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SIDE-HUSTLES

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REDEFINING WORK

FINDINGS FROM YEAR 1 OF THE YOUTH SIDE-HUSTLES PROJECT



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Side-hustles: How young people are redefining work

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KEY MESSAGES



Side-hustles are small-scale entrepreneurial activities undertaken alongside formal employment. We surveyed 1,497 young side-hustlers between the ages of 18 and 34 and interviewed 68 side-hustlers about their experiences. Around 15 per cent of all young people in this age range have a side-hustle.



Side-hustlers do a range of activities. **The most common is selling goods, with almost half of all side-hustlers (47%) selling items like clothing or crafts online.** The other half of side-hustlers do a myriad of things such as digital design and creative work, dog walking, handyman tasks etc.



Passion and enjoyment are the most important reasons as to why young people take on a side-hustle followed closely by not earning enough money in their current job.



Women are more likely than men to have a side hustle, yet they often face the same challenges they encounter in the traditional labour market. The gender pay gap is 67% and they also tend to do more unpaid labour to make their side-hustle work.



Side-hustles require some kind financial back to run, but for most they are not financially lucrative. The median weekly earnings are $200. Most side-hustlers rely on income from their main job to support their side-hustle. Around 1-in-10 side-hustlers also received financial support from family members.



On average, side-hustlers spend 11 hours a week in their side-hustles. Just under 45 per cent do some kind of unpaid work to sustain their side-hustles.



Most side-hustlers are satisfied with their side-hustle. There is a strong level of satisfaction among side-hustlers about their working hours, the balance between their jobs in the labour market, and their side-hustle and work-life balance.



This report is the first wave of a three-year project. Future waves of data collection in 2025 and 2026 will survey and interview side-hustlers about their experiences.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Despite popular narratives, side-hustles are not lifting young people out of economic hardship. Instead, side-hustles often rely on resources — like steady jobs, personal savings, and family support that not all young people have access to. This challenges policy assumptions that encourage entrepreneurship as a quick fix to youth unemployment or underemployment.

2. While financial concerns play a role, many young people pursue side-hustles for passion. This shows the importance of supporting meaningful, work especially as traditional employment for young people becomes more constrained.

3. Promoting hustle culture or entrepreneurialism risks placing the burden of economic insecurity on individuals. Policymakers should be cautious about framing side-hustling as a universal pathway for career development or labour market success. Instead, focus should be placed on strengthening secure, meaningful employment opportunities for young people.

4. Women are more likely to be side-hustlers but earn significantly less and do more unpaid work to sustain their side-hustles. These findings reflect broader gendered dynamics in the labour market and point to the need for gender-sensitive entrepreneurship policy and research.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Youth Side-Hustles Project is a three-year, Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project. It is a mixed-methods project involving researchers from Deakin University, The University of Melbourne and the University of Leeds.

It is the first project to explore the characteristics and experiences of young people with side-hustles.

Side hustles have a popular appeal, but what counts as a side hustle remains uncertain. We have established a working definition. In this project, a **side-hustle is defined as an independent, entrepreneurial money-making activity pursued by someone also engaged in paid employment.**

To qualify for participation in the study, a young person must coordinate their side-hustle activities and set or negotiate the price of goods and services. This means that rideshare and food delivery work is excluded from the project since these workers do not independently coordinate or negotiate their work on these platforms. However, service work facilitated through other apps is included so long as it meets the inclusion criteria.

For this project, a young side-hustler is defined as someone between the ages of 18-34. This age range reflects the extended nature of the youth period, and the fact that even older participants are relatively young in the world of business.

The data used in this report relies on two key data sources; first, a national survey of young side-hustlers and second, qualitative interviews with young people who have side-hustles.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The Young Side-Hustlers Survey was fielded in September 2024 by YouGov. The incidence rate was 15%.

The survey team designed the questionnaire to cover several key topics, including (1) demographics; (2) information about side hustles, including type of side-hustle, motivations and tenure; (3) hours worked and earnings; (4) satisfaction and job quality; and (5) information about other employment outside the side-hustle.

The final sample included: 1,497 respondents**.**

QUALITATIVE DATA

After completing the survey, we conducted interviews with side-hustlers. We asked them about their motivations, experiences and everyday strategies. We also asked them about their paid employment and their aspirations for their overall working life.

The final qualitative sample included 68 respondents: 40 women, 25 men, and 2 non-binary.

REPORT

This is the first report of a three year project. Future reports in 2026 and 2027 will focus on Years 2 and 3 of the project.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND SIDE-HUSTLES

Young people around the globe face growing precarity in the labour market, manifested in employment insecurity, diminished advancement opportunities, low wages, and declining returns on education (Vromen et al., 2021; Cooper & Hill, 2022; Churchill & Khan, 2021). Amid these challenges, entrepreneurship—especially at a small scale—has emerged as a proposed pathway for improving young people's financial security and career prospects. **'Side-hustles' - or small-scale businesses pursued alongside employment - are the most prevalent example of entrepreneurialism amongst young people, but we know very little about them.** Our study is designed to find out what side-hustles involve, who pursues them, and how they affect young people's career trajectories and working lives.

This is important because, despite significant optimism about entrepreneurialism in popular culture and public policy, there are also concerns about a "hustle culture" that intensifies social inequalities and leads to burnout amongst young workers (Spence, 2015; Beringer, 2020; Petersen, 2019; Cigna, 2022). We need to know more about this, because while youth-led ventures can be creative and potentially profitable, the vast majority of such businesses fail (OECD/EC, 2021), with massive costs for young workers and the Australian economy.

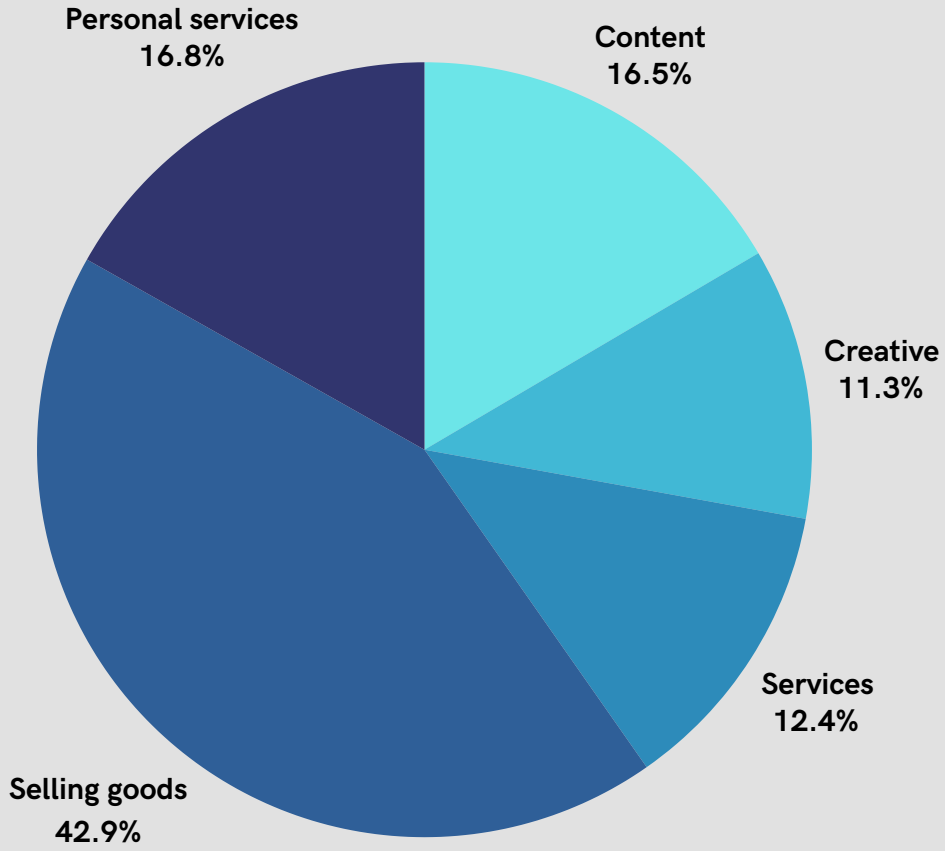
Existing evidence is limited however because of an adequate working definition. **Research on entrepreneurship typically focuses on self-employment or on those who employ others, so side-hustles pursued by people who also have jobs are excluded from research** (Thornton, 1999; Ireland & Webb, 2007).

Despite this lack of evidence, there remains significant optimism in policy about entrepreneurship as a solution to youth under- or unemployment (DESE, 2020; OECD/EC, 2021). **Entrepreneurship is championed for its perceived potential to lead to more fulfilling work** (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021). Moreover, influential organisations promoting "enterprise skills" argue that entrepreneurial attributes—such as managing risk, identifying opportunities, and adapting to market changes—are key to enhancing young people's overall employability (FYA, 2017). This has led to greater pressure on workers to view themselves as "personal brands" that remain flexible and innovative. **We do not know how young people develop these entrepreneurial attributes, or how they relate to their careers.**

A deeper understanding of side-hustles and their role in youth employment is vital for informing policy and practice. Such knowledge can help prevent ineffective or even harmful strategies that place undue emphasis on individual responsibility for solving structural labour market problems. It can also recognise and support the creativity, innovation, and potential productivity that young entrepreneurs bring to the Australian—and global—workforce. **By systematically investigating the side-hustle phenomenon, our aim is to identify which conditions enable positive outcomes, and which perpetuate inequality or result in burnout, thereby enabling more equitable and effective pathways into entrepreneurship and employment for young people.**

TYPES OF SIDEHUSTLERS

The majority of side-hustles done by young people involves selling goods on the internet (42.9%) followed by personal services (16.8%).



- **Content** involves producing digital content, such as TikTok videos
- **Creative** involves doing creative tasks, like graphic design or photography
- **Personal services** involves undertaking personal tasks for people like dog walking
- **Selling goods** involves selling goods on the internet, e.g. old clothes, furniture
- **Services** involves handyman tasks like moving furniture



Around 30 per cent of young side-hustlers have more than one side-hustle, including 5 per cent who have three or more side-hustles. Most side-hustlers do not involve the use of digital platforms.

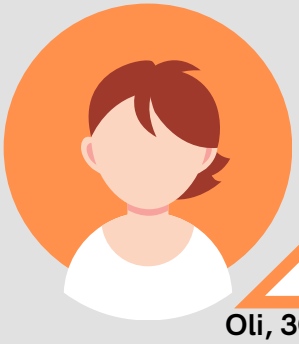
Just over 86 per cent of side-hustlers do their side-hustle by themselves– without a partner or family member.



FOR LOVE OR MONEY? SIDE-HUSTLERS' MOTIVATIONS

Young people were asked to rank a list of reasons why they took on a side-hustle. The list of reasons ranged from being passionate about their side-hustle to feeling unfulfilled in their current job. The top three motivations were: (1) enjoyment and passion; (2) financial concerns; (3) connections between their side-hustle and future career.

1. **ENJOYING AND FEELING PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR SIDE-HUSTLE**
2. **NOT EARNING ENOUGH MONEY IN THEIR CURRENT JOB**
3. **THEIR SIDE-HUSTLE RELATES TO THEIR CURRENT JOB OR FUTURE CAREER**
4. **THEY WERE NOT GETTING ENOUGH HOURS IN THEIR CURRENT JOB**
5. **THEY DID NOT FEEL FULFILED IN THEIR CURRENT JOB**



There wasn't really an opportunity to do the work that I wanted to do in a paid capacity within any of the non-profits that currently exists, and I thought, you know what, if I keep the overhead costs low, be creative about how I go about that, I could probably do a good thing, eventually make a little bit of money,

Oli, 30, side-hustle private counselling practice

SIDEHUSTLERS ARE MOST LIKELY WOMEN, HIGHLY EDUCATED

Young people who engage in side-hustles represent a diverse demographic profile, though there are some clear patterns. Women were more likely to be side-hustlers (54%). Fewer than one per cent indicate a non-binary or other gender identity. The large majority (approximately 85%) identify as heterosexual, with smaller groups identifying as bisexual (9%) or gay/lesbian (3%). Over 13% of respondents identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

Most side-hustlers were born in Australia (roughly 85%), though respondents from England, New Zealand, China, India, and other countries are also represented. A substantial majority (90%) hold Australian citizenship, with just over 5% holding permanent residency and around 3% holding temporary residency. In terms of cultural background, 68.6% identify as Australian, followed by smaller proportions who identify with East/South-East Asian, British/Irish, or Southern/Eastern European heritage.

Young side-hustlers are highly educated. Close to half hold a Bachelor's degree (45%), and an additional 17% have obtained graduate-level qualifications. While two-thirds of side-hustlers are not currently studying, the remainder are enrolled at universities, TAFEs, or private colleges.

The majority of side-hustlers are in relationships. Just under two-thirds are partnered in some form (married, cohabiting, or living separately), and 36% are single. **Around four in ten side-hustlers report some form of caring responsibility**, most commonly for children under 17, a partner, or other family members or friends—responsibilities more frequently borne by women. Most side-hustlers (85%) do not have a long-term health condition, and **the majority describe their overall health as either "excellent" or "very good."**

54%

of young side-huslters were women

13%

identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Isalnder

85%

of young side-hustlers born in Australia

61%

have a tertiary qualification

33%

are currently studying

38%

have care-giving responsibilities

SIDE-HUSTLES COST MONEY TO SET UP

54%

of side-hustlers have invested their own money

11%

of side-hustlers have had their parents invest money in their side-hustles

7%

of side-hustlers have had received investments from other sources

46%

had used their savings to build their side-hustles

Our research found that most side-hustlers fund their side-hustle with money from other sources, such as employment or parental support, rather than relying on the income generated from the side-hustle itself. In other words, side-hustles are not main sources of income, but rather pockets of supplementary, discretionary income.

Just over half of all young side-hustlers (54%) have invested their own money in their side-hustles. Some have had investments from others, including parents (11%) or other sources like family members and friends (7%).

There was also a gender investment gap. More men invested their own money (66%) than women (51%). More men (20%) also received financial backing from their parents compared to women (9%).

We also found that young side-hustlers are reliant on other financial sources to build their side-hustles. **Around 60 per cent of all side-hustlers had relied on other kinds of financial support outside of their family to build their side-hustle.**

The most common source of support was their savings with just under half of all side-hustlers (46%) using savings to build their side-hustle. Around 16% of side-hustlers used credit cards and 9% had got a loan from a financial institution (5%) or a digital platform (4%).

My equipment, apparel like footwear, and gloves, mower, maybe some spray, trimmer, leaf blower, rake, those things were just my investment initially... I did have some savings but at the same time, like I could feel comfortable maybe a little investment at a time, so it wasn't all at once. I didn't purchase all of the equipment at once. There was couple of jobs that I completed with just the limited equipment supply and then saved up to purchase more.



Brooke, 30, side-hustle as a gardener

SIDE-HUSTLERS SPEND JUST UNDER A DAY AND A HALF A WEEK ON THEIR HUSTLES

11hrs

The average hours spent working on side-hustles by young people

Side-hustles are not full-time jobs and most spend just over one day a week on them. On average, **side-hustlers spend 10.9 hours per week in their side-hustles**. though the level of time varies substantially from person to person. **Men spend on average 14.5 hours a week compared to 11.6 hours for women**. Most side-hustles are part-time by nature. Over 77 per cent of hustlers spend 20 hours or less on their side-hustles. Around 3 per cent spend more than 50 hours a week on their side-hustle.

...BUT THEY ALSO SPEND QUITE A BIT OF UNPAID TIME ON THEIR SIDE-HUSTLES

A little under half of all side-hustlers reported doing unpaid work to keep their side-hustle running. There were clear gender differences: **43% of women engage in unpaid tasks compared to 32% of men**, although both groups average around two hours weekly. Most individuals who perform unpaid work (64%) commit fewer than five hours per week. A very small proportion of side-hustlers (3%) invest over 21 hours of unpaid work.

44%

of young side-hustles report doing unpaid labour for their hustle

The profit margin-wise, if we don't count my time and energy put into the business, the margin is acceptable. If I really put my time and energy into the consideration, I would say we're not making much money at all...It's just something I enjoy doing in my free time. Yes, less about generating income, but obviously need to break even.



Claudia, 32, e-commerce side-hustler on eBay

SIDE-HUSTLES DON'T ALWAYS PAY WELL

$200

is the median weekly earnings of side-hustlers

$22

is the average dollar per hour a side-hustler earns

67%

The gender pay gap between men and women's median weekly earnings is 67%.

Side-hustles are not hugely profitable business endeavours for most young people. **Side-hustlers had median weekly earnings of around $200 a week**. We report median earnings instead of average earnings, but there are a few side-hustlers who earn much larger incomes from their side-hustles, which skews the overall distribution of earnings. The median reflects the typical income amongst respondents with half earning less than this amount and the remainder earning more than $200 a week. This equates to about ten per cent of the average weekly ordinary-time earnings for full-time adults (ABS 2024).

We find that this equates to about $22 per hour, which is lower than the median hourly earnings in main job at $40.00 per hour (ABS 2024).

We also find evidence of a gender gap. The median weekly earnings for men in their side-hustles are $300 a week compared to $100 a week for women. This amounts to a gender pay gap of 67%.

I would like more. Obviously, at this point, they're mostly just side hustle. They're not really my main income sources. Yes, of course, I'm just trying out new ideas. I'm just trying out ideas, which one sticks.



Charles, 24, side-hustles of data transformation on Fiverr and tutoring



I have a job, like a permanent– not permanent. I do casual work, so this is just for an extra bit of happiness. Like, "Hey, I got extra money today," kind of thing like that.

Hannah, 22, side-hustle of trading trading Yu-Gi-Oh cards

SIDE-HUSTLERS ARE UNSURE ABOUT FUTURE EARNINGS

There is a moderate level of satisfaction amongst side-hustlers regarding how much money they earn in their side-hustles, reflecting their weekly earnings discussed in the previous section. **Around 60% report being satisfied. More men are satisfied (64%) than women (54%)** which may also reflect the gender pay gap in side-hustles as women earn considerably less than men.

The level of satisfaction may also reflect the uncertainty around future earnings. **Around two-thirds of side hustlers do not know how much money they may earn in the next 3-months**.

There are significant gender differences: **more women (67%) do not know their future earnings than men (58%).**

60%

are satisfied with the money they earn in their side-hustles

65%

of side-hustlers don't know how much money they may earn in the next 3-months

Sometimes it's a little bit devastating, especially because just like stock, you don't know when this is going to go up. You don't know when this is going to go down. Even with the stock I have, the asset is not stable. Sometimes it can get devastating. It's like, "Oh crap, I wasted money on getting these ones." Sometimes it's joyful because like, "Oh yes, I can get a lot of money."



Hannah, 22, side-hustle of trading trading Yu-Gi-Oh cards



It's not so stable in terms of income…Suddenly, I will lose a few weeks of pay or like, say, for example, summer holiday, they want to have a break so that like they will just have tutoring during the semester. I still have to pay my bill… but hey don't care about your income because it's for you to worry about.

Erika, 31, side-hustle as a tutor

SIDE-HUSTLERS ARE SATISFIED WITH SIDE-HUSTLES

76%
are satisfied with the work they do in their side-hustles

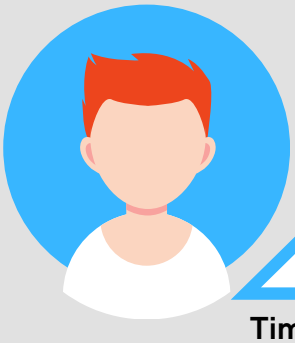
70%
are satsified with the balance between side-hustle and the rest of life

69%
satisfied with the balance between side-hustle and other jobs

70%
are satisfied with the skills and experience gain in side-hustle

Side-hustlers are a largely satisfied with aspects of their side-hustle and their working conditions. They are **most satisfied with the work they do in their side-hustles** (76%). They are also highly satisfied with the **balance between their side-hustle and the rest of their life (70%).** A similar proportion (69%) are satisfied with the balance between their side-hustle and their jobs.

Side-hustlers are also very satisfied with the skills and experience they gain in their side-hustle (70%). There are slight gendered differences. **Women report being less satisfied** with the work they do in their side-hustles and with the skills and experience they gain in their side-hustles.



Sometimes I look at it and go, if I was to pick up a second job, like just say, let's take an example, Uber driving at night time, I won't be happy, I'll be tired, I'll be stressed out trying to do that in a corporate job. Whereas, I think because I've got the passion for it here, I'm happy to do it because, like I said, I'm doing it at my own pace.

Tim, 33, e-commerce store selling toys and home goods

I think at this stage, as I say, that I have time and I want to make better use of it...in general, you can use time in multiple ways. One is you can get extra income, which is what I'm doing at the moment. Another is you can learn new skills, which is also I allocate some time for that. Other things is you socialize and you go out. I'm cutting my time in let's say using social media or more like relaxing



Rahun, 29, side-hustle as a tutor

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of our project contradict popular myths about side-hustles and optimism about entrepreneurship amongst policy-makers. Young people with side-hustles are on secure employment pathways, with relatively high levels of education and high career aspirations. Side-hustles are not pathways into employment, and the opposite is true: to pursue a side-hustle a young person needs money to invest, which usually comes from their jobs. **Side-hustles are the most prevalent form of youth entrepreneurship but there is limited evidence to suggest that this constitutes a meaningful solution to problems in the labour market.**

On the other hand, there is limited evidence to suggest that side-hustles are leading to burnout. Our data shows that young people with side-hustles are relatively satisfied in their jobs, but are looking for a new creative outlet. Our participants are spending their leisure time converting their passions into money-making enterprises and seeking satisfaction in independent work. What we do know is that young people are making their leisure time productive in new ways, and what this means for the youth period needs further investigation.

As this project continues, we will be looking more closely at how gender influences side-hustles. We know that women value flexibility in the labour market and are more likely to pursue a side-hustle. We will be looking more closely at how side-hustles relate to gendered divisions of labour in the home.

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