

Policy Fact Sheet

Reconnecting NEET youth in South Africa

Pilot results from the Basic Package of Support (BPS), 2022–2023

B P S

The challenge

In 2023, over 3.4 million South African youth aged 15–24 were not in employment, education or training (NEET) - 33.3% of the youth population. While most upper middle-income countries reduced NEET rates over the past two decades, South Africa experienced a notable increase. NEET status is consistently linked to poor mental health, social exclusion and long-term economic disadvantage. In response, the Basic Package of Support (BPS) for youth was piloted.

What was tested

The Basic Package of Support (BPS) is a multi-component programme designed to address the social, psychological and economic barriers that keep young people NEET. It combines proactive outreach by peer mobilisers to reach disconnected youth, individualised coaching delivered by social service paraprofessionals, active referrals to learning, earning and support services, ongoing, long-term support, and collaboration with local service providers to strengthen youth-friendly service delivery.

Pilot at a glance

502

NEET youth who completed the pre-coaching session 1 survey were enrolled in the pilot

~40%

reconnected to learning or earning opportunities

3

peri-urban sites in South Africa (Cato Manor in Durban, Orange Farm in Gauteng and Atlantis in the Western Cape)

The pilot ran from March 2022 to November 2023. Participants were aged 18–25 and NEET at enrolment. 62% of programme participants were women. NEET status was tracked after each coaching session. Additional outcomes were measured through pre- and post-coaching surveys.

Pilot outcomes at a glance

All findings below are based on participants who completed at least three coaching sessions. Comparisons are pre-coaching session 1 vs. post-coaching session 3 using paired t-tests.



Reconnection to Earning or Learning

24% reduction in NEET status

88.4% → 64.4%

Youth who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) decreased substantially after four coaching sessions.



Life Satisfaction

20% reduction in youth classified as “suffering”

56% → 36%

Fewer young people reported low levels of life satisfaction after three coaching sessions.

Life Evaluation

~10% increase in youth who are “thriving”

More participants reported positive evaluations of their current and future lives.

Anxiety Symptoms

14.9% reduction in likely anxiety

~40% at baseline → ~25% after coaching

Fewer youth screened positive for likely generalised anxiety.

Psychological Distress

13% reduction in high psychological stress

56% → 36%

Movement away from severe distress toward more moderate levels of wellbeing.

Peer Support & Trust

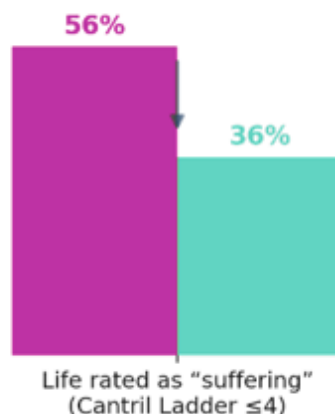
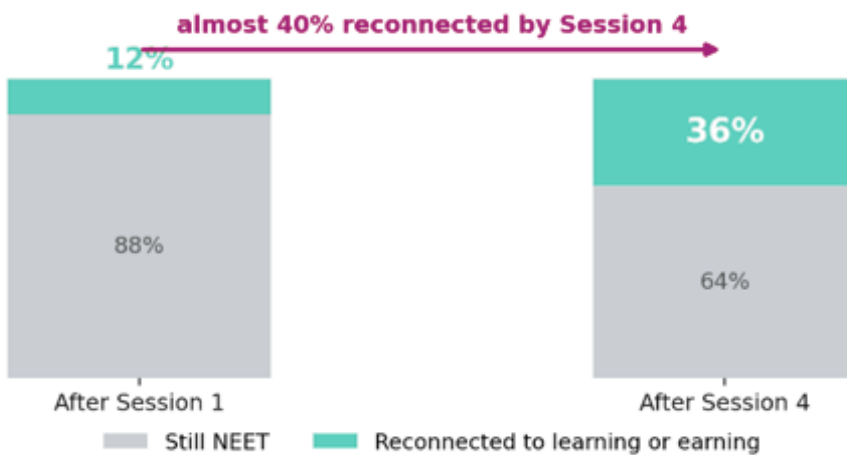
8% increase in trusted friendships

More youth reported having friends they could trust and rely on.

Access to Community Services

18.4% reduction in access barriers

Fewer youth believed they would not receive help when seeking community services. ⁽¹⁾



(1) Statistical significance: Reconnection to learning or earning ($p<0.001$); Life satisfaction ($p=0.001$); Life evaluation ($p=0.010$); Anxiety symptoms ($p=0.013$); Peer support and trust ($p=0.034$); Access to community services ($p<0.001$). Reduction in psychological distress showed a positive trend ($p=0.080$).

Key Lessons:

- **A multi-component, in-person model works.** Significant improvements appeared across wellbeing, mental health, social connection and service access after only three to four coaching sessions.
- **Reconnection to opportunity is achievable.** Almost 40% of participants had reconnected to learning or earning opportunities by the fourth coaching session - a highly significant shift from a starting point of full NEET status.
- **Social barriers are being addressed through the programme.** Improvements in mental health, support networks and service access lay the foundation for sustained engagement in training or work, helping break cycles of social drift^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9}
- **Coaching relationships are the engine.** The qualitative data shows that trust-based relational support drove the wellbeing and confidence gains that underpin the move out of NEET status.⁵

Citing this brief

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References

This fact sheet is based on: ① De Lannoy, A., Graham, L., Grotte, J., Mthembu, S., Ralarala, D., & Tatham, C. "Can a Holistic Coaching and Referral Programme Enhance Well-being and Employability Amongst NEET Youth?" (manuscript). Key references cited in the underlying study: ② Lindblad, V., Ravn, R., Gaardsted, P., Hansen, L., Lauritzen, F. and Melgaard, D. (2024). "Beyond the Mind: Understanding the Influence of Mental Health on Youth NEET Status in Europe—A Systematic Literature Review." *Journal of Adolescence* 96 (7): 1428–44. ③ Gariépy, G., Danna, S., Hawke, L., Henderson, J. and Iyer, S. (2022). "The Mental Health of Young People Who Are Not in Education, Employment, or Training: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 57 (6): 1107–21. ④ Arena, Andrew F., Sophia Mobbs, Samineh Sanatkar, et al. 2023. "Mental Health and Unemployment: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Interventions to Improve Depression and Anxiety Outcomes." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 335 (August): 450–72. ⑤ Lund, C. and Cois, A. (2018). "Simultaneous Social Causation and Social Drift: Longitudinal Analysis of Depression and Poverty in South Africa." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 229 (March): 396–402. ⑥ Marques, M., Alves, R., Dias, S. et al. (2025). "A Realist Synthesis of Interventions for Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): Building Programme Theories for Effective Support." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 30 (1): 2472022. ⑦ Mawn, L., Oliver, E., Akhter, N. et al. (2017). "Are We Failing Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs)? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Re-Engagement Interventions." *Systematic Reviews* 6 (1): 16. ⑧ Kluge, J., Puerto, S., Robalino, D. et al. (2019). "Do Youth Employment Programs Improve Labor Market Outcomes? A Quantitative Review." *World Development* 114 (February): 237–53. ⑨ Apunyo, Robert, Howard White, Caroline Otiike, et al. 2022. "Interventions to Increase Youth Employment: An Evidence and Gap Map." *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 18 (1): e1216.

