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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

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Moderator: Hello and welcome to Youth Futures Foundation's Tackling Youth Unemployment Podcast. I'm Reena, and I'm going to be your host for this season. To kick things off, in season 2, in this episode we'll be getting to know Youth Futures Foundation a bit more. We'll be asking, 'What is our mission?', 'How did we start out?', and also 'How have we developed over the past few years?', navigating huge external factors, like the pandemic, but also growing thanks to our project collaborations and much more. To help me reflect on some of these thoughts, I'm really excited to be joined by some excellent guests, who'll be able to provide much more deeper insights into Youth Futures' journey so far, and to help you, our listeners, get to know the youth employment landscape a bit more. So, hi all, thank you for joining me today, would you mind introducing yourselves to our listeners and maybe just telling us a bit about your role?

M: Good afternoon all, delighted to be invited to today's podcast. My name's George Greaves, and I'm a YFF young board member, and have been since April this year. A bit about myself is I've worked in the employment, apprenticeship landscape since actually leaving school myself, so since the age of 16. I've also been through the apprenticeship system, myself, up to management apprenticeships. And then also, I've had a number of challenges prior to 16, for example, being expelled from school, and leaving school with no GCSEs, so, for someone that's built a career in education and employment, however didn't have the best start, necessarily in that, I'm really keen and passionate about sharing my journey, but also the work I do on supporting young people from marginalised backgrounds into employment, which is, as you all listening today, will be very relevant with the work that Youth Futures Foundation are doing.

M: Hi everyone, my name is Matthew Poole, I'm Director of Grants and Investments at the Youth Futures Foundation, and I've been here since 2019, so pretty much from the start. I am passionate about young people and the reasons why youth unemployment is such a stubborn problem that we should all be concerned about and collectively trying to address. So that's why I'm at Youth Futures, and I oversee our grant-making and investment portfolio so looking after the 159 grants that we've made across England so far.

F: Hi everyone, so I'm Angel Fletcher, and I'm the Policy and Public Affairs Officer here at Youth Futures Foundation. So a little bit about me, my passion for young people and for marginalisation comes from my own lived experience, so I have parents who are unemployed, I have, myself, been a free school meals student, and I'm also mixed race, so really keen about the ethnic disparities work that Youth Futures do, and continue to advocate for. In terms of my role at the organisation, I am in the policy team, and I do a lot of internal policy monitoring for the organisation, and keeping track of political

developments, reports of interest, et cetera, and I also run the secretariat for the Youth Employment Group and the ethnic disparities sub-group, which I'll talk about more later, and it's basically a really cool coalition for youth employment experts to come together to discuss key issues and barriers facing young people's employment outcomes. And as well as that, I also do a lot of ad hoc bits and bobs, like drafting consultation responses, event planning for policy events, and briefings for speakers at the events we get invited to, so a real cool, broad scope of stuff there.

Moderator: Matthew, as you were saying there, you've been at Youth Futures Foundation now since 2019, so that actually does make you a bit of a veteran, since you've been here probably one of the longest, out of all of us here. Would you mind giving us a bit of a background introduction to Youth Futures Foundation and maybe a bit about our mission and vision?

M: Yes, absolutely. Although, Reena, I've got to take umbridge that you're making me sound really old by calling me a veteran of Youth Futures. Anyway, so the Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and we actually were officially set up in December 2019, when we had our endowment from the Reclaim Fund. Now, we currently have £110,000,000 at our disposal, and we're using that money to try and improve the employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. So, just a bit of context, I guess, in terms of understanding, the Reclaim Fund is the distributor of dormant assets money, and it was set up to make use of financial assets that were in banks, building societies, and other schemes, that wasn't being utilised, and today, about £890,000,000 is being made available for good causes across the UK, and that includes Youth Futures. So that's a bit about where our money comes from. So, our mission is to narrow that employment gap between young people from marginalised backgrounds, and we do that in a variety of different ways, so we have some strategic priorities, one of which is thinking about how we change the system within which young people moved towards and into employment. The second is about creating opportunities with employers, and the third is about building the capacity of people that work with young people, so the practitioners that are there to support those young people that need the help the most.

Moderator: You spoke there a little bit about our strategic approach to addressing our mission, can you tell us a little bit more about that? Our research and evidence, and our grant-making? Maybe go into a bit more depth about that?

M: Yes, of course I can. So, in terms of thinking about what we were set up to do and how we're doing it, we recognise that there is a stubbornly high number of young people that are not in education, employment, or training, or NEET as they're otherwise known, and it's a figure that's been stubbornly high for far too long. And we also recognise that there are particular groups of young people, maybe they're from particular ethnic minority backgrounds, young carers, those people who have been excluded from school, or with special educational needs, that face additional barriers in terms of accessing work and employment, and sadly, in some recent research which we commissioned with PWC, the UK was ranked 18th in the global index of youth unemployment. So we know that there's this problem, and a problem that's remained for a long time, for the groups of young people, and we want to try and address that. Now it could be, that we could spend all of our money on just funding outcomes for young people,

so we look at that figure of 700,000 and we run grant programmes and investments that try and support as many young people as possible, to reduce youth unemployment. But, actually, there's been quite a lot of investments and programmes that have been set up to do exactly that, and Youth Futures is here to try and do it differently. So we want to use evidence and learning of what works to generate new ideas, innovations, and create a movement for change so that more young people, now and in the future, have a fairer chance of accessing good quality jobs. So, by taking a slightly different approach, of investing in understanding what works, what we hope is then that learning and that evidence can be used to affect the way that young people are supported, now, and in the future. So it has much wider ripple effects, in terms of its impact.

Moderator: Before we move onto the next section, you mentioned briefly there about our funding streams and dormant assets. Now, the consultation on dormant assets has recently closed, as you'll know, would you mind giving our listeners a bit more of a background about how dormant assets are used and maybe how we approached our use of dormant assets? Where is that funding going and how is it supporting our work and our mission?

M: Yes, so dormant assets funding is a unique opportunity, because it's outside of, kind of, government influence, Youth Futures is an independent organisation, and it means that we're able to tackle some of the issues that we're facing in different ways, and ways that haven't been done before. So, dormant assets were released, initially, to a number of particular causes and, as you highlighted, most recently there's been a consultation as to whether or not those causes should remain, or if there should be new causes that are added. So the consultation had within it youth and young people as a cause, so we're excited by the possibility that we'll receive additional funding in the future, because we recognise, actually, in order to try and tackle the issue of youth unemployment, we need longer than just the initial period of funding that we've received.

Moderator: So, George, I'd love to hear your thoughts on that, as a new member of our board, what are your thoughts on Youth Futures' journey so far, from what you've heard from Matthew? Is it what you expected? What are your reflections?

M: Yes, no, I think, certainly, following on from what Matthew's covered, and also just, sort of, my experience since April this year, it's overachieved what I originally expected, and the crucial influential role that Youth Futures plays, not just within the practitioners arena, but also within government, and most importantly, as well, it is employers, (TC 00:10:00) and I think that the key piece that I've really took away from being a young board member, is how key the youth voice is and is a forefront of the input, and I think, personally, for me, that's what I'm a real champion of, and why I work in this sort of profession in my career and have done, it's just because I feel, sometimes, that can be overlooked, and I don't think there's nothing worse than, actually, the person that's receiving, necessarily if it's education, employment, stuff, should have, maybe, be sitting round that table, and I certainly feel that happens at Youth Futures, and I've had that sort of experience. Also, I'd say the passion, from not just the staff, it's the grantees, the partners, it's all singing from the same hymn sheet, which I think's just very refreshing, being, sort of, an advocate for youth and real quality employment. So I think that's something I've really

taken in from, sort of, my first few months. And then I would say, as I've mentioned, is the role within the landscape, and really that collaboration piece, which I think is one of the hardest challenges I've, probably, realised in my short 7-year career working in this space, and I feel where Youth Futures can play that, sort of, neutral conducting and facilitative role has been really key, and that's across, not just necessarily employers, practitioners, and government, and then bringing all together and having that conversation as well.

Moderator: So, Matthew spoke a little bit there about some of the additional barriers that some young people face, especially from backgrounds where they might be facing adversity, especially young people from ethnic minorities, what are your reflections on the challenges that some young people face from your own experience or your career so far?

M: I think a key one that really stands out to me is the access to professional quality networks, I think that was probably one of my biggest barriers, particularly when I was young, going through secondary school, is, because I didn't have family that come through, sort of, a corporate background or don't, not necessarily a professional role because I don't want to speak down on my family, but very much your hands-on type roles. No-one in my immediate or extended family worked in an office, and I think that really restricted the access of that network growing up and that what comes from a network is understanding the opportunity and experience and exposure, and I think that was really tunnelled into necessarily, I went into a traineeship where then I found out about employability and really started my journey in my professional career. So, I'd say the access to professional networks is the key one, because I experienced what access to the wrong networks can do to young people, and particularly at my 14-16 teenage years, which is a crucial part, I was necessarily having access to maybe not the best networks, and I think, just because of the background and the situation I was, that was just all I knew. So as soon as I managed to find my opportunity of going onto the traineeship, building my professional career, the whole networks that I opened up, I could have never dreamt of, and I know my family could never have put me in touch with the people that I've now engaged and created my network around. So, I think actually that can become the biggest barriers because my, sort of, mantra is, 'Network creates opportunity', so I think when that's restricted, because where you live or your background, that can be such a big challenge for young people, because it's not saying they've not got the skills or the capability, but they might not never know about that opportunity because they've not got no-one in the network that can let them know how they would find out about that or put that in front of them. So I'd say that would be one of the key ones that stand out for me.

I think the impact of the pandemic, if I look from when I started, my traineeship, which would have been 2014, wow it's flown by, is the actual challenge that have now risen from the pandemic, and actually that's accelerated some of the barriers more further, so it's actually put more young people more at a disadvantage, and I think, actually, sectors and industries that are not the same from now, after Covid, where young people would probably get their foot on the ladder, is probably the best way to put it, and get that exposure and that experience, then opportunities are not necessarily there anymore, or not on the same basis. So, for example, I see a lot of young people that are working on, necessarily, zero-hour contracts is much more common, so I think the quality and exposure to the employment at that younger

age, which then can lead into other careers, but it gives you that professional, sort of, experience, and just experience in general, not whether it's in banking, finance, it could be just hospitality, but you're just getting that first job. I think that can be a barrier, because, even though, a lot of employers that say, offer a, sort of, early talent initiatives, it's always good to see that you've done a bit of experience as well as being at college, and so forth. But, when those opportunities are not as frequent to come by, I think that can be a challenge on building that, sort of, profile, or that resume that the employers are looking for.

And then I think the education attainment, I think if I didn't go down the route I did, which was through traineeship, doing my, sort of, English and Maths outside of the school setting, I think that can be a barrier, because when I see a lot of, say, apprenticeships that are level 3 and higher, that it an eligibility requirement, so I think that can be a big barrier. If you haven't managed, for whatever reasons, to achieve your Maths and English necessarily through school, that can be a key barrier for then entering quality employment,

M: Just reflecting on what George was saying, I think that sometimes there's a bit of a misconception that youth unemployment happens because young people can't be bothered, or that young people are just not passionate enough about working hard enough to get into work and George highlights that, actually, it's a really complex issue, and there are multiple reasons why young people face barriers in accessing work. There's reasons why young people can get stuck in a system where there's lots of different organisations that are providing support, multiple government departments that have got responsibility, but not one which has an overarching accountability for youth unemployment. And also funding in this space, like, there's been lots of funders that have delivered programmes and activities for young people, and all of this leads to a system which is fragmented, and disconnected, and it means that young people, at certain points, can get stuck in a system that's not working for them, but can feel like it's working against them. So, when Youth Futures was set up, we really had this ambition of if we can understand what works, and then get it out there and influence more good stuff to happen, based on evidence. And if we can understand this system and its complexity and think about how do we make these journeys to work, for young people, smoother, then we will help to reduce that inequality of young people who face all of these barriers in accessing work and employment. And I think George just, kind of, really helpfully summarised, it's not's one issue that affects young people, there's multiple issues and multiple things that are working to try and support young people but doesn't always ultimately help them.

Moderator: Angel, I'd love to bring you in here, and I'd love to know your reflections, as a member of staff at Youth Futures, as well, what are your reflections on how Youth Futures has developed over the years, hearing about it?

F: Yes, no, absolutely, and I completely echo what George and Matthew have both said. I think, as a member of staff, in just 3 years, Youth Futures has undergone an incredible transformation really, we've gone from, a start-up working out of other organisation's offices, to now having over 50 staff members, and hubs spread over Birmingham, Leeds, and London, and I really appreciate the fact that we're not a London-centric organisation, we're very keen to make sure that we're regionally spread, and that's super

important. We've got a fantastic board, George is one of them, and they're full of inspiring individuals. We've got an employer advisory board, so we're hearing from the employer perspective. We've got a grants and evaluation committee. We've got the Future voices group, for our youth ambassadors. So many exciting and inspiring individuals that we're working with, and we're still continuing to grow. Recently, we actually became the 10th fully accredited What Works Centre in the UK, which is so exciting for us, and we're the first one to focus specifically on youth employment, so, lots and lots of stuff going on, and we're hugely proud of the grants and investments that we've made. Matthew mentioned earlier just how many organisations we've reached, and we're continuing to expand and think about where we can do new best placed partnerships, where we can support more front-line organisations and marginalised young people. We're working really really closely with policy-makers, Civil Society, to advocate for systems change, the merit of test based approaches, and the importance of putting young people as a high-priority on the policy agenda.

And it's just really exciting, to be honest, to work at an organisation that clearly cares about young people, being put at the heart of everything that we do, and to see how, despite having achieved so much, we're still striving to push the envelope further and further, and so I think Matthew's point around dormant assets is a really important one, we're continuing to lobby for our own financial sustainability, because there's so much more to be done to, sort of, narrow that youth employment gap and to change the system for young people, to make sure it works for everyone.

Moderator: You touched upon the idea of What Works at Youth Futures Foundation, that's one of our key principles, can you talk to us a little bit about the policy landscape (TC 00:20:00) right now and what are the key priority areas that you think should be focused on?

F: Yes, and I think it's worth saying as a caveat that, even as I record this, we've literally just found out that Kwasi Kwarteng has stepped down as chancellor and is being replaced by Jeremy Hunt, so I think there is a widespread, sort of, worry across the sector about being able to enact meaningful policy change as the government continues to change and is in this, kind of, period of turbulence. However, having said that, and a more optimistic note, it is our job at Youth Futures, and in the youth employment sector, to cut through the noise and identify the key priority areas in policy to make it easier for civil servants and politicians to get on with their jobs and to enact meaningful policy change. And I think that yes, it goes without saying, that the young employment policy landscape is vast and it's complex, we've got a cost of living crisis, we've got the threat of recession, and keeping up the call to prioritise young people on the policy agenda, is really challenging, amidst all those things going on, we've got the war in Ukraine. Having said that though, it's never been important to continue to lobby for young people, and to put them on the agenda, we're seeing a lot of government rhetoric around low unemployment rates, and normally, this would be something to be celebrated, but it's only part of the picture, and it's masking some really serious issues, and one of those serious issues is economic inactivity, which basically means the amount of people who are unemployed and not looking for work, and this is rising with more people exiting the labour market, and worryingly, the Office for National Statistics' latest stats showed that a record number of labour market exits had been happening recently due to ill health, and it's a really worrying number of young people who are economically inactive, and as Matthew said, we have a stubbornly high number of

young people who are NEET, not in education, employment, or training, and this has remained high for decades.

And I think another point that's really worth flagging is that we've got a participation crisis at the moment, the labour market is really tight, which means basically that we've got demand outstripping supply, and we've seen record-number of job vacancies this year, and employers are struggling to fill them, and the problem is that young people aren't necessarily equipped with the skills they need to take up these opportunities. We've been having conversations recently about just how many opportunities are actually truly entry-level, not many, so it's really really hard for young people to, kind of, break through that barrier, that getting their first step on the career ladder. And I think, as well, just to kind of flag that the fragmentation point that Matthew and George alluded to is really important, employability services are patchy, they're disjointed, and young people don't know where they need to go to get job support, and if you couple that with the impact of the pandemic and the mental health emergency that we're seeing, it's really scary, it's a really scary time to be a young person trying to navigate their employment, education, and training journey, and we know from previous evidence, and from hearing from young people themselves that they're disproportionately represented in zero-hours contracts, in secure work, and they're not feeling like they're able to find good jobs where they live, that was something that came out strongly in the Youth Voice Census, that Youth Employment UK do. So it's really really important, that there's not just this emphasis on getting young people into jobs, but also getting them into good quality jobs, and therefore, I think that, you know, this rhetoric in government around needing to just get everyone into work, and there's a focus on older age groups, and things like that, it's all important, but young people just aren't part of that narrative, and they need to be and especially, as we've talked about, marginalising people, those who face the most barriers and potentially those who are then the most likely to get disengaged with the labour market, they're the ones that really need to be put as a policy focus.

So I just think, overall, there's a lot to look at in the landscape and it's incredibly vast and there's so much noise, but the system, currently, isn't working for young people, and particularly not those from marginalised backgrounds, so it's really important, as an organisation, that we're lobbying for them, even if it's not always happening at the heart of government, amidst everything else that's going on.

Moderator: You touched upon there some really interesting and important issues that, in previous collaborations, on reports, we've uncovered a disparity between young people's views versus the narrative of which they're portrayed, which you touched upon there, and in your role, you collaborate with a range of organisations, right, including the Youth Employment Group, and I imagine some of listeners might not know what that is, could you give us a bit of a background on what the YEG is?

F: Yes, of course, so the Youth Employment Group, for anyone who doesn't know, and it is affectionately known as the YEG, is the UK's largest youth employment coalition, and it was set up in 2020 in response to the threat of a youth employment crisis during the pandemic. The YEG is made up of over 300

members and comes together monthly to bring youth employment experts together to share research and, basically, to influence policy and practice. We're really excited at Youth Futures because we've been able to play a founding role in that group, we're a founding co-chair of the YEG, alongside The Prince's Trust, the Institute for Employment Studies, Youth Employment UK, Impetus, and Learning and Work Institute. And we're really just a space to mobilise the sector, to act as, you know, a forum for collaboration between the various research projects, campaigns, and activity in the youth employment sector. And, just to give a little bit of context, last July we published a paper on levelling up for young people, as part of the YEG, and it was basically lobbying for an opportunity guarantee, so guaranteed education, training, place, or employment opportunity for young people, and we lobbied the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and managed to get 89 signatories from across the YEG to call for this opportunity guarantee, and we continue to work on collective action, and putting our heads together, on what meaningful calls we can make as we approach a general election in the next 2 years.

The YEG has several offshoots, that focus in on particular issues. Now, we recognise that the youth employment landscape is incredibly vast and very complex, so, in partnership with the Westminster Foundation, and supported by Impotus, we created 7 sub-groups focussing on areas such as, quality of work, self-employment, disability, et cetera, just to make sure that we're really thinking about the context barriers that young people face in those particular areas. And it's worth saying that Youth Futures Foundation is proud to be a founding co-chair of the ethnic disparity sub-group, which was set up in July 2021, with The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, but is now jointly co-chaired with the council for the Somali Organisations, and since then we've commissioned 3 strands of ethnic disparities research, on behalf of the sub-group, which looks at the experiences of young people who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, their navigation into work, and we've uncovered some really scary stats recently, actually, about discrimination, and about the fact that 2 in 5 young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, out of a sample of 2,700, said that their mental health had suffered due to the cost of living crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. We're super excited, as part of the sub-group, also, to be launching the findings at an event in the House of Lords in November, which is going to be hosted by Lord Simon Woolley, he's a non-executive director on Youth Futures Foundation's board as well.

So lots of exciting stuff with the YEG, and I think the final thing that I would just comment on, which is I think really important and it's the heart of everything that Youth Futures does, and that the YEG does, is young people are very much, their voice is something we really want to surface and hear, so we've got a Youth Voice Forum as well, which is basically the youth participation strand of the YEG, which is run by young people, for young people, and I'm lucky enough to be one of the co-chairs of the YVF, alongside The Prince's Trust and the IES and Youth Employment UK, and so we meet, basically, every month with young people to discuss topical issues and hear their perspectives, and then we feed that back to civil servants, and also YEG members at the Youth Employment Group monthly meetings, so, it's a really really diverse coalition and I'd encourage people who haven't heard of it, or don't know of it, to check it out, because it's open to everyone, and we just really want to bring people together as much as possible.

Moderator: We've really set the scene there, in terms of Youth Futures Foundation's history, its

development, some of the issues it's tackling and we've touched upon some real barriers and issues that young people are grappling with, including the mental health emergency affecting young people. Discrimination and the importance of youth voice within that and how important it is to, kind of, make sure that it's embedded.

So George and Matthew, what do you think about what Angel has said there about the current policy landscape? Does any of that resonate with you?

M: Thanks, Reena. So yes, it does and at times, it paints a slightly scary picture of not only the challenges that we can see now but also the challenges that we expect to see in the future and we live in uncertain times and uncertain economic conditions and issues like the rising cost of living, are all issues that are going to affect young people. I guess a reflection when Angel was talking, was actually about how well-equipped are we to tackle some of these issues. What are the skills and experiences and knowledge and learning that we have in our professional toolbelt, that enables us to, kind of, maximise the impact of activities and funding for young people? How do we know what is effective in tackling youth unemployment? How do we know what works in order that during, you know, times of crisis, we're able to respond quickly and at pace and in collaboration with others by saying, 'This is the thing that we should do and why.' And we launched our Evidence and Gap Map, which kind of set out our (TC 00:30:00) stool, in terms of understanding what are the interventions that are proven to work or not work and an important part of our role moving forward, is supplementing that knowledge base, but also making sure that people that are working with young people on the front line day in, day out, have the right tools to enable them to support the young people in the way that is most effective and maximises every pound that's invested in supporting them.

Moderator: George, you talked a little bit earlier about your journey on an apprenticeship and, as you know, was set up in 2019 but since then, a huge amount has happened in society and it's impossible to have a conversation, I think, about our history without referencing the pandemic. So what do you think about the impact of Covid on young people's prospects?

M: I think it-, and just quickly on the points that Angel and Matthew have made, I think the piece around the lack of skills and the current jobs, I think that is going to be a key one. A lot of the work that I do is particularly around growth sectors and I think if you were to ask a young person, for example, a career in cyber security, I think there'd be a handful that would know about that but there'd be a lot that wouldn't and I think that's, probably, going to be one of the growing sectors in careers that I think was very suited to it, to a young person. So I think actually, that sort of, knowledge and advice, so that YEG filtered down, so it isn't just at the end of school, 16 afterwards, actually, it's from the age Year 11 you're finding out about these career pathways and what skills and attributes you need to go into them. So then it really narrows down that engagement within that, sort of, academic piece say, for example, in school. I think that the piece on the change and the impact of the pandemic, I certainly do feel it has but I feel like it's created a lot more opportunity, at the same time, and that I'm very keen to make sure that that's opened up for particularly marginalised young people and I think, when you look at the landscape and how for example, employers worked prior to the pandemic and how young people have been brought up with say, for example, digital devices, like myself I've also known how to use, sort of, digital devices and

applications, etc. I think that is a real benefit for young people because I think that is going to be the way of work now. So I think that's certainly within their favour. I think the key piece for me, as well, is the political landscape and I think since 2019, that's been very, sort of, turmoil, as well.

So I think, actually, when we look at the levelling up agenda and I see, for example, that the focus on employment and skills that's coming out of the prosperity funding. That's not going to be launched until, sort of, 2025 and I know how key, for example, the SF Funding instrument has been to charities and employment practitioners across the UK. So I think that could be a challenge where there's that potential gap in services being delivered but I think that's the work that Youth Futures are really supporting with is actually, the services that can be overlooked by mainstream funding and I think I found out through my own, sort of, career, particularly working in a college, is actually that the marginalised young people that do need extra support and just maybe something that's more tailored, the mainstream funding doesn't allow that and I think there's already severe cuts across, for example, further education. So I think actually, being able to provide that source of funding to projects that are maybe more innovative than your, sort of, historic and how traditional education has been. I think that is where I'm really keen on Youth Futures, like, they continue to do more of what they've done already because I think yes, there's only so much the mainstream funding can do and I think sometimes, that's for example, myself I felt I was overlooked through mainstream funding and it was only through, sort of, alternative funding then I got onto my own personal route to employment.

F: I think George's point about Youth Futures' role to make sure that those who are marginalised or those organisations that wouldn't get a look-in or are overlooked are supported and given the funding that they need is super important. There's been so much mis-learning due to the lockdowns, so many missed opportunities. I think George is right, there is an opportunity with hybrid working and it's been one of the unlikely benefits of the pandemic, it's given greater accessibility to young people with disabilities but having said that, there is still a lot of negatives when it comes to the impact of the pandemic, in terms of those face-to-face opportunities. There's opportunity for those young people to get that training to get their foot in the door. There's so many issues there that need addressing, even things like do people have access to devices, that can hinder them when it comes to digital development. I think one of the things that we heard very strongly through the partnership that we run with Youth Employment UK, is that young people told us that the Covid pandemic had a massive impact on their mental health and also their perceptions of which jobs and industries are stable. I think there is definitely a knock-on effect of what young people now consider that is a stable employment venture. There's perceptions and healing that needs to be done in order to make sure that they feel supported to do what they want to do and when they want to do it. It's a role that we'll need to play to facilitate how we can help that healing journey and make sure those that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic have that support.

M: Yes, I guess I couldn't talk about, kind of, Covid response without talking about our partnership with BBC Children in Need, called Inspiring Futures, which is supporting 85 grantees across England and it was launched during Covid to support young people. To make sure that they were still being able to

progress towards working and into jobs during that, kind of, really challenging time and actually, the programme's delivered really well. So we've seen really good progress with some of the young people that have been on programme towards work and a bit of a teaser, we're going to be launching some of the findings of Inspiring Futures later on this year because we commissioned an overarching evaluation of the programme, kind of, adding to that evidence base and learning around some of what has been effective practice during delivery to young people. Like, what has worked and what hasn't, and included in that is some learning about that digital divide but also learning about how do you engage with young people virtually and how do you exit from relationships with young people when it's all been done online? So some really good and useful, kind of, practice guidelines that hopefully, we'll be getting later on this year.

Moderator: I'd love to bring your reflections around a statistic that we have referenced a lot in our works. So currently 1 in 8 young people remain NEET. What do you think about that statistic?

F: 1 in 8 people is far, far, far too high and it's remained that high for decades and I think there's sometimes in Government and just generally, there can be a sort of, complacency that comes with when you see a statistic and it's been there for a long time and it's long-standing, it's historic, to just ignore it or to not know what to do to tackle the issue. So just because it's a long-standing problem, doesn't mean it's not something that should be tackled and addressed, and through our conversations with young people, we've heard about the detrimental mental health effects of the stigma behind being not in education, employment, or training. We've heard about the fact that it, you know, the more people that get disengaged with the system, the harder it is to then re-engage them and then it can become that person's life chances are drastically reduced and they don't get that support that they need. So, you know, there are services out there to support young people but they don't necessarily get to access them, or they're fragmented or disjointed and we've seen this a lot with, for example, Youth Hubs. We love Youth Hubs. We think they're such a brilliant resource when done correctly.

They're co-located services that can help young people to access jobs. We've got youth coaches that the DWP hire to support young people but the problem is, is that it's often a postcode lottery with these things and also, they often require referral. So what happens when a young person is disengaged from the system entirely and doesn't engage with those employability services? That's where we see the real barrier here and it's really difficult to engage with young people. So I think what we're really keen at Youth Futures to do is also work on NEET prevention, to make sure that young people don't end up in a situation where they're completely disengaged from education, employment, training and just have no, sort of, bearing on being able to get their life back on track because it's not that people don't want support, it's just often that they don't know where to find it or it's not in a, you know, single place or a one-stop shop that they can look for to be able to get that information and guidance.

M: Yes, I think just to echo Angel's points. I think the statistic, when you look at it say for example, on an average school basis, when you look at say a year group would have 10 classes of 30 young people. That's nearly a whole class of young people that are classed as NEET. So that's 30 people within one

room, that will after, sort of, that Year 11 period, they're going into that NEET pathway and that's almost, based on these statistics, guaranteed and I just think that's just solely not acceptable. So that's why, as well, I'm very passionate about the work I do. Having been a NEET for a brief spell and then managing to get myself out of that situation. It was very much not from the employability services, as well, so I think that join up from when you do leave school, (TC 00:40:00) and ensuring that there isn't that sort of-, there's all this momentum getting you through your GCSEs and getting you to the end of Year 11 and it's like the momentum drops off. So I think that real connection with school and not just colleges but when you look at, for example, the apprenticeship market, 70% of apprenticeships are delivered by independent training providers.

When I was in school, I wouldn't have a clue what an independent training provider is and I think that whole industry talking with schools is going to be key over the foreseeable future and I feel like the gaps being benchmarked and the announcements and some of the amendments that this year, will hopefully push that along and really embed careers education within schooling but really on that local level, as well because I think that's one of the things I realised is, I think, yes. enterprise days back when I was at school. You're getting some of the biggest employers you can think across the UK come and talk to you about all these fantastic jobs and you go work (inaudible 40.53) and actually, it's not possible for you to apply. So actually, that connection with localised employers, I think's key because when you look at our economy, most of the economy is made up by small businesses and I think that engagement and support and advice for small businesses engaging with the NEET population is key and I think you can see that through some of the grantees that YFF support.

M: Just building upon the points already made, I think a statistic that says 1 in 8 young people will become NEET, is just really sad and it's sad for a couple of reasons. Primarily because for that young person, it can mean a period of instability and uncertainty not knowing what is going to happen next and how they're going to access support to move them beyond being stuck but equally, thinking about the scarring effects longer term. Like, the longer that somebody stays outside of education, employment, and training, the worse the outcomes become for that young person. So being able to think about how do you prevent young people from becoming NEET and getting caught in a system, I think is equally important and actually, there's a job to be done that means that actually, those young people aren't just seen as, you know, wonky economic units that have gone wrong and they're going to be a cost to the Treasury and to government but actually, those are young people and that's their life chances and we want to make sure that we are there to support them and funding front line organisations but also providing them with that learning about what's effective.

Moderator: So we've raised some really important points there. Especially what George was saying there about some of the jargon around your options, like 'independent training provider' and what you were saying there, Matthew, about the long-term scarring effects of being NEET. I'd love to move our conversation towards our approach to how we're tackling some of those issues. So Matthew, what are some of the solutions that Youth Futures have identified in terms of our approach of strategy?

M: So we've learned a lot about the experiences of young people through the funding we've distributed and we plan to learn a lot more. Sometimes, kind of, building evaluations and evidence takes time and we've been developing a pipeline of really promising interventions that we want to learn from and evaluate and build our evidence base, and actually, we're in the process, excitingly, of preparing for our first randomised control trial. Which is super exciting but I'd better not give too many spoilers because we'll have to do a separate podcast on learning about that and in and of itself but in particular, we have identified, you know, some really important lessons and good practice and the first one's going to sound a bit boring but it's important and that's about effective tracking and outreach. So we need to be able to ensure that we are understanding who we are supporting and who we are reaching. That we are making sure that the right young people are being supported onto the programmes and initiatives that they're designed to support and actually, the use of magnets. So things that might attract young people to take up support is in place and is effective so that we're getting access and we're accessible to young people. So I guess a key bit of learning about who are you engaging with and how are you reaching them is quite important. The second one is something that a grantee recently described to me as ordinary magic and I quite like that term and it's about somebody caring for the young people that have been supportive and the effectiveness of advisors in supporting young people (inaudible 44.39) into work and a lot about the kind of consistency of the support that is provided to young people. Either via a mentor or a jobs coach but helping young people to set goals, maintain momentum, and also overcoming setbacks because we recognise that, like, journeys to work aren't always linear. They're not always a straight line.

Actually, crises happen in people's lives and actually, having somebody available to support a young person at multiple points, is really important. So that whole idea about somebody caring for a young person, that provision of support and it being delivered consistently is an important piece of learning that we've identified. The third one that I think is important is around, kind of, that personalised packages of provision. So, kind of, recognising that all young people are unique and different and actually, in order to increase their capability and to break down barriers, young people might need a unique offer of support. Whether or not that's, kind of, support with job seeking, the provision of technical skills or even practical life skills. Like, having available support to young people that's unique and personalised is really important. So I guess, those would be my top 3 and then just a couple of others that we've been doing some research on more recently. So we've been doing quite a lot of work in and around the employer space and we've been looking at what is effective approaches for employers in reaching and recruiting young people that have come from marginalised backgrounds and we've also been doing some funding around intermediary labour markets with our funding up in Durham to Durham County Council.

So we're excited to learn, actually, what the effective practice looks like there and we've also been doing some work with employers around retention. So in work support, how do you enable young people to stay in work once they've found a job? And hopefully, move on and progress through it. So we've been funding some research and sharing that with employers about actually, how do you support not only young people to access employment opportunities but once they've access it, how do you get them to stay? So that's all super exciting, too and then finally, the only other thing that I was going to touch on is that we've recently launched our Connected Futures programme, which is funding in 7 places and these 7 places are uniquely different. We're funding in coastal communities. We're funding in urban areas. We're

funding in areas of high poverty but we're also looking to support some specific groups of young people. So young people who have a learning disability or are from particular ethnic minority groups or have experience of care and what we hope is, by taking a place-based lens is that we can start to look at the experiences of young people within those places and look at the journeys that they take and we think there's going to be some really rich learning about how do you create effective journeys to work for young people.

Moderator: So George, in your capacity as a board member, what are you most looking forward to in your role in terms of what you think you can bring and especially, in terms of solutions?

M: I hope, Reena, that's where I can actually add the most value. I think when I was going through the sort of, process of interview for Youth Futures Foundation, I think that was one of the key areas I highlighted through that process is I feel that particularly my lived experience and then 7 years working with large and small businesses on engaging young people and how to retain them, as well. I think that's one of the key points that Matthews just highlighted there. It isn't just about getting the role, it's about once you're in the role, what's that progression? And that's one of things that I'm very passionate is you're not just being offered one job, you're being offered a whole career and that's where I really want to move the mindsets to the employers because, at the end of the day, employers need to run as a business. So they need to have those benefits as a business and as we know at the moment, there is a lot more obviously, jobs than people that are actually going forward for them. So that whole retention and that, sort of, war on talent is key for employers and I think, actually, marginalised young people is a complete untapped talent pool that really needs to be accessed and I hope my lived experience and the connections and the actual board members and all the staff at YFF and all the connections and collaborations that are already happening but also the ones that could just widen that impact a little further and really scale the innovative projects that we are funding.

So I think Matthew mentioned it around the infrastructure project. So particularly, the one for LPC in London is really helping guide and support small businesses on actually how to recruit young people through apprenticeships and it's those (TC 00:50:00) niche unique intermediary, not the traditional way of the system working, is what I feel is going to be key on being scaled and having a real focus on actually, measuring the impacts through initiatives and projects that we fund, such as that. I think, yes, necessarily still being fairly young myself, so being 24 I think I can also bring that perspective and I feel that sometimes, particularly with employers, I can bring sort of a different perspective having as mentioned, been through the experience as a young person but also, know the paying points for the employers and some of the stuff that they need that support and guidance on, is what I hope I can do and then really, just that cross-sector collaboration. I think as I mentioned with Youth Futures, it's that sort of neutral ground, as well. So it's really sort of bringing out any competition and bringing people around the table to talk about the outcome that we're all here to support, which is help marginalised young people into good quality employment.

Moderator: Angel, in your work in the policy sphere, you mentioned earlier your interests in the

ethnic disparities gap and trying to narrow that. What are we doing at Youth Futures to tackle the ethnic disparities gap?

F: Yes, it's a really important area and it's something that we're very, very passionate about. Especially, given the fact that we were established in response to the risk of disparity in 2017. So we're doing this a number of ways which has been touched on a little bit but I'd just like to expand a bit further. As Matthew said, we're funding front-line organisations, working with young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and in particular, groups as well, to examine what the challenges are they're facing and try to support them, both locally and nationally, to improve their employment outcomes and we're also investing in ethnic minority-led organisations. We're really passionate about changing what the workforce looks like. From previous roles in other organisations, we've seen that, you know, at the top of companies, it doesn't look diverse and that needs to change and I'm very passionate about that, from a personal lens as well. As well as that, we're not just investing in front-line organisations, we're also trying to evaluate what we do. We're trying to put research out to really understand what works and what the landscape is like. So through our research with the EDS, Ethnic Disparity Subgroup, we're acting as a convener for experts in that space to come together and we're also trying to build up this foundational basis of what the post (inaudible 52.55) landscape looks like at the moment. So we did a rapid evidence assessment on this, looking at very different key areas. So housing, immigration, education, employment, and trying to put a picture together of what the landscape looks like for ethnic minority young people and also, ethnic minority groups in general because it is, obviously, a problem that affects wider than young people but we think focusing on young people is really, really important.

We're really hoping to sort of scope out this research and make it become longitudinal, we don't want it to be, 'We do this, yes and that's it.' We're keen to continue to develop our evidence base and identify what works to really, really help young people from those marginalised groups and we're excited, as well, because our brilliant research team are doing some really cool new research on marginalisation of relapsing data with NatCen and we're also hoping to launch a data dashboard towards the end of this year. I won't spoil too much, but it will include ethnic disparities work, as well as other markers of marginalisation for young people, as well and that will be a live platform that we can grow and get a deeper understanding of the labour market. So we've got lots in the pipeline but also lots of stuff to look forward to and we're continuing to, sort of, really dissect and aggregate what we can do in these areas to hone in on the specific barriers that young people face from ethnic minority backgrounds but also to, kind of, do that bigger picture piece. Which is really important, especially, you know, as we've-, there's so much rhetoric out there and racism and systemic racism and those kind of things. We're really keen to make sure that this is put on the agenda and that racism, discrimination, ethnic disparities that people from ethnic minority backgrounds are really given the same opportunities to thrive and especially because there's such intersections as well there that exist. So a young person from an ethnic minority group who also comes from a low-income background or is a care-leaver and that might affect your journey to work, as well. So there's so many different layers to dissect there and we're just keen to make sure that we're working with organisations and that these features, in terms of building evidence base, to really champion this cause and to make sure that attention is being drawn to it and we're also really keen to make sure that we're working with civil servants and policymakers as well to make sure it gets attention because it is a really important issue.

Moderator: Thanks to my guests for joining me for a conversation on Youth Futures journey so far. If you're interested in learning more about our work, our history and our mission, visit our website, where you can also subscribe to our monthly newsletter and keep up to date on our activities. See you next time when I'll be chatting all things research. Bye.