YOUTH FRIENDLY EMPLOYERS
ARE

Accessible, provide a youth friendly environment, engage youth in the workplace and are equitable and inclusive.

"Young people are living in a world that has been designed for adults by adults, in which they are presented with complex choices and opportunities as they navigate their way uncertainly into adulthood. Supporting the developmental needs and capacities of young people's development during this transition into adulthood is essential in creating the best possible outcomes for youth. It has been suggested that young people thrive when developmental support comes from all sectors of the community". (Strengthening the Youth Sector Project, 2016)

Young people aged 15-24 are an unusual aspect of the workforce, in that they are usually the only group that is juggling education and employment, whether this be secondary or tertiary education. For many, part-time jobs during teen years will be their first foray into employment, and therefore their first opportunity to learn about being a member of the workforce and the new responsibilities that come with that role. It is during this time that young people are likely to acquire a work ethic that will follow them throughout their working life.

The following elements explore ways in which workplaces can support young people in their positive development towards independence and success in the workplace.

Guidelines for setting youth up for success through a youth friendly environment:

ACCESSIBILITY

Workplaces need to be accessible to young people, reducing barriers to employment and ongoing development and success within the organisation.

Things to consider:
- Reduce barriers to entry, e.g. application process. Be specific with requirements of the job from the outset (e.g. hours/days, drivers licence) , as well as what to expect and what is expected during the recruitment process – e.g. specific dress attire, types of skills they should be prepared to talk to / demonstrate.
- Set clear expectations and work with the young person to identify how they will meet these and what barriers may exist
- Take the time to get to know the young person and their obligations; what family, school, community obligations they have that may impact on work and vice versa how work may impact on those.
- Provide a clear-cut process for 'requesting change of hours' or 'leave', discuss access to transport to and from work

PROVIDING A YOUTH FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

A Youth friendly environment assists young people in feeling physically, emotionally and psychologically safe and thus contributes to a youth friendly workplace that fosters development.

Things to consider:
- Ensure health and safety, processes and training is made relevant to the young person's development and experience
- Ensure health, safety and well-being policies should be relevant to a young person's developmental awareness (physically, emotionally, psychologically, or spiritually).
- Work with young people to understand if the physical environment is suitable (e.g. break rooms and changing areas)
- Consider the use of additional supervision for younger staff, a buddy system, reduce any ambiguity of language – be specific.
- Check with young people that they have access to required items – e.g. suitable clothing. Don't presume.

ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Employers' can foster youth engagement through valuing youth participation, promoting communication between adults and young people while acknowledging youth culture.

Things to consider:
- Actively seek to communicate and build a dialogue with young employees
- Promote communication between adults and young people
- Acknowledge youth culture (access to wifi, music, language) texting vs email…
- Work with the young person to identify opportunities for learning and future development.
- Identify pathways: training, upskilling, mentoring and performance assessments.
- Regular check-ins, assign a buddy or mentor to guide them through the settling-in period, get to know them as an individual, ask their opinion, use humble inquiry.
- Consider what transferable skills will aid young employees in future employment and support development of these skills – do you give feedback on these?

BEING EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE

An inclusive and equitable, youth friendly workplace values, respects and indeed welcomes diversity of all kinds including the unique perspectives, skills and experiences that youth bring.

Things to consider:

- Organisation promotion of zero tolerance for bullying and discrimination in the workplace, consider specific policies / practices that might safeguard younger staff e.g. cyberbullying and the use of social media, texting etc..
- Reserve judgement and be openminded. Consider that there may be preconceived ideas of 'young people' within the work place and identify ways to build a culture that values each other through a demonstration of mutual respect.
- Be culturally aware and consider how this relates to the workplace.
- Actively welcome, value and respect diversity in all forms.