

# ANNUAL REPORT

**JULY 2022  
JUNE 2023**

**YOUNG WORKERS CENTRE**

Young Workers Centre  
54 Victoria St  
Carlton South, Vic, 3053  
1800 714 754



The Young Workers Centre was established by the Victorian Trades Hall Council and affiliated unions in 2016 as a mechanism for creating safer, fairer workplaces for young people aged 30 and under.

The Young Workers Centre, Victorian Trades Hall Council, and affiliated unions are committed to supporting, educating, empowering, and organising young people in workplaces right across Victoria.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which Trades Hall stands, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We also acknowledge the traditional owners of all the Koori lands across which the Young Workers Centre conducts our business. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. This land was stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & THE DIRECTOR

**Jessica Dawson-Field  
and Felicity Sowerbutts**

The 2022-2023 financial year has been a huge year for the Young Workers Centre (YWC). We increased our capacity to assist young workers with the addition of another Solicitor, we delivered in-person workplace rights education throughout Victoria and advocated for systemic change for young workers.

For several years, YWC has called attention to the need for urgent systemic change in the apprenticeship system, having documented an increase in apprentice exploitation across all sectors and a shocking 77% of our ongoing legal clients are apprentices. Commonly reported issues include bullying, unsafe working conditions, poor training, insufficient supervision and wage theft.

Young workers have bravely shared their stories, advocated to politicians and campaigned in the community for fairer and safer apprenticeships. We were thrilled when Premier Daniel Andrews announced that if re-elected at the 2022 State Election a Labor Government would establish an Apprentice Task-force to improve

regulation, simplify complaint reporting and establish bans on employers who have mistreated apprentices. This shows that when young workers come together, we can achieve big change and we look forward to continuing our advocacy until we win a safe and fair system for all apprentices.

We end the financial year on a bitter-sweet note as our Principal Solicitor, Oanh Tran, has been appointed as a Fair Work Commissioner. During Oanh's time at the YWC, we expanded from one solicitor to four and reached the significant milestone of more than \$2 million recovered for young workers for wage theft, discrimination and termination of employment matters. Oanh has been a staunch advocate for young workers and has been instrumental in winning not only financial settlements but emotional closure for hundreds of young workers. Our legal advocates have been incredibly fortunate to learn from such a knowledgeable and passionate industrial relations solicitor.

Thanks to the ongoing support of the Victorian Government, EML, Slater + Gordon Lawyers, Maurice

Blackburn Lawyers, Unity Bank and Australian Super who have enabled us to deliver our programs and hold training and social events for young workers.

YWC is grateful to Counsel who provided assistance to us and our clients throughout the year: Siobhan Kelly, Paris Lettau and Leo Seward.

Thanks to our Committee of Management, which has collectively provided good governance and strategic vision to the YWC.



# DIRECT SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WORKERS

## ADVICE & ASSISTANCE

Our legal centre is the first and only specialist community legal centre in Victoria to represent young people with employment issues. Our legal team and law student advocates provide legal information, advice and representation for young workers in Victoria aged 30 and under. We are accredited by Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA) under its National Accreditation Scheme (NAS), which is an industry based certification process for community legal centres to support, recognise and promote good practice in the delivery of community legal services.

**488**

Young people assisted in period

**2717**

All-time figure to 30 June 2023

**397**

Required information only

**73**

Ongoing assistance

**15**

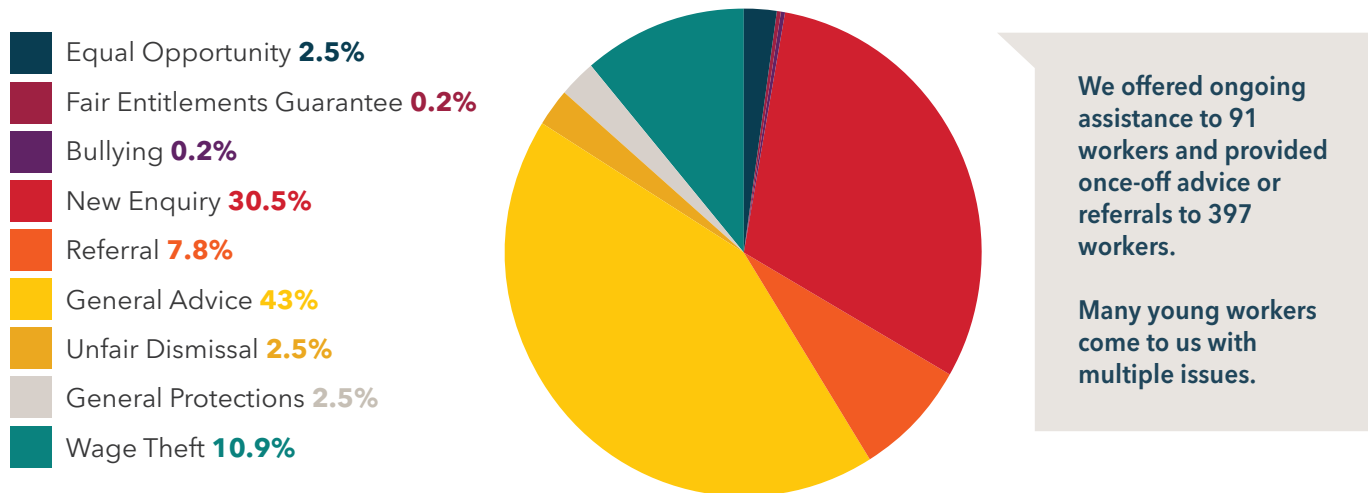
Proceedings commenced in court/FWC/VCAT

**\$284,806.55**

Recovered for young workers

# BREAKDOWN OF MATTERS

The Young Workers Centre spoke to a total of 488 young workers.



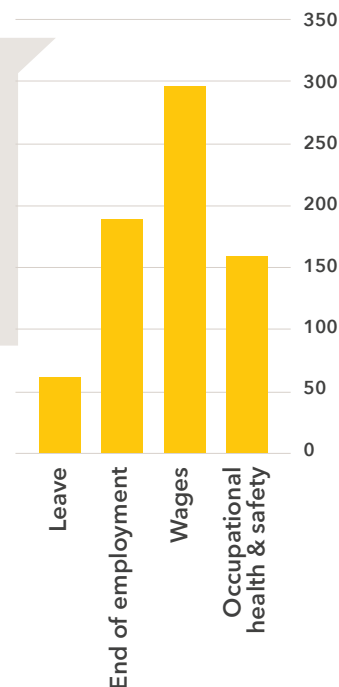
## Type of enquiries

Type of enquiries	Number of enquiries
Workers comp & WorkCover	25
Wage theft	187
Victimisation	8
Unreasonable requirement to spend	9
Unpaid trial	11
Unpaid TAFE fees	27
Unlawful deductions	7
Termination	117
Superannuation	55
Stand down	4
Sham contracting	8
Sexual harassment	18
Personal leave	31
Overtime	27
OHS - psychosocial	90
OHS - physical	61
Junior rates	37
Discrimination	46
Contract advice	73
Bullying & harassment	101
Award/EBA queries	112
Annual Leave	46

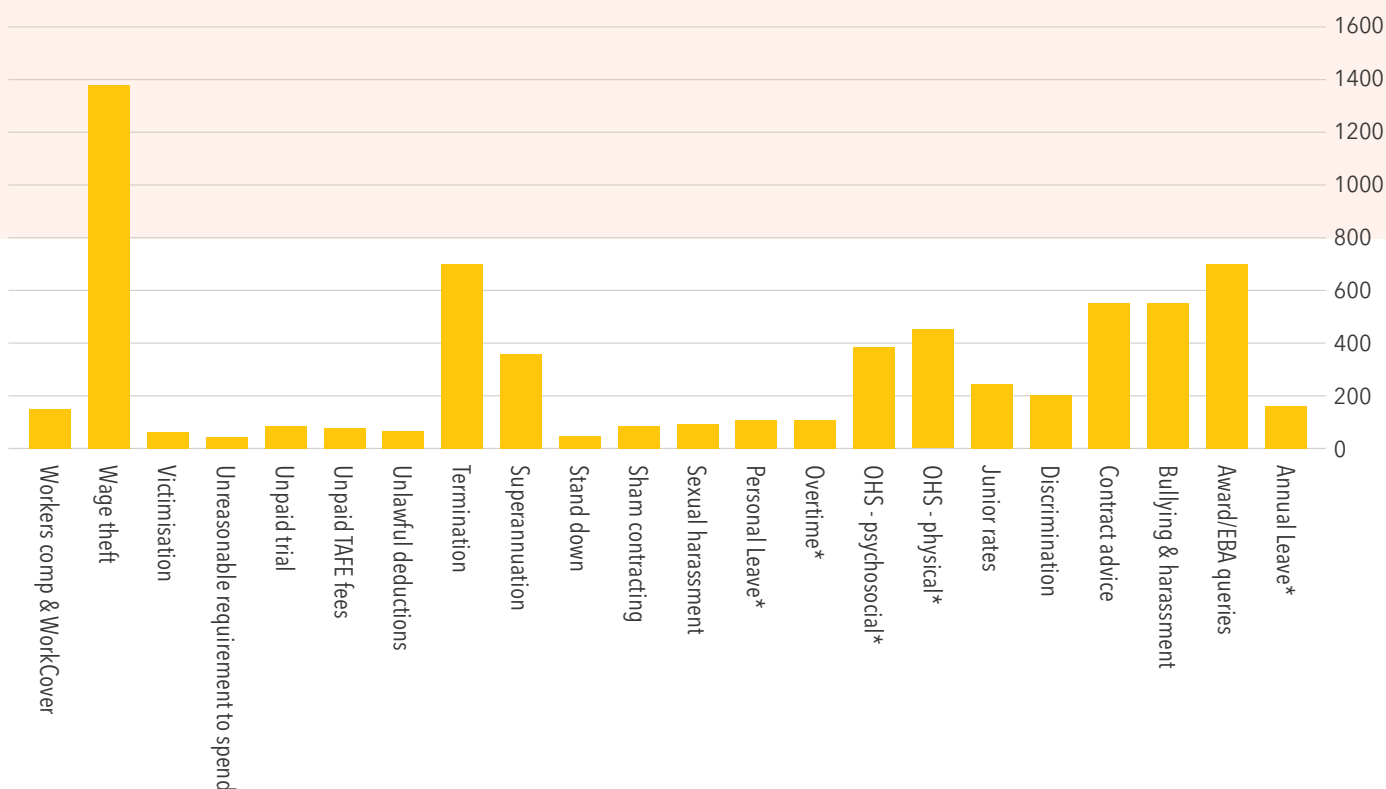
**Grand Total**

**1100**

This graph provides a simplified display of the most common areas of enquiry.







## CASE STUDY: NATASHA'S PAY

Natasha was a casual retail assistant, working an average of 26 hours a week at Melbourne's oldest bookstore, Hill of Content; a franchisee of Collins Booksellers. She contacted the Young Workers Centre after her employer dismissed her and accused her of breaking "trust and

confidentiality" when she discussed her wage increase and associated back pay with other workers in early 2023.

### Melbourne bookstore accuses employee of breaking 'confidentiality' by discussing pay rise

**Worker launches court action over termination from Hill of Content, after also being accused of upsetting colleague and reducing her shifts**

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- [Get our morning and afternoon news emails, free app or daily news podcast](#)



Natasha didn't have a contractual pay secrecy term in an employment contract and the only written terms of her contract were an email chain which didn't discuss confidentiality. This case is particularly poignant because the Secure Jobs, Better Pay Act that prohibits pay secrecy came into effect on 7 December 2022 and the right to share and ask for pay information applied immediately to all workers on existing employment contracts without pay secrecy terms, including Natasha.

The Young Workers Centre supported and represented Natasha to file in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia in what is expected to be the first test of the new laws that prevent employers gagging workers for speaking about their pay. We also supported Natasha to share her story publicly with the Young Workers Centre gaining extensive coverage in the Guardian, 7News, and on Triple J Hack and ABC Radio.

# ADVOCATE PROGRAM

We were joined this year by 31 law students from seven different law schools as Young Worker Advocates. These law students undertook placements for university credit with the Young Workers Centre.

When young workers speak up about their problems at work, our advocates are the first to hear their stories. A typical day as an Advocate might include:

- Interviewing a young worker over the phone or face to face to identify their legal issues
- Finding the relevant Award or workplace agreement
- Researching issues relating to the Fair Work Act and Occupational Health & Safety Act
- Drafting correspondence, legal documents and forms, such as letters of demand to employers and applications to the Fair Work Commission about unfair dismissal and general protections matters

*"This placement exceeded my expectations! I was exposed to a very diverse range of tasks and experiences, and because of this I was able to learn about the law in practice which was amazing after three years of study."*

*"The placement was great! I was very nervous at the start but once I found out how tasks were assigned and done it was a lot less stressful. The templates for documents are very helpful for advocates I believe."*

*"I found being able to work on real people's cases and help to be the most interesting or valuable aspects of the placement."*

*"I enjoyed gaining firsthand experience related to legal world from dealing real clients to drafting different legal documents to legal research."*

*"It was fun, interesting, engaging and most importantly taught me a lot!"*





## UNIVERSITY PARTNERS:

Australian Catholic University, Deakin University, La Trobe University, RMIT, Swinburne University, University of Melbourne, Victoria University

## SEMESTER 2 2022:

Marie Iliadis, Shannyn Stenner, Filomena Rosella, Charley Kitto, Anu KC, Lara Halperin, Adam Clark, Mikayla Shaw, Neisha Scully, Jeremy Perera, Christopher Gardner

## SUMMER 2022-23:

Sarah Nguyen, Declan Roche, Isabelle Keen, Isabella Watson, Paul Nicolaidis, Oscar Crick

## SEMESTER 1 2023:

Lisa Larwood, Kyle Mahony, Alex Hollis, Tiah Mepani, Tasmia Ahmed, Grace Lawson, Sarah Iannello, Tess Robb, Lauren Bennardo, Kirsten Deveraux, Charley Kitto, Erfan Vafamehr, Will Murray, Darcy Moran

*"I expected to work on client matters but did not expect to be so client-facing and be trusted to represent the YWC to the extent that we did. I think it is brilliant that the YWC trust us to have conversations with their potential and ongoing clients. Allowing us to pass on information, reach out to clients to see how they are progressing in their matter and permitting us to conduct the initial stage one contact with clients gives us a good insight into how clients will contact us in a law firm. These are skills that other than in competitions we would not learn until we are on the job."*

*"It was better than I could have ever imagined! I got to work on a variety of issues, across a variety of problems, and was trusted with a lot more than I thought I would be. Everyone was so lovely and helpful."*

## ADVOCATE CASE STUDY:

### ISABELLE KEEN

Isabelle, a third-year JD student at Melbourne Law School shared her invaluable experience as a legal advocate at the Young Workers Centre, what she learnt and why she chose the YWC via Melbourne Law School's social media page.

*"During my years working in hospitality, I witnessed first-hand how the power dynamic between employer and employee allows for the possibility of exploitation. I was so excited by the prospect of the law advocating for these vulnerable workers, so I applied for a placement at the Young Worker's Centre (YWC).*

*I loved being an advocate at the YWC. The team at the YWC ensured I had an enriching learning experience. I built upon a variety of legal skills, including legal research, client engagement and legal drafting.*

*I also learnt so much about employment law, unions and the activist movement aiming to end the mistreatment of workers. My time at the YWC was so wonderful, I intend to further explore the career possibilities of employment law."*



# ORGANISING YOUNG WORKERS

When multiple young workers in the same workplace are impacted by an issue, we often identify that the best course of action is to support them to organise their workplace and stick together to speak to the employer together or campaign for change.

Most notably we have supported workers who have faced occupational health and safety issues and level misclassifications at work.

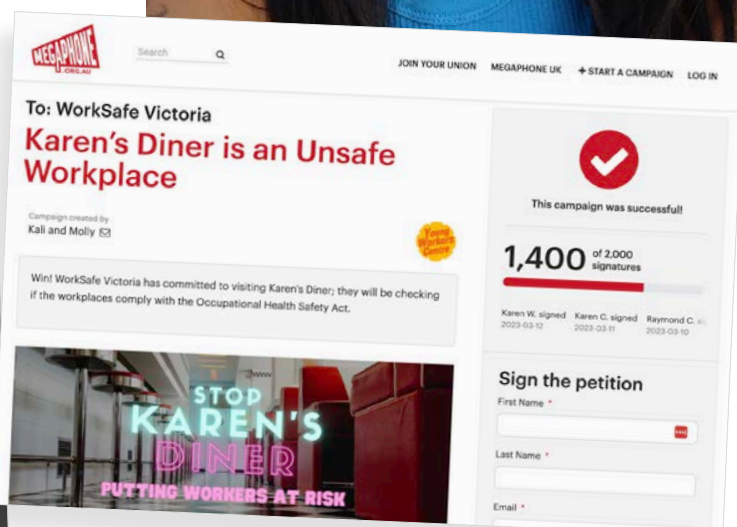
## CASE STUDY: KAREN'S DINER

Kaliya Arumugam (Kali), a former Karen's Diner worker contacted the YWC in mid-2022 with health and safety concerns after she was encouraged to sign a waiver preventing her from pursuing injury claims and a lack of health and safety procedures left her exposed to assaults and racism from customers.

It was obvious the issues Kali faced at work were systemic issues impacting numerous workers in the workplace. With the support of the YWC, six workers took a variety of actions. Three workers were supported with general protections matters, two workers launched an online petition calling on WorkSafe to investigate the unsafe work practices at Karen's Diner workplaces and six workers wrote a group letter of demand requesting re-classification. Two workers were also trained and supported to share their story extensively in the media.

Together, they shone light on a business model which is inherently unsafe, forced WorkSafe Victoria to commit to visiting Karen's Diner to check if the workplaces comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and won over \$1000 in back-pay.

In June 2023 Viral Ventures, who own Karen's Diner, went into voluntary liquidation. Sadly, this means that legal proceedings will go unresolved, but it shows that a business that puts its staff at extreme risk of customer abuse, hangs their workers out to dry, and deliberately creates an unsafe environment is clearly doomed to fail. The YWC will continue to pay close attention to Viral Ventures operations as we are also concerned about the business's move to advertise for staff for "Karen's Diner on tour", just after being placed into liquidation and their ambitions to look for people to invest and own a Karen's Diner franchise.





# KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION & EMPOWERMENT

Running parallel to direct support for young workers is education and empowerment. YWC programs and Outreach Organisers aim to equip young workers with knowledge about workplace rights and safety which enables them to secure safe workplace conditions and be correctly paid at work, but also empowers them to speak up if their workplace is not safe or fair.

## WORKPLACE RIGHTS SESSIONS

We were delighted to travel all over Victoria during the 2022-2023FY to deliver in-person workplace rights sessions to young people in schools, TAFEs and community groups. In 2022-2023 we delivered workplace rights sessions to 6261 young Victorians at 145 schools, TAFEs or community organisations.

Our WorkSafe approved modules include:

- Occupational Health and Safety
- Bullying and Discrimination; and
- Your Rights at Work.

Training is designed to prepare young people for life at work before their first job, and to support them navigating their early working years. Students can share their own experiences at work, and be directly referred to the Young Workers Centre legal team for tailored legal advice if needed.

Since the Young Workers Centre was founded in February 2016, we have delivered training to over 50,700 young Victorians.

## VIC LAW WEEK IN GIPPSLAND

During Law Week 2023 we spent two days in Gippsland. We delivered an Introduction to Employment Law session to approximately 60 students from a range of schools in an event hosted by Victorian Law Foundation. Whilst in Gippsland we also delivered a workplace rights session to a school in Traralgon.



## WORLD OF WORK

In August 2022 we held a one-day conference which was attended by over 40 high school students.

Every year thousands of Victorian students enter the workforce for the first time. As they take their first steps as young workers it is vitally important they know what their rights at work are and are empowered to stand up with their co-workers to ensure they are safe at work and paid fairly.

Along with this knowledge, the ability to organise and take collective action can enable young workers to enact real change in their own lives.

At the World of Work Summit students learnt from our educators and organisers about their rights at work and how campaigns and collective action have been used to change our workplaces and society throughout history.

## CAREER DAYS, COLLABORATIONS WITH YOUTH GROUPS AND O-WEEKS

The YWC has attended orientation week events at Universities and TAFEs across Victoria. Visiting Melbourne Polytechnic, Holmesglen, ACU, GOTAFE, Federation Uni, Swinburne Uni, Victoria Uni and Uni of Melbourne campuses.

The team has been present at various careers days including TradesFit Expo hosted by the Department of Education and Training, and Trades Days at Melbourne Polytechnic.

We collaborated with community and youth organisations including City of Kingston Youth Services, CoHealth, Moonee Valley City Council's Valley Youth, Northern Youth Group, For Change Co., Hampton Neighbourhood Community House, Streat, Common Purposes Leadership Challenge and the National Union of Students to reach young people outside of a typical classroom setting.

## NETWORKING, TRAINING AND SOCIAL

In August 2022 we held a Legal Networking Night which was attended by over 50 people. The Networking Night was designed to connect aspiring young lawyers with industrial relations lawyers at labour law firms, community legal centres and unions.

Throughout 2022 and into 2023 the YWC has brought together young workers monthly to undertake a range of training and social events, including messaging training, banner making for the International Women's Day rally, how to improve your workplace panel discussion and an Apprentice Expo.



# INFLUENCING A FAIRER FUTURE FOR YOUNG WORKERS

We believe young people's experiences at work must be at the centre of youth and employment policy-making. We advocate to ensure young workers' voices are heard by policymakers, academics, politicians and the broader community.

## CAMPAIGN FOR FAIRER AND SAFER APPRENTICESHIPS

Whilst apprentices continue to reach out to the YWC in high numbers and receive legal support, young apprentices also campaigned extensively for fairer and safer apprenticeships in Victoria.

YWC activists organised community meetings and online actions, shared their stories with the media, held meetings with numerous Government Ministers, participated in a roundtable and delivered a Megaphone petition containing over 10,000 signatures to The Honourable Gayle Tierney, Minister for Training and Skills.

The YWC also partnered with McKell Institute on their report about better supporting Victorian apprentices on the job. Our campaigning to Ban Bad Bosses culminated

in the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announcing that a re-elected Andrews Labor Government would establish an Apprentice Taskforce to identify ways in which systemic changes can be made to improve the experiences of Victorian apprentices. This shows that when young workers come together, we can achieve big change. We won't stop until we win a safe and fair system for all apprenticeships.

We are also thrilled to have received funding from Apprenticeships Victoria to roll out workplace rights training to apprentices at Victorian TAFEs. This will ensure that apprentices are educated about their workplace rights early on in their careers and informed and empowered to reach out for assistance if they face any issues at work.

## YOUNG WORKERS CENTRE FRANCHISE REPORT

Whilst apprentices continue to reach out to the YWC After surveying young workers extensively, we released a Franchise Report.

### THE KEY FINDINGS ARE:

1

When head office representatives visit franchise stores, 98% inspect store presentation, yet only 8% want anything to do with workers' pay and conditions

2

61.2% of young workers experience wage theft working at a franchise

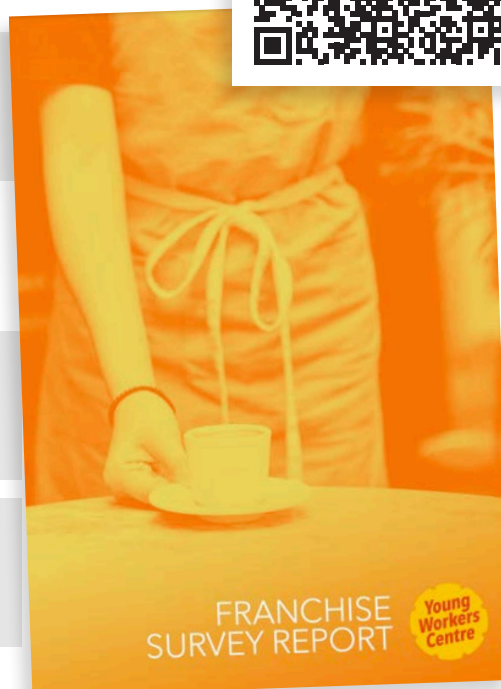
3

Franchises owned by company head offices are just as bad as franchisee-owned businesses when it comes to wage theft

4

The more employment experience young workers have, the more likely they identify as being under-paid at work

SCAN QR TO VIEW REPORT



The report received coverage in an ABC article about Karen's Diner, a company that is moving towards a franchise model.

## SUBMISSIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

### IN THE 22-23FY WE:

- Made a submission to the Review into an Appropriate Cost Model for Anti-Discrimination Matters
- Made a submission to the consultation on the second tranche of reforms to Australia's workplace laws
- Participated in a Review of the Fair Work Act 2009 small claims procedure
- Made a submission to the Federal Government on the Australian Apprenticeship Services and Support

## NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

With a new Federal Government in Canberra, we have taken opportunities to advocate for young workers. Former Young Workers Centre's Principal Solicitor, Oanh Tran, spoke at the Jobs Summit on the 'Creating safe, fair and productive workplaces' panel.



We also coordinated a young worker and former client of the Young Workers Centre, Claudia, to attend a youth employment roundtable with the Minister for Youth, Dr. Anne Aly.







# AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF YOUNG WORKERS IN THE MEDIA

The Young Workers Centre has been prominent in the media across print, TV and radio.

In the media, we have elevated the voices and experiences of young workers including young workers from Karen’s Diner and Natasha Seymour’s pay secrecy case.

The YWC gained extensive national and Victorian media coverage as part of the campaign to safe and fair apprenticeships. Numerous apprentices and former apprentices featured in media articles calling on the Victorian Government to Ban Bad Bosses with former hospitality apprentice, Alia De Savery, most prominently fronting the media as part of the campaign. She bravely shared her story across numerous channels, including on live TV, print and radio.

We have also been responsive to media requests and have connected journalists with young workers. We have been quoted in numerous articles including about an apprentice who lost their life at work and child employment laws. Young workers, like Claudia, were supported to speak to the media about sexual harassment at work whilst Thomas was featured in an article about income inequality.

## Melbourne bookstore accuses employee of breaking ‘confidentiality’ by discussing pay rise

**Worker launches court action over termination from Hill of Content, after also being accused of upsetting colleague and reducing her shifts**

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📷 In a termination email, Natasha Seymour was accused of having a ‘total disregard for confidentiality in anything that occurs between employer and employee’. Photograph: Penny Stephens/The Guardian



**6 NEWS** Melbourne 29°C Ma Min of 19°

Just In Watch Live Voice Referendum Politics World Business Ana

## Workplace sexual harassment rates aren't getting better. How do we make it stop?

By political reporter [Claudia Long](#) and the Specialist Reporting Team's [Gemma Breen](#)  
Posted Wed 30 Nov 2022 at 12:03pm, updated Wed 30 Nov 2022 at 4:40pm



When Claudia was working at lingerie chain Honey Birdette, she alleges she was subjected to sexual harassment on a regular basis. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica)

**6 NEWS** Melbourne 29°C Ma Min of 19°

Just In Watch Live Voice Referendum Politics World Business Ana

## Income inequality surges as richest group gets more than 90 per cent of the gains, Australia Institute finds

By business reporter [Daniel Ziffer](#)  
Posted Wed 12 Apr 2023 at 6:00am, updated Wed 12 Apr 2023 at 10:20am



Thomas Harmathy, 23, lives in Melbourne and he's worried about increasing financial inequality in our society. (ABC News: Simon Tucci)

THE AGE



## 'Crying in the freezer every day': When apprenticeships go awry

Alia de Savery was an apprentice chef who said she thinks the entire system needs to be overhauled. SIMON SCHLUTER



at you and throw things. I'd just be crying every day and

**ALIA DE SAVERY**  
**FORMER APPRENTICE**

**7 NEWS**

## Karen's Diner staff label workplace unsafe, say they were forced to sign waiver preventing injury claims

ABC Radio Melbourne / By [Zilla Gordon](#)  
Posted Wed 9 Nov 2022 at 5:45am, updated Mon 14 Nov 2022 at 11:28am





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[youngworkers.org.au/](https://youngworkers.org.au/)

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