



# Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria **Reach,** **Train and Employ** **Pilot Project:**

Evaluation Report  
October 2021



*Collaborating to grow the social service workforce for the future*

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands across Australia on which this evaluation was conducted. In particular the authors would like to acknowledge the people of the Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands WIDI conducts its business. The authors would like to pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions made to the evaluation by Associate Professor Paul Ramcharan, the participants, as well as RMIT teaching and project staff. The authors would also like to thank the members of the Project Steering Committee for their contributions to the evaluation.

## Authors

Natalie Jacobson, Lead Evaluator

Kerry Lyons, Project Officer

Dr Shefton J. Parker, Senior Advisor – Evaluation

## Suggested Citation

Jacobson, N., Lyons, K., Parker, SJ. (2021). Council on the Aging Victoria Reach, Train and Employ Pilot Project: Final Evaluation Report. *Workforce Innovation & Development Institute*

## About the Workforce Innovation & Development Institute

The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) drives innovation in education, training and applied research to enable the growth and transformation of the social service industry. We are placing the people who are directly affected at the centre of our work to help us set priorities, co-design solutions, and lead and guide the transformation of service approaches. WIDI is a dynamic and innovative contributor to the social service landscape in Victoria.

We partner with diverse social service organisations and government to build a high-quality workforce at a time of major growth and disruption in order to construct scalable lifelong learning solutions for the social services sector. <https://www.widi.org.au/>

This evaluation was commissioned by the Council on the Aging Victoria and undertaken by The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI). The opinions, comments and analyses presented are those of the authors. Data collection, analyses and the presentation of findings are in accordance with RMIT Human Research Ethics Approval 2020-22489-11464 and responsibilities under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and RMIT Research and Integrity Principles and Policies.

## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Authors .....	2
Suggested Citation.....	2
About the Workforce Innovation & Development Institute .....	2
Executive Summary .....	5
Background .....	8
Evaluation Context .....	8
Summary of Project Findings.....	10
Reach Phase: Recruitment Outputs .....	10
Reach Phase: Training Readiness Outputs .....	10
Train Phase: Outputs.....	11
Employ phase: Short-term Outcomes .....	11
Beyond project: Long-term Outcomes .....	12
Beyond project: Goal.....	12
Evaluation Methodology .....	13
Evaluation Design.....	13
Data collection and Analysis .....	13
Limitations of Evaluation Findings.....	15
Evaluation Findings.....	17
Evaluation Questions.....	17
Participant Characteristics .....	17
(i) Does the wrap around support and inclusive training model result in employment outcomes in the social service sector for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment? If so, is the model scalable? .....	20
Key Takeaways .....	28
Opportunities for further RTE model improvement.....	28
(ii) What impact do RTE model supports have on successful participant engagement in the course?.....	30
Key Takeaways .....	41
Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement.....	41
(iii) Has the RTE resulted in increased wellbeing (i.e., mental wellness, resilience, and financial capability) for participants? .....	43
Key Takeaways .....	48
Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement.....	48

(iv) What were the critical factors that helped or hindered the project and what are the opportunities for improvement?.....	49
Key Takeaways .....	59
Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement.....	60
Conclusion .....	61
Appendix.....	62
Appendix 1: Program Logic.....	62
Appendix 2: Evaluation participation rates .....	63
Appendix 3: Partnership survey results.....	65
Appendix 4: Score assessment matrix for <i>Reach, Train and Employ</i> pilot project.....	68
Appendix 5: Score assessment data.....	73

# Executive Summary

## Background

The *Reach, Train and Employ* (RTE) pilot project was designed with the goal of establishing a tested model supporting job security in the social services industry for people over fifty and at risk of long-term unemployment. It comprised delivery of the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing and Disability) alongside a suite of wrap around supports to assist students to; engage and complete the qualification; enhance their wellbeing; and find paid employment in the social services sector. The project ran from March 2020 to June 2021 and involved 37 individuals residing in the areas of Melton, Brimbank, and Bacchus Marsh.

*Reach, Train and Employ* was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) through the Try, Test and Learn fund. It was delivered by a consortium led by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria, with RMIT providing the Certificate III in Individual Support training, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) providing group and individual life coaching, and the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) undertaking a project evaluation.

## The Evaluation

This Final Evaluation Report has been produced by the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI). It presents key findings from the developmental and outcomes evaluation related to program logic activity and identified short, medium, and longer-term outcomes. It collected data from project participants (2 cohorts), teachers, course program managers, industry employers, consortium representatives, and from Project Steering Committee related documentation.

## Key Findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has been evidenced to have caused significant disruption to the early project implementation experience and associated evaluation activities. However, program logic activity towards outcomes since early implementation were generally maintained quite well. Student project retention was high, with 81% of enrolled people over 50 (n=37) completing their training, which is significantly higher than the national average completion rate for the same course (39%)<sup>1</sup>. The high retention is even more impressive considering the numerous COVID-19 related challenges that students and project operators have faced, such as; the sudden and unanticipated transition to remote learning; multiple lockdowns; and work placement delays.

The pilot project utilised a 'place-based' and relational recruitment model which proved to be effective for reaching and engaging the target population, despite not reaching the enrolment numbers target. Recruitment and enrolment challenges were identified to be partly related to government-imposed lockdowns causing engagement difficulties and a project screening criterion that was too restrictive of people with low-level English. Evaluation inferred if the project had built in specific English language support, the target recruitment numbers would have likely been achieved.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: NCVET 2021, Total VET students and courses 2020: program enrolments DataBuilder, Total, Level of education, Program name by Year. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder>

*Reach, Train and Employ* adopted a supportive training model, offering a range of project supports designed to increase participant engagement and their project completion. Support ranged from practical supports, such as assistance with coursework and assessments, to mental health assistance, to material supports such as food relief. Evaluation indicates the provision of these supports have played a key role in ensuring high participant engagement and project retention. Data suggest the supports were highly valued by people over 50, and for some participants, supports were critical to their project access and engagement.

The supports which participants most commonly accessed were; emotional, self-esteem or mental health support; individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes; digital & computing support; and assistance with enrolment. Even supports utilised less frequently such as health and community service referrals, were evidenced to be important supports for participant engagement. Evidence suggests the best project model outcomes for people over 50 are likely when they have access to diverse support types, which can be individualised to differing participant needs and are responsive to changes in participant needs.

The ongoing life coaching sessions were highly valued by most people over 50 and project staff reported it to be a crucial element of the project's model. Individualised life coaching was offered to all participants. The Life Coach provided a range of supports including; the facilitation of peer relationships early in the project; ongoing counselling and emotional support; confidence and self-esteem building; and the delivery of job readiness coaching tailored to the needs of each participant.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent lockdowns and the introduction of remote learning are likely to have impacted on some of the project's potential wellbeing benefits for people over 50. Evaluation data still suggest some trending improvements to participant wellbeing and confidence over the course of the project. However, there were slight decreasing trends in resilience data measures.

By virtue of their stage in life, people over 50 came to training with a wide variety of skills, experiences, needs and responsibilities. Findings suggest, for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment, their successful engagement in study requires a responsive and supportive educational model. Data indicates that it is important that training delivery approaches are flexible and accessible for people over 50. This requires a careful balance between the allocation of project specific tasks with consideration to the complexity of personal commitments and responsibilities that people have.

Once established, the project partnership has proven to be effective at adapting to significant external factors including bushfires and the pandemic. Project governance has been effective in supporting role clarity and allocating responsibilities to stakeholders. These achievements did require some additional efforts early on, but given the complexity of the stakeholders involved, it is understandable that trusting relationships took some time to develop along with the roles and responsibilities of each. Once these partnership relationships were solidified, the consortium reported they were able to more successfully problem-solve and navigate complex sector challenges than each individually could have.

Evidence suggests for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment, the wrap around support and inclusive training model resulted in positive employment outcomes in the social service sector. At the time of preparation of this final evaluation report, the project was on track to meet its 90% employment target within six months of project completion.

To date, 80% (n=24) of graduating participants have found employment, 7% (n=2) are enrolled in further study, and 7% (n=2) are volunteering for further industry experience. The evaluation indicates the pilot project has been a success in achieving its short and medium goals with data suggesting longer term employment and retention goals on track. The future scalability of the project model is currently being explored by COTA Victoria but evaluation recommends, given the pilot's success, further cost benefit/effectiveness is warranted for investigation of the feasibility of a scaled-up version of the project model.

*"I think it will add a lot of good benefit, because I think that ...demographic [people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment] underestimate their value and ... if they know their value they will recognise that it's never too late to take up a degree, it's never too late to take up a new career.... if they understand their value and there's programs out there that can help to give them the confidence to get out there into the workforce, that will empower them to... want to get out there." - Local Partner Organisation*

## Background

The *Reach, Train and Employ* (RTE) project aimed to support older job seekers to re-skill and find paid employment in the social services sector. It comprised delivery of the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing and Disability) alongside additional supports including a Financial Capability and Life Coaching Course, optional computer skills training, first aid training, career guidance and mentoring, and employment assistance. The project targeted individuals over the age of 50 at “risk of long-term unemployment” residing in the areas of Melton, Brimbank, and Bacchus Marsh.<sup>2</sup>

The project has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through the Try, Test and Learn fund. It was designed to be delivered using a place-based and partnership approach, leveraging the roles and expertise of local organisations and networks for sustainable impact. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, some adaptations to the place-based approach were required to ensure compliance with frequently changing health directives and advice. The project was delivered by a consortium led by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria, with RMIT providing the Certificate III in Individual Support training, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) providing group and individual life coaching, and the Workforce Innovation & Development Institute (WIDI)<sup>3</sup> undertaking the evaluation of the project.

The *Reach, Train and Employ* (RTE) project model involved the following components:

- i) Recruitment of target participants.
- ii) Addressing participant barriers to study.
- iii) Delivering the Certificate III Individual Support in an accessible way.
- iv) Supporting employment pathways.

The project intended to increase the employment security and wellbeing of individuals over the age of 50 at “risk of long-term unemployment”.

This Final Evaluation Report has been produced by WIDI. It is a culmination of previous evaluation data and new data collected since the last evaluation briefing report (August 2021). This report outlines the evidence-based findings from the developmental and outcomes evaluation according to the program logic inputs, activity, outcomes and goals (*See: Appendix 1*). Whilst the evaluation team has had representation on the project’s Steering Committee, this report has been prepared independently and does not necessarily represent the views of all consortium partners.<sup>4</sup>

## Evaluation Context

The Human Rights Commission has identified that over a third of Australians aged 55 and over have experienced age-related discrimination.<sup>5</sup> The Commission’s Willing to Work

---

<sup>2</sup> In the context of this project at “risk of long-term unemployment” means any person over the age of 50 who is at risk of unemployment.

<sup>3</sup> Previously the Future Social Service Institute (FSSI)

<sup>4</sup> Views and perspectives are those of the evaluation team based on the data available to it at the time of report preparation. Whilst views and perspectives may differ to that of the evaluation commissioner and other involved stakeholders, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, the evaluation findings were developed independent to project operations.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians Research Report.



report outlined the reality of employment discrimination for mature workers, which represents a loss of skills and experience to the labour force and increased expenditure on unemployment payments, aged pensions, and reducing contributions via taxation and superannuation.<sup>6</sup>

The Council on the Aging Victoria identified that around 34,000 Victorians aged 50-54 years were long-term unemployed and looking for at least part time work.<sup>7</sup> At the same time Victoria's ageing population and the full implementation of the NDIS are driving unprecedented demand for social service practitioners who can provide high quality services and supports. Modelling indicated that the regions with the highest workforce growth requirements were Southern Melbourne, Brimbank Melton and Gippsland.<sup>8</sup> Based on the data collected, (nos. of 50 - 64 year old's unemployed, the increase in the NDIS workforce and the Index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage) there was a strong case for developing a training and employment pathway project for piloting in these regions.

The problem was complex and required a highly targeted approach that focuses on "employment sustainability" over a person's life span is important. The culminating collaborative pilot was aimed to match the long-term unemployed to areas of labour shortage (aged-care and disability) through training (Certificate III-Individual Support) whilst supporting their diverse needs.

---

<sup>6</sup> Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability

<sup>7</sup> COTA Victoria (2017) Submission to the Victorian Government Inquiry into Enhancing Victoria's Economic Performance and Page 15 of 23 Productivity, April 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Social Service Jobs and Careers for Mature Workers. Data to inform and support COTA's Try, Test and Learn Application. May 2018

## Summary of Project Findings

The pilot project officially commenced on 21 August 2019 when the contract was signed by COTA Victoria and DSS and was due to be completed by 30 June 2021. At the time of finalising this evaluation report, 28 out of 30 graduating students had completed their course work and placement requirements, with the remaining two students expected to finalise their project responsibilities by late September. There was some project overrun reported due to COVID-19 related delays to student placement restrictions in accordance with Government COVID-19 public health directives.

This section provides a high-level overview of project outcomes achievements related to program logic outputs, outcomes and project goals (See [Appendix.1](#)).

### Reach Phase: Recruitment Outputs

i) ***Local target group is reached***

**Status: Achieved** All participants resided in the target locations and were older job seekers. 28 out of 33 participants who responded to the first Student Questionnaire indicated that they were unemployed at the start of the course.

ii) ***Local advisory group is established***

**Status: Achieved** Local Advisory Committee established in November 2020 comprising six local employers from both aged care and disability sectors, the COTA Victoria Project Manager, RMIT Lead Teacher and GSANZ Life Coach.

### Reach Phase: Training Readiness Outputs

i) ***Target group enrolled***

**Status: Partially Achieved** Whilst the target audience was reached, the target number of 50 enrolments was not met with 37 enrolments achieved across the two cohorts. It is likely that this relates to both the contextual challenges of recruiting participants within a lockdown environment, and the screening out of people with low-level English skills.

ii) ***Students complete the stronger foundation course or financial counselling***

**Status: Achieved** Students across both cohorts completed a four-week *Individual Financial Capability and Life Coaching Preparation Course* delivered by consortium partner Good Shepherd as part of the pre-course readiness training.

iii) ***Students have tailored plans and access support***

**Status: Achieved** Individual Development Plans were in place for all participants and questionnaire data indicates sustained support access amongst participants across the length of the project.

iv) ***Non-suitable participants are actively referred in other training, study, employment or services to address barriers to employment***

**Status: Achieved** All individuals who registered an EOI in the project received a telephone call to assess their suitability. Any who did not meet project criteria received information/referrals appropriate to their individual situation.

v) *Delivery mode of course is determined based on students' needs*

**Status: Achieved** Tailored content was provided to better support cohort learning on multiple occasions. This content included provision of an optional Computer Skills Course, First Aid Training, RMIT Career Days, and an optional RACV mentoring program.

## Train Phase: Outputs

i) *High completion of course – increased employability*

**Status: Achieved:** The overall completion rate for the project was 81%.<sup>9</sup> National completion rate average for the Certificate III in Individual Support is 39%.<sup>10</sup> Of the participants who completed the project, 83% have found employment and 7% have undertaken further study whilst working in part-time employment.

ii) *Students have received tailored support that keeps them engaged*

**Status: Achieved** Student questionnaire and interview data suggest high levels of support usage within the project, with 100% (n=10) of Cohort 1 respondents to the End of Course Student Questionnaire and 77% (n=13) of Cohort 2 respondents indicating that they have accessed at least one form of support. Interview data indicates support availability and usage was a key factor to project retention.

## Employ phase: Short-term Outcomes

i) *Increased labour market participation or further engagement in education*

**Status: On track** To date, 83% of graduating participants have found paid employment, 7% are engaging in volunteering to gain further experience, and 7% are enrolled in further study whilst working part-time. Of the 7 participants who did not complete the core component of the course, 6 have found paid employment.

ii) *Scalable model developed*

**Status: On track** This outcome extends beyond the life of the evaluation. At the time of preparation of this report COTA Victoria reported it was developing a range of potential solutions for a scalable model.

iii) *Increased wellbeing of participant group*

**Status: Partially achieved** SWEMWBS data indicated positive growth in wellbeing for both cohorts. CD-RISC-10 data evidenced a slight decrease in resilience. Qualitative data indicated positive growth in participant wellbeing, particularly in the confidence domain. As the delivery of the project coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may

---

<sup>9</sup> Cohort 1 – 79% completion, Cohort 2 – 83% completion,

<sup>10</sup> Source: NCVET 2021, Total VET students and courses 2020: program enrolments DataBuilder, Total, Level of education, Program name by Year <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder>.

be that lockdowns and other uncertainties caused by COVID-19 limited any resilience benefits the project may have had for participants.

## Beyond project: Long-term Outcomes

Long term outcomes are typically beyond the life of a project, as such evaluation is only able to estimate based on the available data, if these outcomes are on track to likely be met.

i) ***For participants: increased financial and employment security for graduates***

**Status: On track** 83% of graduates have found employment to date.

ii) ***For government: Reduction in government expenditure and gain in tax income***

**Status: On track** COTA Victoria is currently investigating options for further cost/benefit analysis of the RTE model.

iii) ***For sector: established local partnership model***

**Status: On track** COTA Victoria is designing and developing a range of potential solutions for a scalable local partnership model based on the pilot findings.

## Beyond project: Goal

***Tested model that supports job security in the social services industry for people 50+ at risk of long-term unemployment is established***

**Status: On track** Evaluation indicates from the data that the pilot model has effectiveness in supporting people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment through a training qualification and into employment in the social services sector.

# Evaluation Methodology

## Evaluation Design

Evaluation encompassed two evaluation approaches with all mixed methods evaluation activity, such as the collection and analysis of data approved through RMIT's College Human Ethics Advisory Network (2020-22489-11464):

- 1) A developmental evaluation approach was employed to discuss findings using timely evidence feedback loops (i.e. evaluation briefing reports) to the Steering Committee, to in turn inform continued project design and operational improvements, through project reflection, interpretation of data and knowledge application.
- 2) To test the efficacy of the RTE model a process and outcomes evaluation was implemented, to test the causal relationships between activities and outcomes, and any underlying assumptions.

The evaluation comprised of the following data collection activity:

- Desktop review of project related documentation;
- interviews w/ various stakeholders involved ;
- questionnaires delivery to project participants and stakeholders;
- data extractions from access authorised databases (e.g. Training enrolment data, DEX data);
- data from workshops and focus groups; and
- overall objective and inferential reflections on the project's entirety, through an evaluator lens and within the current Australian public policy environment.

## Data collection and Analysis

This section highlights the key data collection and analysis techniques that were utilised. For a detailed description of the employed evaluation methodology please refer to the original evaluation plan. All data have been collected in accordance with RMIT Ethics Committee-approved processes, with all participants providing informed consent for the collection and use of their data in accordance with this ethics approval.

### *Evaluation Questionnaires*

Participant questionnaires were administered over 3 timepoints (start of training course, mid-course, end of training course) and explored themes related to participant experiences of; the enrolment process, digital literacy; the Certificate III content and delivery; add on support utilisation and satisfaction (such as the Career Days, RACV mentoring & computer skills course); placement experience; and self-reported changes to participant wellbeing, resilience and belonging. Where possible validated and reliable outcomes instruments were selected. Questionnaires were administered online using the software Qualtrics.

### *Interviews and Focus Groups*

Due to COVID-19 related social distancing requirements, interviews and focus groups were held on a secure video conference platform, recorded with the permission of the participants, and transcribed;

i) Participant interviews and focus groups explored themes related to; participant interest in the project; concerns; recruitment experience; enrolment experience; course training content and delivery; placement experience; support needs and access; personal and professional development; and suggestions for project improvement.

ii) Interviews with stakeholders (e.g. Teachers, Local Partner Organisations etc) explored themes related to; project challenges; rationale for decision making; and ideas for model improvement along with some of the same prementioned themes that were explored with participants. Replication of theme exploration assisted to understand how these themes influenced on the project and experience of those involved from a range of perspectives.

Overall, there was a medium to high level of participation in the evaluation from relevant participant groups, with participation varying over various activities and across the course of the evaluation (See [Appendix 2: Evaluation participation rates](#)).

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

Quantitative data was analysed using statistical software SPSS and qualitative data was entered into NVIVO software then themes related to outcomes were extracted and analysed utilising grounded theory and inductive reasoning methodological techniques.<sup>11</sup>

Quantitative participant data was pooled into groups and explored for normalcy, then various appropriate (parametric or non-parametric) statistical analyses techniques were applied to the data, depending on the type of data being interrogated (eg. rank, score or measurement). Statistical tests compared data differences between groups or within groups, as well as data changes over time (pre and post education & training intervention). A sensitivity analysis was conducted to support selection of a conservative missing data imputation method. Where there was missing data for individual responses and where appropriate, missing data was replaced using the mean of available data for that output.

Statistical tests considered statistical significance ( $p < 0.5$ ), but none of the data tested showed statistical significance. For report brevity, extensive statistical data is excluded, but is available on request. The data provided in graphs and tables in this report is aggregated data across both cohorts unless otherwise stated.

---

<sup>11</sup> Grounded theory is an interpretive research method that seeks to describe and explain human behaviour and can examine the meanings that people give to events and experiences within their natural and everyday settings, to describe and understand the social psychological patterns and processes that occur within and between people, in context B. Glaser, A. Strauss; *The Discovery Of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* Aldine De Gruyter, New York); A. Strauss, J. Corbin, *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (second ed.), Sage, Thousand Oaks (1998); inductive reasoning is reasoning' from particular cases to general principles, a particular outcome, inferred from data about an observed sample. F. Klix, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2001.

## Limitations of Evaluation Findings

### *Participation Limitations*

Whilst there was a high rate of participation for some evaluation activities, overall evaluation participation rates varied, so evaluation findings may not be representative of all participant experiences and perspectives. All participants were offered the opportunity to participate in the evaluation, but repeated invitations over the duration of the project, along with the additional TTL evaluation requests on participant time (conducted by the University of Queensland), may have caused some evaluation confusion or fatigue amongst project participants contributing to fluctuations in participant evaluation engagement at different timepoints. (See [Appendix 2: Evaluation participation rates](#))

Both the evaluation and the Certificate III are being delivered by RMIT, albeit through different portfolio areas so were operationally independent of each other. Participants were informed that their participation and provision of data to the evaluation would be kept confidential and their choice to participate, or not, would have no impact on their personal project involvement.

### *Data Limitations*

The first student questionnaire was administered at different training commencement time points for the two cohorts. Cohort 1 had a single questionnaire administered at the start of their Certificate III training, whereas Cohort 2's was distributed, with their baseline questionnaire split over two timepoints. Cohort 2 were administered wellbeing and study preparedness related domains before their life coaching course. This was done to gain a better baseline measure (pre any intervention) and assist in earlier identification of educational barriers so that appropriate supports could be put in place sooner. This provided operational benefits to the project and was a response of Developmental Evaluation adaptations, but these differences need to be considered when interpreting the baseline data of the cohorts.

The developmental nature of the evaluation along with the project being a pilot, saw some operational project changes aimed to improvement delivery as operations progressed. As such, the two cohorts received some differences in the interventions they received. There were some further differences in the evaluation questionnaire content for the two cohorts. This was intended to better feedback useful data to the Steering Committee to monitor what impacts their operational changes were having. As Cohort 1 and 2 did not receive identical interventions or questionnaires, these differences should be considered when interpreting the evaluation findings.

The Timepoint 3 (end of project) participant questionnaire was split for both cohorts, with the questions relating to wellbeing and resilience administered as a separate Wellbeing Survey.

Due to small cohort sizes, coupled with variable participation rates across the three timepoints of the student questionnaire, the ability to detect statistically significant change

in outcomes measures was likely reduced. However, the data does provide insights into trends in change to outcomes, whether positive or negative.

COVID-19 and impacts of related public health restrictions present a significant externality difference to the usual employment and service delivery environment that need to be considered alongside evaluation findings when interpreting the impacts and potential of the project.



# Evaluation Findings

## Evaluation Questions

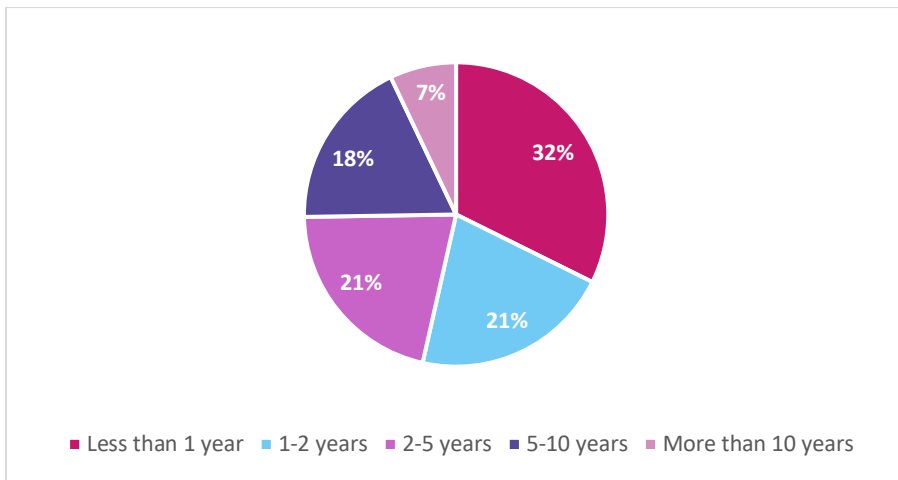
This evaluation contributes to an evidence base of learning surrounding employment pathways for people over 50 who are at risk of long-term unemployment. The below findings are organised to provide evidence-based findings towards a response to each of the following evaluation questions (i-iv). The evaluation was designed to provide evidence-based data to answer the following questions:

- i) Does the wrap-around support and inclusive training model result in employment outcomes in the social service sector for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment? And if so, is the model scalable?
- ii) What impact do RTE model supports have on successful participant engagement in the course?
- iii) Has the RTE model resulted in increased wellbeing (i.e., mental wellness, resilience, and financial capability) for participants?
- iv) What were the critical factors that helped or hindered the RTE project and what are the opportunities for improvement?

Each evaluation question has framed the data themes and outcome measures that were explored in the evaluation.

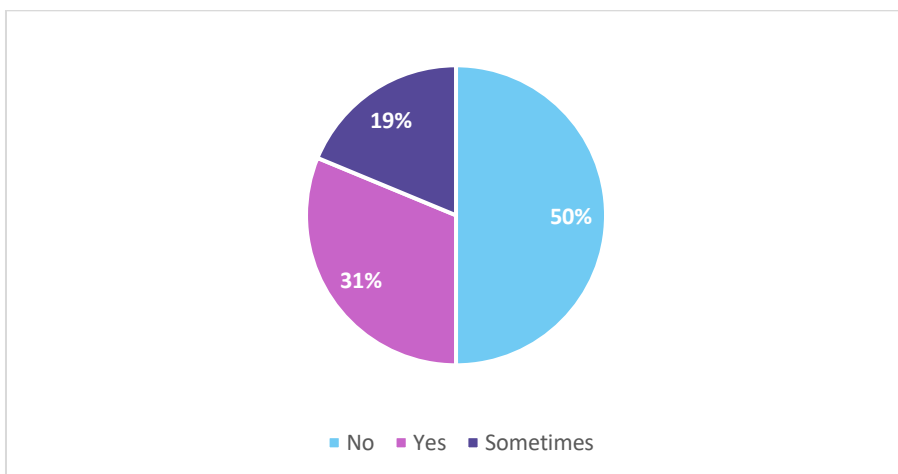
## Participant Characteristics

Targeted promotion and screening processes utilised by the pilot project resulted in successful recruitment of the target audience (people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment). A total of 37 people were screened and enrolled (see [Participant Retention](#) & [Recruitment Processes](#) sections of this evaluation report). The majority of participants were unemployed (28/32) at the time of RTE application, with an average length of unemployment of 3 years and 10 months (See **Figure 1: Length of participant unemployment at the time of recruitment**)



*Figure 1: Length of participant unemployment at the time of recruitment*

- Half of baseline respondents reported having some form of care-giving responsibilities, (See **Figure 2: Participant care-giving responsibilities**).



*Figure 2: Participant care-giving responsibilities at baseline*

- All participants resided in the target locations of Brimbank, Melton and Bacchus Marsh at the time of recruitment and during screening were identified as “older job seekers”. Application data indicates at the time of RTE application, ages of potential participants ranged between 50 and 74 years with a mean of 58( $\pm$ 5.91) (See **Figure 3: Applicant ages**).

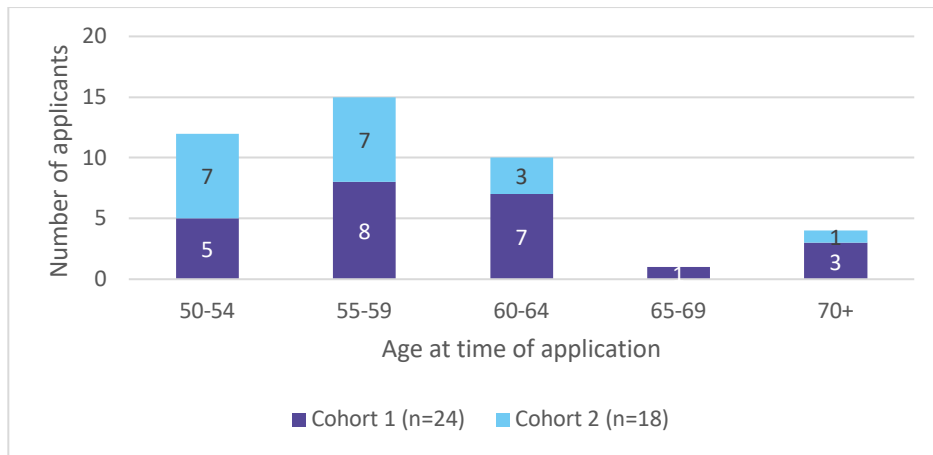


Figure 3: Applicant Ages

- Analysis of RMIT enrolment data indicated significant participant diversity in their highest level of educational attainment, with Cohort 2 participants generally having higher previous level educational attainment.<sup>12</sup> (See Figure 4: Highest Level of previous educational attainment)

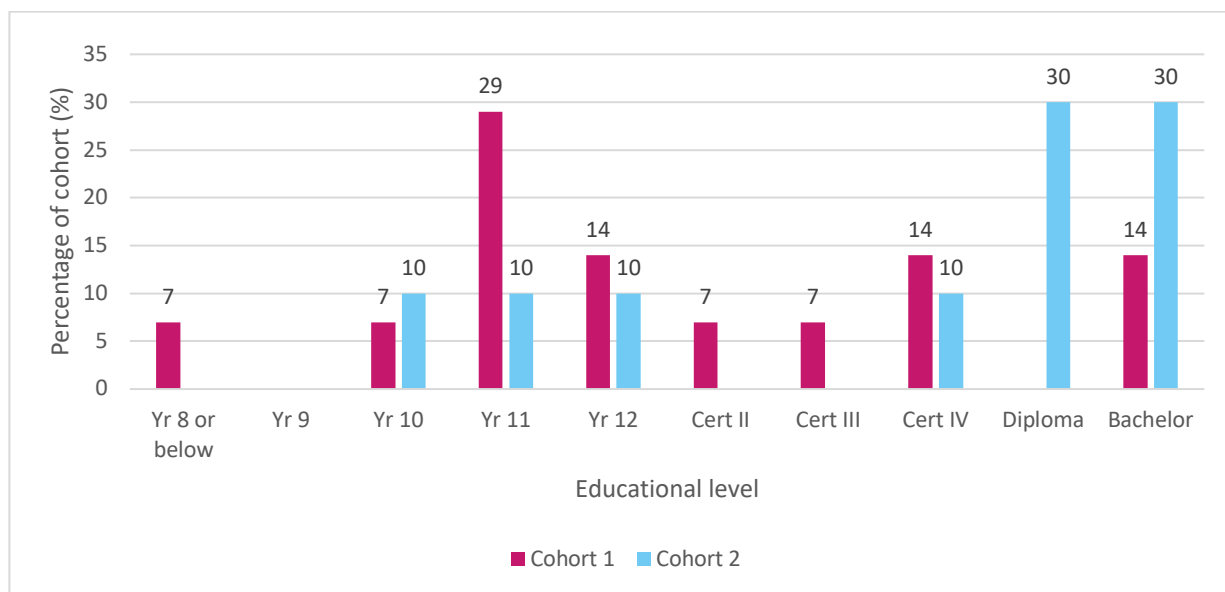


Figure 4: Highest Level of previous educational attainment (percentage of cohort (n=24))

<sup>12</sup> 24 participants provided consent for access and use of their enrolment data.

## (i) Does the wrap around support and inclusive training model result in employment outcomes in the social service sector for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment? If so, is the model scalable?

Evaluation considered a range of data to assess the benefits of wrap around supports in the pilot model including:

- Employment outcomes;
- job readiness training and support for participants;
- employment barriers for participants;
- employment pathways; and
- financial support availability.

### Employment Outcomes

• The RTE pilot had a goal of 90% employment of participants within six months of completing the project and data indicates the project is currently on track to meet this target. Of the 37 participants who enrolled in the project, at the time of evaluation report preparation 86% (n=32) were currently either engaged in paid work or further study. Of the 30 graduating participants 25 had found paid employment, 2 were engaging in volunteering to gain further experience, 2 were enrolled in a full-time Diploma of Nursing, 1 has passed retirement age and plans to volunteer when in better health, 1 has a disability and reported not pursuing employment at this stage.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly despite their training, 52% (n=31) reported they were considering future further study.

• Of the 25 graduating participants who had found employment post project, 9 were working in aged care, 14 in disability, 1 in community services, and 1 in hospitality. Of the 7 participants who did not complete the project, 6 withdrew due to finding full-time employment (two of these are now employed in the aged care and disability sectors) and 1 withdrawal due to ongoing health issues and caring duties. (See **Table 2: Number of participant project completions, withdrawals and employed**)

Number of students...	Cohort 1/Cohort 2	Total
Recruited	19/18	37
Completing the project	15/15	30
Employed who completed the project (n=30)	11/13	24
Employed who withdrew before completing the project (n=7)	4/3	7
Employed in aged care or disability sectors who completed the project (n=30)	11/12	23
Employed in aged care or disability sectors but withdrew before completing the project (n=7) withdrew prior to completion)	1/1	2

<sup>13</sup> Note: 28 participants have completed the Certificate III in Individual Support course at the time of preparation of this report and a further two participants were due to complete the course by September 2021 completion delays were identified to be a consequence of placement scheduling delays caused by multiple COVID-19 lockdowns.

Engaged in further study	1/1	2
--------------------------	-----	---

Table 2: Number of participant project completions, withdrawals and employed

## Job Readiness Training and Support

A range of job readiness activities and supports were offered to participants as part of the RTE pilot such as; provision of job readiness coaching and support by a Life Coach and COTA Victoria; RMIT Career Information Days; an optional RACV mentoring program; and an optional 'computing skills for job seekers' course (see **Table 3: Job readiness training provisions**).

Provider	Time of provision	Individual support	Group support	Job seeking skills	Resume & application writing	Job interview technique	Presentations by industry
COTA Victoria	Post project	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Life Coach	Mid to late project	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
RMIT Career Days	Early in project	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Computer Skills for Job Seekers Course	Mid project	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
RACV mentoring program	Mid to post project	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗

Table 3: Job readiness training provisions

- Whilst the timing of support interventions varied across the providers, there was also some support duplication evidenced. Individualised supports, particularly in the latter part of the project, appear to have been beneficial in supporting participant job readiness.

*"The monthly calls from [the Life Coach] I found to be valuable. [The Life Coach] was a great help with information and with resumes and also just to have a chat about what was going on in general." - Participant*

- Interview and questionnaire data indicate job readiness supports were generally highly valued by participants and positively improved their confidence in seeking employment. The coaching that was provided for resume and cover letter development were a couple of aspects of this support that provided participants with greater confidence in applying for jobs.

*"This whole process was really important.. for them to identify what skills they had and how those how those skills were transferable, so it was a great confidence booster in some ways because we could really identify a whole lot of skills that the students didn't know they had... The elevator pitch was just [as] essential,... to... boost up their confidence, their presentation, the way they spoke about themselves." - Project Staff Member*

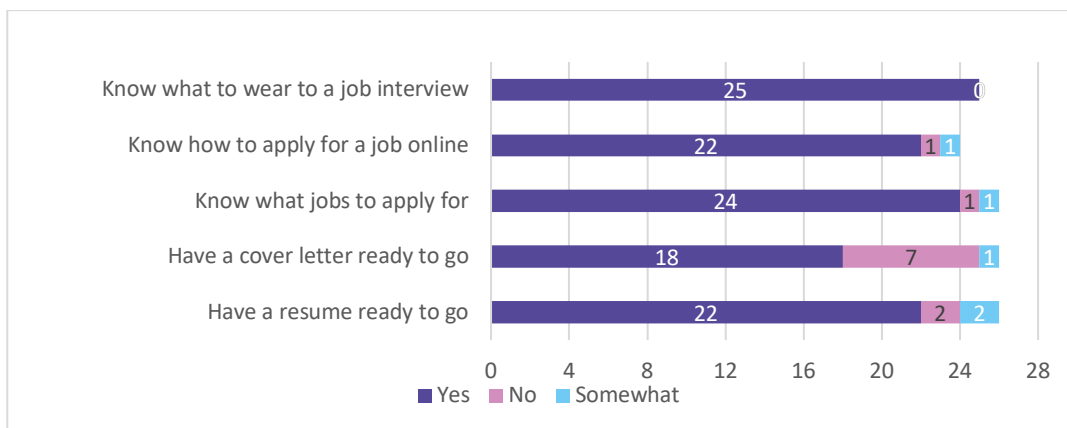
- From exit interview data collected by COTA Victoria, participants reported that the Life Coach:

*“...gave me confidence to apply for jobs.” - Participant*

*“.. really supported me to find work and was always available to me.” - Participant*

*“...was excellent, helped me get [a] part time job, she was my referee.” - Participant*

- Exit data suggests the majority of students are emerging from the project either job-ready, or close to job-ready and only requiring minor further supports (see **Figure 1.6: Participant self-rating of job readiness**).



*Figure 6: Participant self-rating of job readiness (n=28)*

- In June 2021, the Life Coach’s contract finished and COTA Victoria took over provision of job readiness coaching and support, for example individualised coaching, with resume development and support in how to prepare for a job interview. Referrals to other more specialised support services were also provided where required, for example participants needing clothing to attend interviews were referred to the not-for-profit organisation [‘Fitted...for...Work’](#). Whilst this boosted the self-seeking capability for participant to find employment, COTA Victoria also circulated job opportunities to participants.

**RMIT Career Days:** The RMIT Job Shop delivered two Career Day sessions to each cohort comprising: presentations from industry representatives outlining what employers are looking for in potential employees, where to find local jobs, unpacking job advertisements, developing an elevator pitch and job interview techniques. These were delivered early in the project to provide an introduction to job seeking within the aged care and disability sectors.

- Data indicates participant from both cohorts found the sessions helpful with 33% of Cohort 1 respondents (n=12) reporting that they increased their understanding of ‘how to find aged care and disability sector jobs’ ‘a huge amount’ by attending the sessions. For

Cohort 2, 31% of respondents (n=16) reported that they felt the sessions increased ‘a huge amount’ their understanding of ‘what aged care and disability employers are looking for when recruiting’ (See **Figure 7: Cohort 1 To what extent did the career days delivered by the RMIT Job Shop increase participant understanding?** and **Figure 8: Cohort 2 To what extent did the career days delivered by the RMIT Job Shop increase participant understanding?**).

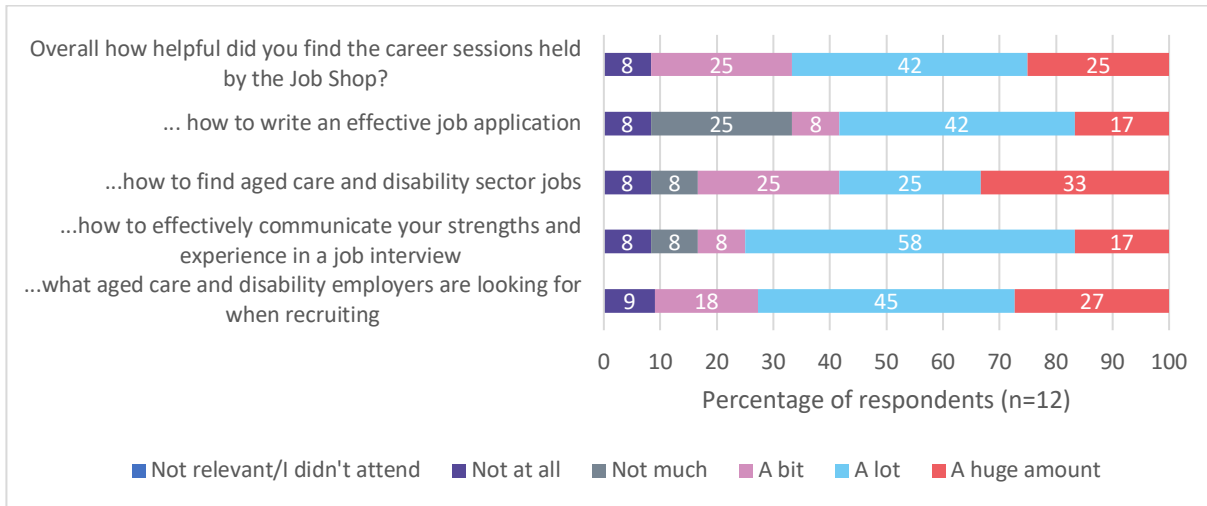


Figure 7: Cohort 1 To what extent did the career days delivered by the RMIT Job Shop increase participant understanding?

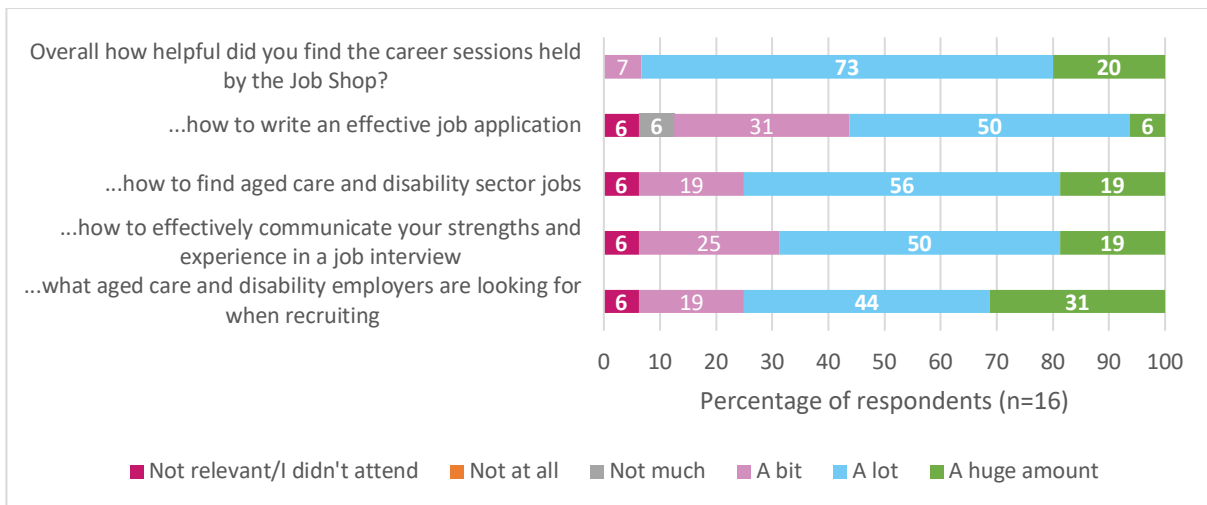


Figure 8: Cohort 2 To what extent did the career days delivered by the RMIT Job Shop increase participant understanding?

- Student feedback suggests that whilst Career Days were beneficial, they would have more beneficial if they had they delivered later in the project schedule.

*“I felt it was too early in the process as we are not looking for jobs yet. Perhaps as we get closer to placement, there could be resume review sessions and more on the practical side of how to find applications, considering the requirements and answer[ing] the interview questions.” - Participant*

**Computer Skills for Job Seekers Course:** An optional computing skills course focusing on job seeking skills was offered to all participants, covering topics such as; writing personal profiles; developing and updating resumes; and job interview skills.

- Local partner organisation interview data reported a strong need for this type of support for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment.

*“They're all highly skilled in the areas that they've been, but they.. don't know how to structure a resume for the modern workplace. They don't know how to respond to interview questions,.. the last time they went to interview might have been 20 years... the greatest need is to get them familiar with modern practices, recruitment practices.” - Local Partner Organisation*

- Participant data though varied, with some reporting she computer skills course to be useful but others reporting greater teacher support was needed. Some participants had less digital skill capability than others, so the data suggests tailoring it for diverse skill capabilities would be important to ensure all get the support and capability development they require.

*“Sometimes the coach or the teacher focused on one person, or a few people in particular and let.. the others just try to... busy ourselves so that.... really [made] me think, no point [for] me to go there.” - Participant*

**RACV Mentoring:** Both cohorts were voluntarily able to participate in a RACV Mentoring program, designed to enhance their job seeking capability via targeted one-on-one support. The program consisted of four sessions covering; resume and cover letter development; creating online profiles on employment marketplaces ‘SEEK’ and ‘Indeed’; learning how to tailor resume and cover letter to a position description; professional presentation and communication skills; interview preparation; and practicing a mock interview with feedback.

- Four students participated in the RACV mentoring program (Cohort 1: n=3; Cohort 2: n=1) two reported the program as “extremely useful” and the other two as “moderately useful”. Whilst program uptake was relatively low, exit interview data showed six participants reported interest in a referral to the program and another two reported they had possible interest in undertaking the program.

**Participant Employment Barriers:** One of the assumptions of the *Reach, Train and Employ* Program Logic is that “the target cohort faces many barriers that, if identified, may be overcome with support if required.” Potential barriers identified in the project grant agreement included; lack of suitable work skills; lack of financial management skills; and/or a lack of resilience. In addition to these barriers, a range of other potential roadblocks to participant employment at the end of training were identified and are important to consider, in order to ensure similar employment models are equipped to successfully meet their employment targets.

- After project completion, the main ongoing employment barriers for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment have been identified to be; needing employers to be



flexible around personal caring responsibilities; a lack of work experience in the social services sector; and age-related discrimination.

*“I think the caring role presents many barriers, just the practicalities of if I have to be here at this time.., or on call for someone, or whatever, that produces huge logistical issues for doing the program and for employment.” -*

**Local Partner Organisation**

*“...over fifty years, in my mind it was really difficult to find other jobs, especially if you didn't have any qualifications or any experience in other fields.” -*

**Participant**

*“A lot of them have been working for twenty years or something like this. It's the first time they've actually had to apply for jobs.” -*

**Local Partner Organisation**

- Project stakeholders and participants seem to be optimistic and feel with the appropriate training and supports in place many perceived training and employment 'barriers' can be overcome, for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment.

*“It's not a total barrier. It's just a little bit of a hurdle.” -*

**Local Partner Organisation**

- Local partner organisation representatives suggested age may be an impediment to their employment due to the physical strain of Support Worker jobs; their lack of experience with contemporary job seeking practices (for example digital applications and interview practices); and employer hesitation being greater in hiring people over 50 (for example occupational health and safety risks). Suitable selection of job types to individual physical capability and capacity appears to be an important factor for the employment of people over 50. Further research is needed to understand if people over 50 sustain longer employment in particular social service job roles.

*“if they do want to work in residential aged care with [a] high level of personal care tasks, I would say for some people, they may not have physical stamina or move fast enough or have their own health issues, but I think most of them seem to have looked outside the box and are looking at support roles which are in home care or, you know, working with individuals rather than in residential aged care, which is interesting.” -*

**Project Staff Member**

## **Financial resource availability**

The *Reach, Train and Employ* pilot project has been completely free for participants, with their study costs covered by either through the project's budget or consortium partner resources. Some of the usual study and work readiness costs that have been absorbed by the project have included; student amenity fees; iPad or laptop provision; first aid training; police checks; and NDIS checks. Evaluation explored if these costs could be met by students themselves.

- Twenty-five out of 32 (78%) respondents reported they were willing and able to make a financial contribution to their project involvement, with amounts students were

prepared to pay ranging from \$16 to \$2816 with a mean of \$619. Almost half of those reporting they were willing to pay for the project, reported they would pay less than \$600 (n=16, 45%). As the student amenity fee is around \$315, by offering a means tested waiver of this fee for students who can't afford it, this could ensure the costs of training do not inhibit people from participation (See **Table 4: The amount participants are willing to pay for the project**).

Cost Range	Response Frequency
Less than \$300	7
Between \$300 and \$600	9
Between \$600 and \$1000	2
Between \$1000 and \$1500	5
Between \$1500 and \$3000	2

*Table 4: The amount participants are willing to pay for the project*

## Employment Pathways

The *Reach, Train and Employ* pilot aimed to provide participants with supported pathways into employment in the aged care and disability sectors via locally based work placement experiences. It is common for students in such projects to gain employment as a result of opportunities arising from their work placements.

- Local partner interviews report COVID-19 related disruptions to work placement scheduling reduced some of the capacity and development momentum for student placements to act as pipeline to their employment.

*“COVID just really threw a spanner because it just, a lot of these people needed placement to get work. They couldn't get the placements ...so it kind of hurt us a bit, particularly if they were aiming for aged care... so a lot of them were kind of burnt out and kind of over it by the time they got to placement and a lot of them, you know, fizzled out.” - Local Partner Organisation*

- Interview data with students and project staff indicate aged care specific placements were not as positive an experience as disability placements. For some participants, their aged care placement experience may act to discourage them from pursuing aged care sector careers. Some issues reported with aged care placement included; insufficient provision of student orientations and support; placement supervisors were ill prepared to provide the education and support the placement students needed; and a tension between course theory and workplace practice. Course content centred around theories of person-centred care and supported more social models of care as seen across the disability sector, yet aged care still largely delivers medical model care.

*“It [the aged care placement] was shocking. I hated every minute of it. We were just following them around like little lost sheep.” - Participant*

*“...in aged care we were ignored, put it that way, we didn’t know what to do, how to do, where to go. Yeah, pretty much it was chaos there, so that was challenging.” - Participant*

*“There’s a lot more that can be done in aged care and I know that the course we’re doing is sort of,... talking about the ideal [care], you know, person-centred care is for me the ideal. It doesn’t exist in a lot of the aged care places, they might just have little dribs and drabs of it here and there, but they don’t run on it. They don’t organise it on person-centred care principles and that disturbs me.” - Participant*

- Considering the maturity and previous experience people over 50 may carry, it may be that these groups could be better positioned for careers in the social service sector via roles other than just as a support worker.

*“Another limitation is, I think this is really great and valid pathway for people, but it is just one pathway, so I’d also be looking at how else, like where else we can be getting people back into the workforce? So people who might have been accountants, or IT, or you know, all those other industries, and trying to replicate it across different industry pathways.” - Local Partner Organisation*

- Questionnaire and enrolment data indicate course/project training hours need to be flexible enough to accommodate for the caring responsibilities and financial needs of participants to be able to work whilst they study.

*“I don’t want to [study] full time, it’s just, because if the kids’ got appointments I’m the one that has to leave the job and all that. My wife can’t go because she’s a schoolteacher so that’s her job so that’s why I don’t want to do full time because then I have to stop work.” - Participant*

- The potential to convert the program model to a traineeship was raised on multiple occasions at Steering Committee meetings, and from local partner organisation interviews, with some acknowledgement that a traineeship like model may be a better fit for the characteristics of people over 50.

*“I think traineeships are a good opportunity, even if they want to do a traineeship part-time, at least they are being paid whilst they are studying [and] at the same time... taking care of family and commitments and things like that.”- Local partner organisation*

*“... whether we could look at doing the training ... and maybe into a workplace that’s willing to do the Cert III as a traineeship model would be good, so certainly never having people sitting online for 12 months learning, that’s not a model I’d advocate for.” - Project Staff Member*

## Key Takeaways

- The wrap around support and inclusive training model seems to result in positive employment outcomes in the social service sector for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment. The project is on track to meet its specified employment target of 90% of graduates employed within six months of project completion.
- Ensuring people over 50 are provided opportunities to reskill and supported to develop can help them to overcome barriers to employment. Additionally, targeted support and training for workplaces may help to make them more inclusive of people over 50.
- Whilst the Certificate III Individual Support (Ageing and Disability) is based upon person-centred care theory, the aged care sector does not currently have the capacity to embrace new graduates and support them in the implementation of their learning. This may result in new graduates becoming disillusioned and seeking employment elsewhere and has long-term implications for aged care workforce sustainability and reform.
- The potential for the future scalability of the project will require further exploration of model costs versus benefits. Whilst the pilot model has proven it can get great outcomes for this group of people, it has also been a high touch model of support. Not all support provisions may be financially viable in a scale-up and it may need to be explored if some support providers can have their support better consolidated for RTE model efficiency. Scalability will ultimately be dependent on policy and funding planning at government level but, the pilot model shows there is considerable promise in finding and implementing a viable model for people over 50 at risk of long-term employment.

## Opportunities for further RTE model improvement

The following model modifications may enhance employment outcomes:

- Further investigation is needed to assess the cost-utility of each of the job readiness support providers to determine who is best placed to provide that support and the most cost efficient way to fund that support.
- Whilst the pilot project had an employment goal of 90%, evaluation findings suggest a further training pathway for participants should be built into the model. As some participants indicated a preference to continue onto further specialised training, rather than entering the workforce at a support worker level. Project graduation pathways onto further education are also positive outcomes for this demographic and should be facilitated in the RTE model.
- Further investigation is needed to understand what support employers need to establish a workplace environment that is receptive and supportive of people over 50 as new workers. It is possible that a traineeship model may see both participants and employers develop appropriate skills and capability to make the model sustainable and enhance worker retention in the sector. Data suggests that paid, on-the-job learning may

attract more people to participate in the RTE model, may retain more people and may promote participant financial independence.

- To increase RTE model reach, and support engagement for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment, the model should explore increasing the scope of course offerings to other level qualifications and across different industries/sectors.
- Fees, as long as they are affordable, do not seem to be a participation deterrent. A mean/needs-based assessment could be introduced to provide financial support for those who require it.

## (ii) What impact do RTE model supports have on successful participant engagement in the course?

The RTE model offered a wide range of supports to assist students to engage and complete their Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing & Disability).

These include;

- Emotional, self-esteem or mental health support;
- individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes;
- individual teaching support;
- assistance negotiating Centrelink;
- individual financial coaching support;
- material support;
- referrals to health or community services;
- English language assistance;
- reading or writing assistance;
- digital & computing support; and
- assistance with enrolment.

This section evaluates the impact of RTE supports upon successful participant engagement in the course and explores;

- Participant support needs;
- participant support utilisation;
- project retention; and
- project withdrawals

### *Participant Support Needs*

Student questionnaire data was analysed to identify supports need and utilisation patterns of participants. Data indicates participant support needs vary across the cohorts with some participants reporting minimal utilisation of supports and others reporting higher levels of support use.

- For Cohort 1 (respondents n=10), the most commonly accessed supports were emotional, self-esteem, or mental health support (80%); digital and computing support (60%); individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes (60%); individual financial coaching support (60%) (See **Figure 9: Cohort 1 support utilisation (%)**)

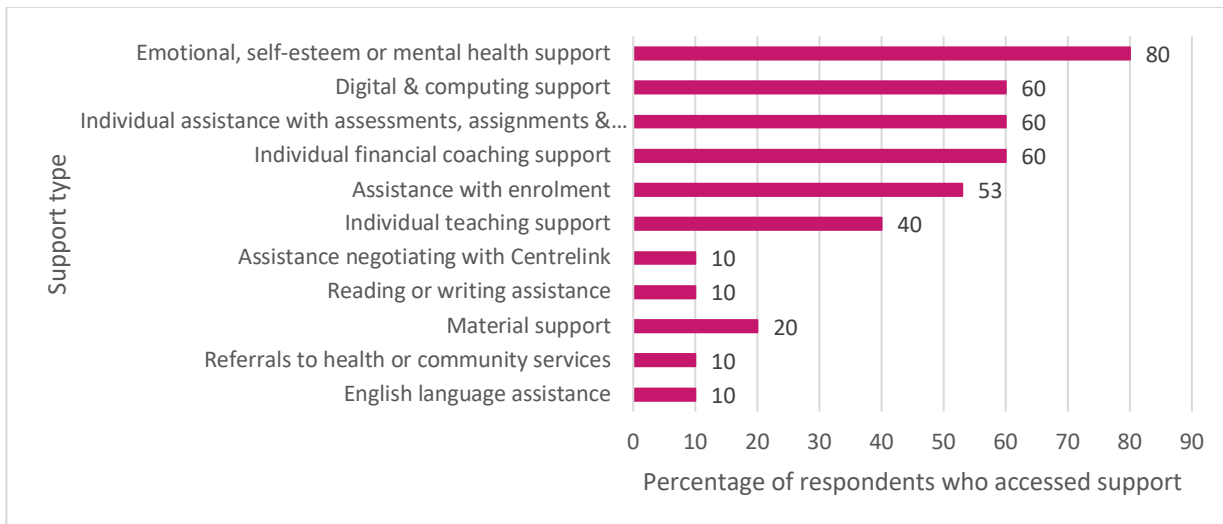


Figure 9: Cohort 1 support utilisation (%)

- Of Cohort 1 respondents who accessed emotional, self-esteem or mental health support (n=8, 75%), 50% indicated this support was 'important' and 25% 'very important' to their ability to effectively engage with the course. Similarly participants accessing individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes (n=6) reported this support was either 'important' (67%) or 'very important' (33%) for them to effectively engage. Other supports, such as English language support and referrals to health/community services although utilised much less frequently, still played a crucial role in enabling RTE access for these participants.

- For Cohort 2 respondents (n=13) individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes was the most frequent support accessed (62%) along with enrolment support (44%); digital and computing support (38%); and emotional, self-esteem or mental health support (38%) (See **Figure 10: Cohort 2 Support utilisation (%)**). 62.5% of respondents (n=8) who accessed individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes reported it was important for them to engage effectively with the course and 37.5% indicated that it was somewhat important.

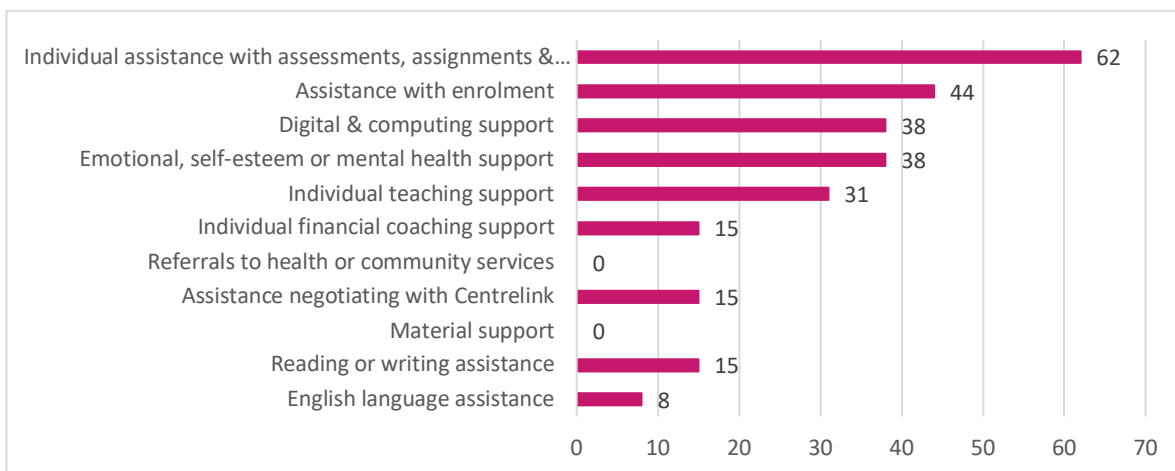


Figure 10: Cohort 2 Support Usage<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 'Assistance with enrolment' is data collected at assessments

- The digital literacy capability of participants varied considerably, with some requiring greater support than others (n=22, 1.18 to 4.82 where 0=no literacy and 5=high level of confidence/experience). Overall, Cohort 1 (mean 3.1 SD±1.1) exhibited a lower level of digital literacy than Cohort 2 (mean 4.3, SD±2.1).
- Respondent views (n=23) on the importance of the different support types varied with highest consensus that enrolment support was important or crucial to their course (91%). Other supports with high reports that they were crucial or important included support for assessments, assignments and/or online quizzes (78%) and emotional, self-esteem or mental health support (77%) (See **Figure 11: Participant reported importance of supports**).

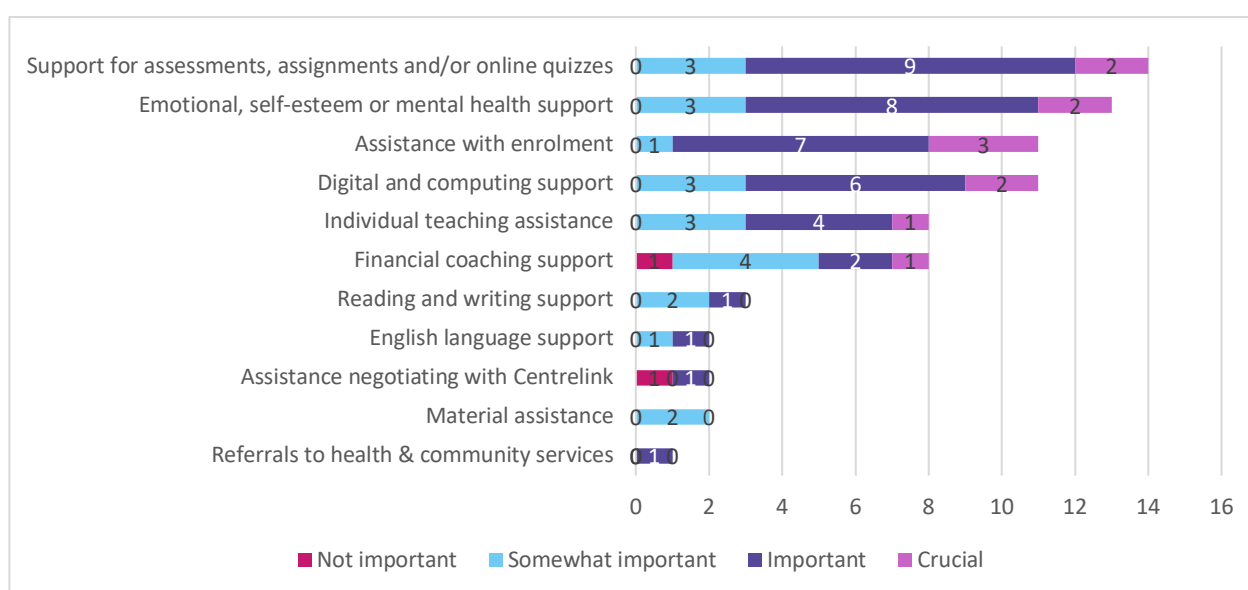


Figure 11: Participant reported importance of supports

## Financial Capability

Delivered by Good Shepherd (GSANZ), financial capability training (Individual Financial Capability and Life Coaching Preparation Course) was incorporated into pre-course readiness activities, prior to participants commencing their Certificate III training.

- Whilst data pre course identified only 15% of responders were interested in gaining increased financial capability from the course, generally participants reported the knowledge they gained from the training was beneficial. Data suggests the majority of project participants were actually quite financially literate so this may be an element of support that could either be dropped or made available only to those screened to require it or who choose to complete it.

*“I was surprised, most of them were really excellent money managers. Only a couple of people are renting. Most of them [are] in their own home.” - Project Staff Member*



*“I am already that kind of person so I’m already [looking] far ahead... at my financia[s], one month, one year, ten years, twenty years, and my retirement, I’ve already plan[ned] everything.” – Participant*

### Support Utilisation Data

Assessments were completed by the Life Coach for all participants across each learning cluster to provide an indication of participant engagement trends with referral support services (referrals provided by RMIT or GSANZ). Data for Cohort 1 (n=16) and 2 (n=15) indicate increasing mean trends in participants’ engagement with support services relevant to their needs and circumstances as they progressed through the model (See **Figure 12: Mean score assessment: Engagement with support services**).

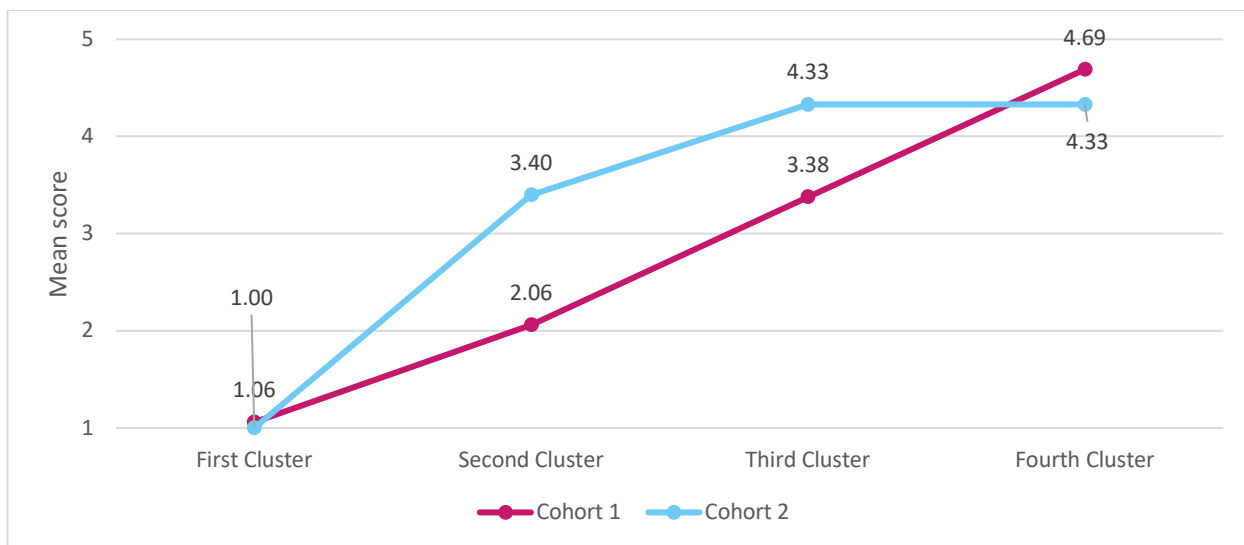


Figure 12: Mean score assessment: Engagement with support services

- Analysis of student questionnaire data revealed high utilisation of different supports across all timepoints, with all Cohort 1 respondents and 77% of Cohort 2 respondents reporting they accessed at least one form of support Cohort 1 participants reported higher utilisation of supports overall. (See **Table 5: Utilisation of at least one support**)<sup>15</sup>

	Start of course (T1)	Midpoint (T2)	End of course (T3)
<b>Cohort 1</b>	14 (n = 15): 93%	14 (n = 15): 93%	10 (n=10): 100%
<b>Cohort 2</b>	12 (n = 16): 75%	10 (n = 12): 83%	10 (n = 13): 77%

Table 5: Utilisation of at least one support

- The differing levels of support access between cohorts were likely influenced by Cohort 1’s unanticipated shift from face-to-face to remote learning; its overall lower levels of digital literacy; and having on average lower previous educational attainments than

<sup>15</sup> As this data was self-reported at program midpoint and end of project, it is unclear if participants reported timepoint specific or cumulative program support usage.

Cohort 2. Evaluation infers these factors were likely to have contributed to Cohort 1's greater need for supports.

### ***Emotional, Self-esteem or Mental health support***

Emotional, self-esteem and mental health support were predominantly provided by the Life Coach via regular monthly meetings/conversations to support their wellbeing and course engagement. More frequent contact and support was provided to any participants who required it.

- Thirteen respondents reported accessing emotional, self-esteem or mental health support during the RTE with data suggesting the Life Coach was the most prominent source of this type of support (n=13, 85%).
- Contributing to this type of support the Life Coach; facilitated the establishment of peer relationships early on in the project; provided participants with strategies for managing personal wellbeing; provided ongoing counselling (to build self-confidence and emotional wellbeing); and delivered participant tailored job readiness coaching.
- Interview and questionnaire data suggest the Life Coach service was important if not a critical support offered in the model (See **Figure 13: How important has the emotional, self-esteem or mental health support been in your ability engage effectively with the course?**)

*"[the life coach is] fantastic... because I've been feeling bad, you know, just COVID and (stuff) like that..." - Participant*

*"I think [the Life Coach] more helped me in a way... [with] depression and all the stuff like that. I have depression and... sometimes it's not that bad, but it affects me in my daily life or in my health and all... stuff like that and probably talking to [the Life Coach] helped me a lot..." - Participant*

*"[The Life Coach] is fantastic [and] very empowering, [the Life Coach] was great in steering me in a good direction for my life." - Participant*

*"the life coaching was essential,... that they had that support and encouragement in terms of the goal setting, but also very practical support to refer on if needed, ... so I think that's an essential element." - Project Staff Member*

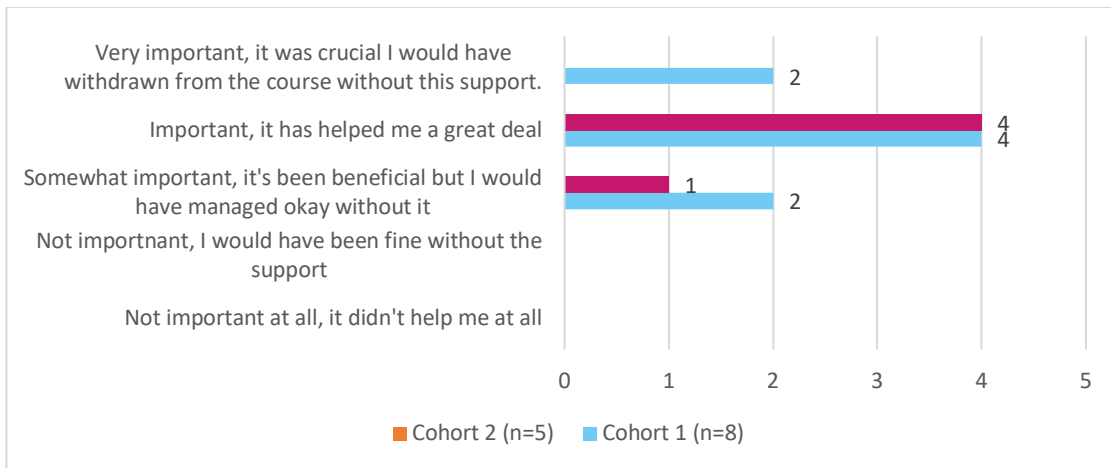


Figure 13: How important has the emotional, self-esteem or mental health support been in your ability engage effectively with the course?

- Whilst overall Cohort 1 reported higher utilisation of ‘emotional, self-esteem or mental health support’ it should be pointed out that Cohort 1 enrolled in the RTE prior to the first COVID-19 related lockdown and moved from face-to-face course delivery to online training delivery, whereas Cohort 2 enrolled understanding the RTE training would be delivered online.

### Individual Assistance With Assessments, Assignments and Online Quizzes

- For Cohort 2 individual assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes was this cohorts the most commonly utilised support whilst it was only the third most utilised support for Cohort 1. Again the majority of people who accessed this type of support reported it was either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ (n=14, 78.6%) for their ability to engage effectively with the course (See Figure 14: How important has receiving support for assessments, assignments and/ or online quizzes been to your ability engage effectively with the course?).

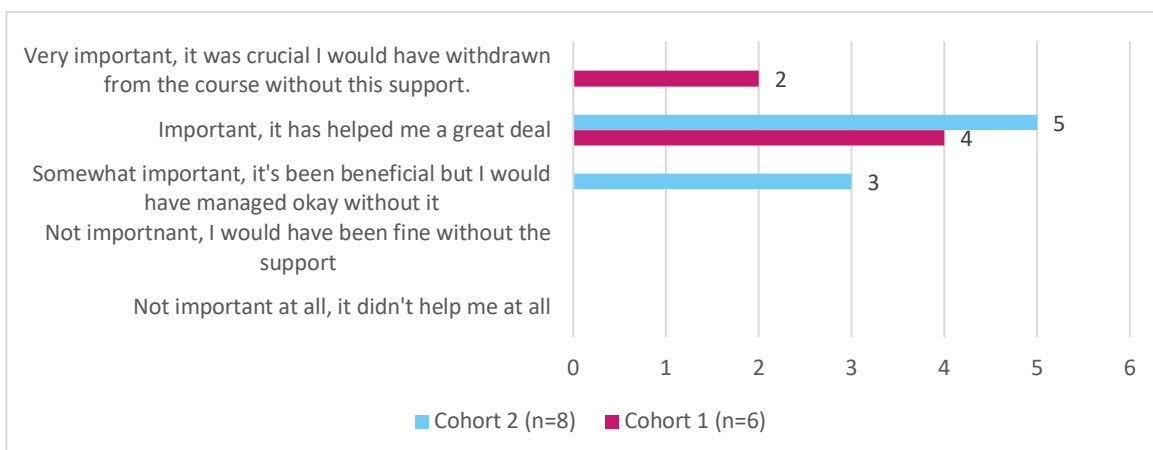


Figure 14: How important has receiving support for assessments, assignments and/ or online quizzes been to your ability engage effectively with the course?

- These types of support were predominantly provided by the class teachers and course program support staff, but participant interview data evidenced peers also played an important role in supporting each other with course activities and assessments.

*“There’s one particular person that I talk to quite frequently and you know, well we talk about everything, not just the course, but also if I need some help with an assignment I’ll say, ‘Well what would you do here, or there?’ You know, or he might ask me, ‘What did you do there?’” - Participant*

*“If we don’t understand something, some of us actually call each other, or even email each other.” - Participant*

*“You know which [peers] will help you. They all help me, put it that way, they all help me... There’s certain people there who have really helped me and if I have to call on the teachers I can but [the teacher’s] really hard to get because she works other jobs as well.” - Participant*

## **Digital and Computing Support**

As training was intended to be delivered face-to-face, digital literacy and computing skills, along with internet and hardware access, were largely unforeseen project needs during design. Subsequent COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face educational delivery created a significant barrier to the access of remote training delivery for some students who did not have the necessary hardware, software or internet access to remote learn. Both COTA Victoria and RMIT quickly put a range of measures in place to address participant digital resource and literacy capability gaps, providing participants with; IT hardware support in the form of iPad or laptop loans; the provision of internet dongles for students without internet access; access to a free computing skills course run by a local partner organisation; and in-class and after-hours technical support provided by the teacher and/or a teaching support staff member.

- Interview data indicate participants found the iPad challenging to use and compatibility with Microsoft Office issues and some participants reported they required more technical support than was available to them.

*“For Cohort One, in the beginning, some of them had no technology at all... they had no hardware. So that’s where COTA was just amazing in getting things together. RMIT offered iPads... and then said they would not support anyone who had any hassle with the iPad, so they wouldn’t provide any IT support. iPads, in my opinion, are completely useless for education.” - Project Staff Member*

*“... I struggled with the iPad, because the iPad is good for some things but.. is certainly not good for documents. It was terrible... and I struggled with it for months. I really wish I had.. a laptop earlier. It would have made it easier for me.” - Participant*

*“I would definitely advocate for laptops for the students to be given as a loan. I think this should have some pre-training in computer learning before they actually start the course. So I think that would be ideal, especially if*

*you've got a[n] [older group...][or] hardly ever use devices.” - Project Staff Member*

- The iPads were later replaced with laptops by COTA Victoria, which although more expensive than the iPads, ensured all students had access to adequate hardware. The RTE model needs to further explore how to ensure all participants have the necessary access to hardware, software and internet to be able to learn online remotely and who should resource the required technology.
- Participant were able to voluntarily undertake a computing skills short course free of charge that provided them with digital support with the completion of their course work.
- As previously reported (see [Computer Skills for Job Seekers Course](#)), digital skill needs varied within the target cohort and supports provided in this area would benefit from being better tailored to the individual capability needs of participants.

*“I would have liked to have had very specific computer support and I didn’t find that was forthcoming from that course.” - Participant*

## **Enrolment Support**

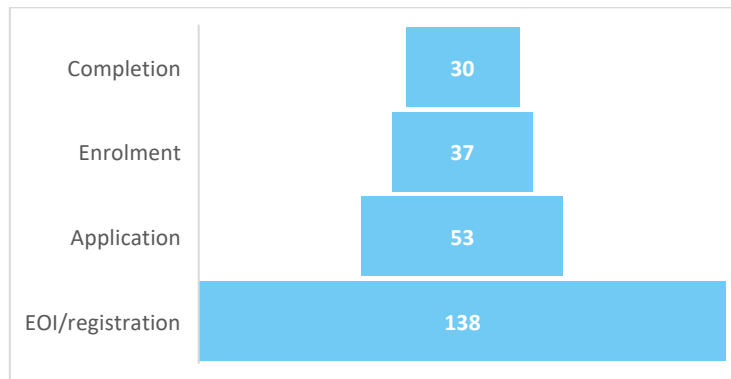
Enrolment has proven to be a challenging process even for conventional student cohorts, so the project partners identified early that given the pilot cohort’s characteristics, participants were likely to require some additional support in navigating through the enrolment process. Some of this support was provided to participants as a group and other support needed to be more personalised. COVID-19 restrictions meant Cohort 2 had to undertake their enrolment entirely remotely so this group was sent an email with clear instructions of how to go through the enrolment process and the documents that they would be required to obtain. This cohort was also provided a single RMIT point of contact to support them through the enrolment process

- Focus group data suggests both cohorts’ participants appreciated the enrolment supports provided, but some described enrolment processes as stressful, in particular the compulsory literacy and numeracy tests.

*“... the English exam and the math exam, they were a little bit frightening. I thought oh my god, I learnt some of this in high school... but there was this sense that I have to do better otherwise I won’t get in. You know what I mean?” - Participant*

## **Participant Retention**

Support availability and access was hypothesised to impact on participant RTE retention. Data evidence that participants are most likely to withdraw from the RTE pilot early on, shortly after first recruitment engagement (Information Session attendance). Whilst there were significant numbers of people expressing interest (n=138), most of these did not end up applying (n=53) (See Figure 16: Conversion from registration to completion).



*Figure 16: Conversion from registration to completion*

- Information session feedback from attendees revealed their reasons varied as to why people did not progress to the application stage, with the most common reason being a lack of interest in becoming an individual support worker. As previously mentioned further exploration should be undertaken to see what other education and career offerings might be suitable for people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment to see if further employment pathways could be developed similar to the pilot model.
- There were numerous potential negative challenges to retention during project delivery, such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unexpected transition to remote learning for Cohort 1, multiple lockdowns, and significant delays in course completion due to pandemic related work placement delays. Yet overall, after enrolment, student project retention was very high, with 81% (n=30/37) of enrolled participants (Cohort 1 n=15/19, 79%; Cohort 2 n=15/18, 83%) completing the course. Recent National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data reports the national average completion rate for a Certificate III in Individual Support qualification was only 39%.<sup>16</sup>
- Project staff and student data from interviews and focus groups indicate the project’s provision of participant supports is likely why the project’s retention figures are so much higher than the national average.

*“The whole thing has been very, very well supported...there’s so many different people involved, there’s COTA, you’ve got the counselling, you’ve got the RMIT tutors and other assistance...” - Participant*

*“Part of me being in this course too, is the support.” - Participant*

*“My role was really to be there, to focus on them, and to work out a way that they could deal with what their challenge was, and to keep them on track. So I think there were a number of times when, I mean, some students definitely left the program but there were some students who were thinking about it, and they stayed because of the support they got.” - Project Staff Member*

<sup>16</sup> Source: NCVER 2021, Total VET students and courses 2020: program enrolments DataBuilder, Total, Level of education, Program name by Year. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder>.

- Participant withdrawal interview data revealed work commitments were the most common reason for participant withdrawal, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic and difficulties managing their study load. One RTE withdrawal was due to a disciplinary matter whilst on their work placement. Of the seven RTE withdrawals, 6 have found employment including the participant who was removed from the RTE.
- Those participants who did withdraw before completing the project still reported obtaining RTE benefits such as developing new and transferable digital skills; increased confidence; defined their life and career goals; improved wellbeing.

### Participant Satisfaction with RTE Supports

- Score assessment satisfaction data (collected by COTA Victoria during student exit interviews) showed the majority of participants to be either ‘mostly satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the project’s services offered (See **Figure 17: Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with the services through the Reach Train Employ project?**)<sup>17</sup>

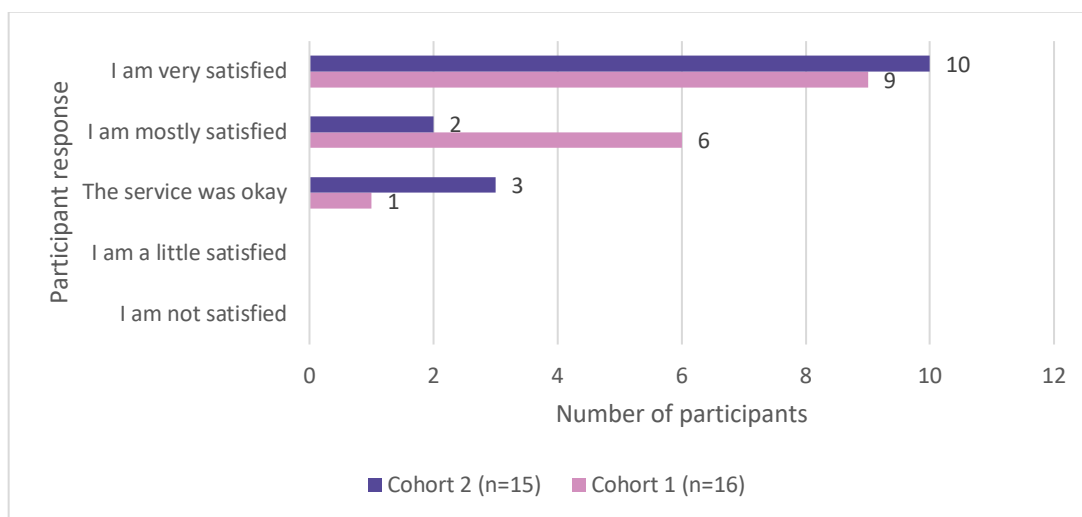


Figure 17: Score Assessment: Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with the services through the Reach Train Employ project?

- Evaluation questionnaire data supported COTA Victoria’s high satisfaction data, with a mean satisfaction score for Cohort 1 (n=10) of 84.8 (where ‘0 = extremely unsatisfied’ and ‘100 = extremely satisfied’) and a Cohort 2 (n=12) mean of 82.5 (See **Figure 18: Participant satisfaction**).

<sup>17</sup> This data was not collected by the evaluation team so may contain some unknown biases.

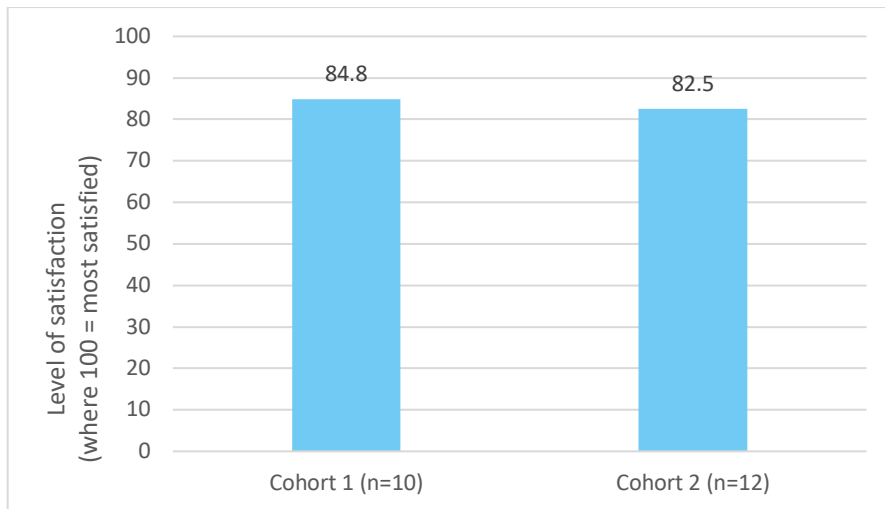


Figure 18: Participant satisfaction

- Evidence indicates respondents (n=23) were generally satisfied with the level of support the RTE provided, with 74% reporting they had been adequately supported (See Figure 19: Overall, do you think you have been adequately supported during your studies).

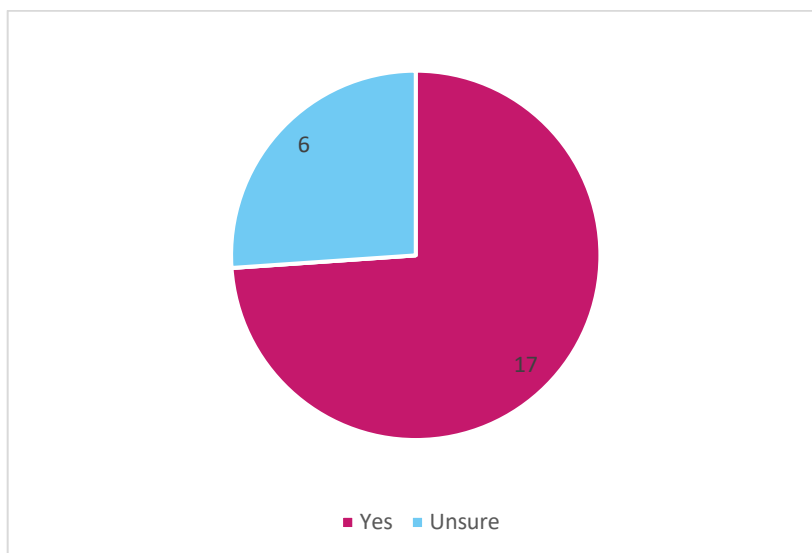


Figure 19: Overall, do you think you have been adequately supported during your studies

- Student interview data also evidenced high levels of overall project satisfaction and gratitude.

*“It’s been a terrific experience...I think it’s a really valuable experience. It’s been fantastic and an excellent idea, excellent, and I’m very grateful to all the people involved in this course for doing this. It’s been fabulous. I’m pretty sure that everybody else feels the same actually. I probably shouldn’t speak for everyone, but I’m sure everyone’s benefitted greatly from it.” - Participant*

*“I personally would like to commend the COTA team, [the Life Coach], RMIT team for their wonderful support given to us during the duration of the course. [I] Learn[t] a lot, met new friends, regained my confidence in full.”*

**- Participant**



*“I am so grateful that I have had this fantastic opportunity especially during this challenging COVID period. I have talked this course up to others who may be interested in it, ie. other mature people who want to advance their skills and employability in these fields.” - Participant*

*“[The teacher] has been fantastic... because of her knowledge but also her very friendly personality, and I’ve told her that in person, it’s common knowledge... I found [her] to be the right teacher for our age group and very experienced. She had a very easy-going manner, you know, very friendly, but she knew what she was talking about and if you wanted to ask her anything she’d always, you know, answer.” - Participant*

## Key Takeaways

- Project supports played a key role in the model’s participant engagement, with data indicating the wrap around supports were an important, and in some circumstances critical aspect of participant retention in the RTE.
- Those supports that seem to be most critical for inclusion in the model include; emotional, self-esteem or mental health support; educational support (assistance with assessments, assignments and online quizzes); digital technology support; and enrolment assistance.
- Whilst some other supports were utilised far less frequently it is important that these supports are still available to participants in the model, as they can be rated just as important for these participants as some of the more frequently utilised supports.

## Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement

- Further consideration needs to be given as to how peer support can be more effectively supported and how peer support may replace some of the supports being provided by other sources.
- It would be useful to assess participants individually as to their digital literacy/computer skills prior to training commencement so participants can seek individualised support meeting their needs earlier in the RTE.
- Thought needs to be given as to how to best ensure all participants have access to the necessary technological hardware and software to effectively engage in their training. Should trainees pay for and source this themselves, should the training provider provide this to the students, or should some other stakeholder provide these resources to participants?
- Whilst the iPad provision was appreciated, the technology does not appear to be suitable for the types of learning that the pilot course delivered. The training model needs to consider if training delivery adaptations are required to better cater for iPad-like platforms or if the model should instead ensure all participants have at least a laptop as minimum hardware for participation. The risk is otherwise that some participants without

this minimum level of hardware may struggle more in the RTE than others with the right hardware.

- Whilst literacy and numeracy tests during enrolment are important to understand competency levels of students to identify where the provision of additional supports may be needed, they are also evidenced to cause the students' stress. Further information provision around the test purposes and preparation support would likely improve the enrolment experience for participants.
- If the RTE model is to be repeated or scaled up, further consideration of the best way to mitigate placement risks would be beneficial. These may include additional education for students around acceptable behaviours and the development of advocacy strategies to support students facing disciplinary action.

### (iii) Has the RTE resulted in increased wellbeing (i.e., mental wellness, resilience, and financial capability) for participants?

A range of different evaluation measures collected data to assess participant wellbeing during the RTE including:

- Wellbeing data - Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale - short version (SWEMWBS)<sup>18</sup>
- Resilience data - Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)<sup>19</sup>
- Confidence data - Student and project staff interview data
- Belonging data - Likert scale

#### Wellbeing

The SWEMWBS was used to measure changes in participant wellbeing between the start and end of the project. Both cohorts reported overall high wellbeing scores with no significant difference between the cohorts ( $P > 0.05$ ).<sup>20</sup> There were though promising improvement trends in the data with Cohort 1 having a 1.6 improvement in their score from baseline and Cohort 2 seeing a 1.0 score improvement (See **Figures 20: Cohort 1 mean SWEMWBS score** and **21: Cohort 2 mean SWEMWBS score**).

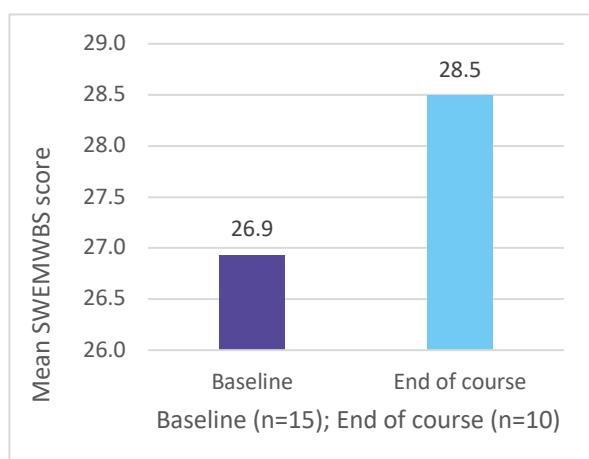


Figure 20: Cohort 1 mean SWEMWBS score

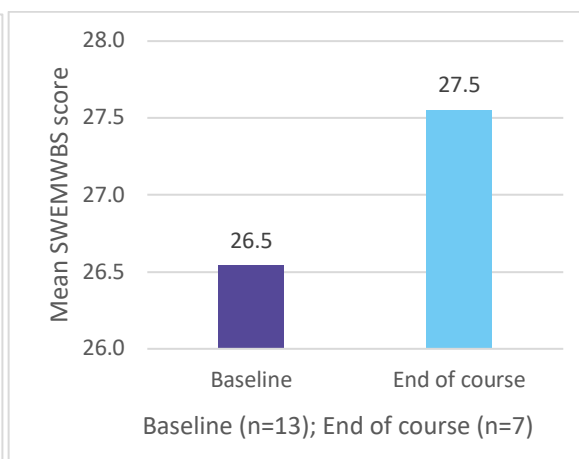


Figure 21: Cohort 2 mean SWEMWBS score

- When exploring SWEMWBS group data at baseline cohort 1 data showed 13% of respondents had scores that fell in the low wellbeing category (where 'low' wellbeing is categorized by a score of less than 20 out of a possible 40), 80% sat in the moderate wellbeing score category (scores between 20 -27) and 7% in the high wellbeing score category scores greater than 27). By end of study there were no respondents with scores in the low wellbeing score category, and high wellbeing scores had risen to 20% of participants. Although not statistically significant, the positive wellbeing score shift is

<sup>18</sup> Taggart, F., Stewart-Brown, S. and Parkinson, J. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) Version 2 (May 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10)

<sup>20</sup> Likely due to small samples sizes as the SWEMWBS has a recommended sample size of at least 50 responses.

promising (See Figure 22: Cohort 1 proportions (%) of wellbeing scores (SWEMWBS) in the low, moderate and high score categories at baseline and end of study).

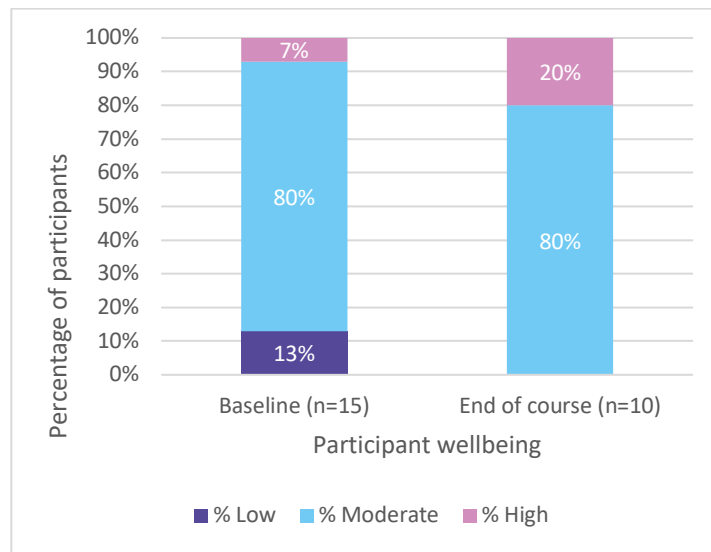


Figure 22: Cohort 1 proportions (%) of wellbeing scores (SWEMWBS) in the low, moderate and high score categories at baseline and end of study

- Cohort 2 displayed similar positive wellbeing score trends with a reduction in the number of participants classified as low wellbeing at baseline 31% compared to 14% at end of study. As those seemed to shift from low to medium wellbeing, so too some scores shifted from moderate to high wellbeing, with 23% classified as high wellbeing at baseline compared to 29% within the 'high' wellbeing classification by end of study (See Figure 23: Cohort 2 proportions (%) of wellbeing (SWEMWBS) scores in the low, moderate and high score categories at baseline and end of study).

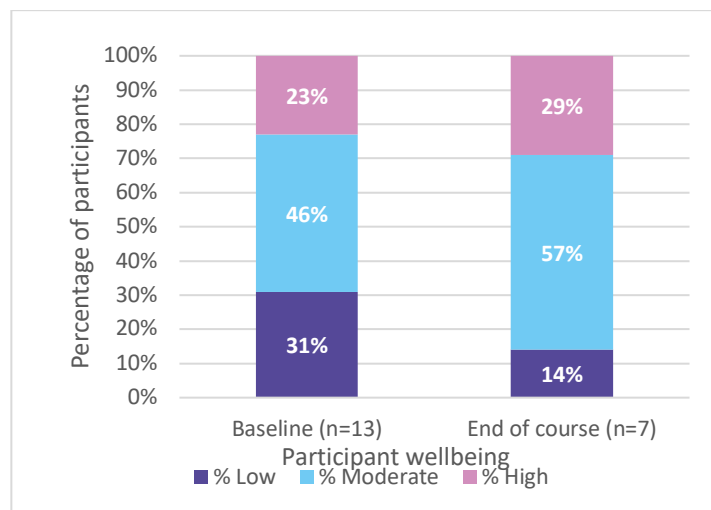


Figure 23: Cohort 2 proportions (%) of wellbeing (SWEMWBS) scores in the low, moderate and high score categories at baseline and end of study<sup>21</sup>

- Student and project staff interview data supported improvement trends in wellbeing outcome measure.

<sup>21</sup> When means were imputed for missing data, there were trending data reductions in the numbers of participants who moved from 'moderate' to 'high' wellbeing classifications by end of study.

*“This is an amazing program that create(s) hope and upskilling opportunities to the age group above 50 years old.” - Participant*

*“I have very much come out of this long experience a better & far more happier person.” - Participant*

*“I am not sure why, but this course has done me a lot of good in general. I now have direction, new interests, confidence to be able to assist others and I have more purpose on a daily basis. I am now going for daily walks, got myself a puppy and learning how to train him, have more contact with my two children and wanting to continue with studies. Prior to this course and the support received I had very little interest in anything. Thank you to everyone who is making this learning process possible.” - Participant*

- Data suggest it is likely that improved participant confidence and social connections stimulated by the project, along with participants accessing wellbeing related supports such as peer support networks and emotional, self-esteem and mental health RTE supports, together contributed to improvements to participant reported wellbeing.

*“I’ve got some students that I talk to, we help each other and things like that, you know if we’re down.” - Participant*

*“I’ve learnt how to do Zoom, and because of being connected to Zoom... I’ve been able to use that, you know, for other things like if I wanted to hear a lecture about something else I could use Zoom.” - Participant*

*“It’s been very, very good because it’s taken us through COVID. We’ve been online, we’ve had contact with each other, there’s been a meaningful focus.” - Participant*

## **Resilience**

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was used to measure changes in participant resilience over time. Data was collected via Student Questionnaire at both the start of the RTE (T1) and the end of training (T3). Less than half of responders at baseline responded again and end of study so a sensitivity analysis was conducted using mean imputation for missing data at end of study. Paired T Tests showed no statistical difference in the mean change from baseline to end of training. Small sample sizes coupled with high standard deviations for both cohorts limit the strength of the findings.

- No change in resilience was found from baseline to end of training for Cohort 1. Cohort 2 exhibited a slight decrease in resilience, but the change was not statistically significant (See **Table 6: Cohort 1 & 2 Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) change**). Based on the quartiles for the general population, both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 fell within the second quartile at End of Course, indicating they have resilience levels above 25% of the general population, but below 50%.
- Available data suggests the RTE model maintains resilience of participants fairly well but does not significantly improve it. It is likely external factors related to the pandemic, such as multiple lockdowns and the unexpected introduction of remote learning for Cohort 1 would have impacted upon participant resilience RTE benefits.

Data set	N	Mean - Baseline (T1)	Mean - End of training (T3)	Mean change (T1-T3)
Cohort 1	8	30.88(±3.14)	30.88(±3.94)	0
Cohort 1*	17	29.53(±3.97)	31.00(±3.26)	1.47
Cohort 2	6	33.17(±7.11)	32.67(±6.92)	-0.5
Cohort 2*	15	32.41(±6.37)	31.45(±4.63)	0.04

Table 6: Cohort 1 & 2 Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) change (\* = mean imputed for missing data)

## Confidence

The project identified confidence as a potential barrier and facilitator to people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment seeking and gaining of employment. There were assumptions that participants lacked not just job-seeking skills but self-confidence as well.

*“... we're speaking about a cohort of people who are over 50, and... who want to remain engaged in the community and they're unengaged, like they're not engaged at all... and it's about giving them the confidence to be able to do that.” - Project Staff Member*

- Data from student and project staff interviews reported a general increase in participant confidence over the course of the project, particularly related to their job seeking activity. The provision of job readiness support and post-course mentoring and support were highlighted by participants as interventions instrumental to their perceived confidence increases. Data indicates, many of the participants were employed at the time of their interviews, and those who were not employed still expressed confidence that they would find employment soon.

*“My confidence is now so much higher since doing the Reach Train Employ program. I did well in the interview... due to this experience.” - Participant*

*“...feel confident that my resume and cover letter will stand out.”*

*- Participant*

- Project staff interviews confirm participant perceptions that there was significant improvement to their confidence from start to end of the RTE.

*“The vast majority have spoken about feeling more confident.... Confidence is one thing that this program has done. It's really, really built self-confidence in a lot of people so that's been excellent.” - Project Staff Member*

*“People now do feel a lot more confident. And some people have had the confidence to say, ‘this is my time now. You know, I want to actually manage it the way I want to, ...I've worked for 40 years. I do want to go and work in this industry...’ So it's the confidence to say that.” - Project Staff Member*

*Member*

## Belonging

Participant perceptions of belonging were measured across three timepoints as identity plays an important role in engagement in study and employment outcomes.

- Analysis of questionnaire belonging data showed Cohort 1 generally saw reductions in their self-rated belonging, from the start of the project to its end. Participant sense of belonging 'as a member of the broader RMIT community' though was relatively stable (see **Table 7: Cohort 1 Sense of belonging**).

Sense of belonging	Baseline			End of Project		
	N	Median	IQR (Q1,Q3)	N	Median	IQR (Q1,Q3)
...as an employee of a community service organisation	15	4	1, 4	9	2	0.5,3
...as an RMIT student	15	4	3, 4	10	3.5	3, 4
...as an individual support worker	15	4	2, 4	8	3	2, 3
...as a member of your local community	15	4	3, 4	9	3	3, 4
...as a member of the broader RMIT community	15	3	2, 4	9	3	0.5, 3

*Table 7: Cohort 1 sense of belonging (where 0 = unsure, 1 = Do not belong at all, 2 = belong a little bit, 3 = partially belong, and 4 = Fully belong)*

- Cohort 2 generally self-reported increases in their sense of belonging to most domains, with belonging 'as a member of your local community' remaining stable (See **Table 8: Cohort 2 Sense of belonging**).

Sense of belonging	Baseline			End of Project		
	N	Median	IQR (Q1,Q3)	N	Median	IQR (Q1,Q3)
...as an employee of a community service organisation	12	2.5	0.3, 4.0	13	3.0	2.0, 4.0
...as an RMIT student	13	2.0	0.1, 4.0	13	3.0	2.0, 4.0
...as an individual support worker	14	1.5	0.0, 3.3	13	3.0	1.0, 4.0
...as a member of your local community	13	3.0	2.0, 4.0	13	3.0	2.0, 3.5
...as a member of the broader RMIT community	14	1.5	1.0, 4.0	13	2.0	1.0, 3.0

*Table 8: Cohort 2 Sense of belonging*

- Baseline data differences between the two cohorts match with the project's delivery environment at each cohort's point of data collection. Cohort 1 commenced the project

pre-COVID-19 impacts, when course delivery was face-to-face, so their physical and emotional connection to others was relatively normal. By the end of the project Cohort 2 were learning remotely and had undergone numerous lockdowns, so the decreased belonging that was self-reported reflects the gradual physical and emotional disconnection that COVID-19 has broadly had across society. In contrast, Cohort 2 commenced the project during the early stages of COVID-19 when there was considerable project adaptation taking place. Low belonging data at baseline reflects some of the social uncertainty and participant experiences of COVID-19 related disconnection. As the project progressed, belonging increases suggest some participant adaptation to life during COVID-19 and although belonging was not high by the end of the project, it did trend higher.

## Key Takeaways

- COVID-19 impacts are evident from the data related to wellbeing, resilience, confidence and belonging. Whilst there were some general improvements to participant wellbeing and their confidence as they developed new professional and personal skills and capabilities, there were also plateauing and slight decreases for participants related to their resilience and their sense of belonging. Cohort 1 seemed to have had a more difficult time with COVID-19 impacts going from what was a conventional course and project delivery to a quick transition to remote learning. In comparison, Cohort 2 commenced during COVID-19 so had less project changes to navigate during their participation.
- It seems COVID-19 has been a significant confounder on wellbeing related outcomes. Whilst it is promising to see some trends in improvement to some outcome measures, others have remained fairly stable or have even decreased a little. Generally though, considering the impacts of COVID-19 have been unprecedented, even the maintaining of wellbeing outcomes from start to end of the project are a significant achievement. Giving consideration to the project's high retention rates and qualitative data which supports some significant wellbeing and confidence improvements, it seems the RTE may generally improve participant wellbeing, but COVID-19 impacts heavily limited the extent of any wellbeing improvements in the data measures.
- Anecdotally, the RTE model's interventions appear to be very effective for improving wellbeing but the statistical significance the RTE model has on the wellbeing of people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment is still unclear.

## Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement

- Further investigation of validated and reliable wellbeing related instruments for the model are needed to statistically understand the wellbeing value of the RTE model for participants.



## (iv) What were the critical factors that helped or hindered the project and what are the opportunities for improvement?

To answer this question evaluation explored various project documents collected as part of the desktop review along with interview theme data. Evaluation surmised the key project areas that were critical factors to the project surrounded:

- Project governance (consortium partnership survey, steering committee meeting documents, email correspondence, communications documents etc)<sup>22</sup>;
- recruitment processes (interviews, survey, marketing and promotional material etc);
- remote course delivery and student engagement (interviews, focus groups and questionnaire data); and
- COVID-19 (interviews, focus groups, questionnaire data)

### *Project Governance*

A co-development workshop was held in May 2019 with representatives from each consortium organisation (COTA Victoria, RMIT University, GSANZ and WIDI) and the funder DSS, where the key elements (for example the Theory of Change) of the *Reach, Train and Employ* pilot project were co-devised.<sup>23</sup> COTA Victoria then produced and circulated documentation outlining the agreed understanding of the responsibilities each partner would hold in relation to the delivery of the project's wrap around supports.

- The complexity of a consortium model posed a number of challenges to the project's early implementation. Challenges largely surrounded the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the different consortium partners. During this implementation phase there were frequent changes to project activity which were further complicated by the onboarding of new project staff. In turn, project activity changes saw some delays in the finalisation of contracted roles and responsibilities between the different partners. These early implementation delays flowed onto delays in early operational activity such as the commencement of participant screening and recruitment. It was suggested that some of the early implementation delays could be avoided if contracts had been developed and finalised during the project design and development stages, prior to project implementation.

*“...the biggest mistake is that we should have had contracts last year... because I think in those contracts we would have been able to clarify those roles and responsibilities right from the start and then from those contracts let the activity work plan flow from that, which is a detailed plan around our*

---

<sup>22</sup> The Partnership Survey was developed by the project's Lead Evaluator based on a review of current literature and the Steering Committee feedback. As this Lead Evaluator left the project prior to its completion, the evaluation team was unable to clarify if this survey was developed based on any previously published instruments. Partnership survey data was collected once at the early stages of project implementation in and again towards the end of the project's operations (May 2021). Consortium representatives and members with lived experience on the Steering Committee were invited to complete the survey. The Survey covered six areas: value of the partnership; clarity of purpose; partnership management; partner ownership; healthy relationship; and responsiveness to context (scale 1 – 7, where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 7 = 'strongly agree') See [Appendix 3](#).

<sup>23</sup> Previously the Future Social Service Institute (FSSI).

*activities, but it should have flowed from the contracts.” - Project Staff Member*

- Some of the difficulties in agreeing to stakeholder roles and responsibilities surrounded the organisational operational differences between the consortium partners. Each organisation had its own layers of internal management and governance related processes it was required to navigate and comply with. Required organisational approvals to progress the partnership were slowed down by these quite different organisational specific governance processes.

*“If you actually had the staff employed by a core organisation, it would work a lot better. Or two at the most. Yeah, so I think ... the actual supervision of staff and the project, if it could happen through the key partner rather than having to work through other individual managers that were then responsible back to a whole other system of management would be a lot better.” - Project staff member*

- To respond to the subsequent early operational delays and get the project schedule back on track fortnightly project team meetings were scheduled. As the project started to gather operational momentum, and as partners got on top of their responsibilities, the frequency of these meetings were gradually more spaced out.
- Whilst there appears to have been differing views surrounding partnership ownership early in the project, survey results indicate over time partners seemed to better understand the part each played in the project’s successful operations. Early on, the high frequency of team meetings seem to have been very important for navigating through past implementation challenges and delays.

*“So in the early days, we had very frequent team meetings and that included the teaching staff as well, so they were fortnightly and we move those across to monthly and then six weekly... it was very important to have that project lead person driving that all the time. I think if we hadn’t... it could have slipped away quite easily” - Project Staff Member*

- Both survey and interview data show the project supported the development of strong relationships between partnership, built around trust and transparency around project operations and challenges. Partnership survey scores for the Healthy Relationships indicators were high, with ‘I feel comfortable communicating my ideas, concerns or differences of opinion’ reporting a mean of 6.75 at Timepoint 2 (See Table 8: Key partnership survey findings). Data indicates there was a team approach to problem-solving, which empowered partners to speak up and bring issues and challenges to the attention of other partners for group discussion and actioning. Communication between partners was reportedly largely open, regular and free flowing.

*“...nobody was shy to bring things to the table, which I think is really good because we just lay it all out on the table, whether from them, from COTA, FSSI or [RMIT], you lay on the table and say it how it is. If things are not working, we need to fix it immediately because this could... impact [o]n the students...” - Project Staff Member*

- Having shared project purposes and embedding these agreed purposes into the project’s governance approach, seems to have stimulated consortium resilience. The consortium has demonstrated it can effectively adapt to external operational risks such as the 2019-20 bushfires and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As well, the partnership has been able to embrace operational changes and proactively respond to them quickly to minimise the project being hindered by any changes whilst also being conscious of maximising opportunities to improve the project’s operations.
- There was a high response rate for the Partnership Survey (T1: 9/10 and T2: 8/9) which in itself is an indicator that partner project engagement remained high over the project. Results from an Independent Samples T Test revealed no significant differences between any of the domains. Overall, the mean partnership scores for all domains were high with 95% of responders agreeing positively to each of the partnership domains. The lowest partnership domain score was reported for ‘There is a consistent commitment by all organisations in the partnership of time, personnel, representation at meetings, and fulfilment of responsibilities’ in Partnership Ownership (4.56). The highest partnership domain score was for ‘In this partnership, solutions are collectively developed to adapt to changing circumstances so the project goals can still be met’ in Responsiveness to Context (6.78) (See **Table 9: Key partnership survey findings** and [Appendix 3: Partnership survey results](#)).

How much do you agree with the following statements about the value of the partnership?		Timepoint	N	Mean (SD)
Value of partnership	1. What we are trying to accomplish in our partnership would be difficult for our organisation to achieve by itself.	1	8	6.25(±1.04)
		2	8	6.63 (±0.74)
	2. Other stakeholders (who are not a part of this partnership) and participants would agree that the organisations involved in this partnership are the “right” organisations to deliver the project.	1	10	5.70(±1.50)
		2	8	5.88(±1.25)
	3. The diversity of organisations involved in this partnership are able to contribute a holistic understanding of the problem and the best solution(s).	1	10	5.80(±1.23)
		2	8	6.38(±0.52)
	4. This partnership increases the credibility of my organisation.	1	8	6.13(±0.64)
		2	8	5.88(±1.36)
	5. The organisational values of each partner complement each other.	1	9	6.00(±0.87)
		2	8	6.00(±0.93)
	6. I understand why each organisation is involved in the partnership and support their involvement.	1	10	6.20(±1.14)
		2	8	6.25(±1.39)
2		8	6.00(±1.31)	
Partner Ownership	1. There is a consistent commitment by all organisations in the partnership of time, personnel, representation at meetings, and fulfilment of responsibilities.	1	9	4.56(±1.81)
		2	8	5.38(±1.30)

	3. There is a strong financial stake for my organisation to participate in this project.	1	7	5.29(±1.70)
		2	8	5.88(±1.55)
Healthy relationship	1. I feel comfortable communicating my ideas, concerns or differences of opinion.	1	9	6.44(±0.73)
		2	8	6.75(±0.71)
	2. I have a lot of respect for the other members involved in this partnership.	1	9	6.44(±0.73)
		2	8	6.50(±0.54)
	3. I am confident that any conflicts or grievances between partners can be dealt with in a respectful way.	1	9	6.22(±0.83)
		2	8	6.50(±0.54)
4. I believe the benefits (including funds) for this project are distributed fairly amongst partner organisations.	1	9	5.00(±1.58)	
	2	8	5.88(±0.99)	
Responsiveness to context	1. In this partnership, solutions are collectively developed to adapt to changing circumstances so the project goals can still be met.	1	9	6.78(±0.44)
		2	8	6.25(±0.71)

Table 9: Key partnership survey findings

- Survey results indicate a good partner consensus to the value and benefits each organisation brought to the project and partnership. Data shows scores were generally quite high and for some aspects of the partnership even improved over time. The indicators 'What we are trying to accomplish in our partnership would be difficult for our organisation to achieve by itself' and 'The diversity of organisations involved in this partnership are able to contribute a holistic understanding of the problem and the best solution(s)' reported the greatest increases in score. These domain increases suggest that as the project progressed partners became more aware of the project's complexity and the importance of the consortium model to the project's progress.
- The greatest variation in responses occurred in questions relating to partnership ownership. 'There is a strong financial stake for my organisation to participate in this project' achieved a mean score of 5.29 (±1.70) at Timepoint 1 and a mean of 5.88 (±1.55) at Timepoint 2 indicating a wide variation of views within the consortium. 'There is a consistent commitment by all organisations in the partnership of time, personnel, representation at meetings, and fulfilment of responsibilities' reported a mean score of 4.56 (±1.81). At Timepoint 2 the mean was 5.38 (±1.30). Whilst there appears to have been differing views regarding partnership ownership early in the project, survey results indicate domain improvement over time. This is likely to relate to the development of strong relationships and increased clarity around roles and responsibilities.

## Recruitment Processes

As previously mentioned, recruitment was successful in reaching the target demographic of people over 50 at risk of high unemployment, but this did not come without careful project partner coordination and planning. For instance, recruitment of people into the project for Cohort 1 involved delivery of face-to-face place-based information sessions to interested people, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, information sessions had to be adapted to an online delivery format for Cohort 2 recruitment.

- Overall, all attendees described the Information Session as either ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ with Cohort 2 targeted people, who received the online information, providing more positive feedback via the Information Session Feedback Forms. This suggests adaptations the project team made to the content and online delivery of information for recruitment of Cohort 2 improved Information Session content.

- Some difficult decisions had to be made during the screening of interested people, as the project team came to realise that their screening criteria was potentially restricting some people from the RTE model that could benefit from being involved. For instance, there were some people already holding a Certificate III in Individual Support who were interested in the project as they were struggling to find employment. The difficult decision was made to refer these people to other support services rather than accept them into the project. The information sessions were an effective pipeline to the engagement and recruitment of eligible people into the project. Project operators reported that having engaged so many of the target population, that they felt the project could have done more to provide pathways for other people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment, but who did not meet the required screening criteria.

*“I would have much rather provided them that in house and sat down with them for two hours to work out why they are not getting work and help them straight away. I think that would have been a really good outcome for our program that we could claim job outcomes if people we supported got a job whether or not we actually provided the training to them.” - Project Staff Member*

- Similarly people with low level English were also screened out as part of the screening process. Whilst there was partnership agreement in the need to exclude these people from the RTE project (due to their additional unbudgeted support requirements), retrospectively the steering committee felt any scale up of the model should build in processes and supports to include this group of people. The project staff agreed that for different people over 50 at risk of long-term unemployment, the RTE model entry gate should be as inclusive as possible. It was acknowledged though, that as the diversity of the cohort widened so too would operational challenges to cater for the differing participant expectations and support needs.

### **Pre-course Training**

Pre-course training was provided in the form of an Individual Financial Capability and Life Coaching Preparation Course delivered by GSANZ. The course was designed to promote the development of friendships and positive peer networks, identify personal strengths, build confidence, develop awareness of effective workplace communication skills, provide an introduction to the importance of budgeting and superannuation, and identify a range of personal supports participants could access to assist their learning and personal wellbeing.

- The course was generally well received by participants, with focus group data indicating it assisted establish participant peer relationships.

*“It was a really lovely bonding time to get to know each other.” - Participant*

- Whilst there was high satisfaction with the course data more than half of the participants (n=16, 59%) indicated they would have liked to gain more study related skills from the course. The course could have better prepared students for study as many participants had not undertaken any recognised training in a long time.

*“I think that the pre-course [training] didn't work so well. I think it was, you know, about setting personal goals, but it really didn't look at study skills and the return to study element and that would have been very helpful for people to actually do just some basic report writing. Setting yourself up basic computer skill if they needed that ahead of time. So I think that was one thing we learned... that should be integrated into it.” - Project staff member*

### **Course Delivery and Student Engagement**

The Certificate III Individual Support curriculum was designed to be delivered face-to-face and there were continued challenges modifying it to fit remote training delivery. For example, the curriculum was built according to adult learning principles, which utilises group discussions and activities as central components in the learning process. Some of these planned learning activities just couldn't be effectively adapted to remote delivery within the project's existing timeframes. Whilst teachers did their best to mitigate negative impacts on the participant learning experience, the current course is still better suited to face-to-face delivery

*“I would say if it was face-to-face it would have been so much better because there are a lot of things that cannot be done in an online environment, that's for sure. There were things that, you know, building relationships with, the [other] students, we couldn't do it because we just pretty much saw each other online...we couldn't... build the rapport.” - Participant*

*“I think face-to-face would be so much more engaging.” - Participant*

*“The impact that it [COVID-19] had on the teaching and the teaching style and the access, just the access to learning, and how long that all took to set up, that had a huge impact, and obviously not being able to go into the workplaces when they should have, that was a massive impact on the on the program.” - Project Staff Member*

- Interview data suggest the diversity of participant characteristics such as differing levels of previous educational attainment, when they last studied and digital literacy all presented engagement challenges. Some participants as a result were more easily able to engage with their training than others could. Catering for these different capabilities to ensure those that needed support got, whilst also ensuring that others were able to progress through their training at a level appropriate to their higher capabilities proved difficult. Cohort 2 participants generally had higher levels of previous educational attainment and data suggest for some participant in this cohort, the course could have been either faster paced or higher-level content included for those who were capable of exploring course topics in more depth.

*“I really went into it not knowing what to expect. I struggled a little bit through the course, because you can imagine, we’re all over fifty, we’ve all had different career paths, we’ve all had different life experiences, we’ve all got different computer skills, so you’d get into a class where I’ve set up my RMIT email, you know, three weeks ago and people still can’t set up that.. email.” - Participant*

*“The class became really, really boring for me. I understand that for some other students that was necessary for them because again everyone’s skills and everyone’s way of learning are different...” - Participant*

- Generally the online learning environment made it quite challenging for participants to engage as they would have liked, and this saw some of them get frustrated. This was exacerbated at times by the haste with which the course content had to be adapted to RMIT’s online learning management software (Canvas). As a result, the user experience was impacted, with participants reporting they had challenges; locating information in the learning management system; with errors in online quizzes; uploading assessments. Similarly there were reported challenges for participants with the remote delivery of classes as the teacher would often need to repeat information because another class member had logged in late; that class time could have been used more efficiently and that online classes provided an uninspiring environment for learning.

*“If you’d done 8 weeks of aged care... and you wanted to go and find the abuse information, you have to go through each [shell in Canvas], unless you can remember every single shell, every single week and what is in it, you have to go through it all step by step by step to find that info. That’s not good enough... You have to have a search engine.” - Participant*

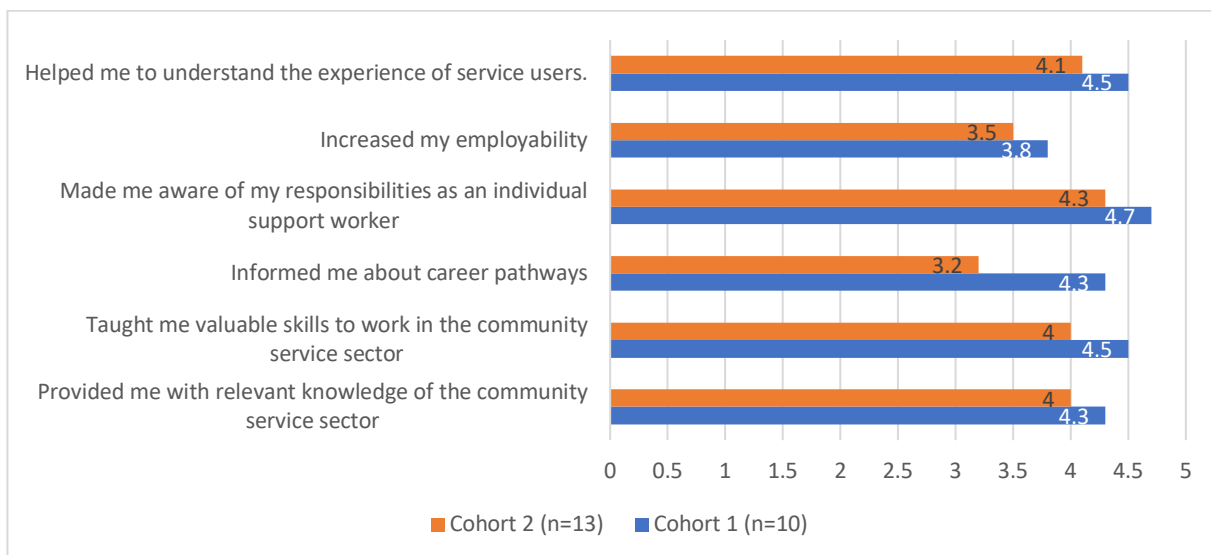
*“...pretty much for the six months she would read off the ... screen and it wasn’t engaging at all. I’m thinking, I could have read this in ten minutes and I’ve been sitting here for six hours and we’ve had eight breaks so... I really, really struggled to sit through.” - Participant*

- Many of these remote delivery and participant training engagement challenges likely could have been overcome if there had been more time to adapt and modify the course to be delivered online. Unfortunately, project timelines and semester schedules meant teachers had to adapt to their new teaching environment, learn to navigate online systems which were quite new for them, and at the same time continue to deliver course modules to a group of students with high needs for educational, personal and technology support. Teachers were trying to balance a need to adhere to course delivery time schedules whilst simultaneously having to adapt the content and the way it was delivered via online learning, and spending significant time troubleshooting student technological challenges.

*“I think there was some real deficits in the teaching, in the teaching style and the teaching resources. I don’t think RMIT was at all equipped to do this as an online [course]. I don’t think that they brought in anywhere near enough guest speakers and scenarios and real examples. It was very dry for a long time.” - Participant*

*“Some students even had no iPads, no computers, absolutely no technology, aside from like, a very old Apple phone or something like that. And that was how they began the course. Yeah. So we were backpedalling, from the very beginning. We were using phone conversations. We had no other choice.” - Project Staff Member*

- Whilst the remote learning challenges were significant for participants, this skill need somewhat forced them to quickly develop necessary digital literacy skills to be able to continue in the project. Had COVID-19 impacts not shifted the course delivery online, it is unlikely the participants would have developed their technology skills as much as they did.
- Cohort 1 (n = 10) reported a more positive experience of the course delivery across all categories. The greatest discrepancy between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 responses was for “inspired me to pursue further study” (means of 3.9 & 2.7 respectively) (See **Figure 24: The way the Certificate III course was delivered** and **Figure 25: The way the Certificate III course was delivered**).



*Figure 24: The way the Certificate III course was delivered... (Mean score: where 0 = not sure, 1 = not at all, 2 = not much, 3 = a bit, 4 = a lot, 5 = a huge amount)*



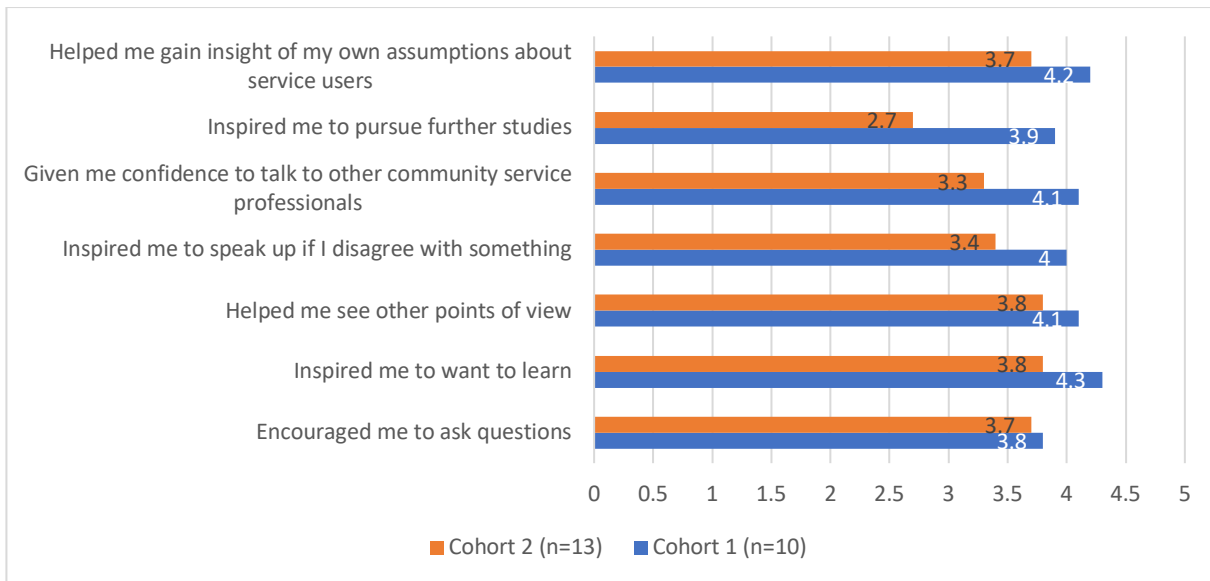


Figure 25: The way the Certificate III course was delivered...(Mean score (where 0 = not sure, 1 = not at all, 2 = not much, 3 = a bit, 4 = a lot, 5 = a huge amount))

## Transitioning from Training to Work

The Certificate III Individual support conventionally includes 150 hours of work placement. The COVID-19 travel and workplace restrictions caused significant disruption to student placements and in response RMIT reduced the placement hours to 120 hours. RMIT had to work quite hard negotiating with employers and students so that all students achieved their necessary placement hours.

*“Placement, because of COVID, it was on, it was off, it was on, it was off, and then at one stage it was on and I was working. And I said, ‘I’m working,’ and they said, ‘well, you’ll have to take time off work’. And I said, ‘no, I can’t take time off work, you know, it’s really difficult’. And as it turns out it was cancelled because of COVID. So then the next time I said, ‘I’m definitely not taking time off work. I’ll work around it.’” - Participant*

- Generally student and project staff report that the disability placements were a more positive placement experience for trainees compared to the aged care placement experience. Unfortunately, data suggests the aged care placement experience may actually deter students from seeking employment in this sector. Work needs to be done with employers to explore how the student placement experience can be improved so that the sector can attract future graduates (as discussed in [Employment pathways](#)).

*“I don’t see myself in an aged care, I just can’t. I don’t know why, I just, but with disability I probably could, I’d rather just do home care if I have to.” - Participant*

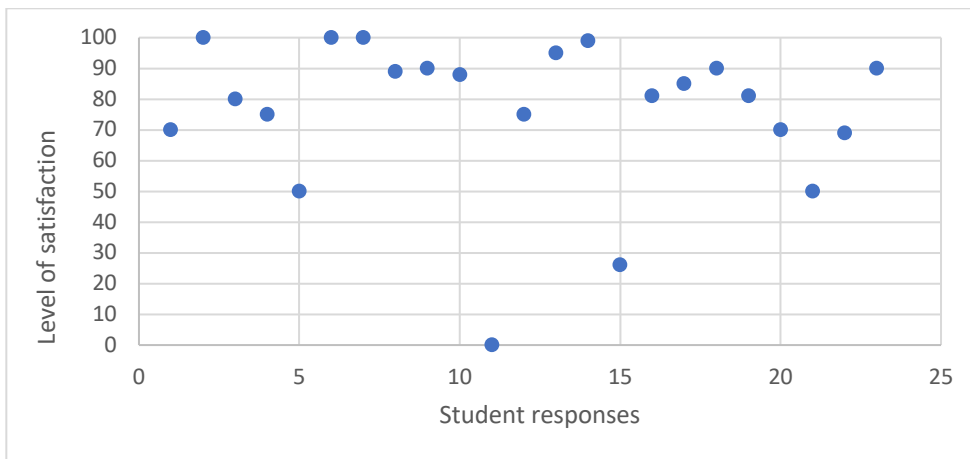
*“Aged care was the worst sixty hours of my life. They didn’t want us there. It was so obvious. We had to be there for 6:45 handover. We were all standing there at quarter to seven, we left at quarter to six to get there, you know, and they’d have their handover and they’d all come out of their room and no eye contact with us, and they’d just scatter, this is the staff, we’d all be standing*

*there, then we'd get allocated to a person and they just did not want us there at all." - Participant*

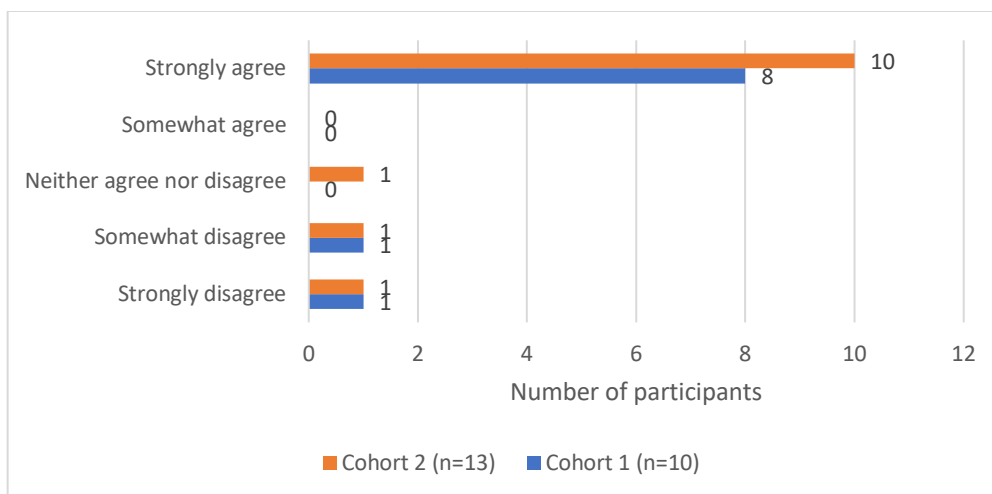
*"I've had one person say they want to go and work in... an aged care facility. And then we went to disability care into facilities. They were just in awe of how fantastic they were, you know, people came back saying, 'that is my dream job. I just loved it, just loved it.' That is, I think if there wasn't the disability placement, we would have lost people, you know, the disability placement has just been so rewarding and the staff have been so terrific."*

*- Project Staff Member*

- Placement satisfaction data was generally high (See **Figure 26: Overall, how satisfied were you with your work placements?**) and students overwhelmingly agreed that their placement experience provided them confidence to work in the sector (See **Figure 28: Overall, the work placement/s provided me with additional confidence to work in the aged care or disability sector**).



*Figure 26: Overall, how satisfied were you with your work placements? (where 0 = least satisfied and 100 = most satisfied).*



*Figure 27: Overall, the work placement/s provided me with additional confidence to work in the aged care or disability sector.*

- On the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 there was national introduction of a mandatory NDIS Workers Screening Check, and this posed significant challenges to the scheduling and delivery of work placements, as well as an additional and unforeseen project expense (\$119.40 per participant). Project staff and participants reported a range of challenges with the application process which delayed the processing of participant applications. These delays subsequently presented challenges in the scheduling of work placement on top of COVID-19 scheduling challenges. Teaching staff assistance provide some assistance with participant submission of applications, but the processing time was still very long, with some students still waiting for their Screening Checks to be approved in July 2021.

## Key Takeaways

- The project implementation phase had a number of challenges for the consortium that predominantly surrounded clarity of partner roles and responsibilities. Until these were clarified and contractually finalised, the project was unable to commence its operational activity. Data suggests that had these contracts been finalised sooner, many of the implementation challenges and operational delays could have perhaps been avoided.
- To catch-up on lost operational activity from implementational delays, COTA Victoria introduced fortnightly team meetings and these seemed to have been effective in ensuring operational responsibilities got back on track.
- Once up and operating, the partnership was able to effectively adapt to external challenges (such as COVID-19) that could have easily threatened project success. Data suggest the trust and open communication between partners were central in them working together to problem solve issues and progress the project activity towards shared goals.
- Recruitment processes were successful but there is scope to widen the criteria for the target population so more people who may benefit from the project can access it, such as people with low English or people with an existing Certificate III unable to find employment. For the latter group, some of the placement opportunities and support in building job seeking skills and confidence may be of some benefit.
- The pre-training course, whilst useful, could be improved to include more development of study skills and digital literacy skills prior to participants commencing their training.
- Course delivery of the Certificate III was impacted significantly by COVID-19 and was not suited to remote online delivery. Unfortunately, time constraints in the project meant retrofit of the course to online delivery was sub-optimal. This saw some challenges for students in engaging with the online training despite efforts by teachers to modify the course at the same time as they were delivering it.
- COVID-19 and NDIS Worker Screening Check regulatory requirements both delayed and disrupted student work placements, stretching out their training when they may have been able to transition sooner into paid employment.

## Opportunities for Further RTE Model Improvement

- Identifying RTE model supports that enable participation of people with low-level English could be explored as a strategy to widen the entry gate and increase enrolments.
- If future models are to be delivered remotely, additional professional development for teachers around online pedagogy may support increased participant engagement.
- Increased industry partner education about how to best support students on work placement would be beneficial.

## Conclusion

Whilst the pilot has had to operate in an abnormal COVID-19 environment, there have proven to be benefits to this. Learning has had to be adapted to online delivery and participants have had to upskill (quickly) in the use of digital hardware and software technologies. The pilot nature of the project and its extensive provision of supports have enabled it to adapt quite well from a conventional model of training delivery to remote delivery. It has had to do this adaptation largely in-flight whilst balancing delivery of the activity towards the project's short, medium and long-term outcomes.

The complexity of the project proved to be challenging during early implementation and triggered some shifts between the roles and responsibilities of the different project partners. However, data indicates that as the project has progressed, the consortium has been able to strengthen their relationships and problem-solve challenges as they arise. The RTE pilot proved to be largely successful in collaborating the design and testing of a complex solution to a complex problem. The recipients of the pilot's success have been people over 50 with a previous history of a risk of long-term unemployment. Evaluation indicates participants are predominantly emerging from the project on a pathway to a career in the Social Services sector. At the time this final report was prepared, the majority of participants were in employment or pursuing further education to support their employment entry into the sector at a higher level.

The success of the pilot RTE model has been the wrap-around support it provides people over 50 to enter and complete training as well as preparing them for employment. The RTE model is producing employment ready graduates, who have some increases to their confidence and general wellbeing. Further exploration of the cost-utility of the model is needed as evaluation identifies the model is very high touch with its supports. There may be potential to streamline some of the accessible supports whilst still getting good employment outcomes for participants. Evaluation recommends though any model reduction of support services should ensure that marginalised people in the over 50 age group are still able to participate (for example people with low level English).

*"I'd love to see this program continue. I really, really would, whether I'm there or not, I think it's a great area. And also, this area of [demographic] who have a big investment in changing .. the current system, to not just get them up, get them out.. They're really invested in looking at things like activities and improving life quality. Whereas a younger person, just, can often just say .. You know, I've got to do this, this, this and this for the day. They don't think about the person that they're trying to deal, trying to assist. So that's...why I think it's one of the best program[s] I've.. seen in a while. I think it's really pertinent to what's happening today and what's going to happen in the future, too." - Project Staff Member*

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Program Logic

Beyond project		1.Goal		Tested model that supports job security in the social services industry for people 50+ at risk of long-term unemployment established.	
2.Long term outcome		For Participants: increased financial and employment security for graduates		For gov: Reduction in government expenditure and gain in tax income	
3.Immediate outcomes		Increased labour market participation or further engagement in education (measurement: 90% of graduates obtain employment within 6 months)		Scalable model developed (measurement: cost benefit analysis, best practice support guide developed)	
4.Activity		Career pathways support (e.g. gaining employment, post-employment, education)		Engagement in alumni	
5. output		High completion of course – increased employability (measurement – 75%, 38-45, complete training 6 employers approached for placements, 4-6 hosts identified)		Students have received tailored support that keeps them engaged. (measurement – high implementation of tailored plans)	
6. Activity		Students undertake Certificate III with tailored delivery		Wrap around support provided to students	
7. Output		Target group enrolled (measurement: at least 50 people who meet criteria are enrolled)		Participants complete the stronger foundation course or financial counselling. (measurement: all participants complete financial counselling)	
8. Activity		Local information sessions (re course, financial implications etc)		Screening for cert III undertaken	
9. Outputs		Local target group is reached (measurements: comms material developed and distributed)		Individual training and developed plans for each participant	
10. Activity		Develop and implement interagency comms/ engagement strategy		Local advisory group established (measurement: at least 6 local employers in Advisory Committee)	
recruitment		Develop and implement interagency comms/ engagement strategy		Community entry to develop local partnerships	

Reach Phase 1	Train Phase 2	Employ Phase 3	Beyond project
<p>8. Activity</p> <p>Local information sessions (re course, financial implications etc)</p> <p>Screening for cert III undertaken</p> <p>Individual training and developed plans for each participant</p> <p>Stronger foundations / financial capability course</p> <p>Other pre-course training, e.g. IT familiarisation</p> <p>Referral / engagement in other supports / training / employment opportunities</p> <p>Cert III is co-designed with necessary supports and delivery mode.</p>	<p>7. Output</p> <p>Target group enrolled (measurement: at least 50 people who meet criteria are enrolled)</p> <p>Participants complete the stronger foundation course or financial counselling. (measurement: all participants complete financial counselling)</p> <p>Students have tailored plans and access support (measurement: all enrolled participants have plans)</p> <p>Non-suitable participants are actively referred in other training, study, employment, or services to address barriers to employment (measurement: active referrals undertaken)</p> <p>Delivery mode of course is determined based on student needs. Measurement: delivery mode reflects students needs.</p>	<p>4. Activity</p> <p>Career pathways support (e.g. gaining employment, post-employment, education)</p> <p>Engagement in alumni</p>	<p>1.Goal</p> <p>Tested model that supports job security in the social services industry for people 50+ at risk of long-term unemployment established.</p>

Assumptions
<p>Mature unemployed people are motivated to explore training and employment opportunities.</p> <p>A combination of enhanced training and wrap around supports will increase training completion and greater employability.</p> <p>A place-based approach will increase changes of success through developing and sustaining local networks with support agencies and employers.</p> <p>The right system incentives are in place to encourage participation.</p> <p>The target cohort faces many barriers that if identified, may be overcome with support if required.</p> <p>There is high demand for employment in the chosen industries.</p>

## Appendix 2: Evaluation participation rates

Participant Group	Data Source	# of Participant Responses	Total # in Participant Group (incl. non-consenting)	Participation rate (%) of the total population
Cohort 1	Information Session Feedback Session	27	35	77%
Cohort 1 & 2	Session feedback from life coaching			
	- Session 1	34	38	89%
	- Session 2	32	35	91%
	- Session 3	22	37	60%
	- Session 4	27	35	77%
Cohort 1	Student Questionnaire T1	15	19	75%
Cohort 2	Student Questionnaire T1 (Part A)	14	19	74%
Cohort 2	Student Questionnaire T1 (Part B)	17	18	95%
Cohort 1	Student Questionnaire T2	16	18	89%
Cohort 2	Student Questionnaire T2	12	17	71%
Cohort 1	Student Questionnaire T3 (Part A)	10	16	62.5%
Cohort 1	Student Questionnaire T3 (Part B)	10	16	62.5%
Cohort 2	Student Questionnaire T3 (Part A)	13	15	86.7%
Cohort 2	Student Questionnaire T3 (Part B)	9	15	60%
Cohort 1 & 2	Focus Groups	17	29	59%
Steering Committee	Partnership Survey T1	9	10	90%
Steering Committee	Partnership Survey T2	8	9	89%
Project Staff	Interviews	6	6 approached	100%

<b>Local Partner Organisations</b>	Interviews	4	10 approached with target of 4	40%
<b>Teachers</b>	Interviews	2	2 approached	100%
<b>Cohort 1</b>	End of course interview	2	16	12.5%
<b>Cohort 2</b>	End of course interview	2	15	13.3%



## Appendix 3: Partnership survey results

How much do you agree with the following statements about the value of the partnership?		Timepoint	N	Mean
Value of partnership	1. What we are trying to accomplish in our partnership would be difficult for our organisation to achieve by itself.	1	8	6.25(±1.04)
		2	8	6.63(±0.74)
	2. Other stakeholders (who are not a part of this partnership) and participants would agree that the organisations involved in this partnership are the “right” organisations to deliver the project.	1	10	5.70(±1.49)
		2	8	5.88(±1.25)
	3. The diversity of organisations involved in this partnership are able to contribute a holistic understanding of the problem and the best solution(s).	1	10	5.80(±1.23)
		2	8	6.38(±0.52)
	4. This partnership increases the credibility of my organisation.	1	8	6.13(±0.64)
		2	8	5.88(±1.36)
	5. The organisational values of each partner complement each other.	1	9	6.00(±0.87)
		2	8	6.00(±0.93)
	6. I understand why each organisation is involved in the partnership and support their involvement.	1	10	6.20(±1.14)
		2	8	6.25(±1.39)
Clarity of purpose	1. There is a common understanding amongst partner organisations of what the project is trying to achieve.	1	9	6.44(±0.88)
		2	8	6.38(±0.52)
	2. There is a common understanding amongst partner organisations of a plan to deliver the project.	1	9	6.00(±0.71)
		2	8	6.25(±0.71)
	3. There is a common understanding amongst partners of clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each organisation for every stage of the project.	1	9	5.33(±1.23)
		2	8	6.00(±0.54)
	4. I have a strong appreciation of how the success of one partner organisation’s activities are dependent on the success of another’s.	1	9	6.56(±0.53)
		2	8	6.38(±1.06)
	5. I have a clear understanding of the various organisational interests of different partners in this partnership.	1	9	5.44(±1.33)
		2	8	6.25(±0.71)
	6. There is a shared understanding of terminology and language used amongst partners.	1	9	5.56(±1.13)
		2	8	6.00(±1.31)
Partnership	1. I am informed both formally and informally as often as I should be about what is going on in the partnership and project.	1	9	6.11(±0.60)
		2	8	6.63(±0.52)
	2. I find partnership meetings productive and effective.	1	9	6.22(±0.67)
		2	8	6.00(±0.76)

	3. There are things in place that keep the experience of the project participants (i.e., students) central to decision making.	1	9	6.00(±0.71)
		2	8	6.38(±0.52)
	4. The various governance and operational arrangements (e.g., committees, working groups) have a clear purpose and fit together well	1	9	5.89(±0.78)
		2	8	6.25(±0.46)
	5. There are processes, practices and structures in place that hold each partner accountable for their respective project responsibilities.	1	9	5.56(±1.13)
		2	8	5.63(±0.92)
Partner Ownership	1. There is a consistent commitment by all organisations in the partnership of time, personnel, representation at meetings, and fulfilment of responsibilities.	1	9	4.56(±1.81)
		2	8	5.38(±1.30)
	2. Within my organisation there is a clear commitment to the partnership and project from a senior executive level.	1	7	6.14(±1.21)
		2	8	6.75(±0.46)
	3. There is a strong financial stake for my organisation to participate in this project.	1	7	5.29(±1.70)
		2	8	5.88(±1.55)
	4. Participation in this project is integral to my organisation achieving its strategic objectives and is not considered in any way an extra curricula activity.	1	7	5.86(±1.07)
		2	8	5.63(±1.51)
	5. My organisation currently has adequate capacity to invest in both the partnership and project.	1	7	5.86(±1.22)
		2	8	6.63(±0.52)
	6. Partners equally contribute resources to the success of the project. (resources can include: funds, skills, knowledge, ideas, expertise, networks, physical assets)	1	9	4.89(±1.69)
		2	8	4.88(±1.46)
Healthy relationship	1. I feel comfortable communicating my ideas, concerns or differences of opinion.	1	9	6.44(±0.73)
		2	8	6.75(±0.71)
	2. I have a lot of respect for the other members involved in this partnership.	1	9	6.44(±0.73)
		2	8	6.50(±0.54)
	3. I am confident that any conflicts or grievances between partners can be dealt with in a respectful way.	1	9	6.22(±0.83)
		2	8	6.50(±0.54)
	4. I believe the benefits (including funds) for this project are distributed fairly amongst partner organisations.	1	9	5.00(±1.58)
		2	8	5.88(±0.99)
Responsiveness	1. In this partnership, solutions are collectively developed to adapt to changing circumstances so the project goals can still be met.	1	9	6.78(±0.44)
		2	8	6.25(±0.71)
	2. There is a strong understanding of the various organisational contexts (e.g., time frames, procedures, limitations) and how each	1	9	6.22(±0.83)
		2	8	6.13(±0.84)

	organisation is impacted by changing circumstances.			
	3. Partner organisations articulate risks early, both in terms of fulfilling their own responsibilities and the project as a whole.	1	9	5.56(±1.59)

## Appendix 4: Score assessment matrix for *Reach, Train and Employ* pilot project

Domain Category	Criteria	Informants, sources and tools	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
Education and skills training  (CIRCUMSTANCES)	Training engagement and skills progress	Teacher assessment based on the level of engagement of the participant in the course and its impact on independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant experiences a significant negative impact of lack of engagement with education and training on independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant experiences a moderate negative impact of lack of engagement with education and training on independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant experiences progress towards improving engagement with education and training to support independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant experiences adequate short-term engagement with education and training to support independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant experiences adequate ongoing engagement with education and training to support independence, participation and wellbeing.

Employment  (CIRCUMSTANCES)	How much a person's level of employment impacts on their ability to be independent, ability to participate and their general wellbeing	GSANZ Life Coach assessment based on some specific and guided discussions with the participant as part of the Individual Support Plan	The participant states that their current employment situation is a severe negative factor impacting on their ability to be independent, participate in the community and their wellbeing.	The participant states that their current employment situation is a moderate negative factor impacting on their ability to be independent, participate in the community and their wellbeing.	The participant states that the amount and type of paid employment they have is improving including its likelihood to support their independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant states that the amount and type of paid employment they have is adequate in the short-term to support their independence, participation and wellbeing.	The participant states that the amount and type of paid employment they have is ongoing and supports their independence, participation and wellbeing.
Changed Knowledge and access to information  (GOALS)	Ability to access information and increase knowledge of the work of an Individual Support staff	Teacher assessment based on progress of the participant in the Cert III course.	The participant shows no progress in increasing theoretical knowledge in areas relevant to	The participant shows limited progress to date in increasing theoretical knowledge goals - but shows emerging	The participant shows limited progress to date in increasing theoretical knowledge - but strong engagement for working as an Individual	The participant shows moderate progress to date in increasing theoretical knowledge goals for	The participant shows full achievement of goals related to increasing theoretical knowledge in areas relevant

	member		client's needs and circumstances for working as an Individual Support staff member.	g engagement for working as an Individual Support staff member.	Support staff member.	working as an Individual Support staff member.	to working as an Individual Support staff member.
Change d Skills (GOALS)	Ability to progress practical skills as an Individual Support staff member	Teacher assessment based on progress of the participant in student placements.	The participant shows no progress in increasing practical skills in areas relevant to client's needs and circumstances for working as an Individual Support staff member.	The participant shows limited progress to date in achieving practical skills goals – but shows emerging engagement for working as an Individual Support staff member.	The participant shows limited progress to date in achieving practical skills goals – but strong engagement for working as an Individual Support staff member.	The participant shows moderate progress to date in achieving practical skills goals for working as an Individual Support staff member.	The participant shows full achievement of goals related to increasing practical skills in areas relevant to client's needs and circumstances for working as an Individual Support staff member.

Engagement with support services (GOALS)	Engagement with support services referred through or provided by RMIT and Good Shepherd.	GSANZ Life Coach assessment based on Individual Support and Employment Plans development and progress.	The participant has a high level of support need, but shows no progress in increasing engagement with support services relevant to client's needs and circumstances.	The participant has a high/moderate level of support need, and shows limited progress to date in achieving engagement goals – but has emerging engagement.	The participant has high/moderate/low support needs, and shows limited progress to date in achieving engagement goals – but has strong engagement.	The participant has moderate/low support needs, and shows moderate progress to date in achieving engagement goals.	The participant has moderate/low support needs and shows full achievement of goals related to increasing engagement with support services relevant to client's needs and circumstances.
Changed Behaviours (GOALS)	Job Application abilities and/or engagement in future study	GSANZ Life Coach assessment based on guided discussions during Individual Support Planning /Mock Interviews/career	The participant is not engaged in job and/or further study applications and does not know how or what kind of work/st	The participant has emerging engagement in job applications and/or further study, but has not yet applied for work or	The participant is engaged in job and/or further study applications, but requires a lot of hands-on support to achieve either.	The participant has strong engagement in job applications and/or further study and has moderate success in achieving	The participant is able to independently apply for a job and successfully pass the interview stage to secure work and/or is successfully

		counselling	study to be engaged in.	future study.		either independently.	engaged in further study.
I am satisfied with the services I have received  (SATISFACTION)	Service satisfaction	Feedback received through evaluation survey from participant at end of course	I am not satisfied with the services I have received.	Tends to disagree that I was satisfied with the services I have received.	Neither agrees nor disagrees that the services listened to me and understood my issues.	Tends to agree that I was satisfied with the services I have received.	I am satisfied with the services I have received. <sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Example of Plain English survey questions:

I am satisfied with the services I have received	I am not satisfied.	I am a little satisfied.	The service was ok.	I am mostly satisfied.	I am very satisfied.
SCORE	Score: 1	Score: 2	Score: 3	Score: 4	Score: 5



## Appendix 5: Score assessment data

### Changed behaviours (GOALS)

C1DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
1	1	3	2	5
2	1	3	2	5
3	1	3	4	5
4	1	3	4	5
5	1	3	2	5
6	1	3	2	5
8	1	3	4	5
9	1	3	4	5
10	1	2	5	4
11	1	3	4	5
12	1	1	2	5
14	1	3	4	5
15	1	2	4	5
16	1	1	1	4
17	1	2	4	5
19	1	2	2	5

### C2

DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
21	2	2	5	5
22	2	3	3	4
23	1	2	5	4
25	2	2	5	4
26	2	2	4	5
30	2	2	5	5
31	2	2	5	4
32	1	2	5	4
35	2	5	4	5
36	2	3	5	5
38	2	4	5	5
39	2	4	5	5
40	1	4	5	5
41	1		5	5
43	1	3	5	5

**Engagement with support services  
(GOALS)**

C1DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
1	1	2	4	5
2	1	2	3	5
3	1	2	4	5
4	1	3	4	5
5	2	3	4	4
6	1	2	3	5
8	1	2	4	5
9	1	2	4	5
10	1	2	3	3
11	1	2	4	3
12	1	2	2	5
14	1	2	3	5
15	1	2	4	5
16	1	1	1	5
17	1	2	4	5
19	1	2	3	5

**C2**

DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
21	1	5	4	4
22	1	2	1	3
23	1	3	5	4
25	1	3	5	4
26	1	4	3	4
30	1	4	5	5
31	1	4	5	5
32	1	3	5	4
35	1	5	2	5
36	1	3	5	4
38	1	3	5	5
39	1	3	5	5
40	1	3	5	4
41	1	3	5	5
43	1	3	5	4

**Employment  
(CIRCUMSTANCE)**

C1DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
1	2	3	2	5
2	1	3	2	5
3	2	3	2	5
4	2	3	2	5
5	2	3	2	4
6	1	3	2	5
8	1	3	2	5
9	1	3	3	5
10	1	2	2	4
11	1	3	2	5
12	1	2	2	5
14	1	3	2	5
15	1	3	3	5
16	1	1	2	4
17	1	2	2	5
19	1	2	2	4

C2

DEX	First	Second	Third	Fourth
21	1	2	3	3
22	1	1	5	3
23	1	2	4	3
25	1	2	4	3
26	1	2	4	5
30	1	1	5	5
31	1	2	5	3
32	1	2	4	3
35	1	4	5	5
36	1	2	4	3
38	1	1	5	3
39	1	1	5	4
40	1	1	5	5
41	1	4	5	4
43	1	2	5	3

**Changed skills (GOALS)**

C1 DEX	First	Fourth
1	2	5
2	2	5
3	2	5
4	2	5
5	2	4
6	2	5
8	2	5
9	2	5
10	2	5
11	2	5
12	2	4
14	2	5
15	2	5
16	2	4
17	2	5
19	2	5

C2

DEX	First	Fourth
21	4	5
22	2	5
23	2	5
25	4	5
26	3	5
30	2	5
31	2	5
32	2	5
35	3	5
36	3	5
38	3	5
39	1	5
40	3	5
41	3	5
43	3	5

**Education and skills training  
(CIRCUMSTANCE)**

C1 DEX	First	Fourth
1	3	5
2	4	5
3	4	5
4	4	5
5	2	4
6	2	5
8	4	5
9	2	4
10	3	5
11	3	5
12	2	4
14	4	5
15	1	5
16	2	4
17	3	5
19	1	4

C2 DEX	first	fourth
21	5	5
22	3	5
23	2	5
25	5	5
26	5	5
30	3	5
31	3	5
32	2	5
35	5	5
36	5	5
38	5	5
39	1	5
40	5	5
41	5	5
43	2	5

**Changed knowledge and access to information  
(GOALS)**

C1 DEX	First	Fourth
1	2	5
2	2	5
3	2	5
4	2	5
5	1	4
6	2	5
8	3	5
9	1	4
10	2	5
11	2	5
12	2	4
14	2	5
15	1	5
16	1	4
17	2	5
19	2	4

C2 DEX	First	Fourth
21	4	5
22	2	5
23	1	5
25	4	5
26	3	5
30	2	5
31	1	5
32	2	4
35	3	5
36	3	5
38	3	5
39	1	5
40	4	5
41	4	5
43	3	5