause they're not actually making decisions to expand their factory on any business case, it's purely because they grew up here and they don't want, oh, couldn't possibly have a factory in the north.

For the young people from Eastshire, there is an even wider range of local opportunities that are seen as important leisure and lifestyle resources. These young people note that they would lose access to these resources if they left the area in pursuit of career opportunities:

I think we've got some fantastic natural resources locally, like it's really good to go up to the hills and have a bit of a walk around or go to the rainforest or go the beach, so we're really lucky in that sense. (Drew, aged 22, Eastshire)

I suppose you're not really that far from anything when you think about it. There's the beach, rivers ... depends on what your hobbies are really. Shooting, fishing, four wheel driving, camping, there's pretty much whatever you want. If you were in the city you wouldn't really be doing that much. Like you could be but you'd have to travel a fair bit.

(JD, aged 17, Eastshire)

## Gender influences

As we indicated in our literature review, gender is one aspect of post-school transitions largely neglected by the Australian literature. Our findings run counter to this trend. They suggest that young people's career and educational aspirations remain substantially influenced and restrained by traditional gendered career expectations, role models and choices. In appendix tables A5 and A6, we list the career aspirations and pathways of young participants by gender and categorise each career choice as either 'gender-traditional', 'non-traditional' or 'neutral'. In the following section, we describe these career aspirations and pathways and the influences underpinning them from the perspectives of the young women and men interviewed. We conclude that the career aspirations and intended pathways of these young people are predominantly gender-traditional.

### Finding 8: Influences on young women's career aspirations and pathways

The general picture that emerged from our interviews with young women is of career aspirations and pathways that tend to be gender-traditional. As appendix table A5 shows, only three non-traditional careers were mentioned by young women participants, and since two of these careers were mentioned by the same participant, only two young women appeared to aspire to non-traditional roles (in medicine, outdoor recreation and archaeology). Even those young women who have chosen what may be considered gender-neutral career fields are still clustered in industries with high rates of female participation, such as community services, the arts, office work, health and teaching. Their stories, described below, illustrate the more subtle restraints and gendered expectations that young women still encounter.

The role of gender in forming young women's career expectations emerged from the accounts of many of the young women interviewed. When asked about the opportunity for a woman to achieve or aspire to a non-traditional job, Ashlee from a small town in Eastshire said:

I guess we could do it. I just guess we chose not to do it because we don't want to, I don't know, put ourselves out there as much as the boys.

Emily (aged 22) from Southland described her experience at school when she enrolled in what was considered to be a 'male' subject:

Yeah, because there's more kind of early links programs and there's apprenticeships and things available through the high school system for males and yes there's hairdressing but it's very limited for girls and it's very male bias still. I loved tech in high school and wanted to go down that pathway with woodwork and things but I was only one of two girls in the class and the guys just took all the tools and the teacher was more inclined to let them have it because tech was just a bludge class for the girls. Like the guys could go somewhere in his mind.

Jessica (aged 23), also from Southland, described her perception that career opportunities for local young women were more limited than those available to local young men:

They could be finished their apprenticeship and they'd be earning something of a University level whereas I find, as a female, not that I couldn't do the apprenticeships they were doing, but they were a lot more physical, physical apprenticeships. Whereas I found as a female if I wanted to earn, have a good earning, I would have to go to University because if you went to TAFE and just did beauty, the income wasn't as high.

Perhaps as a result of the prevalence of gender-traditional expectations, only two young women aspired to careers that could be considered non-traditional in relation to gender. Jade (aged 17, Southland) had no reservations about taking non-traditional subjects at school:

I did a home and property maintenance. I just thought: why not get it to get some skills so if my wall gets a hole in it or stuff like that, so I now know how to gyprock, plaster and sand and paint over walls ... I always keep popping into classes like that just to know a few extra skills. I was the only girl in a class of 15 boys, so when it came to the cleaning up I remember one going: that's a girl's job. He learnt never to say that again, he just learnt what I could do with a broom.

The indication is, however, that these opportunities to explore non-gender traditional roles are more limited once young people leave the environment of the school and seek to participate in the local workforce.

## Finding 9: Influences on young men's career aspirations and pathways

The prevalence of gender-traditional expectations is not limited to young women but also emerges from the accounts of many of the young men. (See appendix table A6.)

The role of gender in forming young men's career expectations emerged strongly from the research data. As a senior academic at Federation University explains, this is particularly prevalent for young men in Westvale:

The young boys are sort of pressured into lots of storylines around trades and good, well-paid jobs straight up, fast up, you know what I mean? Why wait and do four or five years or however long and so there's a lot of that pressure around for young men as well ... a lot of the boys will go into very masculine [jobs]; the trades, the roles, those sort of jobs.



This was borne out by staff from Federation University: ‘mostly for the guys, it’s traditional trades, so building, automotive, well could be plumbing or electrical’. These same staff describe Westvale as a region still characterised by the general attitude that young men don’t ‘need to get a degree to earn good money’. This is part of a wider local habitus in these areas of low socioeconomic status, where employment has been predominantly in low-level service and manual work, which places value on ‘practical’ outcomes, as a senior staff member at Eastshire TAFE explains:

People don’t necessarily proudly say, oh my son or daughter is doing an arts degree. Law would be good, medicine would be good, nursing would be good. They’re jobs that have got a known kind of outcome.

Only two of the young men interviewed have chosen non-traditional careers. Dan (aged 18, Southland) is studying aged care at TAFE but is considering swapping to disability care, having been told that he has a natural aptitude for this type of career. Drew (aged 25, Westvale) is undertaking studies in children’s services as a pathway into primary teaching, having tried a number of careers, including the Airforce, which didn’t work out.

## Traditions and the influences of family and the familiar

Underpinning the young people’s accounts of gendered patterns of career aspiration and employment were narratives about the influence of family and friends and the social networks in which they participated through leisure activities such as sport.

### Finding 10: The influence of family habitus and social networks

This section explores the influences of family on the career choices and aspirations of the case study participants, by gender.

#### *Family habitus, social networks and young men*

In the industrial area of Westvale in particular, young men’s career expectations and aspirations draw strongly on the traditions associated with the locality and with their families’ histories in that locality, especially the employment history of their fathers. For some young men, the expectation is frequently that they will remain in the area and enter the same trade as their father or other male family members, as Jay explains: ‘my brother is now a 4th Year Boiler Maker ... he’s out at the power station so he’s doing really well for himself, so Dad wants me to get a trade and he wants me to be an electrician’. Ted also appears to be following in his father’s footsteps, although closer attention to his story suggests that he is open to other opportunities. (See appendix table A7 for more details of these patterns.)

In Northtown, none of the three young men who aspire to study at university have fathers with university qualifications. Here, sporting mates and the school seem to have a particular influence. Jimmy, for example, mentions that his soccer team mates, many of whom are older than him, have been the most influential in his aspiration to study at university:

Probably from my friends or people at soccer, because they’re always saying that, ‘Oh, yeah, if you go here, these courses are good, these people can help you’ or, ‘This is where you can get help’, stuff like that ... I think one is doing ... one’s going to be a doctor, another one is in like, health, or something like that, and one’s in business management or something like that.

### *Family habitus, social networks and young women*

The analysis of the 16 females interviewed in depth to explore understandings of the effects of their family habitus and social networks identified a link between mothers' educational qualifications (especially university qualifications) and the university intentions of participants. (See appendix table A8.)

Mothers were particularly influential in the career aspirations and decisions of some of these young women. Missy (Eastshire) attributes her decision to study fitness to her childhood experience in and around the recreation centre where her mother still works: she is currently working part-time at that same recreation centre. Jo (Eastshire) attributes her decision to undertake a visual arts diploma to her mother's encouragement and a family habitus in which 'my family are all artists pretty much'. For other young women, their mother's influence was more ambiguous. Simone was the only young woman aspiring to university whose mother did not have a university qualification, and her aspirations appeared to be formed despite her mother's wishes. Her mother didn't particularly want her to leave the area or to study: she wanted her to find a job locally. Instead, it was Simone's father who encouraged her aspirations.

For other young women, family influences may discourage further study. This is particularly true in Westvale, where young women and men may both be discouraged from having aspirations, as these teachers from one Westvale school observe:

A lot of the families don't necessarily value education too well or they have had bad experiences themselves so they don't necessarily put a high value on it for their kids.

Usually kids will go with what they know because that's all they know. And if mum and dad didn't go to university, then it's not something that's necessarily seen as the first option either.

For young women, however, the family habitus may have more specific outcomes, limiting their horizons for education and employment:

We had a lot of stories around particularly young women not being encouraged from their own families to go onto university or higher education, because it was far more important for them to marry and have a family ... there's a lot of girls who get caught up in ... having young families and having families young and then they just feel that they can't ever do anything different and that's a big issue in the valley. (Academic, Federation University)

There's quite a lot of young mothers. There's a fair amount of teenage parenting going on. But yeah, so the birth rate, it's certainly higher than the Victorian average.

(Staff member, Eastshire council)

Another key figure in the lives of many young women was their boyfriend or husband. Some of these young women appear to draw encouragement and support from their partner, or, where this encouragement is lacking, have distanced themselves from that partner. Simone (aged 17) and Jessica B (aged 24) both ended relationships because their boyfriends were distracting them from their studies. For other young women, the presence of a partner has held them back somewhat from career decisions that they may otherwise have made. Joanna (Eastshire) describes her experience:

I'm still with the same boyfriend I had when I was 16 and that's been quite an influential factor because I'm not just going to leave for four years and he wanted to study here which he couldn't find the avenues to do so, so he hasn't actually studied yet. So that was something that I took into consideration was that I wanted to stay here for those reasons as well. So I guess he wasn't influential in expanding my education but he was influential in the decisions that I made.

## Finding 11: The influence of local traditions and the school

Our discussions with some young people also illustrate the wider educational habitus that influences some young people's future aspirations. For young people in the school in the main regional centre in Eastshire who aspire to university qualifications, including those who would be the first in their families to attend university, there appeared to be a particular importance and desirability attached to university study as well as an expectation from school and family that they would embark on such study:

When I first finished high school there was a lot of pressure: 'You need to go to Uni. You need to go to Uni. You're not going to get a job anywhere if you [don't] go to university'.

(Joanna, Eastshire)

Because all I was hearing was, 'you've got to go to university, to do this, to do that', to survive really ... I just I didn't think I'd be able to live without going to Uni. And so that has put a lot of stress on my schooling and home life, because I'm just like, 'well what am I going to do if I don't pass my subjects?' I had difficulty with that.

(Meg, Eastshire)

Missy from Eastshire expresses an active regret that she did not accompany her friends to university:

I talk to all my friends now because they're still at Uni. They're in their final year and they just don't regret it at all. They're just like 'It's the final year. I can't believe that I've done this'. I'm just like 'I wish I'd done that'. So now I'm at the stage where I'm looking online: can I do an online university course or should I go now while they're in their last year?

For Mason, however, the pull of the local neighbourhood exerts a stronger influence than these expectations: 'there was pressure from the high school to go to university, but it was not something I wanted to do because I didn't want to leave this sort of hub around here'.

In Northtown and Southland, too, the 'educational habitus' was mixed. For some young people in Southland attending a socially mixed school with relatively high numbers progressing to university, for example, Jessica B, university study is the expected norm: 'Well, pretty much all my friends went to Uni and my sister also went to Uni'. In Northtown, where the principals claimed that school cultures had changed significantly over the past ten years, a number of the school students we interviewed attending local high schools also identified their aspirations for university study, although they expressed this as a personal ambition in which the school supported them, rather than a normal pathway from the school. This was perhaps because, as the principal of this school informed us, there is 40 per cent youth unemployment in this area and considerable intergenerational poverty and unemployment. The young men we interviewed at Northtown TAFE provided different insights into the lives of other young people in this neighbourhood. Three had left school at an early age following a poor experience of high school, as one of them describes:

Me, I got kicked out in Year 9, out of high school, Year 9, yeah. I sort of got kicked out for a bit of violence, been a bit of, yeah. School, wagging. It was only because I couldn't do half the work the teachers handed me. I'm dyslexic myself ... I was a heaps good kid in primary school. I was on the student council and everything.

A number of the school participants, however, identified the supportive environment provided by their school. Simone (Westvale) was full of praise for her school, describing several instances where teachers had supported her in her career aspirations in the context of classes where many students did not want to continue with study:

The teachers know [those] who want to do well, it was evident in my English class ... A group of us were dying to get to Uni and wanted to push ourselves up [but] there were four guys – the rowdy

sporty ones – who didn't give a crap about school, there was [sic] students who rarely turned up, students that did turn up and just wouldn't listen and I suppose the teacher focused on the group that I put myself in the most, like he still interacted with everyone, he got along with the guys a lot, but he was welcome to help us and he was more supportive of us.

At another school in Northtown, students spoke highly of the careers program held on Monday mornings and of the support of particular teachers. For James (aged 16, Northtown) it was the positive feedback from one of his teachers, who praised his ability in his subject, that sparked his imagination and gave him the confidence to realise that he could follow his interest in finance and commerce through to university.

Interviews with the principals and other key staff supporting young people's transitions in all six schools attended by the young people interviewed also revealed the changing dynamics of the contexts in which these people had studied or were studying and the current school focus on developing a culture that values educational participation. All these schools are in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage and in some cases struggle with limited resources. For example, in the more socially mixed area of Eastshire one small under-resourced school was not only having to cope with a diminishing population and pressures on remaining staff but also had to contend with the 'cream skimming' activities of private schools. This problem was particularly acute in this small town in the remote east of Eastshire, as the principal stated: 'There's a little bit of a trend starting to emerge of kids leaving after Year 7, 8 to go to private schools'. This trend of the flight by the more able and mobile has the potential to undermine further resource allocations and the opportunities schools can provide for those in more disadvantaged circumstances.

Consequently, this Eastshire school found it more difficult to shift the local family culture of the remaining students into valuing post-school educational participation; university progression was relatively low, students often deferred places and the average ATAR score last year was 65. The school also struggled to maintain a comprehensive range of subjects, but with combined classes and video conferencing, the principal feels that 'it's all compromised, but better than distance education'.

In contrast, the Southland school, also located in an area of poor transport, has a school bus service that is essential to those living in the very dispersed poorer neighbourhoods. Moreover, as the area's population is increasing, it is also becoming more socially mixed, resulting in this school becoming very popular among the locals from the poorer areas that the bus serves, as well as those from the more affluent families: 'We certainly are a people's school of first choice in the local area' (Principal, Southland). School numbers have doubled in the past two years, a high proportion (80 per cent) of the Year 12 cohort are progressing to higher education and links have been established with an interstate Group of Eight research-intensive university, thereby opening up very different pathways to university from the other schools in the study.

Nevertheless, all of the schools identified that school retention rates in both states have increased due to the presence of VET in Schools, which now affords many more opportunities, particularly for those students who prefer applied learning. In Northtown there was strong evidence that the two schools investigated were able to change both the school and local cultures by working together in providing access to a broad VET curriculum and in changing staffing cultures, employing more newly qualified young staff and developing a culture of staff living in the area and showing a commitment to the community. For example, the principal of one of the Northtown schools commented:

Ten years ago we really had a dysfunctional school with a staff that was very staff centric and students were just an afterthought really and we've kind of changed that around but that's really

through a rejuvenation of the staffing and leadership and changing some structures and pretty much had an 80–90% staff turnover in that ten years ... The kids are valuing the place very differently and a lot of that's got to do with the relationship with the adults, it's got a lot to do with the sort of courses we're offering, the relevance of the curriculum and I think the kids are really, I think it's really about feeling valued and participating more in their education than they ever would've.

All principals identified a number of specific initiatives to redress the problem of young people and their families having little knowledge or experience of university education and other post-school education pathways and consequently leaving the educational decision-making up to the young person.

Many of the kids that I deal with, some of the parents have never even set foot on a university before and wouldn't have any idea how a university is structured, how they go about paying for it, what's expected of the child to get to university, what's expected of the parents. So it is really breaking down all of that information that they need to obtain in order to be able to go forward. When you're talking about incentives it's a little bit hard to pinpoint it as any incentive as such because it's more so based on the personal choice of what the child wants to do.

(Spokesperson for Access initiatives, Group of Eight University)

The schools claimed to provide excellent support to the students in terms of information on post-school options. Career counsellors, apprenticeship brokers, transition leaders, visits to expos and universities, connections with TAFE institutes, working on placements with local employers, for example, were all facilities provided by the schools. Other strategies adopted by schools to increase post-school aspirations ranged from the 'case management' of Years 11 and 12 by a senior management team, to seeking connections with regional campuses of universities, developing personal learning plans in Year 10, bringing in speakers from TAFE and universities, and connecting with local employers. However, it was interesting to note that the progression pathways developed to TAFE institutes and universities tended to reinforce progression to recruiting, rather than selecting, institutions and to institutions that were local and familiar to staff and students, and largely these were non-metropolitan. In addition to the practices of schools that encouraged progression to local institutions, many young people's sources of information about universities and colleges also reinforced the idea of staying local. Apart from what they found out through school, young people derived most of their ideas about post-school education from informal sources such as their parents, siblings and other family members or friends, who also had limited experiences of higher education, and perhaps had had negative experiences of schooling. Thus an information cycle of reinforcement about the limited horizons for post-school education and training developed from interactions in young people's families and social networks. When schools also supported connections with the local providers rather than to more distant metropolitan universities, the students who did consider university were typically guided to choose local lower-ATAR entry institutions and lower professional vocations.

It was also interesting to note some differences between states. In Northtown and Southland in South Australia, schools, the local council, state government departments, the TAFE institute and some of the university campuses all worked closely with a wide range of non-government organisations to support disaffected and disengaged or truanting school-aged students and encourage post-school education and training pathways. In identifying stakeholders in these areas we invariably found ourselves being referred by one organisation to another. Stakeholders in Northtown and Southland knew each other well and had identified specific partnership strategies to address their local needs. In contrast, in regional and rural Victoria, where distances were much greater, stakeholders identified

the difficulties of distance from specific organisations such as the regional offices of the state education department. It was also interesting to note that in Victoria there was some dissent between schools and other organisations in the education field, and some stakeholders specifically questioned the value of each other's activities, with one principal questioning the role of specific non-government organisations and some of these organisations questioning the expertise of some schools in relation to career counselling. Nevertheless, the universal opinion of school principals in both states was that schools were vital in shaping a student's future pathways and the government needed to provide better support.

## Critical events and disruptions

### Finding 12: Early career and work experiences

Aspirations developed at an early age are important in predicting the post-school destinations of young people (Johnson et al. 2014). In this context, work experience can be a crucial 'critical incident' in terms of young people's decision-making and horizons of aspiration. A number of school student participants described their Year 10 work experience as a positive influence in framing their career choices. LM, from Westvale, for example, described his Year 10 experience of working in an electrical business and his desire to undertake an electrical apprenticeship: 'in Year 10 I had a family friend who had an electrical business so I went and did work experience with him and then just since then I've wanted to do that'. LM's friend BC also chose work experience in the field of work of his dad and brother:

My brother is a qualified builder and it just seems like a good lifestyle and that, being outside and everything, and it seems good. It's just something I've always wanted to do and it's what my dad does, so ... I'm the same as LM through work experience, and I've loved it ever since.

Jessica, who left school after Year 12, but with little motivation about her future, began casual work in retailing, which became a significant turning point in increasing her confidence in her abilities and raising her awareness and imagination about other opportunities. She is now in the third year of a degree course in social work and is committed to making a difference to the lives of her contemporaries in Southland and elsewhere:

The reason why I decided to go to university is because I got to the point where I'd kind of learnt everything I had learnt in my position. Like I could go higher, but even then I was thinking about, 'Do I even want to do that?' Like, 'Do I really want to go into being a State manager or a regional manager?' and I kind of started to see a bit more of my potential I think through managing. Like I started to realise that I think I was a bit better than just managing a store. Because I think a lot in my younger years I didn't see myself as a very smart person. Like I was a bit like, you know, just wasn't going to do anything like university. I hated to read. I'd probably say I put myself down in that sense. Like I didn't really give myself credit for what I could do and so I think by managing it gave me that confidence that I think I can do more than this sort of thing.

(Jessica, aged 24, Southland)

## Finding 13: Positive critical interruptions by organisations or individuals

Other critical events include the encouragement or example of friends or serendipitous experiences with organisations that expand young people's horizons and opportunities. For Kate (aged 23, Eastshire), the decision to open a dance school and to offer accredited dance programs has been largely inspired by one friend:

A friend from Melbourne actually pushed – oh he sort of gave me the idea of, you know, you should push yourself to try new things and search out new avenues and search out new places to teach and he's actually opened up a dance program, I'd say you'd call it, or performing arts program down in Melbourne for underprivileged kids and, yeah, so he's really a big influence on me and, yeah, he's one that always says, 'Yes' to any opportunity that he can get so, yeah, and that's really driven me.

John (Southland) had a most disrupted experience of schooling, partly the result of his role as carer for his ill mother. He left school early and did a number of 'shit jobs' before participating in a Flexible Learning Option (FLO) program, through which he managed to complete a Certificate II in Community Services. His long-term aspiration is to set up a youth camp for troubled youth. He makes it clear that the support of case managers and a second chance at education through the FLO program have turned his life around:

I tried to get into Cert IV in youth work through TAFE for two consecutive years, but I never got accepted, because I left school early and my history – I missed out on a lot of schooling when I was younger too. And then one of my case managers was: 'why don't you try through Tabor Adelaide, because they've got a different way of looking at it, it's not just about your education, it's about your background, they fully take other things into consideration'. And then I got accepted and I had my books within two weeks.

For two of its members, the Youth Council in Eastshire has been a key influence. Through his part-time and casual positions with the council, Mason (aged 22) has slowly worked his way to a full-time traineeship. He now aspires to staff management and higher management positions and has been considering a business degree. AA didn't want to do any further study at all after school: 'I didn't think school was my thing, so I just went to get a job as soon as I could ... I finished year 11 and then I just went job hunting'. The Job Network agency advised her to do some voluntary work, which led her to the Youth Council. She has subsequently embarked on a traineeship with the council: '[I] literally stumbled across it and I really – because I didn't want to do study or anything like that, but I love what I do'. For Missy, a turning point came with the intervention of school leaders at her high school who provided advice and support at crucial times:

I got such a close relationship with them that when I left high school, I could still go to the principal's office and be like, do you want to have a coffee and he'll just make a coffee and we'll sit in his office and talk ... they gave me the help that I needed and ... they were just amazing ... I'll always be grateful for that.

There are limitations to the futures that can be imagined when influenced by friends and serendipity as James's story shows. James (aged 16, Northtown) had sought out additional information about his options through the internet and attended the open days of two Adelaide universities. He identified some advantages to a scheme of entry to the Group of Eight university, but he found that his school didn't participate in this scheme and he rationalised that it would be preferable to choose the lower ATAR entry recruiting university with which his school had a connection because it seemed friendlier and less strict than the more selective university:

I get this vibe that University of Adelaide is more of like a prestigious kind of university whereas Uni SA just gives off a friendlier, it has better, more student life, more student involvement outside of class. [And friends] I think all of them, pretty much, will go to Uni SA. I've gone to the open days and ... the only good thing I thought about Adelaide Uni was it had a Head Start programme. I think it was if you did well in year 11, you could undertake a university course in year 12 at the same time and have that count towards your SACE and your ATAR.

## Finding 14: Resilience, expanded horizons and imagined futures

Not all young people see their horizons as being geographically bounded, as we identified earlier. Family habitus could play a part in opening up horizons and building resilience and a capability to recognise situations as opportunities rather than obstacles. Of those we interviewed who were choosing a university pathway, their narratives described relatively stable home lives, often with two parents who were employed, parents who had hobbies and interests outside the home, frequently read books and organised family holidays camping or, in a limited number of cases, to Europe to meet extended family. These family environments were in sharp contrast to the instability and intergenerational unemployment that many of the stakeholders identified as commonplace in the neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, when families provided stability and support, young people were less likely to choose the pathway of early school leaving. Additionally, when such contexts fostered interests and activities that were outside the norms of the local community, young people were able to recognise situations as opportunities and possessed the resilience to handle difficult situations more positively than some of their contemporaries. Critical experiences such as a school trip or meeting someone in relation to one's hobby or interest were sites for learning about the self and one's capabilities. These incidents or encounters could increase young people's confidence, expand their horizons and stir their imaginations about their futures.

In Southland, Jade's narrative presented a life (until three years ago) of chaos, frequent moves around the region with her father and periods of homelessness. She has now found some stability because her father has a new partner and a home and she is attending a socially mixed school in Southland. Here she has had the longest continued attendance (three years) than at any other school to date and has found opportunities through education that have expanded her horizons. She is now committed to completing studies in Japanese and participating in a school trip to Japan: 'I want to travel, I don't want to – the world's so big, I don't want to stay in this tiny little spot in the world, I want to travel, I want to see it'.

For Emily (22, from Southland) capabilities developed through dealing with a very complex and chaotic family life can account for her determination to make something of her life after becoming a teenage mother. She put it this way:

I just knew [about] children so I did some work experience at a child care centre ... I just didn't know what I wanted to do with it yet ... then I got pregnant, I've got very high morals and I'm very pro breastfeeding for as long as possible and things like that, so I didn't want to be working at least for the first year or two so I could educate him, but I also didn't want to just be kind of a dole bludger sitting on Centrelink. So I looked into study.

Emily described seeking out an older mothers' group rather than the teenage mothers' group because she didn't want to be labelled and stereotyped as someone with no ambition, and the older women were able to provide some support for her aspirations. Subsequently, she completed Year 12 and a Certificate III in Business and Finance at Southland TAFE. She is now contemplating a bridging course for university entrance, as well as building up her own business as an accounts clerk working peripatetically with small businesses.



While few young people from the Westvale area saw themselves leaving the area or mentioned international travel, young people from the foothills of the high country (in the towns in Eastshire) appear to have more mobile and expansive horizons. Missy from the main regional centre had travelled to the US while at school and was itching to return, although her immediate plans were to save money to visit Thailand, while Joanna had spent a few months in India doing volunteer work. Ted (aged 17) and JD (aged 17) both had aspirations to travel around Australia or overseas, using their rural skills and apprenticeship qualifications as passports to wider places. Ted's story in particular highlights the global aspirations that may be held by young people whose rural neighbourhoods may be otherwise seen as restrictive. Ted sees his career and hobby choice as having expansive global horizons. He wants to gain a stock agent licence and is happy to move anywhere in Victoria to achieve that. He has extensive networks of stock agent contacts through a long informal apprenticeship with stock agent mentors after being introduced to the profession through his grandfather. However, this career appears to be a means to a financial end. His real love is cattle, anything to do with cattle, and he has bred show cattle from quite a young age, which has taken him to shows throughout regional Victoria: 'I go and show my cattle at shows – no one here really does. I've sort of got a couple of younger kids involved in it, but none of my mates really do it'. This interest in stock breeding has earned him a scholarship to spend some time on a stud farm in New Zealand and then when he's finished his traineeship he sees himself travelling around Australia visiting cattle farms to get some more experience and he also plans to travel to Canada, having met a Canadian at one of the shows he attended. He has been working on his father's dairy farm for many years and is already looking to purchase a house to have financial security behind him. One gets the impression that a lack of aspiration for a higher education degree, or a VET traineeship, will not be a hindrance or 'deficit' in his life because his passion and ability to network make the world his oyster.

# Conclusion

This report has investigated the ways by which different aspects of living in a neighbourhood, including how people relate and participate in the structures, opportunities and networks available in their neighbourhoods, affect young people's (16–25 years old) post-school education and training pathways and decision-making. By exploring the influence of neighbourhood factors, including access to education and training and other community aspects, on education and training outcomes, this study has contributed to an understanding of the geographical and place aspects of social exclusion and the role that education and training can have in reducing its risk and in improving labour force participation.

This study discusses findings from qualitative research in two regions of Australia, one in Victoria and the other in South Australia. Qualitative research was identified as necessary to build on and explore in more detail the findings from a quantitative study conducted during the three-year (2010–13) funded research partnership between Monash University and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research which examined the role of community and neighbourhood factors in predicting the post-school destinations of young Australians (see Johnston et al. 2014). We used a qualitative methodology to enable more in-depth research on the mechanisms and environments that enable some people in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods to overcome the effects of neighbourhood and participate in post-school education and training. This methodology enabled exploration of people's life worlds in different contexts.

A comparative analysis of areas with differing neighbourhood and schooling characteristics and post-school labour markets and education and training opportunities facilitated an examination of our contention that a nuanced understanding of the 'geography and place' of neighbourhoods is required. This understanding will enable policy responses that take into account the factors affecting the educational aspirations and choices of young people from urban fringe, rural and regional places. The selection of areas (see discussion on page 24 and table 1) showed that two areas, one in South Australia, Southland, and one in Victoria, Eastshire, were performing above the average for areas of low SES compared with Northtown in South Australia and Westvale in Victoria, which were performing below the average. Our research identified some differences between these areas, which we discuss as the 'embodied psychology of place'. Southland and Eastshire were both regarded as areas of natural beauty and had fairly stable professional communities who were very committed to living in these areas and making a difference to the lives of young people. In contrast, Westvale and Northtown had a history of employment in traditional extraction industries and manufacturing, and the professional employees who worked in these areas were more likely to live apart from the communities they were supporting.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the greater social mix in parts of Southland and Eastshire permeated the cultures of two of the schools, where university aspiration was regarded as a more normal post-school aspiration. While policy-makers might consider themselves powerless to change the physical characteristics of a place and the social mix, we did find examples of strategies that at least one school in Northtown had adopted that helped to overcome the negative psychology of place from the perspective of the professionals and encouraged more staff to live in the local area.

Our findings have been grouped into four major themes: pathways of engagement in education or training; geographic and place influences; gender, and the influences of family and the familiar; and critical events and disruptions.

## Pathways of engagement in education or training

Firstly, within our broad theme of pathways of engagement to education and training, we found that vocational education and training was an important pathway for the continuing education and training of young people and for the re-engagement of the unemployed. We found that this held true across all four of the socioeconomically disadvantaged sites in South Australia and Victoria. The narratives identified one of the specific ways by which young people were enabled to engage with this form of education in times of economic downturn and industrial restructuring. This was to utilise post-compulsory education as a safety net to secure employment; however, this did not necessarily mean these young people had become socially mobile (Thompson & Simmons 2013). Nevertheless, some schools and some family contexts afforded more opportunities for, and had greater expectations of progression to, university, but there were no discernible patterns of difference across the four areas.

Secondly, while all schools had developed strategies to encourage students without the family habitus and understanding of university to consider this option, the schools that were more socially mixed and included young people from families with a history of tertiary education were more likely to consider this option, confirming findings in the literature on the continued influence of social class on education outcomes (Ball 2006; Reay 2011). This finding also resonates with the ideas of cultural convergence and disruption, whereby young people who encounter educational cultures different from their own are more likely to make life choices divergent from those they 'inherit' from their socioeconomic background (Granovetter 1973; Broadbent & Cacciottolo 2013). However, as with other research on educational choice and decision-making, families without experience of tertiary education left the decision to the young people, who in turn relied on friends and other local networks.

As a consequence, our third finding was that localised considerations affected the aspirations and choices that young people made in 'choosing' to stay with the familiar (as Mills & Gale 2008 also found and termed 'inheritance'). Additionally, as with Ianneli's (2013) study of the role of schools and curricula in influencing young people's decisions on whether to study locally or stay with the familiar, the young people in this study were on pathways to lower ATAR scores; they often lacked the requisite subjects for science, technology and maths (STEM) subjects and therefore 'chose' pathways into lower professions, often in the public sector, rather than selecting curricula and universities that would segue into traditional professional employment. In this regard, their physical lack of mobility was once again replicating their social immobility (Elliott & Urry 2010).

## Geographic and place influences

Underpinning the findings in relation to these pathways to engagement were geographic influences and what we have termed the 'embodied psychology of place'. Popular culture and policy might promote mobility, but our study identified a range of physical and perceptual factors that kept people in the local place. Many physical difficulties to relocation/study were recounted, as they have been in other policy studies (Dow, Allan & Mitchell 2011), including distance from centres of learning, lack of transport, lack of broadband internet access, costs of travel, limited education providers and programs, and the unintended consequences of funding policies for education and training that impacted particularly harshly on those most in need. Equally, the perceptions of place and acceptable times and costs for travel to study were important, demonstrating again that perceptions of place are developed through interactions within families, social networks and other encounters (or, drawing on Bourdieu, what we termed 'habitus' and 'fields of power'). For a number of participants, however, the local place was 'not all bad'. Two of the places, Southland and Eastshire, both with beaches,

farmland, forests and artisan food producers and wineries were regarded as offering a good lifestyle. Not surprisingly, there were several examples of professionals who had chosen to relocate to these areas. In contrast, in the other two areas, Westvale and Northtown, many professionals chose to commute to the area for employment rather than live there. Interestingly, the strategic move by one school principal in Northtown to encourage new, younger staff to live locally had helped to develop a commitment to the needs of the area and had contributed to an increase in the number of young people from this school choosing a post-school pathway to a local university.

As well as the importance of the natural beauty of a place, a number of people identified the value of community in ameliorating the isolation of distance and in compensating for poor pay and having a 'job not a career'. These findings resonate with those of Hillman (2005), who found a strong pull to return 'home' among university students once they have graduated. Indeed, a number of stakeholders pointed to the practice of many university-educated families leaving the area (particularly areas with outstanding scenery such as Southland and Eastshire) to support the continuing education of their families in metropolitan areas and then being drawn back by the psychology of the place, choosing to return later to resettle. Indeed, one provider mentioned the advocacy her organisation undertook for a Victorian scholarship scheme (called Young Professionals Provincial Cadetships Program). The aim of the program was to facilitate the return for work experience of young people who had moved out of the area to study, the idea being to encourage post-qualification resettlement in regional and rural areas.

## Gender, family influences and the familiar

Two other major themes were also connected to the psychology of place. These were gender and the traditions and influences of family and the familiar. Although Glover et al. (2010) identified low levels of parental involvement in education in two of the areas, Northtown and Southland, in our study of those young people who aspired to continue in post-school education and training, the involvement of parents was highlighted as valuable, suggesting even parents without direct experience of university education are an important part of the support structure in creating the habitus and building the capability to continue with education and learning. This confirms the notion of 'quiet support' from parents raised by Marks et al. (2011), Bryce et al. (2007) and Bedson and Perkins (2006). As with other research on traditional working class communities, we found the strong influences of family and gendered role modelling (Marks et al. 2011; Bryce et al. 2007; Broadbent & Cacciattolo 2013; Bedson & Perkins 2006). The patterns of VET and university participation were similar to those found by Butler and Ferrier (2006) and Mills and Gale (2008). Post-school participation in VET and university curricula replicated the occupational opportunities available in the highly gendered labour markets in these urban fringe and regional and rural areas, thus perhaps limiting the potential for personal change. But while boys often followed in the traditions of their fathers, brothers and other key male figures, not all women stayed local and close to their mothers, especially if their mothers had some past tertiary education experience. As one university spokesperson commented, 'smart girls leave' (again confirming findings of other studies of remote and isolated communities, see Porter 1993 on Newfoundland; Corbett 2007 on Nova Scotia).

## Disrupting pragmatic rationalism and envisaging new imaginaries

In identifying how geography, place, opportunities, family tradition and gender play a part in affecting how young people 'choose' pathways to education and training, we have shown how their choices are circumscribed and can be understood as pragmatic rationalisations of their aspirations, or put another way, of 'the capacity to imagine futures' (Sellar & Gale 2011, p.122). Our findings also

confirm one recent report, which notes, ‘there is no single determinant of education aspirations, but rather a complex interplay between related considerations which operate cumulatively to reflect how far a student hopes to progress in school, and the degree of education they seek to achieve’ (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013, p.32).

Our contribution has been to uncover the sources of these complex effects on aspirations and to identify the navigational strategies young people employ to pursue their aspirations. Narrative inquiry has enabled us to present and discuss a range of accounts and types of aspirations. In these accounts we have identified examples of how family habitus, school environments and other social networks are experienced and given meaning in young people’s accounts. In other words, we have revealed the pragmatic rationalisations of the ‘choices’ young people make (Hodkinson & Sparkes 1997). Yet, within these accounts, specific moments, key individuals, particular encounters are also relayed as turning points of significance in shaping people’s capacities to handle difficult situations and build resilience or to imagine a future very different from that of their family and friends and other locals (Laub & Sampson 2003). In describing these critical moments and encounters, we have shown that Granovetter’s (1973) concept of ‘weak ties’ still has some purchase in providing an account of how the process of change operates by exposing young people to new people, ideas or experiences that can disrupt the ‘strong ties’ of the familiar and comfortable. By describing their stories of disruption to their taken-for-granted horizons for action, young people reveal new imagined possibilities and aspirations for the future and challenge what others have described as a deficit model of rurality (Robinson 2012).

## Suggestions for policy and practice

Drawing on our findings, this report makes the following suggestions for policy and practice:

For representatives from state departments and local government

- In Victoria and South Australia, local government areas should be utilised as geographic research sites or units of study and for policy design, implementation and coordination in relation to education and work support services for young people.
- In local government areas where public transport is very limited, policy design and implementation should recognise the importance of the car for young people for accessing education and work opportunities, by measures such as identifying areas where access to a car is crucial and providing petrol subsidies to replace public transport subsidies for some on government income support; removal of the car as an asset for the purposes of income support assessment is recommended.
- Education and training providers should work closely with local government and transport authorities to find creative solutions for individuals to access a wider range of education and training opportunities, particularly for those in small towns and places outside the major population centres in each local government area.
- Review where relevant, the state government policies regarding the restrictions on funding for those studying at an equivalent or lower level to previous qualifications when such study is part of a progression pathway to a higher qualification; consider the unintended consequences of policies on VET-University pathways of restricting such funding; and consider introducing support on an income-weighted index to those studying lower qualifications.
- Additional and targeted support to access opportunities is required for young people in areas which lack public transport, especially for travel to study in tertiary education.

- Recognise that ‘learning pays’ and that education policies aimed at one sector can impact on another. Support for adult learning and adult re-engagement in education spills over into increased aspirations and support for children’s learning and aspirations to be economically active.
- Further research should be undertaken and subsequent policy and practice advice be formulated on ‘closing the status gap’ between VET and university pathways.

For educational providers and community organisations working with young people

- Identify opportunities to work across organisations at the local level to enable sharing of resources between schools (in the public and private sectors), colleges, universities and other not-for-profit agencies to spread the burden of initiatives from schools and draw in other resources and expertise.
- Expand co-located facilities for VET and university provision to enable pathways through vocational qualifications to degree programs in a greater range of curriculum areas.
- Create opportunities for young people to engage with a wide range of work experience and to encounter peers from a variety of geographical, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- Introduce (paid and expenses covered) peer mentoring between students in tertiary studies and school students, and a training program and network for mentors.
- Facilitate organised and supervised trips to careers expos for younger students at no additional cost to students or families.
- Provide additional and targeted support to access opportunities for young people in areas which lack public transport, especially for travel to study in tertiary education.
- Provide career advice and career preparation programs to commence earlier in schools (well before Year 9–10), with a key principle on which programs are based being that of expanding the exposure of young people to unfamiliar careers and sectors of employment.
- Parental and key family members’ educational engagement programs should provide information and dispel myths about schooling and post-school education and training pathways and provide access to resources for enabling parents to support young people’s learning, including the higher rates of Youth Allowance for study away from home.
- Tertiary education provider/school networks should provide continuing professional development for staff in both sectors to share and update curriculum developments and career opportunities.
- Consider the potential of introducing learning and advice relating to educational pathways in primary schools. Experience in the UK has shown that introducing programs such as the cartoon character Professor Fluffy to children aged 9–10 years can develop a language and understanding of learning journeys through fun and games and projects such as the Children’s University and can raise the status of schooling and learning in communities that have traditionally devalued education (see for example, <<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2005/nov/29/accesstouniversity.primaryeducation>>).
- Recognise that, while it presents significant opportunities, technology such as internet-based learning and video-conferencing is a ‘mixed blessing’, which can serve to further isolate geographically remote students, and is also not a ‘one size fits all’ solution.
- In the light of the proposed deregulation of higher education fees, universities need to consider their support systems for students from low SES and geographically remote locations. There needs to be specific recognition of the economic, social and logistical barriers to university attendance for such students. Such considerations could include the provision of appropriate and flexible

accommodation, the provision of mentoring for first year students and funding related to their geographical location.

- The raising of VET status and increased recognition of VET pathways to both higher education and careers is important. Information on the VET options available to young people should be increased and the ways in which this information is presented should be examined to eliminate assumptions about the 'type' of students for whom VET is suitable.

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# Appendix

**Table A1 Young people's career aspirations and pathways summarised by career category, neighbourhood and pathway**

Number <sup>1</sup>	Career category	Research site				Proposed and actual pathway		
		Eastshire	Westvale	Northtown	Southland	Uni	VET	Other <sup>2</sup>
14	Community services	2	5	2	5	1	12	
9	Trade	1	5	1	2		9	
8	Health	2	1	4	1			
6	Teaching	2	3	1		5		1
6	Small business	1		3	2	1	4	1
6	Arts	3	1	1	1	3	3	
6	Office work	5			1		6	
3	Beauty & fashion		1	1	1		3	
2	Management	2					2	
2	Armed Forces		1	1				2
2	Retail		1		1			2
Other:								
1	Stock agent	1					1	
1	Dairy farmer	1						1
1	Archaeology				1	1		
1	Commerce			1		1		
1	Civil engineering			1		1		
2	Psychology				2	2		
1	Business	1				1		

- \*Notes: 1. Number of mentions not necessarily number of participants  
 2. Other: teaching – dance teacher skills developed through private classes throughout childhood; small business proposal for carpet cleaning no formal training proposed to be undertaken; armed forces recruitment and training processes; retail – informal on the job training; dairy farmer – taught by father throughout childhood.

**Table A2 Most popular career categories**

Number	Career category
13	Community services
9	Trades
8	Health
6	Teaching
6	Office work
6	Arts
6	Small business owner

**Table A3 VET pathway preferred career categories**

<b>Career category</b>	<b>Career type</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
Community services	Children's services; youth work; aged care and disability	13
Trade	Including pastry chef and chef; bricklaying; fabrication; electrician; civil construction; linesman; building or carpentry	9
Office work	Local government; reception; other	6
Health	Fitness; personal trainer; outdoor recreation	4
Beauty & fashion	Make-up artist; beauty therapist	2
Management	Hotel and local government	2
Small business	Electrician, gym	2
Arts	Graphic design	1
Other	Stock agent	1
<b>Total VET pathway</b>		<b>40</b>

**Table A4 University pathway preferred career categories**

<b>Career category</b>	<b>Career type</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
Teaching	PE teacher x 3; Primary school teacher x 2; Art teacher	6
Arts	Arts: visual arts, creative writing, curating, fashion	5
Health	Nursing, nutrition, health sciences, medicine	4
Community services	Social work	1
Small business	Own business – physiotherapy	1
Other	Psychology	2
Other	Archaeology	1
Other	Commerce/finance	1
Other	Civil engineering	1
<b>Total university pathway</b>		<b>22</b>

**Table A5 Women's career aspirations and pathways**

<b>Career category</b>	<b>No.*</b>	<b>Career</b>	<b>Gender traditional</b>
Community services	6	Children's services	Yes
	3	Youth work	Neutral
	1	Social work	Yes
Arts	5	Arts: visual arts, creative writing, curating, fashion (uni)	Yes
	1	Graphic design	Neutral
Office work	5	Administration	Yes
	1	Local government officer/trainee	Neutral
Health	1	Nursing	Yes
	1	Nutrition	Yes
	1	Health sciences	Yes
	1	Fitness	Neutral
	1	Medicine	No
	1	Outdoor recreation	No
Teaching	1	Primary school teacher	Yes
	1	Dance teacher	Yes
	1	PE teacher	Neutral
Beauty & fashion (VET)	1	Make-up artist/special effects	Yes
	1	Beauty therapy	Yes
Small business	1	Dance school	Yes
	1	Own business – bookstore	Neutral
Other	2	Psychology	Neutral
	1	Archaeology	No
Retail	2	Retail	Yes
Management	1	Hotel management	Neutral

\*Note: number of mentions of actual or possible careers by female participants not number of women.

**Table A6 Men's career aspirations and pathways**

Career category	No.*	Career	Gender traditional
Trade	1	Pastry chef	Yes
	1	Chef	Yes
	1	Bricklaying	Yes
	2	Electrician	Yes
	1	Civil construction (trade)	Yes
	1	Building or carpentry	Yes
	1	Fabrication	Yes
	1	Linesman	Yes
Other	1	Commerce	Yes
	1	Civil engineering	Yes
	1	Stock agent	Yes
	1	Dairy farmer	Yes
	1	Business	Yes
Small business	1	Own business – gym	Yes
	1	Own business – electrician	Yes
	1	Own business – carpet cleaning	Yes
Community services	1	Aged care	No
	1	Disability	No
Health	2	Personal trainer	Neutral
Armed Forces	2	Army and Airforce	Yes
Management	1	Local government management	Neutral
Small business	1	Own business – physiotherapy	Neutral
Teaching	1	Primary school teacher	No

\*Note: number of mentions of actual or possible careers by male participants not number of men.

**Table A7 Men's parents' careers and qualifications**

Site	Case study	Career/aspiration	Mother(s)	Father(s)
Eastshire	Ted	Stock agent and eventually take over his father's dairy farm	5 generations local. Division 1 Nurse, midwife and women's health nurse	Dairy farmer
	Mason	Local government	Nurse at local hospital	Electrician but works for the Union
Westvale	Drew	Primary school teacher	Cleaner local hospital; emigrated from Scotland	Maryvale Paper Mill; Jack of all trades incl. boilermaking and building
Northtown	Michael W	PE teacher	Gaming manager prior to raising four boys	Roller shutter installer
	James M	Commerce/finance	Team leader of hospital orderlies	Aged care carer (possibly has cert. quals)
	Jimmy	Civil engineering	Emigrated from England maybe for Telstra 'on the phones'	Linesman for SA Power but now is 'more of a teacher there'
Southland	James S	Pastry chef	Youth Centre Manager	Thinks his biological father works in admin at a council in Qld; stepfather: 'wine hand'

**Table A8 Women's parents' careers and qualifications**

Site	Case Study	Career/ aspiration	Mother(s)	Father(s)
Eastshire	Jo	Visual arts	Mother: artist and teacher's aide Nurse (long time ago) Stepmother: masseuse and teacher's aide	Lawn mowing and mechanic Trained as a teacher in 1930s or 1940s and taught at Orbest HS in the 'big shed'; mines in WA
	Ashlee	PE teacher	Pharmacist	Logging industry with Vic. Forests
	Kate	Dance teacher	Canteen manager secondary college Cleaning and retail	Father: plumber and 'jack of all trades' Stepfather: motorbike mechanic
	Missy	Fitness instructor/trainer	Swimming instructor Diploma in children's services, Manager recreation centre	Doesn't have much to do with her father Truck owner-driver
Westvale	Simone	Uni PE teacher	Left school in Yr 10 worked at a power station and RSL for years; currently in a bank	Head electrician at Australian Paper Mill; been there for about 20 years
Northtown	Theresa	Make-up artist	Mother: nut factory School canteen	She thinks he might have done engineering and or computing at uni but is now a truck driver
Southland	Emily	Bookkeeping admin	Hasn't seen her for eight years; possibly works in a disability care home	Father who raised her was a butcher but then worked as sales rep for a drug company; now high up and keeps winning awards
	Jessica B	Bachelor of Social Work	Hospitality trained in the equivalent of TAFE in the Philippines which was considered like university; various jobs in Australia	Retired prison officer Previously Army
	Jade	Fashion (archaeology, outdoor recreation)	Mother in WA: artist Stepmother: retail fruit and veg store and aged care possibly with certificates	Disability allowance Left school at 13. Grape picking; producing rap music

**Table A9 Stakeholders and organisations in South Australia and Victoria**

Stakeholder	South Australia	Victoria	Total
Schools	7	5	12*
Tertiary providers	3	8	11
State departments/local government	5	4	9
Employers/learning networks/community organisations	20	4	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>56</b>

\*Note: These 12 stakeholders included the principals and other key staff from three schools in Victoria and three in South Australia.

**Table A10 Young people's education and geographical location at point of interview**

State	School student group		Post-school group		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
South Australia	7	6	3	12	28
Victoria	7	4	7	6	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>52</b>



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