

The Consep Experiment: Growing the next generation of talent

Case study of Consep's Young Starters Program



Executive summary

Confronted by challenges in attracting and retaining young talent, Consep introduced the 'Young Starters' program, a paid rotational work experience initiative. The program **uplifted the whole business, and led to ongoing employment for 6 of the 10 trainees.**

Through Social Ventures Australia's Employer Innovation Lab, Consep designed a program to attract local young people with limited or no experience of work. It only had one requirement: that participants show up to work every day.

Consep formed relationships with community partners to identify participants. They kicked off with an open day, welcoming 11 young people to learn about the business and the program. While only 6 positions were originally envisaged, 10 attendees expressed interest in working at Consep and were offered positions.

The young people were rotated across different teams over 6 months. Critical to the program's success was understanding participants' needs, providing support, mentoring and training, and getting buy-in from across the company.

The young people thrived in the program and impressed colleagues with their talent and potential. As the trial concluded, all 5 remaining young people secured permanent positions at Consep, with one other supported into employment aligned with their interests. The initiative transformed Consep's culture and is being scaled up as a permanent fixture across Consep's Australian and Canadian operations.

[The Young Starters Program] is one of the most profound things I have achieved in my career... it touched me more than anything I have done, watching them overcome challenges.



Grant Steward
Founding CEO, Consep



The 6 Young Starters being presented with their completion certificates at the end of the program.

About Consep

Consep is a global business established in 1990 based in Australia, with a long history of providing innovative engineering solutions to the mining, construction, water and wastewater industries. They employ 127 people over 6 sites in NSW and WA.

What prompted action?

Consep was struggling to find and attract young people in their community to future-proof their workforce. They had few entry-level pathways, and recruitment processes were difficult to navigate. When they did recruit, they experienced challenges keeping new employees engaged in their tough work environment.

What was done?

During SVA's Employer Innovation Lab, Consep designed the Young Starters program. This paid work experience rotation initiative based in Wetherill Park, NSW was designed to attract local young people with limited or no experience of work. Roles were accessible to females, young people from diverse backgrounds, and those experiencing other barriers to work.

Intended benefits included:

- paid training pathways with rotations across the business to enable skill development and highlight different career pathways,
- supported learning and working environment to give Young Starters the best chance of success, and
- long term career opportunities for the Young Starters with Consep.

To better align the program and the needs and aspirations of young people in the community, Consep partnered with local organisations already supporting young people including OCTEC, Evolve Housing and Headspace.

The Young Starters program kicked off in November 2022 with an open day. 11 young people and their families attended, from which 10 applied for the program.

The participants commenced later that month, rotating through various business areas including Engineering, Fabrication, Assembly, Logistics, Rubber Lining, Paint & Passivation, Administration, Spare Parts, Accounts and Creche over 6 months.



Listen to the Young Starters stories and learn about the program's impact in this 3-minute video.



Two Young Starters were assisted to get their Learners Permits. Consep has provided the opportunity for all 6 to take a novated lease of up to \$10,000 to purchase a car, and have decided to fund driving lessons for future Young Starters.

What resources were needed?

In addition to budget set-aside for participant wages and training, the biggest requirement was staff time to attend the Lab, design and implement the pilot program, and deliver relevant training. Consep invested in improving recruitment and onboarding processes and allocated mentors for each Young Starter ahead of program commencement. This drove collaboration, and ensured buy-in and support from across the business.

Lessons and insights for employers

Clarify expectations upfront

Some Young Starters had little understanding of expectations due to limited interactions with work growing up. Explain your expectations upfront – even if they appear obvious, such as arriving to work on time.

Build skills first

Ensure core training for participants is provided upfront (like licences or a white card) so they can use them immediately and grow skills from the outset.

Prepare your team

Provide training for employees to help them understand and support young people, including around recruitment, onboarding, mentoring, or mental health.

Involve the family

Incorporating the young person's community as a support network can help them thrive. Consep are considering a 'family day', after the open day, to involve this network earlier.

Check-in with staff regularly

Quarterly check-ins with staff were critical to maintain strong engagement and connection with the pilot, and mitigate any people issues.

Provide safety in numbers

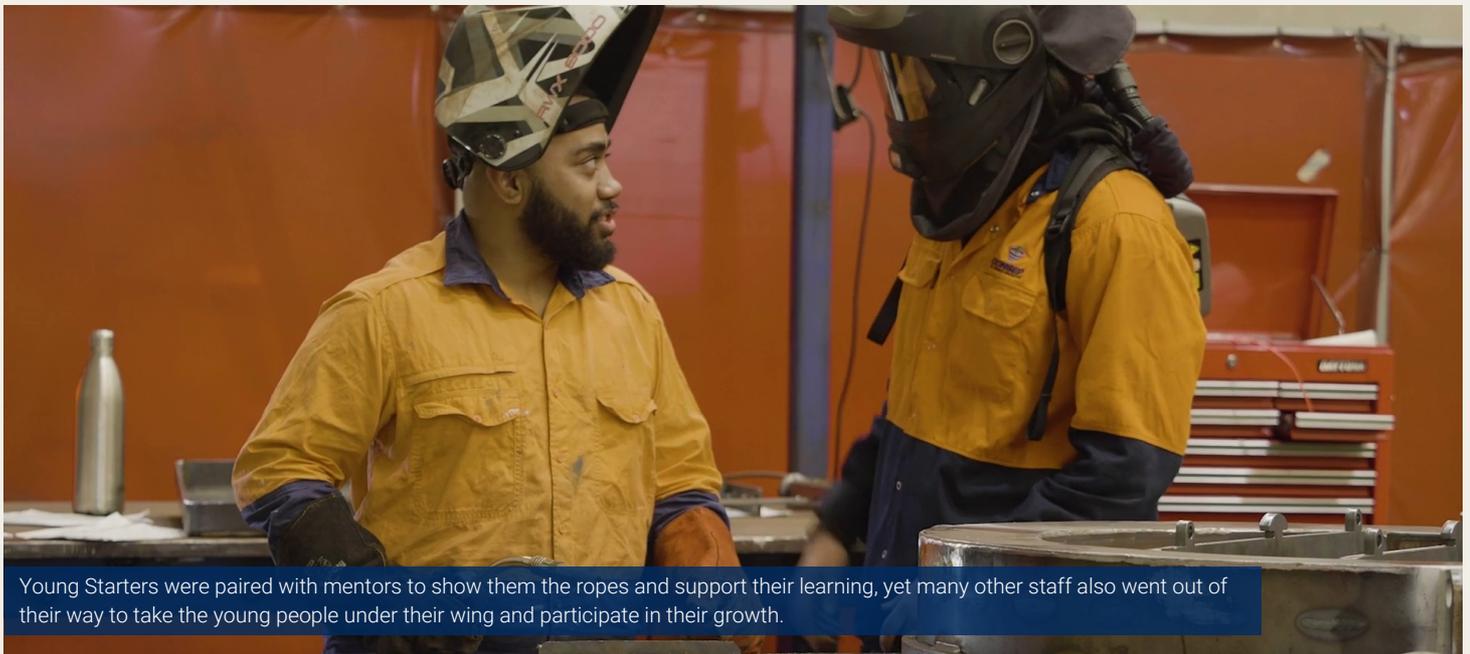
The 10 young people were a tight-knit group, forming a complementary and supportive network. A smaller group wouldn't have had the same energy or chance of success.

Engage community partners

Forming strong relationships with community partners, particularly employment providers, was critical. Establishing regular check-ins for participants and their case managers can help with retention, ensuring they are on-track and well-supported.

Be more flexible

Young people might enjoy some types of work more than others. As a business, Consep found they needed to be more responsive to participants' interests and aptitudes, rather than sticking to a firm, preconceived plan.



Young Starters were paired with mentors to show them the ropes and support their learning, yet many other staff also went out of their way to take the young people under their wing and participate in their growth.

What was the impact?

By the end of the program, 5 participants were provided ongoing employment at Consep, with one other being supported into a role in another industry aligning with their aspirations. Of the 6, all attained their First Aid certificate, 5 their White Card, 5 a Forklift licence and 2 a Learners Permit.

Importantly, everybody at the company was positively impacted, with Consep observing a significant shift in engagement from their team. Staff experienced first-hand the benefits in productivity and culture that the young people brought, and it lifted the whole business.

While mentors were assigned at program commencement to support participants to navigate the workplace, Consep observed other staff taking the young people under their wing. Many had similar experiences when they were early in their working lives and were able to relate to the young workers well. The relationships built as a result of the program have been very rewarding for everyone.

Grant, Consep's founder, was directly involved with the program all the way. He was so taken with the impact of the program that not only did they immediately decide to run it again in Australia, but are taking it overseas to their Canadian site, with a cohort of Young Starters commencing in late 2023.

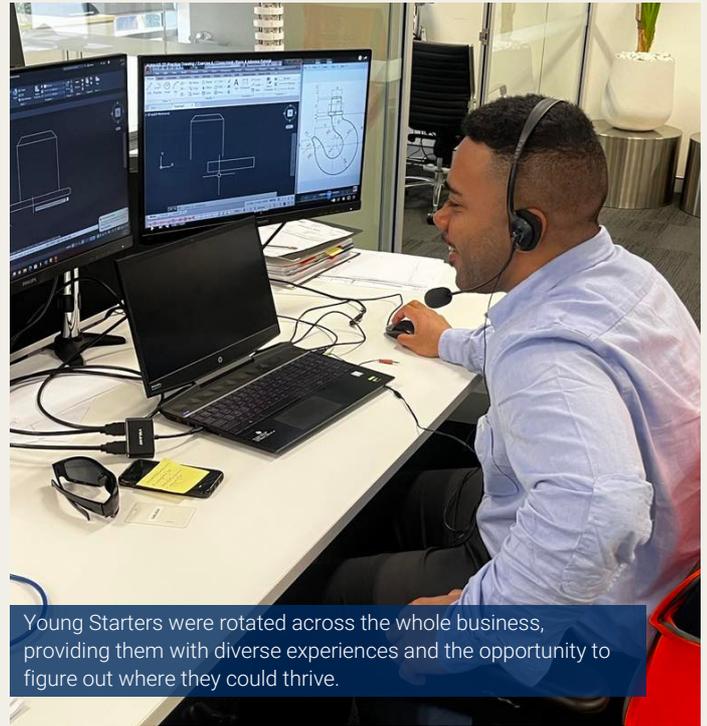
Towards the end of the program, Consep decided to fund driving lessons for the Young Starters and provided the opportunity to take up a \$10,000 novated lease to buy a car. This was a transformative step, assisting Young Starters with their transport concerns, and encouraging ongoing employment at Consep.

Meaningfully, Consep are looking to double their business in the next 5 years. The goal is for present and future Young Starts to be a key part of this growth.

About the Employer Innovation Lab

The Employer Innovation Lab is an initiative by Social Ventures Australia empowering organisations to address workforce challenges by breaking down barriers to employment for young people experiencing disadvantage.

[Learn more on the SVA website.](#)



Young Starters were rotated across the whole business, providing them with diverse experiences and the opportunity to figure out where they could thrive.



Consep witnessed a cultural transformation as staff embraced the benefits their new colleagues brought to the workplace.

