



*everyone's family*

**IMPROVING ACCESS TO CAREER SUPPORT PROGRAMS  
FOR AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS EXPERIENCING  
DISADVANTAGE:**

**WHO GETS CAREER ADVICE AT SCHOOL, AND DOES IT  
RELATE TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES?**

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# CONTEXT: THE SMITH FAMILY

## OUR MISSION

Create opportunities for **young Australians in need** by providing **long-term support** for their participation in education.

## OUR SIZE

Nationally supporting **220,000+** disadvantaged children, young people and their carers per year.

## LEARNING FOR LIFE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- **58,000** financially disadvantaged students in primary, secondary and tertiary education on a multi-year educational scholarship. Support includes financial, relational and learning opportunities.
- Involves partnerships with families, schools, business, VET, unis, community organisations etc
- Each student has a **unique student identifier** so outcomes (attendance, achievement, school completion, post-school engagement in EET) can be tracked along with demographic and admin data.

## GROWING CAREERS PROJECT

- Working with **50 high schools in disadvantaged communities** over **4 yrs** to provide a more integrated, sequenced and **effective suite of careers supports** with evaluation to hopefully inform policy and practice in this space. **76,000+** instances of support.

# PATHWAYS, EDUCATION & TRANSITIONS STUDY (PET)

- Designed to examine post-secondary outcomes of *Learning for Life* students and contribute to better understanding:
  - **Post-school pathways** taken by young Australians experiencing disadvantage
  - **Factors** that influence these pathways
  - What might be done to **improve** the post-school engagement of young people experiencing disadvantage
- **Methodology:**
  - Young people of interest are those in Year 10 and Year 12 on *Learning for Life* in 2020
  - Longitudinal survey March-May 2021, 2022,2023
  - Longitudinal qualitative interviews with sub-cohorts in August 2021,2022 and 2023
  - Combination of new data with that collected on students since they began on the program

# WAVE 1, 2021

- **Survey 80% response rate**
  - 4,621 completed surveys on line or telephone
  - 94% agreed to follow-up survey
- **Key sample characteristics:**
  - 64% Year 10 cohort / 36% Year 12 cohort
  - 53% female
  - 16% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
  - 68% in metropolitan area and all states and territories proportionally represented
  - Minor non-response bias, all analyses are weighted to adjust for non-response
- **Qualitative component**
  - 60 interviews
  - 34 female
  - 11 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people
  - 16 in regional areas
  - 21 Year 10 cohort
  - 39 Year 12 cohort

# Research focus: Career support and post-secondary engagement

## Background

- Research consistently shows that disadvantaged students in Australia:
  - Report receiving fewer career advice opportunities than other students
  - Have lower rates of engagement in employment, education or training after leaving high school

## Our research questions

- **Among young people who are disadvantaged:**
  - What characteristics are associated with receiving *useful* career support?
  - Is career support associated with higher rates of work/study engagement in the first year after leaving high school?
  - Do some students appear to benefit from those supports more than others?
  - What can young people tell us about their experiences of career support?

# Main data items

## Career support:

- “Has your/did your school give you support, advice or information about possible careers or post-school options?”

Yes/No

- “How useful was it in helping you decide on post-school options?”

1 = Not at all useful; 5 = Very useful

## Other items

- Questions relating to:
  - Current study/employment/training activities
- Questions concerning health and wellbeing
- Prior data on English and Maths grades in Year 9
- Administrative data relating to family type, primary carer’s education and employment, school-level disadvantage

# Approach

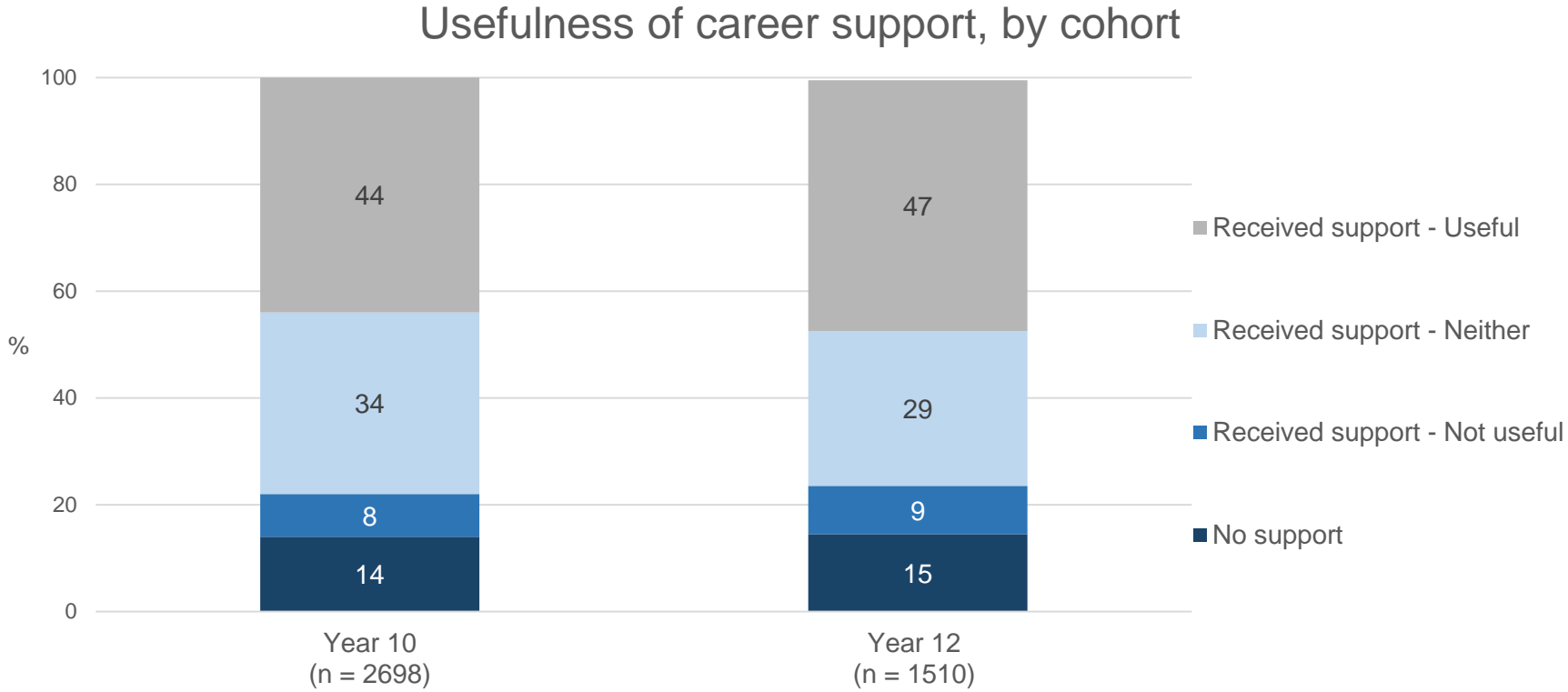
**(1) Which students are more likely to report receiving career support? (both cohorts)**

- Identify a set of candidate variables with bivariate association with receiving useful career support
- Include these variables in a multinomial logistic regression to identify the variables independently associated with receiving career support

**(2) Is useful career support associated with higher rates of post-secondary engagement in education, employment, or training? (Year 12 only)**

- Test bivariate association between receiving support and type of post-secondary engagement
- Adjust for variables related to receiving career advice in (1)
- Assess if the association varies for students who are less likely to receive support

# Majority of students report receiving career support, and most say it's useful





# Which factors are associated with receiving useful career support? (unadjusted)

Characteristic	Year 10 cohort	Year 12 cohort
Still at school / completed Y12	↑	↑
Aboriginal students	↑	↑
Main income from Centrelink	↑	-
Ever suspended	↓	↓
Higher general life satisfaction	↑	↑
Mental health condition	↓	↓
Physical health condition	-	↓
Developmental condition	-	↓
Higher general health rating	↑	↑
Higher general mental health rating	↑	↑
Higher Year 9 English achievement	↑	↑
Higher Year 9 Maths achievement	↑	-
Higher school-level advantage	-	↓

Overall, items relating to school completion, health and wellbeing, and prior achievement were associated with useful career support.

Not associated:  
Gender, remoteness, family structure, parent education and employment.

# Which factors are associated with receiving useful career support? (Adjusted, Year 10 cohort)

Characteristic	No support vs Useful	Not useful vs Useful	Neither vs Useful
	RRR (95% CI)	RRR (95% CI)	RRR (95% CI)
Not at school vs at school	5.9 (3.6–9.5)	2.7 (1.3–5.3)	-
Non-Indigenous vs Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students	-	-	1.3 (1.0–1.7)
Main income from Centrelink vs from family	-	0.4 (0.2–0.8)	0.6 (0.4–0.8)
Medium vs high life satisfaction	2.0 (1.4–2.7)	2.4 (1.5–3.6)	2.0 (1.6–2.5)
Low vs high life satisfaction	3.5 (2.1–5.8)	5.3 (2.9–9.8)	3.0 (2.0–4.4)
Very good vs Excellent mental health	-	2.8 (1.3–6.0)	
Fair/poor vs Excellent general health	-	2.3 (1.0–5.4)	
Good vs Excellent general health	-	-	1.8 (1.3–2.4)

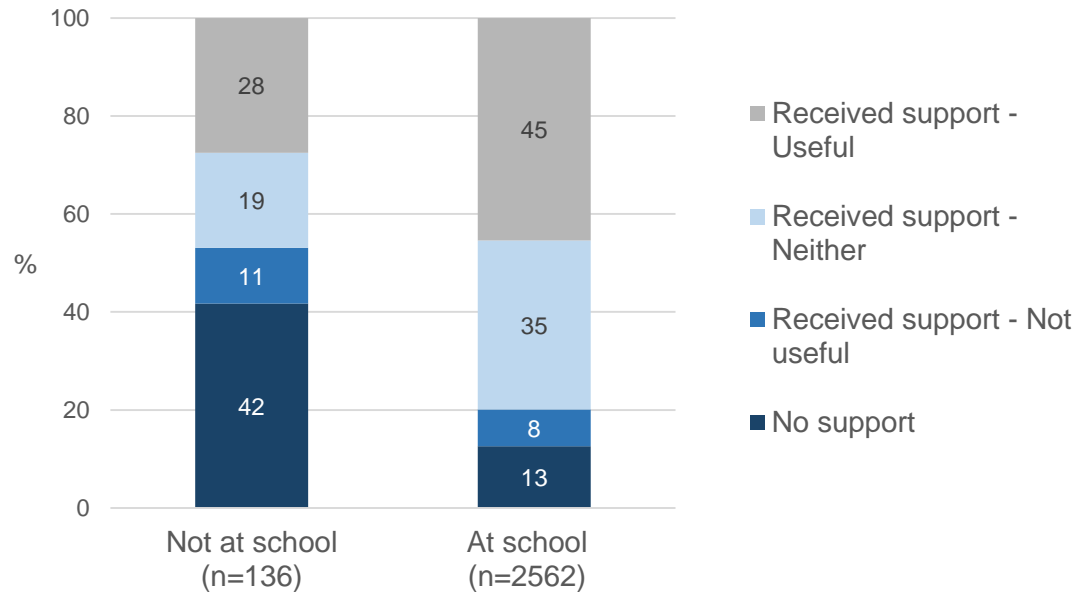
# Which factors are associated with receiving useful career support? Multinomial logistic regression (Year 12 cohort)

Characteristic	No support vs Useful	Not useful vs Useful	Neither vs Useful
	RRR (95% CI)	RRR (95% CI)	RRR (95% CI)
Did not complete Year 12 vs completed	2.1 (1.3–3.4)		
Non-Indigenous vs Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students		2.3 (1.1–4.7)	
Ever suspended vs never suspended		2.1 (1.4–3.4)	
Medium vs high life satisfaction	2.1 (1.4–3.3)	2.5 (1.4–4.2)	2.7 (2.0-3.8)
Low vs high life satisfaction	4.0 (2.1–7.7)	4.2 (1.9-9.3)	4.1 (2.4-6.9)
Poor vs Excellent mental health	3.2 (1.4–7.3)	3.4 (1.2-9.8)	
D/E Year 9 English vs A/B grade	2.2 (1.2–3.9)		
School adv: 951-1000 (average-low) vs <900 (low)		2.7 (1.2-6.1)	
School adv: >1000 (average-high) vs <900 (low)		2.7 (1.1-6.5)	

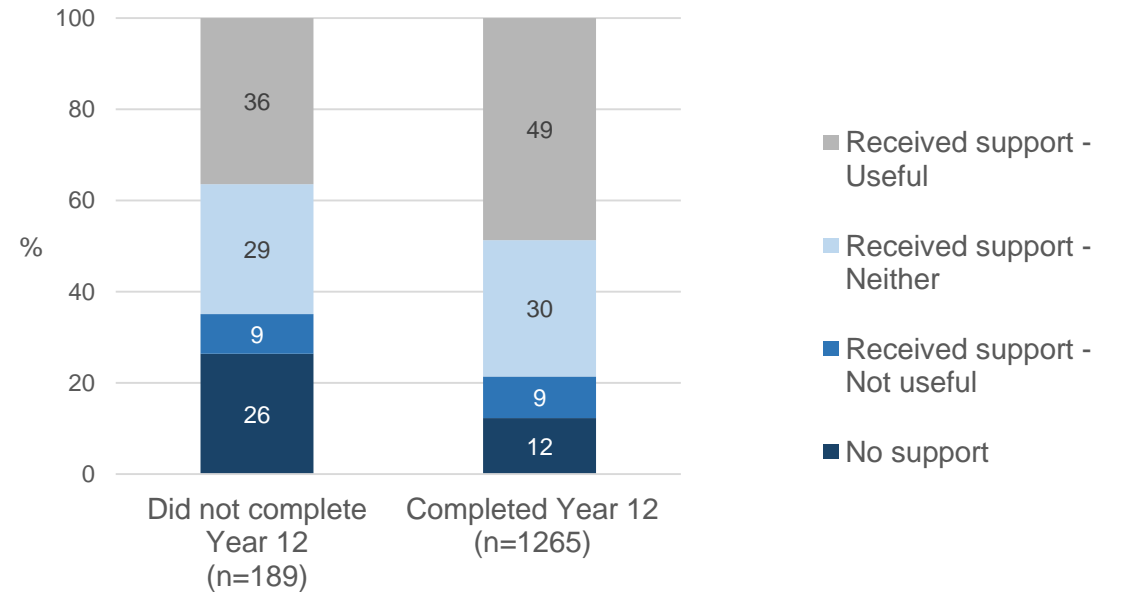
# How useful was the career support?

Early school leavers were less likely to receive support or to find any support provided useful

Year 10 cohort: Usefulness of career support, by early school leaving



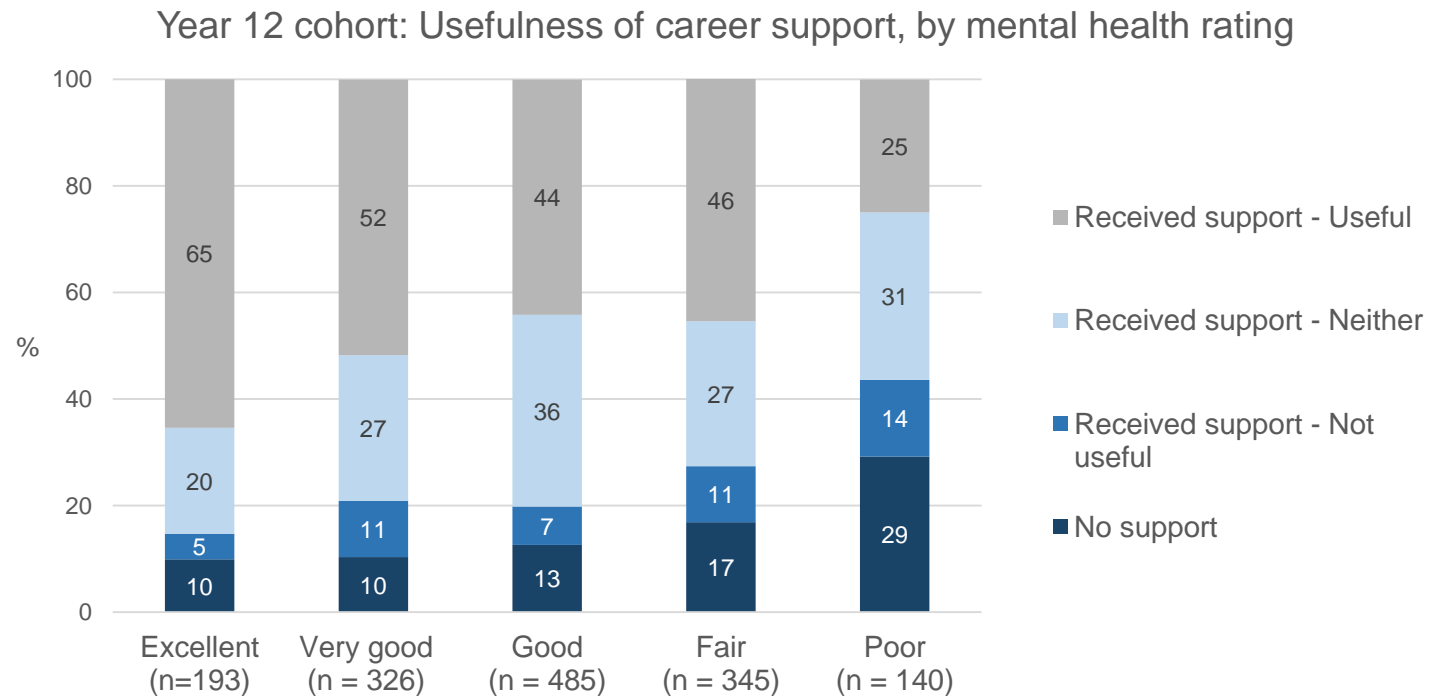
Year 12 cohort: Usefulness of career support, by Year 12 completion



# How useful was the career support?

Disadvantaged young people with **poorer mental health** are **less likely** to get career support or to find it useful.

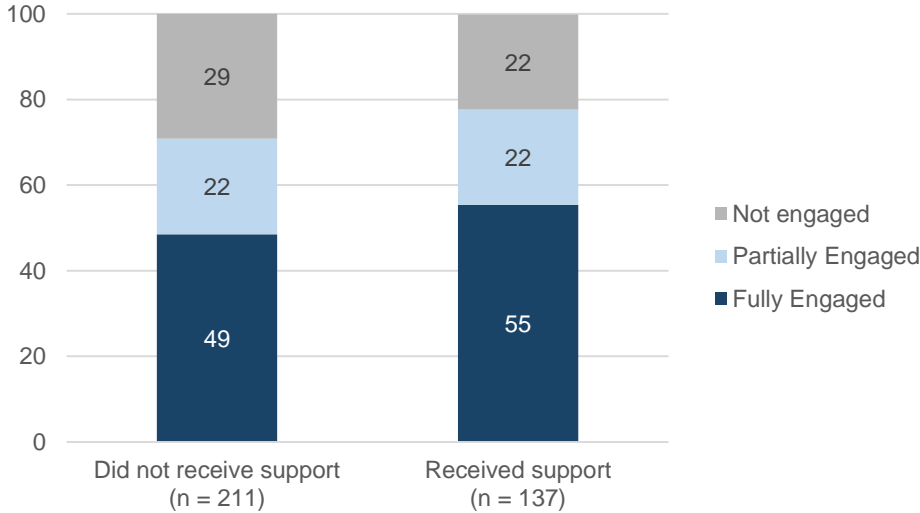
Potentially an area for intervention/improvement – what kind of supports would be more helpful for young people with health or mental health concerns?



# Is career support at school associated with post-school engagement in employment, education, or training?

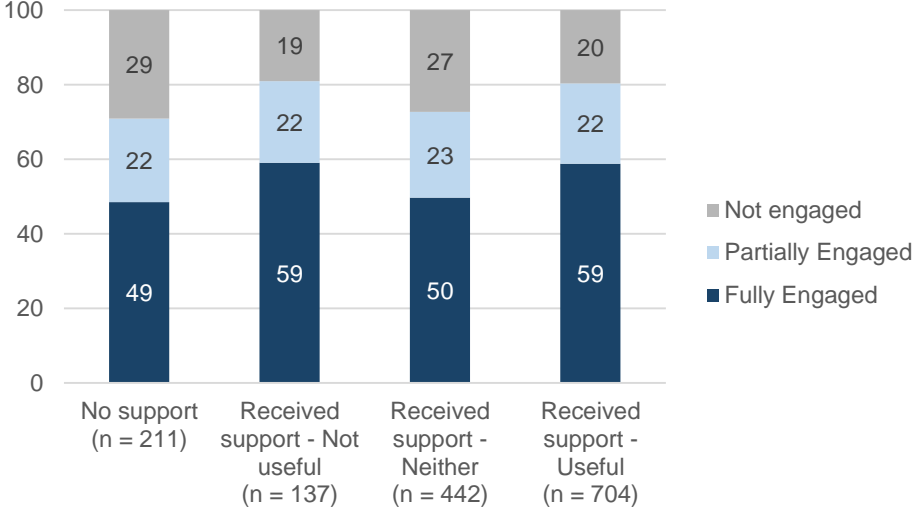
Receiving career support at school was not significantly associated with post-secondary outcomes. The usefulness of support was statistically significant, but with unclear interpretation.

Year 12 cohort: Engagement outcomes, by career support



Chi-Square p-value = .077

Year 12 cohort: Engagement outcomes, by usefulness of career support

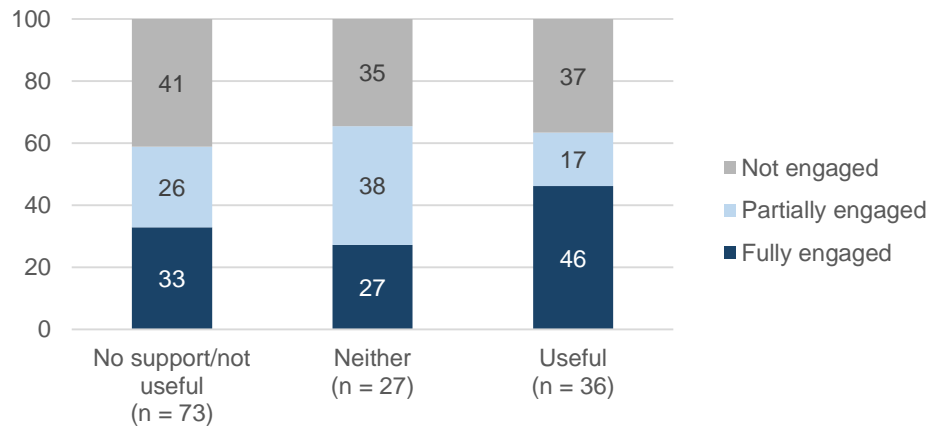


Chi-Square p-value = .009

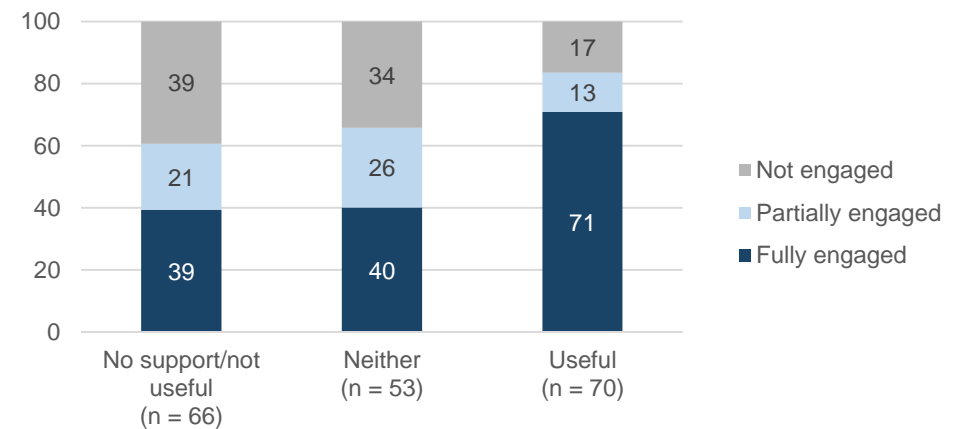
# Is career support at school associated with post-school engagement in employment, education, or training?

For those who left school before completing Year 12, full engagement is higher among those who said their career support was useful.  
A similar, but smaller and non-significant trend for Year 10 cohort

Year 10 cohort, early school leavers:  
Engagement outcomes, by  
career support



Year 12 cohort, early school leavers:  
Engagement outcomes, by  
career support



# Qualitative study: Experiences of career supports at school are mixed

- Young people relied on a mix of supports when making decisions about future pathways.
- Schools have an important role to play, but young people saw the value in having discussions with others they trusted to provide sound advice
- Many early school leavers expressed that they needed more support while at school
- **It's critical that this support takes the form of a two-way conversation, with the knowledgeable person taking the time to explore what the young person wants to do in life and options for them to achieve their goals**

*"My uncle, he's definitely a bit different at times, but when it comes to serious things like what you want to do in future, he will help you decide, help you talk through it."* Jarrod, Indigenous, completed Year 12, employed full-time.

*"Just having people understand what the goal is, and why. And then actually helping them create – make a path. Like steps to get there. I had none of that. And it would have been nice to know, oh, maybe we should this course or that course. Helping kids plan that way and work their way around is a huge thing".* Rosie, early school leaver, employed full-time.

*"I wish someone talked to me a bit more about the different certificates and... what's required for each one. I think that would have helped me make a better decision on what I was actually studying".* Liam, completed Year 12, studying part-time.



# Teachers provide instrumental support for many young people, but don't always support varied pathways

Teachers can home in on student interests to generate ideas for career pathways, or identify students' strengths as a way of opening up discussion about future trajectories

*“Teachers encouraging me to do whatever it is that I... and being like “Oh, you're really good at this. Why don't you look at a career in this?” and stuff like that.”* Heath, school student.

Some found that teachers' conceptions of success could be rigid and they were unhelpful if students' career goals diverged from their ideals.

*“For the six months leading up year 11, they had us doing career opportunities, choosing subjects and things like that. I know they meant well, all the teachers really just point the finger and say ‘Uni, year 11 and 12, that's the only real way to go’”. Rosie, early school leaver, employed full-time*

# Similar comments about career counsellors

For those who utilised career counselling, most found counsellors helpful in thinking about careers that interested them, and then choosing relevant subjects.

*“I haven’t really had much interaction with her, but she has been really helpful and I have, with subject selections, she’s been helpful. I feel like talking to her has made me want to strive for better. I feel like I’m better that I have talked to her rather than not talking to anyone.”* Tarni, school student.

Some were reluctant to seek counselling unless they have a clear idea of why. As with teachers, some felt career counsellors were pushing options that weren’t of interest.

*“At one point the career advisor said to me “It’s actually my job to really question you as the school really wants you to do year 12 and go to university of whatever”... I was really confused because it went against all the promoting he had been doing around the school, I felt like he didn’t see me as a proper individual, like I was just a child or didn’t know what I was talking about.”*  
Angela, early school leaver, fully employed.

# Summary (1)

- The vast majority (~86%) of disadvantaged young people in this study report receiving some kind of career support at school
  - More students said the advice they received was useful than not useful
  - Students who were more likely to rate the support as useful included:
    - Those who are still at school (Year 10 cohort) or who had completed Year 12 (Year 12 cohort)
    - Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people than non-Indigenous
    - Those with high levels of life satisfaction, general health, mental health
    - Those in less advantaged schools than in average or average-high advantage schools (Year 12 only)

# Summary (2)

- Despite the value/usefulness reported by young people, the relationship between receiving career support and post-secondary engagement outcomes was not clear.
  - Qualitative interviews had clear examples of how the support led to post-secondary engagement
  - The outcome is too soon after leaving school
  - Young people get advice from multiple sources/avenues. If they don't get the right support at school, they can go to other places for information.
  - Early school leavers who received useful advice were much more likely to be fully engaged than those who received less useful advice
- Next steps:
  - Link in data on which school-based programs these LfL students participated in
  - Collect more detailed information different types of career support in Wave 2
  - Gain further insights on why some young people don't find the support useful (e.g. disadvantaged students attending advantaged schools)
  - Consider implications/opportunities for the Growing Careers Project