

# ANNUAL REPORT

**JULY 2023  
JUNE 2024**

**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 and present. This land was stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



# CONTENTS

<b>A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, DIRECTOR AND PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>DIRECT SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WORKERS</b>	<b>2</b>
Legal Centre Advice and Assistance	2
Breakdown of Matters	3
Case Study: Ella and Lucy	5
Case study: "Gabe"	5
Advocate Program	6
Advocate case study: Lyndon Caswell	6
<b>KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION AND EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
Workplace Rights sessions	7
TAFEs	
Schools and Community Groups	
O-weeks, Career Days and collaborations with other organisations	8
Regional legal clinics	8
Gig Worker Outreach	8
Apprenticeship Taskforce	9
Networking, training and social events	9
The Voice Referendum	10
Influencing a fairer future for young workers	10
<b>ELEVATING THE VOICES OF YOUNG WORKERS</b>	<b>11</b>
Submissions and representations to Government	11
Young workers voices in the media	11





## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR, DIRECTOR & PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR

Jessica Dawson-Field,  
Felicity Sowerbutts  
and Kelly Thomas

During the 2023-2024 financial year the Young Workers Centre (YWC) continued to support young workers with employment law matters, delivered workplace rights training in schools and TAFEs across Victoria and brought young workers together to campaign for systemic change in workplaces and the community.

For years, the YWC has supported apprentices with workplace matters and campaigned for safe and fair apprenticeships. We are thrilled that the YWC has delivered workplace rights training to apprentices and trainees in all Victorian TAFEs during this financial year. We are also pleased that the Victorian Government established the Apprenticeships Taskforce during the financial year and that the Young

Workers Centre was a Taskforce member. Both initiatives will mean better apprenticeships for young workers in Victoria.

We are excited to have also progressed a campaign to end junior wages and look forward to continuing to bring young workers together to campaign for fair and sensible wages for all young workers. From our experience, speaking to thousands of young workers, we know that youth wages is a confusing system for young people and a form of wage opacity. It makes it impossible for young workers to compare their wages and in turn, this increases the likelihood of wage theft.

As a small team with big goals we appreciate all the support we receive.

Thanks to the ongoing support of the Victorian Government, EML, 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.

We could not have delivered great outcomes for young workers without the support of our colleagues at the Victorian Bar, including Yasser Bakri, Rabea Khan, Declan Murphy, Siobhan Kelly and Paris Lettau, and we give thanks to each of them for their pro bono assistance for our clients.

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





# DIRECT SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WORKERS



## ADVICE & ASSISTANCE FROM THE ACCREDITED COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

The Young Workers Centre provides legal advice and legal information to workers under the age of 30. Our four solicitors, an advocate team leader and law students guide young workers to navigate legal problems at work.

In the financial year 2023 to 2024, the Young Workers Centre received inquiries from 752 young workers about their workplace issues. We provided ongoing legal assistance to 156 workers, as well as 267 clients who received one-off ad hoc legal advice. In that time, we recovered \$415,851.93 in settlement money.

This year we held our Legal Networking Night and hosted the Fair Work Commission's President, his Honour Justice Adam Hatcher

along with Amanda Threlfall (VTHC Assistant Secretary) and Elyane Palmer (Principal Solicitor, Migrant Workers Centre) who spoke with over 100 law students and early career lawyers.



**752**

inquiries received from young workers

**156**

workers provided ongoing legal assistance

**267**

workers required information only

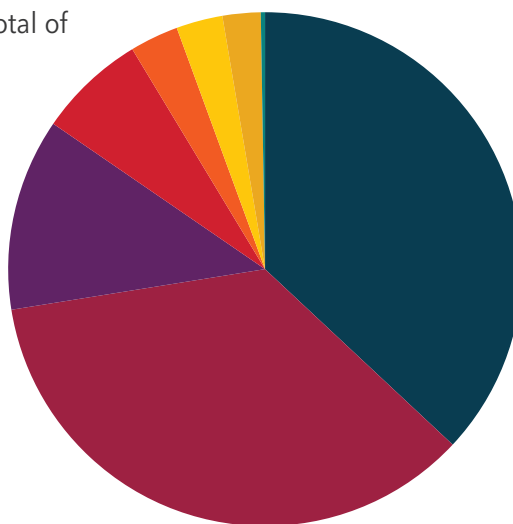
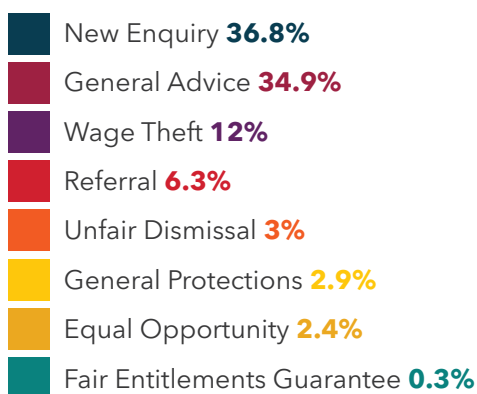
**\$415,851.93**

Recovered for young workers

# BREAKDOWN OF MATTERS

## ALL MATTERS

The Young Workers Centre spoke to a total of 752 young workers.

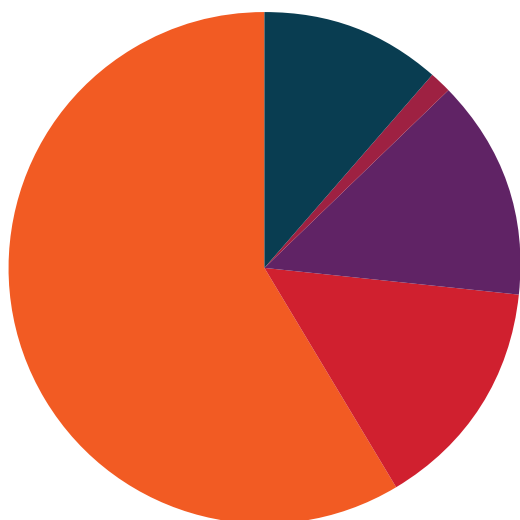
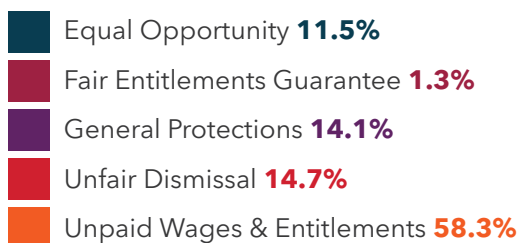


We offered ongoing assistance to 156 workers and provided once-off advice or referrals to 596 workers.

Many young workers come to us with multiple issues.

## ONGOING MATTERS

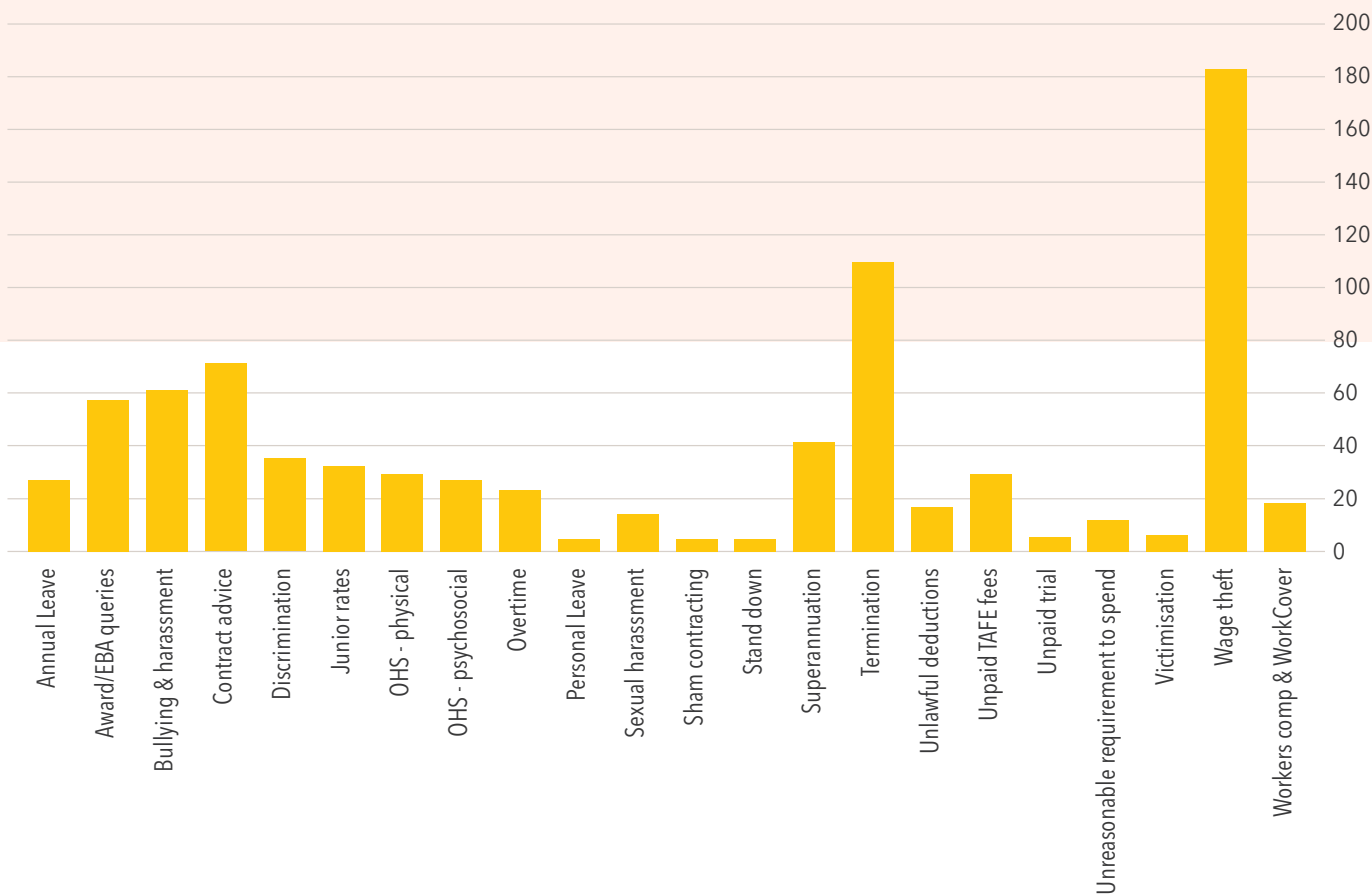
Assistance -



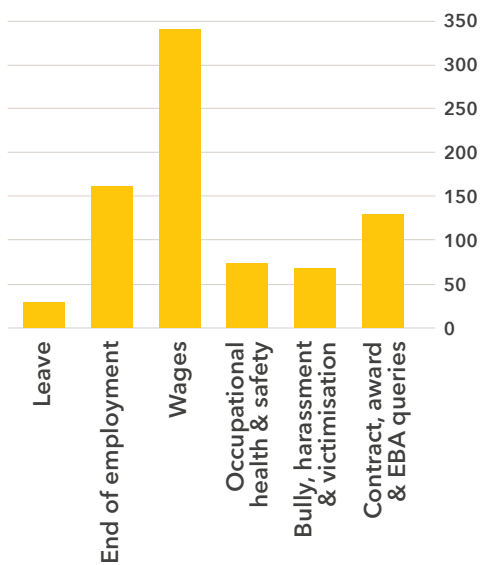
## TYPE OF ENQUIRIES

## NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES

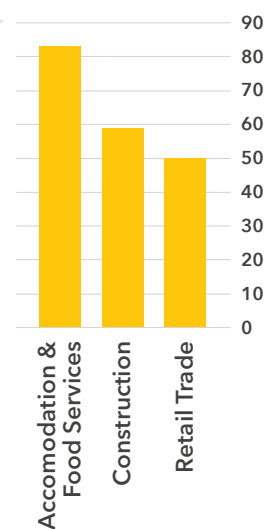
Annual leave	29
Award/EBA queries	57
Bullying & harassment	61
Contract advice	69
Discrimination	35
Junior rates	33
OHS - physical	32
OHS - psychosocial	29
Overtime	23
Personal leave	5
Sexual harassment	14
Sham contracting	4
Stand down	4
Superannuation	42
Termination	110
Unlawful deductions	15
Unpaid TAFE fees	30
Unpaid trial	5
Unreasonable requirement to spend	12
Victimisation	6
Wage theft	183
Workers comp & WorkCover	19



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



60% of our enquiries come from workers in the accommodation and food services, construction and trades, or retail trade industries





## CASE STUDY:

### ELLA & LUCY

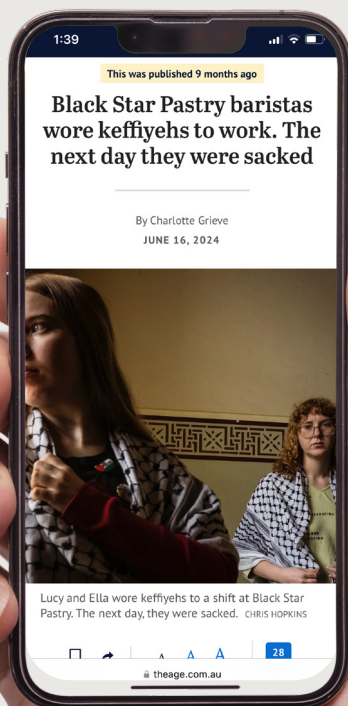
Ella and Lucy worked at Black Star Pastry; a café known for its “watermelon cake”. In support of Palestine, Ella and Lucy wore keffiyehs to work. Black Star Pastry then dismissed them from the workplace.

The YWC represented Ella and Lucy in a claim of discrimination, filed in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The basis of the claim was that Ella and Lucy had expressed a political opinion, and the business discriminated against them because of it. The case was widely reported in The Age and the Guardian.

Following mediation, the case was settled, with the parties making a joint statement, which was also reported on in the Age and The Guardian.

YWC is proud to have helped Ella and Lucy and was thrilled with the outcome.

See also our post about free speech rights at work [youngworkers.org.au/political-expression](https://youngworkers.org.au/political-expression).



## CASE STUDY:

### GABE

Electrical apprentice reclaims \$16k in stolen wages with assistance from the Young Workers Centre

Australian apprenticeships are rife with exploitation, and young workers are particularly vulnerable to wage theft and unsafe conditions.

The Young Workers Centre was called in to assist a young electrical apprentice, Gabe\*, who was owed thousands of dollars in unpaid wages and superannuation. Gabe had also experienced frequent racial abuse from his employer.

With the support of the Young Workers Centre, Gabe successfully settled the dispute with his former employer, winning over \$16,000 in stolen wages and superannuation.

With the money hitting Gabe's account, he is in a much better position to continue his apprenticeship and career, in a workplace where he can feel safe and supported.

In a similar incident, a builder's labourer working near Bendigo was able to reclaim \$9,000 in unpaid wages after his employer dodged his calls and blocked his number. Congratulations to both workers and to the staff in the Young Workers Centre, for building up young workers' knowledge and taking down bad bosses.





# ADVOCATE PROGRAM

This year, we were joined by 49 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

University Partners: Australian Catholic University, La Trobe University, RMIT, Swinburne University, University of Melbourne, Victoria University

## ADVOCATE CASE STUDY:

### LYNDON CASWELL

*"I applied to be an advocate at the Young Workers Centre after finding out about it at a union networking night run by the YWC. I spent a lot of my years prior to study working cash in hand jobs in kitchens with long hours and poor conditions. I also have many friends who experienced the same and worse, and have seen many times just how much of an impact it can have on people's lives. I started my law degree with the intention of helping people experiencing these kinds of problems, so this placement was the perfect fit.*

*I had no idea what to expect from my time as an advocate, but quickly realised I loved coming in. It was amazing to take my training from university out of the abstract and apply it to helping real people. This placement cemented in my mind that this was the kind of work that I wanted to do. The level of trust put in us as advocates to do real work meant we learned a huge amount even in a relatively small amount of time. The YWC taught me more about the practical side of the law in 2 months than in the previous 3 years of my degree."*



# KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION & EMPOWERMENT

Running parallel to direct support for young workers is education and empowerment. YWC programs and Outreach Organisers equip young workers with knowledge about workplace rights and safety, and empowers them to speak up if their workplace is not safe or fair.

## WORKPLACE RIGHTS SESSIONS

### TAFES

In the 2023-24FY our Apprentice Voice program was launched - an outreach program designed specifically to educate apprentices and trainees about their workplaces. This program was designed in response to a high number of apprentices seeking assistance from the Young Workers Centre about workplace issues.

Since the program was launched in late 2023 we have delivered 104 sessions and 348 modules across Victoria in 17 TAFEs. This includes visits to regional TAFEs in Mildura, Swan Hill, Wodonga, Gippsland, Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton as well as online sessions.

Our Apprenticeships Victoria approved modules include:

- Apprentice Readiness
- Your Rights at Work
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Bullying and Discrimination

### SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

We were delighted to travel all over Victoria during the 2023-2024FY to deliver in-person workplace rights sessions to young people in schools and community groups. In 2023-2024 we delivered workplace rights sessions to 8429 young Victorians at 119 schools or community organisations.

Our WorkSafe approved modules include:

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

Our training is designed to prepare young people for life at work before their first job and to support them in their early working years. Students and apprentices 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 53,264 young Victorians.





## O-WEEKS, CAREER DAYS & COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Our lawyers have elevated the voices of young workers in the community by:

Our outreach organisers have attended orientation week events at Universities and TAFEs across Victoria, visiting Melbourne Polytechnic, Holmesglen, ACU, University of Melbourne, Monash, and GOTAFE campuses.

The team presented at career and trades days including Melbourne Polytechnic Trades Day and AMWU exhibition days. We also attended the University of Melbourne's Public Interest Law Fair.

We collaborated with community and youth organisations including STREAT, Launch Housing, Scouts, University of Melbourne Student Union, Engage! Youth Ballarat, YouthNow and the National Union of Students to reach young people outside of a typical classroom setting.

We have also elevated the voices of young workers by speaking at the Victorian Trades Hall Council Women's Rights at Work Conference and supporting a young worker to do that same.

We have also presented at the Victorian Trades Hall Council's Industrial Officers Conference, "Advocates Unleashed",

given a guest lecture at the University of Melbourne to law students learning about workplace law and spoken on a Victorian Law Foundation Panel on Youth Injustice, which was hosted by Youth Law Australia.

Finally, we hosted Dr Anna Cody, the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner as a part of the Australian Human Rights Commission's "Speaking from Experience" project.



## REGIONAL LEGAL CLINICS

We have travelled to various regions and held legal clinics in Albury, Gippsland and Shepparton. We also visited Bendigo to present as part of the Bendigo Law Talks with our friends at the Victorian Law Foundation.



## GIG WORKER OUTREACH

In response to the launch of the Victorian Government's Gig Worker Support Service the Young Workers Centre delivered outreach to gig workers to inform them about their rights at work and how to access support.

This involved developing a survey to capture the experiences of gig workers in Victoria, from healthcare workers and graphic designers to rideshares and delivery riders. Survey responses were collected at street blitzes in Melbourne CBD and surrounding areas, a gig worker support night and online. In addition, we developed a section on our website with general resources for all gig workers.

In total, we have reached more than 250 gig workers all over Victoria, with 100 workers responding to our survey,

including 79 gig workers who chat face-to-face, and an additional 183 gig workers who took information about their rights at work.





## APPRENTICESHIP TASKFORCE

As a response to the Young Workers Centre campaign for safer and fairer apprenticeships the Victorian Government committed to establishing an Apprenticeship Taskforce to identify ways in which systemic changes can be made to improve the experiences of Victorian apprentices.

The Taskforce was established in mid-late 2023 and chaired by Sharan Burrow AC. The Young Workers Centre sat on the Taskforce and apprentices nominated by the Young

Workers Centre were part of a reference group that shared their ideas and stories with the Taskforce.

The Taskforce's report and recommendations were submitted to the Victorian Government in early 2024. Extraordinary commitment was shown to delivering a report which represents a vision for a modernised apprenticeships system and we eagerly await the Government's response.



2023 - Announcement of the Apprenticeship Taskforce

## NETWORKING, TRAINING AND SOCIAL EVENTS

The Young Workers Centre regularly holds networking, training and social events for young workers to upskill, connect and learn. In the 2023-2024FY the team hosted three networking nights, including a networking night attended by 97 people.

We also held numerous street blitzes where staff and activists spoke face-to-face and surveyed young workers. We took the opportunity to educate young workers about the new minimum wage in early July 2023 and other blitzes

were about junior wages and gig worker rights.

The team held our annual conference and monthly solidarity nights including ones focused on climate justice, housing, influencing policy, gig workers and an end of year trivia night.

Union Winter and Union Summer, a biannual 2-3-week paid internship program coordinated by the Young Workers Centre was also held in July 2023 and February 2024.



July 2023 - Solidarity Night (Union networking night)



October 2023 - Solidarity Night with Jordan Van Den Lamb



## THE VOICE REFERENDUM

In the lead up to the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum young workers organised and held street stalls in their local communities to talk to members of the public about the importance of voting. In order to have safe workplaces for all we must have safe and fair communities too.



## INFLUENCING A FAIRER FUTURE FOR YOUNG WORKERS

We believe young people's experiences at work must be at the centre of youth and employment policymaking.

We advocate to ensure young workers' voices are heard by policymakers, academics, politicians and the broader community.



# ELEVATING THE VOICES OF YOUNG WORKERS

The Young Workers Centre has continued to make an impact in the media landscape this year, through print, digital, radio and TV. We have continued to use our platform to uplift workers' voices and to highlight the issues they are facing.

We continue to be responsive to media requests and current and immediate issues facing young workers showing our agility and ability to speak to reporters and get quotes into print and digital articles. We supported a young retail worker to share their story about safety at work and empowered Lucy and Ella to share their story when they were fired for wearing keffiyehs.

Our End Junior Wages campaign was highlighted in an ABC article that discussed the renewed union push for equal pay for young people. Young Workers Centre activists and staff were also able to attend the filming of an

ABC Q&A episode on two occasions and ask the panel a question about junior wages, superannuation for under 18s and unpaid placements. The clips were then shared across social media and on YouTube and was an efficient tool to get out our message.

We also continued to speak out about wage theft, contributing to pieces about the cost of wage theft to workers and a case study of our work helping young workers to get back \$15,000 from employers. In addition, we continued to be quoted in articles about apprenticeship rights.

Our ability to both set and reach longer term media campaign goals as well as be responsive about emerging employment topics shows our ability to be heard in the media landscape.

10 THE AGE MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2024

NEWS

## Baristas sacked after wearing keffiyehs to work

Charlotte Grieve

Ella and Lucy loved working at the Black Star Pastry in the Chadstone Shopping Centre. For them, it was about more than just making coffee. "It was a high school job that turned into a livelihood," Ella says. "It very much became part of my identity as well."

The 22-year-olds - who asked that their surnames not be used - shared interests in barista techniques, but also human rights. They began attending the Sunday rallies for Palestine, a weekly fixture among those protesting the war in Gaza.

"Just walking in a group, hearing and feeling the emotions of the community going through such a horrific crisis right now," Ella says. "It hit me really hard."

It was the second day of "Keffiyeh Week", a national pro-Palestine campaign in late January, when they decided to wear keffiyehs to



Lucy (left) and Ella are taking legal action against the high-end Chadstone bakery. Photo: Chris Hopkins

Parliament. There, a fellow activist recommended they see a lawyer.

Now, they've engaged community law firm Young Workers Centre and are taking legal action against the bakery, alleging breaches of the Equal Opportunity Act for loss of employment due to discrimination based on political belief or activity.

Lawyer Kelly Thomas is representing them pro bono and believes this is a clear-cut case, as the letters confirm the jobs were severed because of the keffiyehs.

"The link is irresistible. There's a political belief, activity, it's expressed. The next minute, they don't have a job," Thomas says. "It's so heavy-handed, this approach, to two young workers who are engaging in a really peaceful showing of support for the Palestinian community."

Thomas said the tribunal had broad powers and could award remedies including compensation for lost wages, humiliation, emotional distress, or force the

## SUBMISSIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

We supported Madeleine, a ceramics tutor, and Thomas, a hospitality worker to share their story of insecure work and the impact it has on their lives at a Seate Inquiry hearing into the Closing Loopholes Bill.

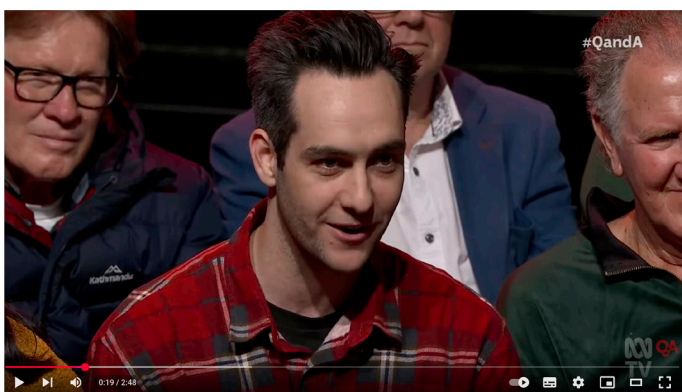
The cost-of living crisis is hitting young workers hard and this is worsened by the many systemic barriers they already face. In an economy stacked against them, young workers face a barrage of challenges just to get by and everyone - but especially young people starting out - should have

decent, secure, safe, well-paid jobs no matter where you work.

We also made a submission to the Federal Government about the cost model for sexual harassment matters and appeared at a Victorian Government inquiry hearing into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works as the number of apprentices seeking assistance with employment issues, such as non-payment, has been increasing year on year.



Natasha - who was sacked for talking to her co-workers about their pay - and YWC Director, Felicity, on Triple J's Hack 14 June 2023.



James asks Q&A panel about unfair junior wages.



Victoria

● This article is more than 9 months old

**Black Star Pastry workers sacked after wearing keffiyehs at Melbourne bakery reach settlement with former employer**

ABC NEWS



Log in



## Unions to campaign against 'discriminatory' junior wages

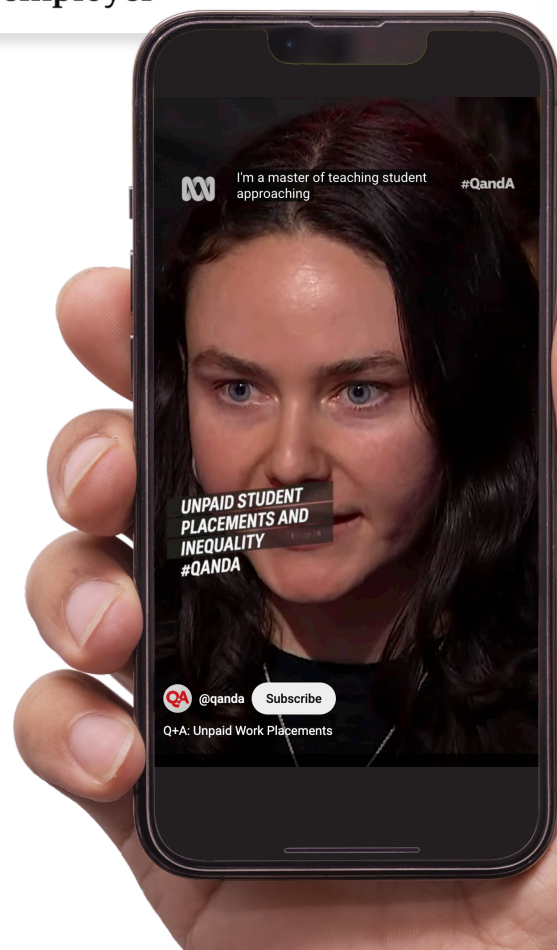
triple j Hack

By Shalailah Medhora

Thu 6 Jun



Industries like hospitality and retail, which have a high proportion of younger workers, still utilise junior rates. ([unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com))



Siane asks Q&A panel about unpaid placements for student teachers.





 [facebook.com/YWCVictoria](https://facebook.com/YWCVictoria)

 [@YWCVictoria](https://twitter.com/YWCVictoria)

 [@YoungWorkersVic](https://www.instagram.com/YoungWorkersVic)

 [Young Workers Centre](https://www.linkedin.com/company/YoungWorkersCentre)

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

54 Victoria St  
Carlton, Vic, 3053

1800 714 754

