CHANGING PERCEPTIONS IN EMPLOYMENT

A pilot project led by the City of Casey on behalf of the Southern Metropolitan Partnership.

July 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Casey, on behalf of the Southern Metropolitan Partnership, undertook a pilot program which was to be a place-based approach to placing job seekers into employment while responding to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

The brief targeted job seekers; under 25 year olds, over 45 year olds and people from culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. The industries that were targeted because of their critical skills shortages were Manufacturing, Allied Health & Community Services and Hospitality & Tourism. The key objectives of the project were to refer and upskill up to 200 job seekers and secure up to 50 employment outcomes for job seekers.

Rather than duplicate what was already happening in the regional employment landscape, the objective of this project was to incorporate all the existing mechanisms, funding and supports that already exist for employers and job seekers.

Using a person-centred wraparound approach, the project matched job seekers to jobs by building genuine relationships with employers, cultivating connections, offering more holistic referrals to job seekers, facilitating industry information sessions, providing access to training to upskill job seekers and facilitating access to employment.

The findings highlight the value and efficacy of the project with regard to:

- creating sustainable relationships with employers in order to gain a better understanding of their industry challenges, especially current skills gaps and future skill needs, and thereby be able to assist them to access and make better use of funded programs and employment initiatives

- establishing key lines of communication and feedback between job seekers, training organisations, businesses and industry bodies, and employment services to tailor training and employment solutions

- improving collaboration and accountability rather than competing between existing employment service providers (local, state and federal)

- focusing on a person-centred approach in dealing with employers and job seekers by offering a true wraparound model that can identify and fill the needs of job seekers and employers with in-time upskilling solutions

- improving the public image of some industries with pre-conceived and outdated knowledge of the working conditions and employment pathways; and

- helping employers experience different recruitment methods that promote screening-in rather than screening-out opportunities.

As a result of using these underpinning principles, the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project was able to meet its key objectives and engaged with 317 job seekers and referred them to upskilling initiatives, 109 of whom completed upskill training for target industries. In addition, it secured 53 employment outcomes.

The Changing Perceptions in Employment Project had a short timeframe to deliver these results (nine months: September 2021 to June 2022) and these results would not have been possible if not for the many hours of in-kind support from other council units, and project industry partners as well as the collaborative approach of the project working group (PWG). This project demanded everyone to share their contacts, networks and resources which was done willingly. This enabled the project team to work on building strong relationships in the community and industry, give quality time to employers and job seekers and follow through on referrals to ensure a high standard of service and good outcomes were delivered to stakeholders.

The Changing Perceptions in Employment Project responded to social and economic impacts of COVID-19 specific to the region. This place-based approach to creating jobs and skills was a holistic pilot project that sought to deliver upskilling and employment opportunities for eligible job seekers. The Project is in alignment with the Southern Metropolitan Partnership's Report Back 2019 to improve job and skill outcomes for the region – particularly for young people, women, and CALD communities.

In the absence of place-based solutions involving local governments across the southern region, operational hurdles are making it difficult to leverage existing offerings by state and federal governments. This project established a key line of communication between job seekers, key institutions, and governments to tailor solutions to their needs, thus securing much-needed job opportunities and simultaneously increasing upskilling in needed areas.

Despite initiatives in place to increase supply in areas where there are skills shortages, employers continued to stress difficulties in employing, primarily due to attraction and retention of staff, lack of localised solutions, cultural barriers, low quality referrals, and poor employment readiness.

By working within a localised context, the project team developed a shared understanding with local businesses and leveraged existing intergovernmental programs to address skill gaps and secure local employment opportunities for job seekers.

The following target job seekers were the remit of this project:

Young people aged under 25

People aged over 45 years

People from CALD communities

The following target industries were also the remit of this project:

manufacturing

allied health

hospitality and tourism

THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT WERE TO:

Gain up to 200 number of referrals to upskilling initiatives within target industries

Secure up to 50 employment outcomes for job seekers for target cohorts

Develop a tool kit for employers to screen-in future job seekers rather that screen out. This original objective was deleted as another funded project in the region was tackling this employer toolkit in a much more robust manner. It was agreed by the Project Control Group (PCG) that it should be replaced with:

Conduct an independent evaluation of the project to provide an objective assessment and overview of the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project, lessons learned and outcomes, through inputs and outputs.

SUPPORTERS/PARTNERS AND THEIR ROLES IN THIS PROJECT[1]:

Casey Jobs Victoria Advocates – Referred job seekers to the program information sessions and followed up with participants and directed them to appropriate services such as upskilling activities, career counselling or employment services (Job Active and JVES). They provided project support, insights and feedback to the lead agency and bridged the gap between the federal and state employment services through liaison and facilitated referrals and follow-ups.

City of Casey Project Team - Responsible for leading and setting up the project structures, such as the PWG. They also developed the information sessions, consulted with employers and job seekers through data gathering instruments and provided individual support to a diverse range of stakeholders.

Employers and industry groups - Participated in information sessions and provided insights through consultations and where relevant, they supported job seekers with industry visits and offered advice, trends and immediate skills needs of employers coming out of COVID-19.

Councils in the Southeast Region - Shared contacts and information and promoted the project in their local areas.

Employment Service Providers (Federal's Job Actives and State's JVES) - Offered insights into job seeker behaviour and connected their job seekers to opportunities offered by the program. Connected them to employers with job vacancies so that they could continue the relationship beyond this project.

Funders (Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Victorian Government on behalf of the Southern Metropolitan Partnership) - Provided the funding for the project and led the Project Control Group (PCG) with the City of Casey, participating as an observer in some PWG meetings and will be a key recipient of the project findings.

Jobs Victoria Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne and Local Jobs Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne - Promoted the project aims and encouraged their employment support providers to support the project, sharing networks and resources, and work collaboratively.

Project Control Group - Included representatives of the delivery partner and the Office for Suburban Development. This group was responsible for project oversight and supporting overall strategic directions, including the financial and contract management

Project Working Group – Comprised of industry, community, training, and employment support organisations and offered guidance, networks, direction, and solutions based on their industry experience. Some representatives participated in the information sessions and raised awareness of the project.

Training organisations - offered localised training and support as well as promoting and raising awareness of the project. They co-funded some of the training courses. These included Registered Training Organisations and Learn Locals.

---

1. Supporting organisations are listed in Appendix A

APPROACH

The objective of this project was to incorporate all the existing mechanisms, funding and supports that already exist for employers and job seekers and add an element that will help change perceptions of employers towards certain cohorts and change the perceptions of job seekers towards employment opportunities in certain industries. This was made possible by information sharing between all parties at strategic points throughout the project and at a personal level to build understanding, empathy and trust.

This was to be achieved by providing[2]:

individualised support for job seekers

programs and resources for specific cohorts

recruitment approaches that look for potential in candidates

Importantly this project was also underpinned by a program logic that included trauma informed practice, a strengths-based framework founded on five core principles – safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment as well as respect for diversity. This was especially appropriate given the levels of trauma and reactive anxieties amongst job seekers and employers coming out of prolonged lockdowns due to COVID-19[3].

Other important elements in how this project was approached were:
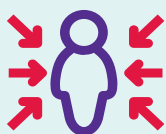
a person-centred approach

incorporation of the theory of planned behaviour

the ecological systems theory

the intersectionality theory

---

3.   See https://mhaustralia.org/general/trauma-informed-practice

2.   These were adopted from the findings of the work undertaken by the Dandenong/Doveton Community Revitalisation Report 2020/2021.

The key milestone activities were split into three distinct phases of operation:

PHASE 1 RESEARCH

The project team undertook an investigation to identify what funded programs were already in existence locally that could be leveraged for this project. This included local, state and federal training to address local skills gaps, employment programs and resources for cross referring to establish appropriate wrap-around service for employers and job seekers.

A comprehensive literature review was done of existing evidence-based programs, such as Dandenong-Doveton Community Revitalisation and learnings from the Greater Dandenong Regional Employment Taskforce.

PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT

Phase 2 was stakeholder engagement to get a clear understanding of what was happening for each group of stakeholders post COVID-19. The project team engaged with local business in the target industries and local job seekers from the target cohorts, training organisations and state and federal employment service providers.

Through these engagements:

- the pain points of each stakeholder group were identified

- the project approach and logic were validated

- it informed the design of the project activities.

Some of the key learnings from these initial engagements were:

- There was a prominent level of relative helplessness amongst Job Seekers and Employers, agreeing that there's ample jobs out there. However, the two factions were not able to fulfill each other's needs.

- Job seekers were disheartened in their job seeking attempts as they rarely got a response.

- While most job seekers received assistance with their resumes, they had not accessed any independent career counselling.

- Job seekers did not feel particularly supported by their employment case workers.

- Job seekers were relying on word of mouth for vacancies rather than online platforms

- Job seekers were looking for jobs that offered more work/life balance

- CALD job seekers felt that their overseas qualifications and experience were largely not appreciated by Australian employers.

- Employers are seeing extremely low responses to job adverts since COVID-19

- Health services under enormous pressure and losing staff at alarming rates

- Critical skills shortages in welders and chefs

- Mandatory vaccination requirements were adding additional pressure to employers having to let go of valuable staff with critical skills.

- Training organisations felt out of touch with industry skill needs due to lack of engagement with them which was compounded by COVID-19 lockdowns.

PHASE 3 ACTIVATION

EMPLOYER SURVEYS AND SOURCING JOB VACANCIES

A needs analysis instrument was created and directed at employers to identify their immediate and minimum skills needs. This included information such as the types of employment (part-time, full-time, casual etc.) number of hours, types of qualification/licences needed, attributes required, usual recruitment methods, what recruitment methods worked and what did not. In addition, they were asked to identify the barriers that hindered them from finding the right staff. Employer engagement showed that the lockdowns and public health policies had severely impacted their ability to forward plan and deal with extra administrative requirements. Therefore, this instrument was delivered in person or over the phone rather than an online questionnaire, which would most likely not have been completed. Talking through the survey with the employer helped them to unpack their needs and distress and contributed to authentic interactions because they felt heard in a safe and supportive way.

Through these in-person and telephone conversations, job vacancies were identified, and employers were encouraged to upload them onto the local jobs portal (www.caseycardiniajobs.com.au[4]). In some cases, it was necessary to upload these on behalf of the employer.[5]

SOURCING INDUSTRY SKILLS TRAINING

Once the required, immediate and minimum skills were identified, the project team sourced local training organisations, in particular Learn Locals in the Local Government Areas (LGAs) as they were able to rapidly create the training programs required. There was a shortage of trainers (another skill shortage post COVID-19) but working collaboratively with other social enterprises, community organisations and training organisations, it was possible to pool resources and be ready to run the programs once the participants were found.

INDUSTRY SPECIFIC INFORMATION SESSIONS

With live job vacancies and skills training organised the next step was to find job seekers to apply for them. Industry specific information sessions were arranged.

The purpose of the industry information sessions was to:

1. inform job seekers of the job opportunities

2. hear direct from the employers about their industry and the jobs on offer

3. educate on the current industry pathways and conditions

4. allow job seekers to interact with employers; and

5. increase connection, networks and confidence and rapport for job seekers

---

4.   www.caseycardiniajobs.com.au with a database of 5000+ members (past and present job seekers)

5.   Examples of job adverts on the Casey Cardinia Jobs Portal are in Appendix C

It was planned that these sessions would be in-person events, however with COVID-19 restrictions still in force, they were held online.
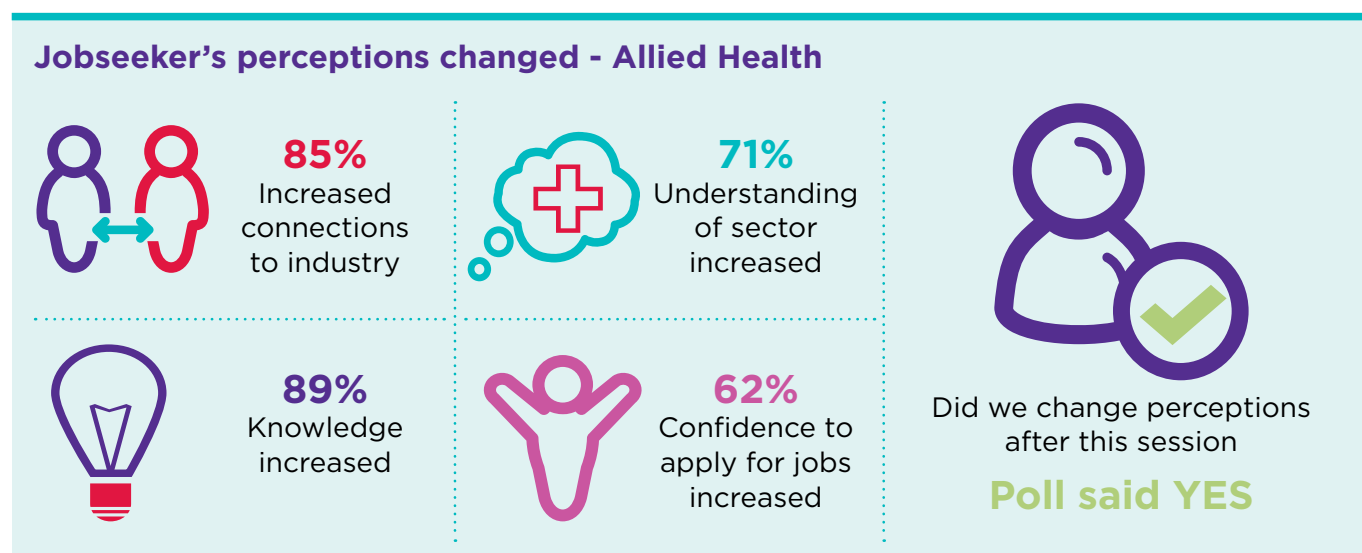
These sessions were promoted using a variety of tools[6], including:

- press Release
- social media
- Casey Jobs Victoria Advocates in public spaces and events (referring jobs seekers directly to the sessions)
- visits to community groups
- emails/flyer/phone calls to employment services and training organisations
- emails/flyer to LGA's in region[7]
- library and school newsletters; and
- Casey Cardinia Jobs Portal.

At each session, at least 2 employers spoke about their business, why and how they got into it, why they loved their industry, what kind of jobs they have on offer, working conditions, career pathways in the industry etc. There were also opportunities for the job seekers to ask questions and interact with the employers.

Polls taken before and after these sessions showed an encouraging change in perceptions to target industries, an increase in knowledge on how to apply for the jobs, and an increase in likelihood of applying for the jobs on offer. Polls also showed that job seekers felt more knowledgeable, connected, and confident about how the program could assist them to access employment opportunities.

POLL OUTCOMES

Jobseeker's perceptions changed - Allied Health

85% Increased connections to industry

71% Understanding of sector increased

89% Knowledge increased

62% Confidence to apply for jobs increased

Did we change perceptions after this session
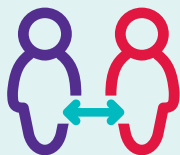
Poll said YES

---

6. Examples of these can be found on Appendix C
7. Project Managers established a community of practice with Cardinia Shire Council's Economic Development unit who replicated our model in relation to Industry Information Sessions.

Jobseeker's perceptions changed - hospitality

95% Increased connections to industry

95% Understanding of sector increased

95% Knowledge increased

73% Confidence to apply for jobs increased

Did we change perceptions after this session

Poll said YES

Jobseeker's perceptions changed - manufacturing
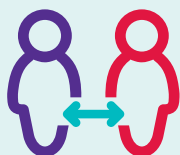
93% Increased connections to industry

100% Understanding of sector increased

100% Knowledge increased

79% Confidence to apply for jobs increased

Did we change perceptions after this session

Poll said YES

Jobseeker breakdown

In total, **88** individuals attended the 3 industry information sessions.

29 attended the hospitality and tourism session.

41 attended the allied health and community services session.

18 attended the manufacturing session.

Of these, **65** were job seekers who attended the sessions.

29 at the hospitality and tourism session.

26 at the allied health and community services session.

10 at the manufacturing session.

The demographics of the job seekers are provided below.

KEY STAGES AND MILESTONES

Gender

The gender percentage breakdown of job seekers who attended the industry sessions:
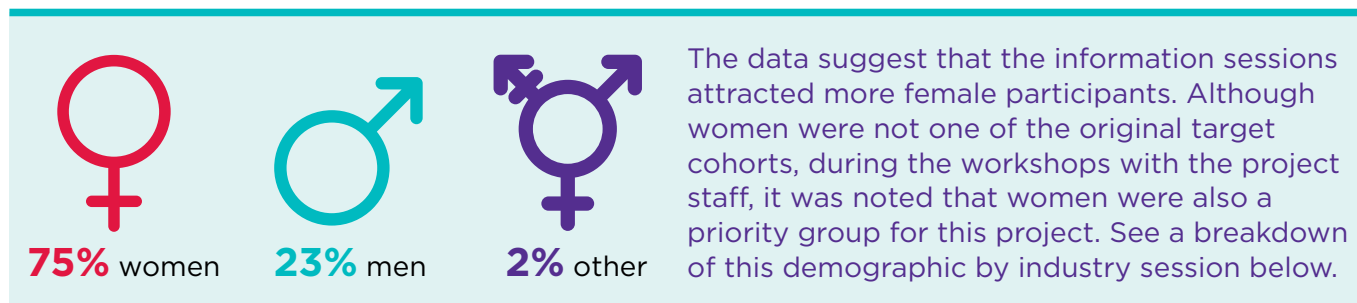
75% women **23%** men **2%** other

The data suggest that the information sessions attracted more female participants. Although women were not one of the original target cohorts, during the workshops with the project staff, it was noted that women were also a priority group for this project. See a breakdown of this demographic by industry session below.

Gender: Industry Information Sessions

Allied health and community services
92% women **8%** men

Hospitality and tourism
66% women **31%** men
3% other

Manufacturing
60% women **40%** men
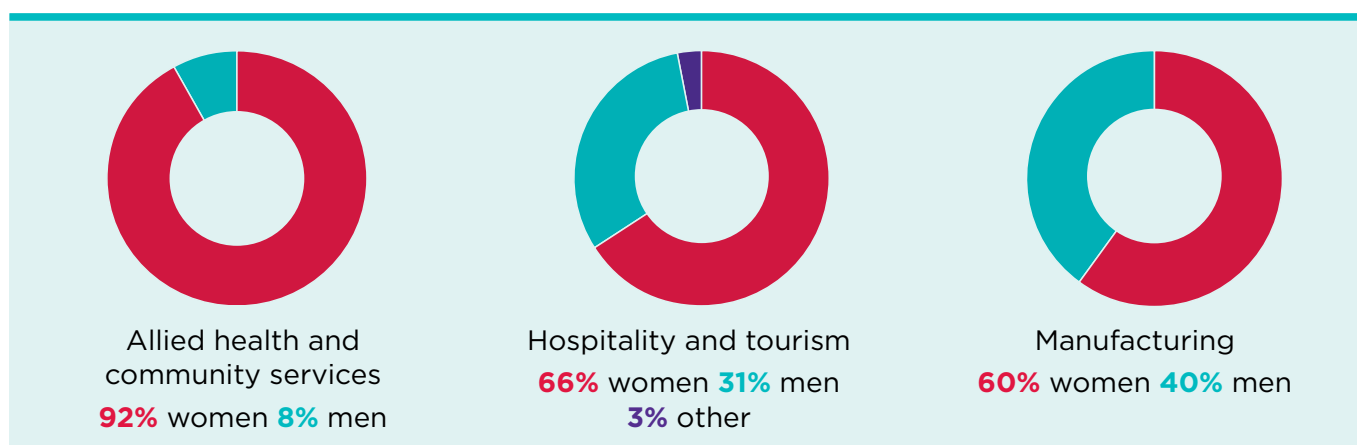
Age

The percentage breakdown of the job seekers who attended the industry sessions:

69%
from target cohorts

32%
under 25 years

37%
45 years or over

This suggests that the project achieved this objective by attracting the majority of attendees from these cohorts. In particular, the allied health and community services session attracted many job seekers over 45 compared with other age groups, and the hospitality and tourism session attracted mainly young people under 25 compared with other age groups. The manufacturing session had no attendees under 25 (see figure below).

Age: Industry Information Sessions

Allied health and community services
15% 15-24 **35%** 25-44
50% 45+
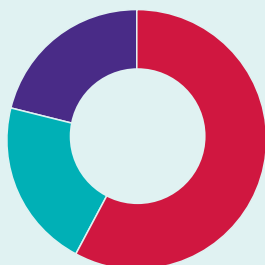
Hospitality and tourism
58% 15-24 **21%** 25-44
21% 45+

Manufacturing
50% 25-44 **50%** 45+

Cultural background

62% of job seekers who attended the industry sessions were born outside Australia.

The percentage difference between those who were born in Australia and those who were not was the largest in the manufacturing session (see figure below). For those who stated their cultural background, the largest number were from Afghanistan, India, Latin America, Mauritius, Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Country of Origin: Industry Information Sessions

Allied health and community services
54% Not born in Australia
46% Born in Australia

Hospitality and tourism
62% Not born in Australia
38% Born in Australia

Manufacturing
80% Not born in Australia
20% Born in Australia

Unemployment
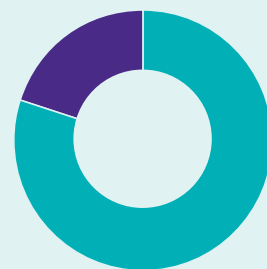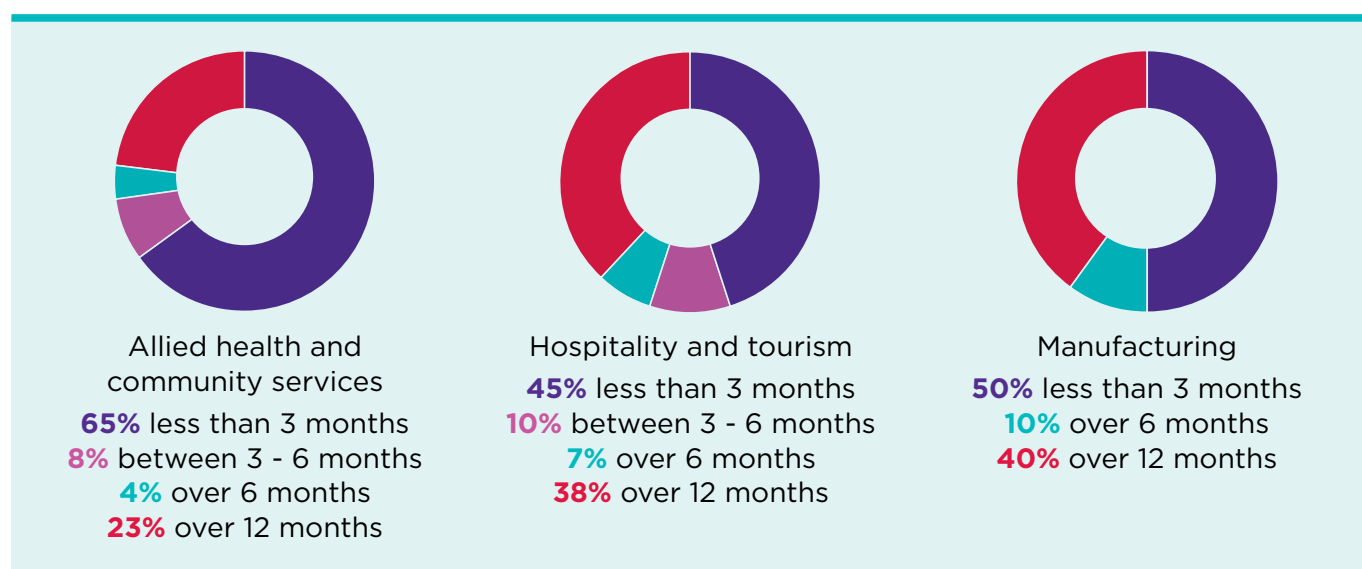
The unemployment percentage breakdown of job seekers who attended the industry sessions:

54% had been unemployed for less than 3 months.

8% had been unemployed between 3 and 6 months.

6% had been unemployed between 6 and 12 months.

32% had been unemployed for over 12 months.

Unemployment: Industry Information Sessions

Allied health and community services
65% less than 3 months
8% between 3 - 6 months
4% over 6 months
23% over 12 months

Hospitality and tourism
45% less than 3 months
10% between 3 - 6 months
7% over 6 months
38% over 12 months

Manufacturing
50% less than 3 months
10% over 6 months
40% over 12 months

At the conclusion of each information session, job seekers were directed to view the jobs on the Casey Cardinia Jobs Portal.

In addition, after each industry information session, every participant was contacted by a Casey Jobs Victoria Advocate to identify their specific needs and interests. An Expression of Interest form was devised so that those participants who wanted to take up any of the job vacancies that required specific skills, could apply for specific skills training.

In this way, every job seeker was personally attended to and transitioned into the next phase of their job seeking journey. This helped the job seekers to feel connected, that they were treated with respect and felt self-empowered to take action on the opportunities being offered.

WRAPAROUND PERSON-CENTRED SUPPORT MODEL FOR EMPLOYERS

Once the employers' needs were identified, a wraparound person-centred support model was devised to continue the relationship and build further trust and confidence. This involved meeting with each active employer (those that had vacancies to fill) at least 3 times. This trauma informed approach was necessary to help them see that project staff understood their needs and circumstances and were on their side. Crucial to building trust and confidence was to not over promise and under deliver.

> " *<The project staff member> has gone above and beyond. She has been exceptional.* "

As the employers gained trust and rapport, project staff gave them the space to vent their personal distresses, business concerns and basic and critical staff needs to keep the business going. Our data conveyed, that 50 percent wanted qualified staff whereas the other 50 percent just wanted staff with the right attitude who they would be willing to train with baseline qualifications.

In order to create connection between employers and job seekers, employers were invited to present at the information sessions and speak about their industry the jobs on offer, and answer questions directly from the job seekers. By speaking directly to prospective candidates and answering their questions, employers were able to see that there were job seekers out there who could be suitable for the vacancies. This resulted in increased confidence in the employers that the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project may very well be able to deliver a desired outcome for them.

As this project was a pilot, a critical part of the program was to create sustainable links between employers and local employment services and industry engagement brokers. If strong relationships could be fostered now, the employers would then have a point of contact for future ongoing employment needs. The employment service providers and the industry engagement brokers would also be in the best position to introduce the employers to existing resources such as wage subsidies etc.

However, it was unfortunate that this critical aspect of the project did not work out as was expected. The project team found it necessary to repeatedly follow up on arrangements made to make the personal introductions between the employer and the service provider. Also a small number of the employers had commented that even when they had met with the employment services, the interactions were transactional in nature, the follow ups were not timely, and the employers felt that their needs had been forgotten and started to lose confidence in the system.

Once we had the potential job seekers trained to meet baseline levels, at times employers needs some convincing to interview people they normally would not hire, and it was only because of the good rapport that had been built that it succeeded in having some job seekers screened in for interviews, rather than screened out before interview stage.

The data also suggested that the project changed employers' perception of local government. This was mentioned by two employers who took part in the evaluation interviews.

> *The success rate from this project has been comparable with others. However, the difference in cost is very significant in comparison with going through agencies and also the access to job seekers who probably would've not been suggested by an agency and/or wouldn't approach an agency.*
>
> (Employer - interview)

> *Finding what their problems and situations are - this has been eye opening for me. Everyone takes it for granted. That is not the way for everyone. Could be the English barrier, age, transport, that not everyone has a phone or internet. Yes, we are getting there, in terms of understanding the needs of job seekers. The council has helped us to understand this.*
>
> (Employer - interview)

> *It has changed my perception of the local government - being on the front foot...It also gave us a bigger understanding of what they need to go through to make things happen.*
>
> (Employer - interview)

WRAPAROUND PERSON-CENTRED SUPPORT MODEL FOR JOB SEEKERS

Every job seeker that was engaged in the project was screened by the Casey Jobs Victoria Advocates who referred them to the appropriate employment supports. Those who wanted to be part of the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project and take up the jobs on offer were asked to complete an expression of interest form for short courses to help upskill them to enter the industry of their own choice.

> *The best thing has been the support by <the project staff>. She is just so supportive and was reaching out even when I thought I didn't have time to see my resume. She always motivating me. The best part of the program! She encouraged me and told me I have so much potential.*
>
> (Job seeker - interview)

During this time there were job seekers that needed quite a bit of handholding, sociopsychological support to work through their worries, anxieties, and fears. The project team also worked with the training organisations to administer enrolments and provide any additional support to the job seeker during training. Additionally, the project team would also gauge interest of job seekers by listening and understanding their needs before seeking consent to introduce them to employers whether it be in a 1:1 setting or group interviews. To achieve this meant a lot of negotiating with all parties and having transparent conversations about the Job seekers with employers to help screen them in wherein the past they would probably have been screened out.

This process was all about identifying barriers to employment early and identifying the best solution before it is too late. For example, the project had identified several vacancies at a food manufacturing facility. Project staff were able to source a group of job seekers with minimal language and literacy but were very keen to work in this environment. However, these candidates would have normally been screened out by employers, mainly due to their concerns of around literacy in health and safety. Because good relationships had been forged with the employer, it was not difficult to convince the employer to meet the job

> *The City of Casey's staff must have talked to employers as I told them that doing 4 hours was OK for me as doing more than that would be very difficult for me as I am older. The boss offered me what I asked for, so I was happy about that.*
>
> (Job seeker - interview)

seekers through a group interview and then make up their mind. Project staff knew this employer already had the same cultural staff that could support these job seekers. It was arranged that the employer could be present during the group interview and support the job seekers along with an external interpreter from one of the employment providers. This gave the job seekers the needed confidence to interview well and convey their aspirations to work in this environment. As a result, 4 job seekers with minimal language skills were taken on. This employer is now open to working with migrants even if their literacy is below what they would normally look for in new staff.

There were many challenges and time limitations in supporting job seekers who would normally be screened out of jobs, but it is possible to build good relationships with employers and help them participate in new ways of recruiting. It also takes flexibility, cooperation and collaboration between employment services and training providers to be more person-centred, relational in their interactions and processes rather than linear and transactional.

SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT

EMPLOYERS ENGAGED

During the project, the project team attempted to make contact with nearly 100 local employers. It ultimately engaged with more than 50 who went on to undertake the needs analysis survey. Of these, and 26 became actively involved in the project and had job vacancies to fill. Below is the break-up of these 26 employers.

14 from hospitality and tourism.

4 from allied health and community services.

8 from manufacturing.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

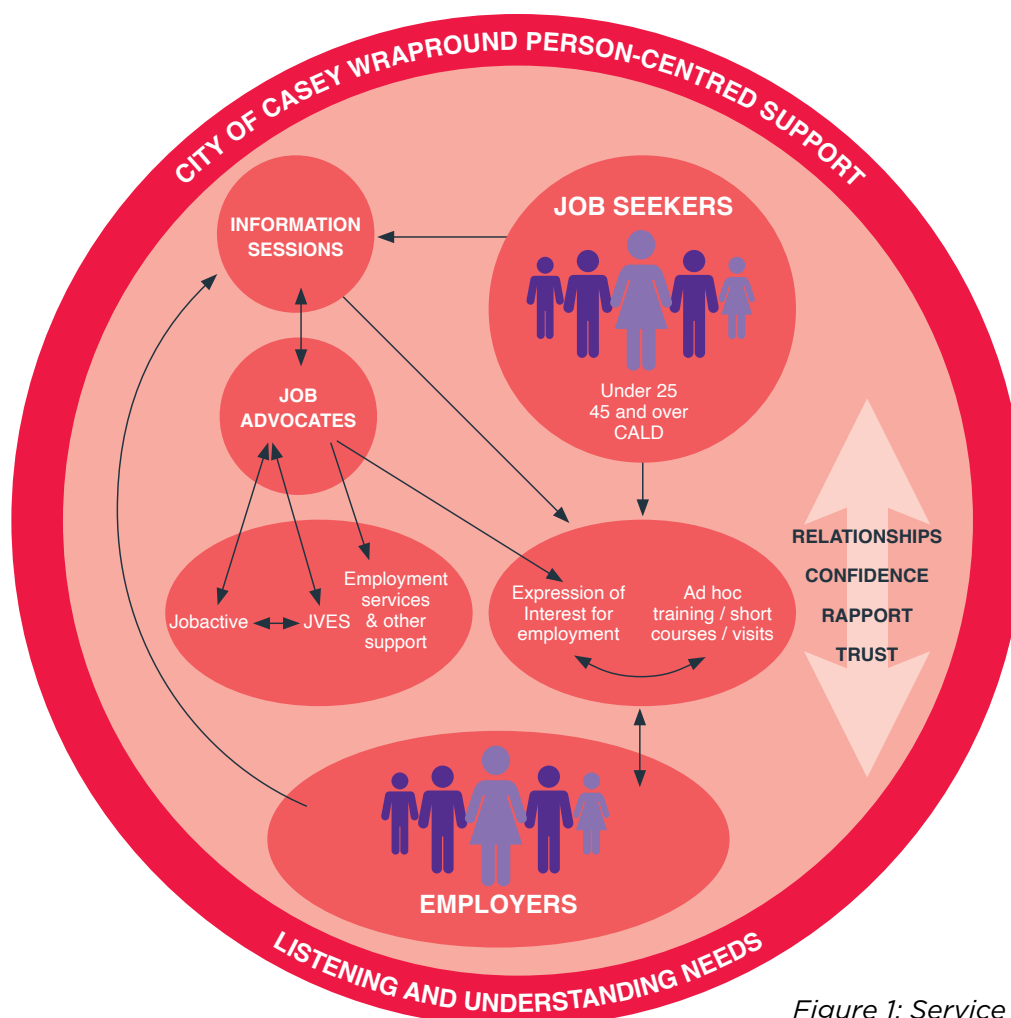Shown below is how the wraparound of service delivery model worked with all key stakeholders.

Figure 1: Service delivery model: Changing Perceptions in Employment.

KEY STAGES AND MILESTONES

UPSKILLING TRAINING PROVIDED

In total 109 job seekers completed free training/short courses

68 in the hospitality and tourism sector

1 in the allied health and community services sector

40 in the manufacturing sector

> *"For RTO's, the project has created opportunities to connect more with the industry. The networks have been massive. It has really opened up! Now there are different players talking to each other (jobactive, Job Victoria, other training organisations, employers, industry). It is putting all the pieces together.*
>
> (RTO representative - interview)

OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA INTERACTIONS

A community of practice was devised to work with the five local government partners, who were facing similar high rates of unemployment namely, Cardinia, Frankston, City Greater Dandenong, Kingston and Mornington Peninsula. They all supported the program within their own time and resource constraints.

THE PROJECT WORKING GROUP

The Project Working Group met once a month and included 14 members from different organisations. Below is a diagram showing the composition of the group.

3 City of Casey representatives

4 Employers

3 RTO representatives

2 Employment services representatives

1 Not-for profit

1 Community members

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: SARIKA'S[8] STORY

The project team met with a Sikh community group in Lynbrook. Subsequently, several people registered their interest in short courses. Each person was contacted by a City of Casey Jobs Victoria Advocate to ascertain their needs and direct them to the right organisations for further assistance. As a result of this outreach initiative, the project team encountered Sarika, a 65-year-old woman from a CALD background with and exceptional skill set. She had a postgraduate degree and many years of experience. She was keen to work but lacked pre-established networks because she had been in Australia for less than 5 years. She had specific needs regarding a suitable job (a part-time role that could give her financial independence). Sarika had a go-getter attitude; she was a mother and grandmother. The project team were able to introduce her to a local employer who already had a culturally diverse workforce, with 10% percent of staff over 50 years of age.

THE RESULT

Sarika currently works 3 days a week and undertakes 5-hour shifts in hospitality. This employment opportunity increased her confidence and independence. She has also established new networks.

WHAT MADE THIS EMPLOYMENT OUTCOME POSSIBLE?

• Sarika's willingness to try out an industry and job role far removed from her professional skill set.

• The project's ability to adapt to varying needs by incorporating cognitive and social skills and resilience building, as well as cultural behaviours and attitudes.

• The employer's practices in terms of diversity, equity and inclusivity.

• The employer's willingness to craft an opportunity without an implicit age bias and incorporate Sarika's needs and physical requirements into day-to-day work practices.

Creating socially inclusive workplaces for older workers can offset mental health burdens in older job seekers as well as produce the best outcomes for seniors by being connected and supported whilst they earn a wage and support local businesses. (The prevalence of women over 55 years old becoming homeless is alarmingly high).[9]

---

8. Not her real name

9. The 2016 Census reported that the number of women over 55 experiencing homelessness increased by 31% to 6,866 compared to 2011. Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2016 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

CASE STUDY 2: A CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE PROCESS

The project team held a manufacturing industry information session for a community group of 40 Afghan women to address unemployment and wellbeing. Interpreters were present because the English skills of many of the women were still developing. Prior to the session, the women were asked whether they would be interested in working in a manufacturing facility (doing process work or similar). Most were not willing, but after the project team had described the local job opportunities in the manufacturing sector and presented video footage of the conditions in local and modern manufacturing facilities, they nearly all changed their minds. Consequently, this Dari-speaking cohort registered their interest in short courses, careers counselling and employment opportunities.

Language was a barrier for many who were seeking employment. The project team worked with a Dari-speaking Jobs Victoria Advocate to make this process culturally inclusive and sensitive to the fact that some had never worked in Australia (some did not have resumes, as they had never applied for a job in writing) and struggled with interviews.

The Changing Perceptions in Employment project team actively sought opportunities with employers who would accept lower levels of literacy without compromising occupational health and safety. An employer in the agriculture processing sector was found who had an urgent need for workers, and to expedite this process, a group interview with 3 women and 1 man, along with a Dari interpreter, was scheduled.

THE RESULT

All the candidates were offered employment and are currently working in this company.

WHAT MADE THIS EMPLOYMENT OUTCOME POSSIBLE?

• Being responsive to the needs of the job seekers, encompassing innovative support systems to achieve employment outcomes.

• Practising inclusive systems that support needs without compromising safety, policies and procedures.

• Finding employers who are open and willing to support culturally inclusive work practices.

• Having a translator at the group interview, enabling the job seekers to express themselves fully without feeling judged.

• Being able to convince local employers that there are suitable local job seekers to be found if they make some adjustments to their usual recruitment methods.

CASE STUDY 3: INDUSTRY PERCEPTIONS IN THE CALD COMMUNITY

Many CALD communities often have high expectations of their children when it comes to education and employment. However, sometimes their perceptions and understanding of suitable career paths are not completely in line with the employment opportunities available to young people in Australia and the pathways to reach them.

Because the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project was short-term, it was a challenge to change perceptions in the longer term which could have a positive effect on CALD communities and the economy.

The project team considered that education is key, not just for the youth but for the parents also. Studies show that parents still have the most influence over a young person's choice of subjects and career paths. The project team collaborated with Bakhtar Community Organisation, an Afghani community-based organisation with the goal to build capacity and shed light on Australian education, skills, training, and employment. One of the mediums that the Bakhtar Community Organisation used was live video interviews with education content targeted to help their community make informed choices and not be felt pressured by cultural perceptions and stigmas. The programs were presented by experts in education, training and employment and translated live into Dari.

The project team also found that often, understanding amongst CALD communities of the Victorian Education System, qualifications system and career options available is relatively low. A program was devised by the project team to help educate CALD communities in education and employment related issues. The program includes comparing Victorian Certificate of Education to Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and explains the upcoming new Secondary School Certificate. It also explained the benefits of undertaking work experience, the benefits of undertaking a school-based apprenticeship and pathways from TAFE to Universities.

PROJECT AIMS

The project aimed to

Engage up to **200** job seekers.

Provide up to **100** upskilling initiatives within target industries.

Secure **50** employment outcomes for job seekers from target cohorts.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Engaged with **317** job seekers.

Of those **109** completed training to upskill for target industries.

The project secured **53** employment outcomes.

Update: Employment outcomes as of 10 June 2022 was 53.

EVALUATION METHODS

The Changing Perceptions in Employment Project commenced in October 2021. Family Life commenced its evaluation activities in March 2022, with the overall completion of the evaluation component in mid-May 2022.

An Evaluation Reference Group was established for the project, including 2 members of the City of Casey (the Changing Perceptions in Employment Project Manager and the Workforce Skills & Regional Partnerships Lead) and 2 members of Family Life (the Evaluation Project Lead and the Senior Manager, Practice and Evidence). An evaluation project plan, evaluation framework and risk management plan were agreed by the Evaluation Reference Group. Teleconference meetings occurred weekly during the evaluation period.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with standard ethical practices for research involving human subjects (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2015) and the Australasian Evaluation Society's Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (2013). In addition, Family Life's Research Ethics Advisory Committee was provided with the relevant information related to this evaluation and gave feedback, which was incorporated into the evaluation tools. Family Life's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group was also consulted in relation to this evaluation. Informed consent processes (consent forms and plain language statements) were implemented, the confidentiality of the evaluation data has been maintained and the content of this report has been de-identified.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In delivering this project, what came out loud and clear, was that relationship building is key to successful matching of job seekers with employers. Unless we have a clear understanding of what each stakeholder is dealing with, the pressures that they are under, the trauma they may be experiencing and the goals and aspirations they have, it is impossible to deliver a person-centred wraparound support program that provides good outcomes for both employee and employer.

Also, it was very clear that without the sharing of knowledge, insights, resources and networks in a spirit of true collaboration by stakeholders, the outcomes of this project would not have been possible. This can only happen where there is clear and honest communication and a strong sense of accountability to deliver on promises made.

Therefore, the project team put forward the following observations as gained through the delivery of this project and recommendations that could be implemented in order to greatly improve how place-based activities are delivered to make better use of existing services, initiatives and programs while incorporating higher levels of collaboration and trust based on a relational model rather than a transactional basis.

The following can be achieved if those in the eco-system are willing to work together to make a collective impact and change.

OBSERVATION ONE:

Employers are generally not aware of the many employment programs, incentives and training that are local and relevant for their industry's current and future skill needs.

Recommendation

Install place-based independent industry skill advocates (ie not represented by any specific employment service or training organisation) to liaise with employers, identify their current and future skill needs and assist them to connect with the most appropriate industry programs, local industry networks, employment incentive programs and/or training initiatives.

Rather than transactional relationships, the Industry Skill Advocates would work to create relationships based on respect and trust and thereby have a measure of influence over business decisions, especially around skills and employment.

As job vacancies are identified, the industry skills advocates can refer vacancies to all employment services/training providers with the expectation that they will work collaboratively to train and or fill the positions in a timely manner.

This recommendation will be a conduit for a holistic, person-centred, wrap-around and place-based model.

Outcomes

One point of contact for employers and increased satisfaction that their needs are being heard and met.

Increased participation by employers in government programs and initiatives.

Training programs and delivery are better aligned with current and future skills needs by industry.

A better understanding of real-time skills is needed in a particular region.

Improved participation in place-based activities, government initiatives and local networks can assist employers to raise their local profile, attract talent, incorporate staff training and increase their innovative practices.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Independent place-based industry skills advocates employed by LGA's.

These should be industry specialists and be familiar with government initiatives, but also have good place-based networks within the education, training and employment landscape.

Who

LGA administered, funded through state or federal government

OBSERVATION TWO:

When a job vacancy or a job seeker is referred to employment services, there is currently no obligation to provide feedback on the progress of the referral back to the referee. A lack of feedback does not help to build accountability and trust in the system. If a referral falls through the cracks for some reason, the referees' reputation with the employer or job seeker is weakened and thus it is more difficult to build rapport and trust.

Recommendation

Mandate that feedback is provided back to referees by employment services within 10 working days.

Create a mechanism to bridge communication gaps and monitor follow-through on referrals and outcomes to create more accountability for employers and job seekers and in the long run, more trust that the system can work for them.

Note: Where it is happening it builds great rapport, relationships and good reputations, not only at the provider level but also among individuals working within the system. It goes to building a trusting relationship-based system rather than a linear transactional approach. This approach energises referees and case managers to keep up their good work of supporting job seekers into employment and meeting employers' skill needs.

Outcomes

Increased accountability across employment services to follow through on referrals.

Increased transparency and trust in the system.

Possible Implementation / delivery

This could be through an 'open ticket' system with a reference number that can easily be tracked.

Who

Funding bodies

OBSERVATION THREE:

Competition between employment services (and to some extent training organisations) makes it difficult to provide the best outcomes service delivery to employers and job seekers.

Recommendation

Set up an alliance of employment services and training organisations (state & federal) to assist with transitioning to a more collaborative model rather than a competitive one.

As referrals come in, all relevant services work collaboratively to ensure timely and desired outcomes for employers and job seekers.

Outcomes

The best candidates from all employment services can be put forward.

On-time skills training can be quickly resourced and delivered.

Focus is transferred to how to get the best outcome for employers and job seekers in the region rather than the best outcome for 'my KPI's' or 'my organisation'.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Alliance is set up by region and governed by an independent body.

Who

Regional advocacy group,

LGA lead

OBSERVATION FOUR:
There is currently no government funding or subsidy for the most highly demanded industry skill sets.

Recommendation

Provide funding for high demand skill sets which are linked to guaranteed employment outcomes.

However, rather than just offer subsidised or free training, employers should be identified with vacancies and linked with the training organisations.

In addition, ideally employers should be part of the training program, even if it is a meet and greet of potential employees as this adds to building rapport and job seeker confidence in applying for the jobs on offer.

Outcomes

Funding is spent on identified industry needs with minimum wastage.

Personal connection is made between employers and students and thereby students are more motivated to complete training and more confidence to apply for jobs.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Training organisations to have better links with employers to identify training needs in demand and customise as required.

Training organisations to work collaboratively with employment services and job advocates to source suitable and motivated job seekers.

Training organisations to ensure employers are included in the training program in order to talk about the jobs on offer, working conditions and career pathways available.

Who

Funding body

Training Organisations

OBSERVATION FIVE:

In some industries (especially those experiencing skill shortages) there are pre-conceived and outdated ideas by the job seekers of what the job opportunities encompass. When provided opportunities to meet employers and see videos of the working conditions, job seekers can begin to challenge their outdated perceptions.

Recommendation

Challenge people's perception of certain industries that are seen as undesirable because of pre-conceived and outdated ideas about working conditions, job opportunities and career pathways through direct contact with employers and their workplaces.

Create more opportunities for industry to have direct contact with the job seekers and students.

This should be not only targeted to job seekers and students but also educators, career advisors and parents.

Celebrate and promote employers of choice who take time out of their business to improve the image of their industry.

Outcomes

Increased understanding of industry conditions, standards and pathways.

Positive personal experiences can pathway choices in industries with skill shortages.

Employers of choice emerge as they are committed to improving the image of their industry.

Other employers in the industry may be encouraged to become involved and improve their working conditions etc.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Industry tours for job seekers.

Industry tours for students (and parents where appropriate)

Integrate employers into training programs to meet students.

Industry forums where employers can network with students and job seekers.

Create effective education and marketing campaigns of industries experiencing skills shortages that visually portray modern workplace practices, range of jobs and pathways it can offer, pay ranges and working conditions. Included should be the 'voice of the employer' and the 'voice of existing staff'.

These could be promoted at schools, community centres, career expos, training organisations, employment services etc. to help change the perception of these industries to educators, parents, students and job seekers in general.

These also should be translated into CALD languages.

Who

Industry bodies

OBSERVATION SIX:

There is not enough inclusivity and flexibility by employers when it comes to employing seniors who can offer experience and skills.

Recommendation

Incentivise employers to create employment opportunities for older workers

Most older people have great work experience, are willing to work, have the right attitude but there is not enough inclusivity and flexibility when it comes to employing seniors. Many industries with a skills shortage expect long working hours and conditions that are difficult for older workers to comply with.

Outcomes

Offset mental health burdens in older job seekers.

Socially inclusive workplaces with a range of skills and experience.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Offer a subsidy to employers who modify working conditions to accommodate older workers.

Incentivise older workers to return to the workforce by creating a superannuation/PAYG tax-friendly policy to better prepare them for retirement.

Who

State and federal Government

OBSERVATION SEVEN:

There is a high turnover of client facing employment and training personnel. This could be due to imposed high levels of caseloads on top of administrative and reporting requirements, which affects the quality of their person-centred and strength-based approach and often leads to empathy fatigue and eventually burnout.

Recommendation

Provide genuine opportunities for professional development and advancement for client facing employment and training personnel (case managers, mentors, trainers) that will make them feel more valued, encompass personal growth, job satisfaction, and contribute to their own wellbeing and resilience and be better equipped to provide a person-centred approach to their clients without becoming desensitised.

Also, consideration should be given to pay levels for similar roles in government funded programs.

Outcomes

Better staff retention of client facing staff.

Will feel more valued, encompass personal growth, job satisfaction, and contribute to their own wellbeing and resilience.

Be better equipped to provide a person-centred approach to their clients without becoming desensitised.

Possible Implementation / delivery

Embed genuine professional and personal development opportunities into client facing roles for client facing roles in employment services and training.

Who

Build into current and future funded delivery programs

APPENDIX A – LISTING OF SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERS

PROJECT PARTNERS

Economic Development - City of Casey
Southern Metropolitan Partnership

PROJECT WORKING GROUP

Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Casey Inclusive Communities Reference Group
Chisholm
City of Casey Access & Inclusion
Engagement, Participation and Inclusion Division, Department of Education and Training Jobs
Victoria Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne
Lanterns Viet Kitchen
Local Jobs Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne
Mecwacare
South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance
Skills and Jobs Centre
South East Local Learning & Employment Network
TRJ Engineering

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS & EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Bahtar Community Organisation
Baran Club
Casey Inclusive Communities Reference Group
Family Life
Headstart – South East
Lynbrook Gurudwara Sahib
South East Local Learning & Employment Network

COUNCILS IN SOUTHEAST REGION – COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Cardinia Shire Council – Economic Development
City of Greater Dandenong (SEBN)
Frankston City Council – Economic Development
Mornington Peninsula Shire – Economic Development
Kingston City Council – Economic Development

Changing Perceptions in Employment: A pilot project led by the City of Casey on behalf of the Southern Metropolitan Partnership

33

EMPLOYERS AND INDUSTRY GROUPS

3 x Industry Groups
22 x Hospitality/Tourism Employers
10 x Manufacturing Employers
9 x Community Care & Health Services Employers

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS (state and federally funded)

AMES Australia
Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Inner Melbourne Vet Cluster
Jobs Prospects
Jobs Victoria Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne
MAS Apprenticeship Services
Local Jobs Coordination Function Southeast Melbourne
Matchworks
OCTEC
Settlement Services International
Taskforce Community Agency
The Bridge
Whitelion

JOB ADVOCATES

Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Casey Jobs Advocates
Settlement Services International Advocates
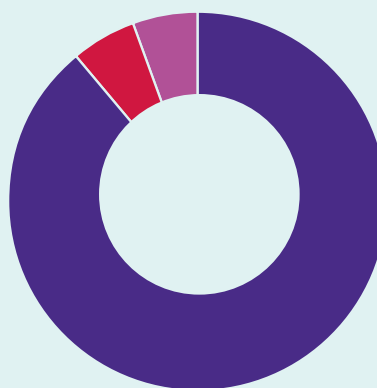Springvale Learning and Activity Centre

TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

Chisholm
Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (Learn Local)
Foresite Training
Foundation Learning Centre (Learn Local)
Hallam Senior Secondary College (Training Facility)
L'Arte Central Social Enterprise Café (Training Facility)

APPENDIX B – EXAMPLE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS INSTRUMENT RESULTS

Are you looking to employ people in your business? If so, when?

- **16** Now
- **1** 1-3 Months
- **1** 3-6 Months
- **0** 6-12 Months
- **0** Ongoing- HR process

Where is your biggest need for staffing?

- **12** Wait staff
- **8** Bartender
- **3** Barista
- **7** Supervisor
- **7** Cooks
- **10** Chefs
- **6** Dishwashers
- **7** Kitchen all-rounders
- **2** Delivery Drivers
- **3** Other