

How to fund the future

Barbara MacLennan, Manager Workforce Development at Toi EDA, Eastern Bay of Plenty Economic Development Agency discusses where there is opportunity for funders to invest in future generations through supporting youth employment in Aotearoa.



TOI EDA
Eastern Bay of Plenty Economic Development Agency

Barbara recommends four areas for investment:

1. Raise awareness of the youth employment crisis

"If you look at the statistics, the rate of youth unemployment is growing much faster than the rate of unemployment generally," Barbara said.

"That unfortunately happens every recession. But what happens in communities like ours in the Eastern Bay of Plenty that have been depressed for so long, is that more young people become long-term beneficiaries and they never enter the world of work. They never step up to higher learning or higher education. We're at risk of starting another generation like that because of Covid.

"We need co-investment by philanthropy and potentially others in comprehensive tracking of what's really going on," Barbara said.

Investment in good evidence, the development of programmes and the tracking of them as a long-term commitment will paint a better and more informative picture.

2. Communications showing success

"From a strength-based perspective, we need a commitment to sharing good stories about things that are working and that help young people get into employment."

Barbara said she sees many examples of successful youth employment in communities, especially in youth enterprise and innovation. Through amplifying good practice where communities find solutions that work, and showing this over multiple years, case studies will provide evidence of what's working.

"The stories need to get deeper into what's enabled this to happen and how sustainable it is. It's not saying that what's happening is the right thing for everyone or is the right thing forever. But if the intent to improve youth employment is not supported by sustainable and flexible resourcing, then we will not see change."

3. Investment in backbone roles

"We've had the privilege at Toi EDA of a multi-year investment by Todd Foundation in a backbone role in the Eastern Bay communities. We've taken a place by place lens and we really believe that the best solutions are co-designed and lead locally."

The role of the backbone organisation is to support collective effort and help attract resources to where the best things can happen for young people and employment. It takes multiple parties - employers, iwi, business, training organisations and wrap around support to make sure young people get what they need. The backbone roles encourage collectivism and clarity about strategy. They build up relationships, information and common strategies.

"The vision we have is that the local communities design their own youth employment plan and anyone who wants to support the Kaupapa funds into the plan. Then, locally they decide who is going to do what with that money given current challenges and opportunities."

4. Youth development training

"This area really needs attention," said Barbara. "Youth workers do the most amazing, hard work and are generally poorly paid, and often have little access to quality tailored training, and support. There needs to be more attention here."

Barbara recommends more investment in quality training, support, coaching and mentoring for youth workers involved in the youth to employment kaupapa. They need to work with the complexities young people face and also understand the world of work in their own community.

Barbara said, "There needs to be recognition of the youth work profession, and investment in training and capacity development. We've got a youth employment crisis; we've all got to help solve it."

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