

Employment pathways for care-leavers in South Africa

A key component of the process of leaving care is navigating entry into employment and building a sustainable work history. Unemployment and underemployment are common among care-leavers in many countries, and a NEET status (not in employment, education or training) tends to be more common among care-leavers than the general population. In South Africa, by contrast, the inverse appears to be true. However, these data are complicated by the apparently high levels of unstable employment among youth, including care-leavers. This paper therefore aims to describe the employment pathways of care-leavers, showing the kinds of changes they experience over a period of some years. This paper draws on data from the 'Growth Beyond the Town' (GBT) longitudinal study, hosted by Girls and Boys Town South Africa. A survey was conducted with all participants who were enrolled in the GBT study, who were contactable and willing to participate. A total of 34 care-leavers with a work history participated in the study, with data collected between October 2020 and April 2021. Participants were asked to provide a history of their employment. These data were captured in employment pathways (like timelines) for each participant, a selection of which will be presented. The pathways prove to be highly variable, with frequent job changes, and with participants frequently not landing up in the career they aspired to. In most cases, participants could not show a purposeful employment pathway. Recommendations emerging from this study relate to improved career planning prior to leaving care and linking care-leavers to employment guidance after leaving care, with a view to facilitating a more steady and purposeful career progression, leading towards financial security.

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