Investing in local people and harnessing local communities

A progress report on Victoria's Work and Learning Centres

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Brotherhood
of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

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About Work and Learning Centres

Work and Learning Centres support and enable the economic participation of Victorians facing disadvantage, particularly public housing tenants and other clients of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS).

With a focus on creating learning and employment pathways for jobseekers, the WLCs provide personalised support, non-vocational training, career guidance and direct links to vocational education and training opportunities and employers in five local communities. The WLCs have been funded by the Victorian Government to operate for a three-year period until June 2015.

About this report

This report presents early findings about the impact of the Work and Learning Centre (WLC) model implemented at five sites across Victoria (Carlton, Geelong, Moe, Ballarat and Shepparton)[1].

This research sought to gauge the efficacy of the model and to enable better understanding of what works for which clients and the elements that clients themselves identify as contributing to their outcomes.

The report draws on two key data sources: research with clients conducted during 2013 and 2014, and analysis of program data.

Key messages from the research

Achieving successful outcomes

The WLCs have achieved considerable success given that most are at an early **stage of implementation**:

- **Training outcomes:** Most WLC clients have engaged in non-vocational (86%) and/or vocational (44%) training

- **Employment outcomes:** Most clients are achieving successful employment outcomes (536 had secured employment by January 2014)

- **Exit income:** Most clients exit the centres with higher incomes and lower reliance on income support

- **Life skills:** Most exit the centres with increased confidence, clear career plans and a better understanding of their skills and abilities.

A different approach

Harness local networks: WLCs utilise a different approach from other job services. They seek to build the human capital of individual jobseekers by leveraging their own community networks to access and secure jobs and training for jobseekers.

Focus on career planning, training and work: Based in areas of significant disadvantage and delivered by local not-for-profit organisations, WLCs capitalise on their local community, service and business networks to provide timely and intensive personalised support, tailored non-accredited training, career pathway planning, links to appropriate vocational training and access to local employers and employment opportunities.

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[1] There was a staged rollout of centres, with Carlton and Geelong opening in January 2012, Moe in November 2012 and Ballarat and Shepparton in January 2013. The analysis focused on aggregated data from the five centres, due to their varying periods of operation.

> **Prioritise assistance to clients with multiple barriers:** Many WLC clients are long-term unemployed and face multiple barriers to employment. They identify lack of training, skills and relevant work experience as leading barriers to economic participation.
>
> **Providing a second chance:** Many of the WLC clients have previously been unsuccessful in finding employment, despite the best efforts of local job service providers. Job Services Australia providers struggle to gain sustainable outcomes for the most highly disadvantaged jobseekers. The high level of referrals from local providers to WLCs suggests that the WLC model offers a second chance for the more highly disadvantaged clients—a group that has been otherwise failed by the mainstream system. Given this, the outcomes achieved through the WLCs for these clients are especially positive:
>
> - 41% of clients are referred to a WLC by their JSA provider, having been unsuccessful in gaining employment. Most of these clients have been looking for work for more than 6 months.
>
> - 44% of these clients have been supported by their WLC to achieve a job placement, with 59% retaining employment for 16 weeks (a further 13% were employed but had not reached the 16 week milestone at the time of reporting).

Work and Learning Centre clients

Demographics

WLC clients are diverse in terms of age and birthplace.

- Just under half of all clients (44%) are younger than 26, with 39% aged between 26 and 45 years. There are similar numbers of men and women.

- Around two-thirds (63%) are Australian-born. Just over half of those born overseas are from countries in Africa, with Carlton WLC having the largest proportion of overseas-born clients.

- Work and Learning Centres work with very local communities. The majority of clients live within a few kilometres of their WLC. Carlton WLC has a more widespread client base than other centres; nevertheless just over half of its clients live in Carlton, Fitzroy and Collingwood.

Income support receipt

- Of the clients who supplied income support data, 51% were in receipt of Newstart Allowance; around one-quarter were in receipt of Youth Allowance; 13% were receiving Parenting Payments and 9% Disability Support Pensions.

Barriers to employment

- The main **client-identified barriers to employment** were lack of education, training and skills; lack of work experience; lack of transport; and health problems or disability.

- Most of the surveyed clients had been looking for work for more than six months and 42% were long-term unemployed—that is, looking for work for longer than one year. One in five (22%) were very long-term unemployed, having been looking for work for two years or more.

- The main reasons clients had left previous jobs were that their jobs were temporary or seasonal or no more work was available.

How clients engage with WLCs

This research found that disadvantaged jobseekers in these communities are being referred to WLCs by mainstream job service providers or are taking their own initiative to seek support to find a job. **WLCs are therefore providing a second chance for those who have been failed by the employment services system.**

- **Voluntary engagement:** A feature of the Work and Learning Centre approach is that clients engage with the service voluntarily.

- **Dual JSA and WLC clients:** Some 65% of clients are also clients of local Job Services Australia (JSA) providers, yet choose to attend the WLC.

- The most common source of referrals to WLCs is local JSA providers, with 41% of clients having heard about the WLC through employment service providers. The next most common source of referral is word of mouth (36%).

- A small number of clients engaged with WLCs because they were not eligible for mainstream employment assistance due to the type of Centrelink payment they received or other factors, despite wanting to work and facing significant barriers in securing employment.

Work and learning pathways

The WLCs focus on enabling clients to establish work and learning pathways. These **pathways are tailored to individual clients' aspirations and circumstances** and take into account the need to find a job in the short term, while working towards longer-term career goals and sustainable employment.

Non-vocational training and support outcomes

Since many clients have limited work experience (or no *Australian* work experience), the **centres have developed tailored, non-accredited learning opportunities** which focus on vocational preparation, general employability skills, industry-specific work preparation, personal development and confidence building. The accessibility of these courses has resulted in very high attendance, with **86% of clients taking part in some form of non-accredited training, and a high completion rate of 93%**.

A focus on employability, including increasing client confidence, reliability, ability to get on with others and problem solving, provides clients with skills that will assist them to remain employable in the future, even if their current employment does not continue.

Vocational education and training outcomes

The centres have been successful in assisting clients to gain further qualifications. As of January 2014, **44% of WLC clients had engaged with accredited training, and over half of these have completed their training**. The majority of these clients (54%) were engaging in education and training at Certificate III level or higher.

Outcomes from linking clients to employers and job opportunities

Despite the significant challenges facing WLC clients, by January 2014, **536 clients (49%) had secured employment. Over half (54%) of these (290) were still employed 16 weeks later**. This level of employment outcomes should be viewed as a considerable success when considering that the main referral pathway for these clients was from other employment services (JSA providers) and their experiences of long-term unemployment and other barriers.

Overall, analysis indicates that the WLCs have been successful in enabling their clients to obtain more sustainable jobs with more hours and better conditions than before. Since clients have been assisted to identify possible career paths and navigate the labour market as well as links to jobs and training, it is likely that the employment outcomes achieved will be sustained in the longer term.

Other outcomes

Compared with clients entering the WLCs, clients exiting them have:

- lower reliance on income support

- higher incomes

- increased confidence

- increased life satisfaction.

While these outcomes are very positive, it is too early to determine whether these changes, particularly changes to income, will lead to clients moving out of public housing. Survey results suggest that housing affordability remains an issue, even for employed WLC clients.

Conclusion

The Work and Learning Centre service delivery model seeks to build human capital within disadvantaged communities through leveraging local community networks and trust. This study provides initial insight into the effectiveness of this approach. These insights also have broader application.

Recent research has identified the increasing need for services that are responsive to local circumstances and, crucially, harness the capacities of communities to identify and solve their own problems. Strong civic communities require the building of social trust and reciprocity, which is achieved through collaborations between local communities, institutions and central government (Padley 2013). Based on trust between local community-based service providers and the communities in which they operate, the WLCs are able to link into and harness networks to create opportunities for clients. The WLC model also provides an example of intersectoral collaboration predicated on the notion that local community organisations are best placed to build relationships within particular communities. They do so more easily, and with greater flexibility and innovation, than large public sector bureaucracies (Sullivan et al. 2013).

As more clients exit the five WLCs, more comprehensive analysis of the outcomes achieved will become possible. Further study will be necessary to ascertain clients' longer-term employment retention and advancement and the impact of employment on their housing, particularly for public housing tenants. However, this preliminary snapshot indicates that this innovative approach is having a real impact on the lives of many Victorians.

1 Introduction

Unemployment can be one of the most damaging experiences an individual faces during the course of their life. The personal and social costs of unemployment include severe financial hardship and poverty, debt, homelessness and housing stress, family tensions and breakdown, boredom, alienation, shame and stigma, social isolation, declining health, the deterioration of work skills and the erosion of self-esteem and confidence (McClelland & Macdonald 1998).

Unemployment is higher and more persistent among some populations, including those living in public housing. Despite being linked to mainstream services or training, many jobseekers living in public housing and disadvantaged communities are struggling to find employment. The cost of this failure is significant. It is both an economic cost as well as a social cost for individuals, families and the broader community.

The Work and Learning Centre (WLC) model offers an alternative, place-based approach to assisting jobseekers facing disadvantage by investing in and harnessing local communities and networks.

This report provides some initial findings about the impact of and outcomes achieved by Work and Learning Centres and their clients in Victoria, focusing on employment, learning pathways, community links and housing.

Providing employment assistance – the mainstream approach and the WLC model

Mainstream employment services

The current model of mainstream employment services, Job Services Australia (JSA), works reasonably well for many unemployed people, especially those with recent work experience and the skills and capacities to take up work. However the JSA system currently struggles to assist the most highly disadvantaged clients into jobs (Department of Employment 2013). While many providers attempt to provide assistance to those jobseekers facing the greatest barriers to employment, the current system works against them. Limitations of the mainstream system include:

- inappropriate assessment and classification of jobseekers (see Refugee Council of Australia 2012; Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2011; Rose et al. 2011)

- difficulties effectively engaging with jobseekers (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2011; Rose et al. 2011)

- failure to place enough of the 'hardest to place' clients in employment (Department of Employment 2014; Davidson 2013)

- a transactional mindset and restraints to innovation (see Jobs Australia 2013; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011)

- limited engagement with employers (DEEWR 2013a).[2]

As a result, people who have been long-term unemployed and those who need additional support often find themselves pushed to the back of the queue, 'caught in the undertow', cycling between unemployment and short-term insecure work or giving up job searching altogether (Bretherton 2011).

Incorrect classification of jobseekers

There are also concerns that many highly disadvantaged clients are not correctly identified and classified within the mainstream system. When jobseekers apply for income support payments from Centrelink that require recipients to engage in job searching, such as Newstart Allowance and Youth

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[2] A survey of a random sample of Australian businesses showed that only two-thirds of employers are aware of government-funded employment service agencies and the fact that they provide a free service to help employers find staff. Of these employers, only 7 per cent of them had used JSA and 3 per cent had used DES (Disability Employment Services) in the previous 12 months (DEEWR 2013a).

Allowance, they are advised that they must attend a JSA provider. Jobseekers are usually assessed by the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) when they first register for assistance and reassessed when there is a change in their circumstances. The assessment can be conducted by the Department of Human Services, Job Services Australia providers, Disability Employment Services providers, or specialist assessors from the Department of Human Services[3].

Eighteen factors are taken into account in the JSCI (see table).

Table 1.1   Classification of jobseekers by the JSCI

JCSI factors	
Age and gender	Geographic location
Work experience	Proximity to a labour market
Job seeker history	Access to transport
Educational attainment	Contactability
Vocational qualifications	Disability/medical conditions
English proficiency	Stability of residence
Country of birth	Living circumstances
Indigenous status	Criminal convictions
Indigenous location	Personal factors

Depending on their classification, jobseekers are allocated to one of four streams in Job Services Australia. These are:

- Stream 1, for jobseekers who are work ready

- Stream 2, for jobseekers with relatively moderate barriers to employment

- Stream 3, for jobseekers with relatively significant barriers to employment

- Stream 4, for jobseekers with severe barriers to employment.[4]

This allocation determines the level of support jobseekers are eligible for. There are concerns that the JSCI gives insufficient weight to particular forms of labour market disadvantage, such as that faced by refugee and migrant jobseekers (Oliff 2010; Refugee Council of Australia 2012). Others have indicated concerns that the way assessments are administered may prevent disclosure of particular barriers at initial meetings due to stigma and fear of discrimination. These barriers include issues such as family violence and homelessness (ALRC 2012; Mavromaras et al. 2011). This means that jobseekers requiring more intensive support may be incorrectly classified as Stream 1 or 2 clients.

Training churn

Research also suggests that some jobseekers within the JSA system consider that they are 'churned' through accredited training courses which they did not choose. Many of these jobseekers also report that they did not understand the kind of employment their training would lead to and were not offered work experience or linked with 'real' employers (Bodsworth 2014; Bowman & Souery 2010). A report prepared in 2010 for NVEAC on access and equity in vocational education and training includes the observation that:

> Studies of disadvantage in VET are based on evidence of under-representation in the student population, over-representation in lower level programs, poorer completion and outcomes, inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, low levels of motivation and aspiration **and churn – repeating programs at the same level.** Many groups and sub-groups are identified as

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[3] <https://employment.gov.au/who-conducts-job-seeker-classification-instrument-assessments>.
[4] <https://employment.gov.au/job-services-australia-eligibility-and-how-register>. Potential Stream 4 clients must also undergo a Job Capacity Assessment.

experiencing some disadvantage and the evidence points to a complex mix of interacting causes (North, Ferrier & Long 2010, p. 5, emphasis added).

That study identifies a number of reasons for 'training churn', including:

- inadequate advice and inappropriate referrals from JSAs

- lack of advice from schools

- RTOs promoting inappropriate courses

- incentives tailored for commencements and not completions

- culture shock of the classroom environment, for some disadvantaged learners

- RTOs delaying completion in order to maximise subsidies received

- students delaying course completion in order to retain options for further concessions.

In addition, the nature of eligibility for training subsidies in Victoria means that students who have made poor initial course choices are prevented from further study at the same level.

Overall the BSL has observed that, despite receiving training and assistance, many jobseekers facing disadvantage are not moving into sustainable employment. Lack of publicly available program data on effectiveness and outcomes makes it difficult to accurately assess the number of people falling through the cracks and being churned through the system.

The Work and Learning Centres

The Work and Learning Centres' unique governance structure, based on a collaborative and localised approach, enables the development of client-centred support, tailored training and employer networks. The WLCs offer an innovative approach to supporting the economic participation of Victorians facing disadvantage, particularly the clients of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS). The WLCs are delivered by local organisations with accrued community trust and an ongoing commitment to the local community and. These agencies work collaboratively to break down barriers between government, not-for-profit and private sectors. They harness local networks to facilitate employment outcomes for clients.

Background and context

In 2009 the Brotherhood of St Laurence established a Centre for Work and Learning (CWLY) in the City of Yarra in response to an appraisal which showed 73% of surveyed public housing tenants wanted to obtain paid work. The CWLY was a demonstration project to test an innovative, place-based approach to providing voluntary work and learning opportunities for people living in an area with much public housing and pockets of high unemployment. The approach also recognised that mainstream employment services were not achieving good outcomes for this group.

The CWLY was funded by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) through the Innovation Fund over a three-year period from July 2009.

Key elements of the CWLY program model included lower caseloads for more personalised and flexible assistance; individual needs assessment; access to motivational support; outreach to public housing residents to foster engagement; advocacy on behalf of clients to Centrelink or JSAs; and access to paid work and traineeships through employers and social enterprises.

In 2011, based on the success of the CWLY approach (see BSL 2012), the Victorian Coalition government committed to fund five Work and Learning Centres (WLCs) across Victoria in areas with high concentrations of public housing at a total cost of $4.6m over four years. The five Work and Learning Centres are currently funded until June 2015.

The five Centres have opened as part of a staged process since January 2012:

- Carlton and Geelong opened in January 2012
- Moe opened in November 2012
- Ballarat and Shepparton opened in January 2013.

Purpose

The WLCs aim to provide pathways to learning and work for public housing residents, DHS clients and others living in areas with high levels of public housing and low employment through addressing their complex personal and structural barriers to workforce participation.

Key elements of the model

The WLCs were developed in recognition that many Victorian public housing tenants, DHS clients and those living in disadvantaged communities want to work but face significant personal and structural barriers to employment. Many struggle to access appropriate employment and training services. The mainstream employment services system is ill-equipped to provide the personalised support and links to employers required by these highly disadvantaged jobseekers.

The key elements of the WLC model are shown in the panel below:

WLC model elements
• **Place-based approach:** The WLCs are delivered by local agencies in local communities for local people. This enables them to address the specific needs of communities facing disadvantage and leverage local connections.
• **A core model, with flexibility:** Each WLC adopts the core service delivery model, but is afforded the flexibility necessary to act as an independent broker and adapt the model to local conditions and community needs.
• **Voluntary engagement:** Clients are engaged in an active search for work on a voluntary basis, although the service offer sets out clear expectations of jobseekers and WLCs.
• **Building human capital:** WLCs focus on building the vocational and non-vocational skills of clients.
• **Leveraging organisational social capital:** As local community organisations with existing community trust and relationships, the WLC delivery agencies build and leverage their local networks.
• **Building individual social capital:** The local networks of WLC delivery agencies provide opportunities for WLC clients to build their social capital through direct links to employers and other community organisations.
• **Prime provider approach:** The prime provider model of contracting enables coordination of the WLC initiative by an organisation with direct experience of and investment in the model. The prime provider is therefore able to provide relevant support, training and service development to local delivery agencies.

Place-based: the WLC locations

The WLCs are located in four regional, and one metropolitan, locations across Victoria.
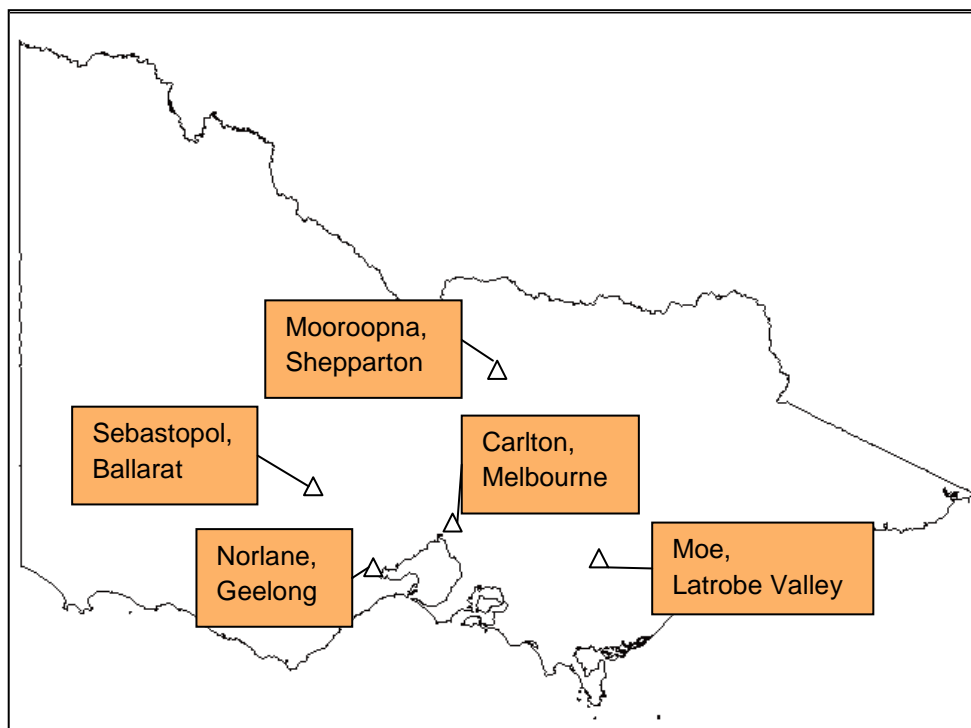
Selection of sites and delivery agencies

Each of the WLC locations has high rates of public and community housing, of unemployment, and of social and community disadvantage. Sites were chosen following an expression of interest process from a list of priority locations. Applications from local not-for-profit agencies were assessed based on the features of their community as well as their local networks. Tendering parties were required to demonstrate the capacity to harness local economic and employment opportunities through establishment of strong partnerships with local employers, training providers and other community and social service organisations.

High public housing

There is some variance in the levels of social housing[5] reported for the five WLC areas in the 2011 Census (ABS 2011), but all are higher than the average for greater Melbourne (2.9%) and for regional Victoria (4%):

- Norlane 22.1% (4.2% in the City of Geelong)

- Sebastopol 8.3% (5.1% in the City of Ballarat)

- Mooroopna 6.0% (5.4% in Greater Shepparton)

- Moe 9.9% (5.7% in Latrobe City)

- Carlton 11.1% (13.5% Inner Melbourne[6]).

Two of the centres are located within or adjacent to public housing sites: the Carlton WLC is located beside the Carlton Public Housing Estate and the Shepparton WLC is located within a complex of public housing run by Rural Housing.

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[5] Social housing includes both public housing and community housing.
[6] Carlton data based on the Linking Melbourne study area using 2011 Census data: Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Parkville, Travancore <http://profile.id.com.au/linking-melbourne/about?WebID=10>.

In addition to above-average proportions of public housing households, the WLCs are located within communities experiencing above-average levels of unemployment.

Table 1.2   Unemployment in WLC communities, December 2013

Location (with corresponding Small Area)	Unemployment rate (15–64 year olds)
Carlton (Yarra – North)	7.5%
Geelong (Corio)	9.5%
Moe (Latrobe – Moe)	7.8%
Ballarat (Ballarat South)	6.6%
Mooroopna	8.9%
Melbourne	6.6%
Victoria	6.2%

Source: Small Area Labour Market data, December 2013 <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/SALM/Vic>

High disadvantage

Similarly, the WLC locations have above-average levels of disadvantage. The SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage is a general index that summarises information about the economic and social resources of individuals and households in an area. Scores are standardised to a mean of 1000. An area might have a low score (below 1000) if there are many households with low incomes, many people with no qualifications, or many people in low-skill occupations. Areas are ranked in 10 deciles, with the lowest deciles indicating the highest levels of disadvantage.

Table 1.3   Disadvantage in WLC locations

Location	SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage Score	Decile (Victoria)
Carlton	939[7]	2
Corio–Norlane	836	1
Moe–Newborough	889	1
Ballarat South	938	2
Mooroopna	911	2

Source: ABS 2011

While they face some similar challenges, the Work and Learning Centres have to respond to the particular needs related to urban or rural areas, different demographic profiles and local labour markets[8]. This variety is outlined below.

Carlton

Carlton is an inner suburb of Melbourne with a diverse population of around 22,280 residents. Many of these are overseas-born (42.8%) and speak languages other than English at home (36.4%). Of those born overseas, 53% arrived in the five years prior to 2011. Carlton residents are, on average, highly educated: 45.8% hold a bachelors degree. However, one-third of residents have no post-secondary qualification[9]. Over one-third of residents are tertiary students, including many international students.

In terms of schooling, 76.9% of Carlton residents have completed year 12 or equivalent, whereas 7.6% have only completed Year 10 or below (or equivalent). Most workers in the area are managers or professionals (57.2%), yet significant pockets of disadvantage exist, with around one in ten households living in public or community housing (11.1%). Leading employment sectors are professional, scientific

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[7] Note, Carlton's below average SEIFA score may in part reflect its high student population.
[8] The information in the following section is drawn from 2011 Census data for: Carlton; City of Greater Geelong; Moe and Moe South; City of Ballarat; City of Greater Shepparton. Note that these are different-sized areas. http://profile.id.com.au/
[9] This may also reflect the high numbers of students in the process of completing degrees.

and technical services (16.7%); education and training (13.2%); and health care and social assistance (12.5%).

Geelong

Geelong is Victoria's largest regional centre, located 75 km from Melbourne, on Corio Bay. In 2011, the City of Greater Geelong had 210,874 residents, most of them born in Australia (80.3%). Nearly half of the population (46%) have no post-school qualifications and around one-third have not completed secondary education above Year 10 or equivalent (33.4%). Significant pockets of disadvantage exist, particularly in Norlane and Corio.

Main industries of employment for Geelong residents are health care and social assistance, retail trade and manufacturing. The former two have grown, whereas employment in manufacturing has declined in the last decade.

Moe

Moe is a city in the Gippsland region of Victoria, 130 km east of Melbourne. It is located in the Latrobe Valley, with neighbouring towns of Morwell and Newborough. This region experienced significant development in the 1970s and 1980s due to the construction of power stations using the extensive brown coal resources, but has subsequently experienced population decline since the restructuring of the utilities sector in the 1990s.

The population of Moe (and Moe South) in 2011 was 9319. One-fifth of the residents were born overseas (21.0%), 7% of them arriving since 2006. However, most people (89.0%) speak only English at home. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 2.1% of the population.

Less than half of the population have completed above Year 10 education and 53.6% have no post-school qualifications. The main employment sectors are health care and social assistance (14.2%), retail trade (13.4%) and construction (10.6%).

Ballarat

Ballarat is Victoria's largest inland regional centre, located in the Central Highlands, about 110 km west of Melbourne. The City of Ballarat has experienced strong population growth since the mid 1990s, due largely to substantial employment growth in service industries and expansion of core manufacturing (food processing) and agricultural industries.

Ballarat's population in 2011 of 93,502 was predominantly Australian-born (85.6%) and English-speaking (92.1% speak English at home). Nearly half of the population have no post-school qualifications (46.5%) and around one-third (34%) have only completed Year 10 or below. Key employment sectors are health care and social assistance (15.3%), retail trade (12.7%) and manufacturing (10.7%).

Shepparton

Shepparton is a regional city in north-central Victoria, about 180 km from Melbourne, with a population of 60,442 in 2011. The surrounding rural areas are mostly used for dairy farming and agriculture, including wineries and orchards, and in turn this has been a major fruit and vegetable processing centre.

Among Greater Shepparton residents, 13.1% of were born overseas, 82.2% speak only English at home, and 3.4% have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestry. More than half of the population (52.5%) have no post-secondary qualifications and two-fifths have not completed above Year 10 or equivalent of secondary school. The three leading employment sectors are health care and social assistance (14.2%), retail trade (12.7%) and manufacturing (12.4%).

Contracted service delivery

The Work and Learning Centres operate according to a 'prime provider' model (O'Flynn et al. 2014). This is an approach where government contracts with a lead or prime provider, which in turn takes responsibility for organising and managing service delivery through a group of subcontractors or providers who are specialised and/or local suppliers. Benefits of this approach include the capacity to scale up innovative programs, provide opportunities for partnerships and collaborations, and to garner greater community support in delivery.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence received funding as the lead agency to establish, source, appoint and manage the service delivery organisations that are responsible for the day-to-day operation of each of the five centres. Through its experience of developing and delivering the Centre for Work and Learning Yarra, and as a WLC delivery agency in Carlton, the Brotherhood of St Laurence is invested in the model and has direct knowledge of service issues.

Through the WLC State Office, the Brotherhood of St Laurence provides assistance with service development, staff recruitment, financial and other reporting, employer engagement, evaluation and advocacy. The office is also responsible for collecting program data from the sites and reporting to DHS. This information is also used for reflection, continuous improvement, support and sharing of good practice between sites.

The Centres are operated at each location by the following community groups:

Table 1.4   Delivery agencies

WLC	Delivery agency
Carlton	Brotherhood of St Laurence in partnership with Church of All Nations
Geelong	Norlane Community Centre (Northern Futures)
Moe	Gippsland Employment Skills Training (GEST)
Ballarat	Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre (Next Steps)
Shepparton	Pathways Housing Service (Salvation Army)

The delivery agencies or consortia were selected for their strong local track records and their existing community networks. Each WLC receives core funding for a coordinator and two Work and Learning Advisors (WLAs).

Governance and accountability

To oversee the implementation of the Work and Learning Centres[10], the Minister for Housing established the Employment and Youth Support Initiatives Development Inter-Agency Steering Committee ('the **Inter-agency Steering Committee**'). Chaired by the Hon. Rob Knowles, the Inter-agency Steering Committee includes members from the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the Australian Industry Group, the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Hanover Welfare Services.

Each WLC is governed by a **Management Advisory Group** (MAG) which reports to the Inter-agency Steering Committee. The MAG provides advice in relation to the policies, procedures and evolving practices of the Work and Learning Centres. It includes representatives from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Community and Economic Participation division of DHS, DEECD and the Commonwealth Department of Employment as well as the manager of each Work and Learning Centre.

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[10] The governance arrangements for the WLCs are shown diagrammatically in the Appendix.

Each WLC is also supported by a **Local Advisory Panel** (LAP). This panel provides a forum for local stakeholders to work collaboratively with their local WLC to enhance work and learning opportunities for clients. The LAP comprises representatives from local government, local business and economic development agencies, local DHS representatives, social housing agencies, community support agencies (such as health centres, mental health agencies) and local Commonwealth government offices, and other relevant stakeholders from the area.

Operationalising the model – assisting jobseekers

WLC model is based around two core 'offers' for clients:

1 **Links to education and training**, through:

- Learning pathways planning

- Non-accredited training

- Accredited training

2 **Links to employment**, through:

- Career coaching

- Work experience

- Work opportunities through links to local employers

Key features of the service offer

For individual jobseekers, service delivery is based on the following approaches:

- **Personalised, tailored support:** Clients are provided with personalised support through an assigned Work and Learning Advisor, with whom they develop a trust-based relationship.

- **Pathway planning:** Clients work with their WLA to develop a tailored pathway plan for future action, which takes into account their past experience, skills and qualifications, aspirations and any issues that may cause problems for gaining and retaining employment.

- **Non-vocational and vocational training:** Clients have access to one-on-one coaching and group learning opportunities specifically designed to enhance employability skills and confidence, job search training and interview skills. Clients are provided with referrals to training and courses in line with their pathway plan.

- **Careers coaching and support:** Work and Learning Advisors provide careers coaching and support for clients and also provide referrals to support services to address non-vocational barriers to employment, such as those relating to health and mental health issues, drug and alcohol support, and child care.

- **Real work experience and links to employers:** Work placement opportunities with local employers enable the formation of trust and networks for future employment.

As many clients have been out of the workforce for some time, and some have limited or no work experience, or no Australian work experience, the Centres have developed tailored non-accredited learning opportunities which focus on vocational preparation, general employability skills, some industry-specific work preparation and personal development and confidence building. These courses also help clients navigate employment pathways, develop skills in communicating and interacting with others in a workplace, and enhance their planning, decision making and problem solving skills.

With an emphasis on education and skills, the WLCs provide support for clients to access accredited training. Some WLC providers are also Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and offer training within the scope of their registration. Others work with local RTOs or TAFEs to provide accredited training to meet individual aspirations and employment needs. When individuals prepare their pathway plans in consultation with their Work and Learning Advisor, their interests, existing skills, preferred areas of employment and associated training needs are identified. At some sites, accredited training is directly

linked to employment outcomes through a traineeship model. Other sites offer access to accredited training connected to local labour market needs and requirements.

The WLCs also bring together other local community services and organisations, vocational and non-vocational training providers and local employers to provide resources, support and opportunities for participants. Each centre provides additional programs and resources, made possible through local networks and other funding sources. The networks of service collaboration include relationships with local organisations such as:

- local offices of the Department of Human Services (DHS) Victoria, including the Office of Housing

- health and welfare agencies and other community services, such as women's programs, Indigenous programs

- local councils

- training providers, including local TAFEs and RTOs

- local Job Services Australia (JSA) providers

- local learning and employment networks (LLENs)

- local employers, particularly those with labour shortages or in growing industries, for the purpose of job brokerage and reverse marketing of jobseekers.

These relationships inform the design of specific job search and job readiness programs and contribute to the creation of ongoing partnerships to provide sustainable employment opportunities for local people.

Work and Learning Centres also provide clients with direct links to employers by harnessing local networks (see panel for an example from Geelong). Such links are essential for many jobseekers who lack their own networks that might lead to employment, such as the long-term unemployed and refugees and migrants.

Local links: Geelong

Health care is a growing industry offering a range of employment opportunities. Northern Futures' steering committee comprises representatives of government, business, community, education and health organisations—including Barwon Health. Barwon Health has recognised that the residents of Geelong's northern suburbs, where most WLC clients live, are high users of the hospital, and that their workforce should be drawn from these suburbs.

As an example of networks in action, the two organisations are working together to create sustainable employment opportunities for WLC clients. Accredited training for WLC clients is provided through Gordon TAFE and graduates move into Personal Support Assistant traineeships and jobs, offering relatively high pay and shift work. With a new hospital in Geelong, it is likely that there will be ongoing demand for these roles.

The following sections include an overview of the literature regarding public housing tenants, disadvantage and social capital (Chapter 2). The report then draws on preliminary research conducted with WLC clients, including client surveys and focus groups, as well as analysis of routine program data and a stakeholder interview. Chapters 4 and 5 provide insight into the profile of WLC clients and the particular barriers they face. Chapter 6 examines the nature of client engagement with the Centres, particularly of clients who are also engaged with mainstream employment services. Chapters 7 and 8 also highlight the outcomes achieved by and for clients in relation to employment, training, and employability and wellbeing. Clients' perceptions of their communities and housing circumstances are also examined, in the context of clients' employment pathways (Chapters 9 and 10).

2 Public housing, work and learning: a literature review

Over the past four decades, the public housing system in Australia has been transformed from providing housing for low-income Australians generally to housing the most disadvantaged individuals and families. Long-term underfunding of the sector, diminishing stock combined with increasing demand, and long waiting lists have resulted in residualisation through the tightening of eligibility criteria (Jacobs et al. 2010). Over time, priority has been given to people who are homeless and receiving support, people with a disability who have significant support needs, and people with special housing needs (Office of Housing 2014). Applicants who do not meet priority criteria but meet low income and asset tests are placed on a general 'wait-turn' list which has lengthy waiting times (Family and Community Development Committee 2010).

The change in public housing provision also means that the tenants are increasingly likely to be experiencing poverty and social exclusion. A Victorian Parliamentary inquiry in 2010 found that around 41% of households living in public housing received less than $300 per week in income; moreover many tenants had experienced homelessness, mental illness, disability, family violence and alcohol or drug dependence (Family and Community Development Committee 2010 p 23). Research by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Azpitarte 2012) suggests that most people living in public housing experience social exclusion (61%) and almost one-quarter are deeply excluded (23%).

These changes to public housing policy have seen a related change in the labour market participation of public tenants. In 1966, 80% of public housing tenants were in paid employment; by 2007 this had dwindled to only 25% (Lovering 2014). A 2008 national study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that a considerable proportion (67.4%) of public housing tenants were not in the labour force—that is, not working or looking for work, mostly due to older age, disability or caring responsibilities. Of the one-third of public housing tenants (32.6%) in the labour force, around 22.6% were unemployed, 54.9% were employed part-time and only 22.4% were employed full-time (AIHW 2008).

However, while the increasingly residualised nature of public housing in part accounts for the low labour force participation and significantly higher than average unemployment rates for public housing tenants, it is not the whole explanation. Other factors include lack of access to appropriate training or employment services, disincentives to employment due to the way public rents are tied to income, and lack of social networks conducive to providing employment services.

Access to employment and training services

While the security provided by public housing is important in facilitating economic participation, particularly for people with unstable and fractured family, employment and housing histories (AHURI 2009), the tenants face a range of barriers.

In the AIHW (2008) study, half of the unemployed public tenants surveyed reported that their need for further training, education and experience had a strong influence on their current circumstances. Around one-third reported that a lack of jobs in the area where they lived, or a lack of suitable jobs, was preventing them from gaining employment. In an earlier 2004 study, 61% of public housing tenants who took part indicated that lack of skills and self-confidence were the main reasons they were having difficulty getting a job (Hulse & Randolph 2004). Public housing tenants who were employed were likely to be employed in manufacturing (Hughes 2006), suggesting that re-skilling and careers advice may be important for tenants in work, as well as those looking for work, as the labour market changes.

Recent AIHW (2013) research asked public housing tenants which services they had accessed in the previous 12 months, with a list including drug and alcohol counselling, mental health services, life skills and personal development, aged care, information advice services, residential care, family or children support; training and employment support, financial or material assistance or other support services.

One-third of public tenants indicated that they had not accessed any of the services listed. Some 52.6% had accessed health services and 19.4% mental health services but only 7.1% indicated accessing training or employment services and fewer than 10% had used any of the other services.

Other research suggests that working-age public tenants are less likely to have access to a computer or the internet at home than other income support recipients (Hughes 2006). Public tenants have also identified difficulties finding work due to employer perceptions and stigma associated with living in public housing (AHURI 2011a). Women living in public housing identified concerns about safety for children left unattended and income-based rents as creating disincentives to employment (AHURI 2011a). There are disincentives for public tenants to engage in paid work due to the structure of public rents[11] and the impact of the withdrawal of income support creating high effective marginal tax rates (EMTRs) (Bodsworth 2010; Wood 2005). Similarly, people on public housing waiting lists face disincentives to take up paid work due to waiting list requirements and the risk of jeopardising their place in the 'queue' (Bodsworth 2010).

The role of social networks

Social networks are also known to play a valuable role in assisting jobseekers to find employment. These networks are essentially relationships between individuals, such as ties between friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues and acquaintances. They can be an important source of information about potential employment opportunities (Granovetter 1973). Distinctions are made between types of networks—often defined as 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' networks (Ziersch & Arthurson 2005). Bonding networks are local, horizontal links between like-minded people, such as family, friends or neighbours, which often provide practical, emotional and material support. Bridging networks are weaker social ties, for example between workmates, classmates or members of the same sporting team or community group (Szreter 2002). Linking ties are similar to bridging networks but also involve unequal power relations: they include more formal relationships between a teacher and student, or a doctor and patient (Szreter & Woolcock 2004). Bridging and linking ties connect different types of people within the community and are most commonly thought to make a difference in job searching and gaining employment (Granovetter 1973). This is especially the case for people with weak direct links to the labour market, such as people who have been unemployed.

There is limited research examining the relationship between housing, social networks and employment outcomes (Ziersch & Arthurson 2005). Comparing social networks of individuals in different forms of social housing, Ziersch and Arthurson (2005) found that those in community housing appeared to fare better than those in public housing in terms of access to 'employment-conducive' networks. They argued that this was related partly to the different ways community and public housing were managed, but also to the stigma, local deprivation and pockets of entrenched unemployment associated with public housing.

Considering neighbourhoods and networks more broadly, research suggests that neighbourhood trust, cooperation and shared neighbourhood values are generally lower among renters (public or private) than homeowners (Stone & Hulse 2007). However research has also shown that in communities experiencing greater infrastructure problems and disadvantage neighbours often interacted more— suggesting that people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods were helping each other and 'coming together' to resolve local problems (Stone & Hulse 2007). While this form of bonding social capital can provide support and contribute to a sense of identity, it may be limited in providing links to employment, particularly if friends, family and neighbours are also facing disadvantage in the labour market.

Social networks are relevant not only to public housing tenants but also to other jobseekers who face significant disadvantages in the labour market but do not necessarily live in public housing, such as the long-term unemployed and refugees and asylum seekers. Research suggests that long-term unemployment causes a scarring effect through the loss of social networks, as well as loss of skills, sense of control, self-confidence, further entrenching their disadvantage (McLachlan, Gilfillan & Gordon

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[11] Rents are a fixed percentage of income with up to 13 weeks' delay in adjustment for changes in income; and with no allowance for fluctuating earnings from casual work.

2013). The unemployed tend to rely on close ties with people such as friends and family—who may also be experiencing disadvantage in the labour market—in looking for work. In 2012, 32% of previously unemployed new job-starters used word of mouth (contacting family and friends) to find information about job opportunities, compared to only 24% of job-starters who were employed and changed jobs (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

Refugees and migrants also often lack well-developed networks outside their own communities and they may experience further disadvantage in the labour market due to racial visibility and cultural difference (Torezani, Colic-Peisker & Fozdar 2008). Yet research suggests that mainstream employment services struggle to assist refugee jobseekers to develop networks or 'linking social capital' that would open up employment opportunities (Torezani, Colic-Peisker & Fozdar 2008).

The relative importance of formal or informal networks also varies depending on the context, with informal approaches to employers more common in rural labour markets (Lindsay, Greig & McQuaid 2005). While bridging and linking networks may be more helpful for jobseekers wishing to advance within an industry, bonding networks (such as friends and family) can be helpful for jobseekers seeking to move to a new industry, for example, people from declining industries who are looking for entry-level work in other sectors (Lindsay, Greig & McQuaid 2005).

In considering the role that employment services might play in brokering bridging and linking networks for clients within local communities, researchers looking at social networks for rural and peri-urban jobseekers in the United Kingdom concluded:

> one way forward may lie in the provision of local, community-based facilities ... that deliver formal job search services, while also providing jobseekers and recruiters with a space to interact on a more informal basis. Local community-based facilities, offering job search training and advice alongside an emphasis on peer support and motivation, may be able to combine the best elements of informal networking ... with formal services for the unemployed (Lindsay, Greig & McQuaid 2005, pp. 68–9).

3 Methodology

The aim of the research underpinning this report was to examine the impact of WLCs on individual clients and draw preliminary links between aspects of the model and outcomes for clients.

Three sources of data have been used to provide this preliminary overview:

- routine program data (from the commencement of the WLCs to mid January 2014)
- client surveys conducted in September 2013
- a focus group with clients at one centre and a stakeholder interview.

JobReady data

The JobReady client database containing routine service data collected by four of the five Work and Learning Centres was used to develop a profile of clients. Routine data analysed includes (de-identified) basic demographic characteristics, information about clients' work and learning histories and whether they live in public housing, as well as work and learning outcomes achieved.

The timeframe for the routine data analysed in this report is from commencement to mid January 2014 (n = 1346). Unfortunately data for Shepparton was not available due to technical difficulties. Client numbers recorded in the database by January 2014 are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1   Number of Work and Learning Centre clients

WLC	Clients by 31 January 2014
Geelong	548
Carlton	459
Ballarat	176
Moe	163
Total	**1346**

Due to the staggered opening dates, the numbers of clients varied widely among the five centres. For this reason the data presented in this report is mostly aggregated to present an overview of WLC clients.

The routine data was supplemented by quarterly and monthly headline reports to DHS to identify age, gender, engagement with the department, and work and learning outcomes for all sites (n = 1116).

Surveys of WLC clients

Clients were surveyed in September 2013 to gain a richer picture of clients' experiences and outcomes than work and learning outcomes alone.

This part of the research involved two surveys. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to survey the same group of clients at entry and then at exit from the WLC. Instead data was collected from two different groups across the five Work and Learning Centres: 'entry' surveys were provided to clients at commencement or during their first three months of engagement and 'exit' surveys were provided to clients who had exited the WLC or who had been actively engaged for more than six months.[12]

Survey questions were drawn from a range of sources, including the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey and the Families, Social Capital and Citizenship Survey (Stone, Gray & Hughes 2003).

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[12] Copies of the entry and exit surveys are available from the research team on request.

The questions were chosen to shed light on the following areas:

- What is the difference in wellbeing, social connections, life satisfaction and income for clients who have received support from a WLC compared to those who are just commencing with a WLC?

- Do the WLCs make a difference to clients' perceptions of the neighbourhood and social networks?

- How satisfied are WLC clients with the service they receive from the centres and what difference has it made to their lives?

Surveys were advertised and made available at the centres. Clients were encouraged to participate by Work and Learning Advisors. A total of 161 surveys were collected—71 entry surveys and 90 exit surveys.

Limitations of the surveys

While the survey used validated instruments where possible, due to the non-random and non-representative sample and the small number of participants, the results have been analysed using descriptive statistics only. This enables a general comparison of the entry and exit groups but care should be exercised in interpreting causation. While the results support the program staff's observations of positive progressive outcomes achieved by clients moving into work, the positive results achieved for the exiting cohort may alternatively indicate that clients who obtain employment outcomes already had greater wellbeing or social connectedness. It is suggested that further research is needed to explore these issues.

Focus groups and stakeholder interview

After the surveys and routine data were analysed, additional research questions were identified in relation to clients' use of mainstream employment services. As a result, several focus groups were conducted with clients and a telephone interview was conducted with a JSA provider. Due to the timing of this additional research, only the findings of the first focus group (with seven clients) and the stakeholder interview are included in this report. A further report will document the findings of the additional focus group research.

Research ethics

Ethics approval for this research was granted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence Research Ethics Committee. Clients surveyed provided informed consent to participate in the research project and express permission was sought from survey participants to access further information from their WLC records. Confidentiality was maintained at all times, and data was stored securely.

4 Work and Learning Centre client profile

The client profile reflects the differences and similarities of the Work and Learning Centre locations.

Gender

Available data suggest that overall the WLCs serve both women and men. Carlton had a greater proportion of male clients (60%), while Ballarat (66%) and Moe (61%) had a greater proportion of female clients.[13]

Table 4.1   Gender of WLC clients

Location	Women	Men
Carlton	40%	60%
Geelong	50%	50%
Moe	61%	39%
Ballarat	66%	34%
Shepparton	45%	55%
All centres	**50%**	**50%**

Age

Just under half (44%) were aged under 26 years and 39% were aged between 26 and 45 years. Ballarat and Geelong had a younger client group with 55% and 52% respectively under the age of 25, while Carlton and Shepparton had a greater proportion of clients aged 26–45. Moe had the largest proportion of clients aged 45+.[14]

Table 4.2   Age groups of clients at each WLC

Location	Under 25 years	26–45 years	46–65 years
	%	%	%
Carlton	32%	51%	16%
Geelong	52%	30%	17%
Moe	43%	34%	23%
Ballarat	55%	31%	13%
Shepparton	32%	47%	21%
All centres	**44%**	**39%**	**17%**

Place of birth

Around two-thirds (63.1%) of clients for whom data was obtained were Australian-born.[15] The map (Figure 4.1) shows the spread of overseas birthplaces. Just over half of these clients were born in African countries. Carlton WLC had the largest proportion of overseas-born clients.

[13] Quarterly reports to 31 December 2013 (N = 1041)
[14] Quarterly reports to 31 December 2013 (N = 1041)
[15] JobReady data January 2014. Missing data = 87 (N = 1346)

Figure 4.1   Overseas birthplaces of WLC clients
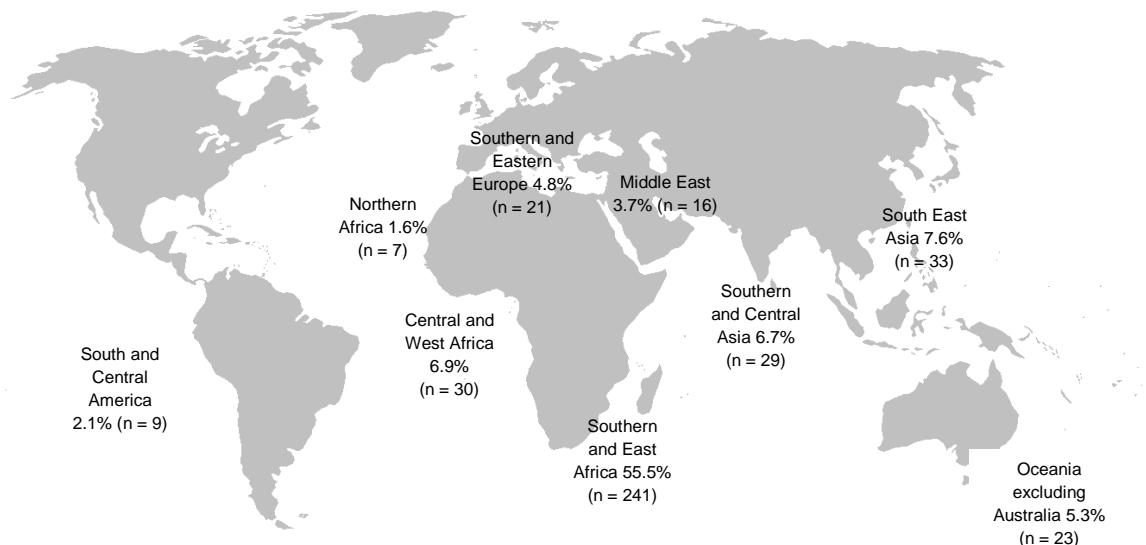
Place of residence

Work and Learning Centres work with very local communities. Most clients live within few kilometres of their WLC. Carlton WLC has a more widespread client base than other centres; nevertheless just over half of its clients live in Carlton, Fitzroy and Collingwood. The remaining clients come from 78 suburbs of Melbourne, mostly in the north and west. This reflects the experience of the Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra, where the mostly African-background clients were attracted, largely through word of mouth, from across Melbourne.

Income support

Of the 671 clients who supplied income support data, just over half were in receipt of Newstart Allowance (342 or 51%); and around one-quarter were in receipt of Youth Allowance (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3   WLC clients and income support

Type of income support	%
Newstart Allowance	51%
Youth Allowance	24%
Parenting Payment	13%
Disability Support Pension	9%
Austudy	1%
Carer Payment	1%
Other	1%
Total	**100%**

Job Services Australia stream

As Table 4.4 shows, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the 227 WLC clients for whom JSA stream information was supplied[16] were classified as Stream 4 or Stream 3, jobseekers facing the greatest disadvantage (it was difficult to collect this data as many jobseekers are unaware of their classification).

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[16] JobReady data January 2014 Missing data (n = 1119)

Table 4.4   JSA streams of WLC clients[17]

JSA stream	n	%
Stream 1	40	18%
Stream 2	41	18%
Stream 3	54	24%
Stream 4	92	41%
Total	**227**	**100%**

Further research is needed to better understand the level of disadvantage faced by the various sub-categories of WLC clients. However, the profile of the overall client group, their histories and their prior unsuccessful experience of employment services indicate a substantial incidence of multiple disadvantages, not necessarily picked up through the Centrelink jobseeker classification process.

Car access and drivers licence

Fewer than half of all WLC clients (47%; n = 474) have a car[18] and only 32% (n = 436) have a full drivers licence, according to client data. A further 11% (n = 143) have a learners permit. In all areas except Moe, clients who did not have a car outnumbered those who did.

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[17] Source: JobReady data January 2014 Missing data (n = 1119)
[18] JobReady January 2014 n = 999

5 Barriers to employment and training

The entry and exit surveys provided further information about clients' experiences of looking for work and confirmed that they faced significant barriers to employment. Survey respondents were asked to whether they had had difficulty getting a job, and asked to choose from 12 contributing factors, selecting as many responses as applied. Lack of education, training or skills, lack of work experience and transport difficulties featured as the most common barriers, closely followed by health issues or disability. From the 145 responses, the following barriers to employment were identified:

- I don't have the education, training or skills required for jobs I am interested in (37%)

- I don't have enough work experience for jobs I am interested in (32%)

- Lack of transport or too far to travel (24%)

- My health problems or disability (20%)

- I couldn't find any jobs in my line of work (19%) or 'There just seem to be no jobs' (19%)

- Employers think I am too old or too young (15%)

- I can't find a job with suitable hours (15%)

- 'I have difficulties finding childcare' or 'I have other caring responsibilities' (10%)

- My English language skills (10%). [19]

Respondents were invited to provide 'other' reasons in a comments section. A small number commented on facing negative employer perceptions about the long-term unemployed and some culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups as barriers to employment. These experiences are supported by VECCI and BSL research (2009) that found many employers are hesitant about hiring disadvantaged jobseekers due to perceptions about lack of job-readiness, relevant skills or concerns about appropriate workplace behaviours.

Transport emerged as a key issue for just under one-quarter of respondents (24.1%), particularly in rural and regional areas. This is unsurprising given that fewer than half of the WLC clients have a car, often an essential mode of transport in the country (see panel).

Going the extra mile: Shepparton

In late 2013, a Shepparton abattoir located on the outskirts of the town put out a call for workers to all local employment service providers, including the Shepparton WLC. Keen to address their labour shortages, the abattoir had developed an employment induction program with the Kyabram Community and Learning Centre targeting jobseekers facing labour market disadvantage.

Sixteen workers attended the induction, including nine from Shepparton WLC who were facing significant barriers. Since only one of the nine had transport, workers from the WLC drove the clients on the hour and a half round trip to and from the induction and then to the week of training, which commenced at 6 am each day. From this, five clients have gained ongoing jobs. A second client has since obtained a car, so now they all car pool to get to work.

Surveyed clients were asked how long they had been looking for work before attending the WLC (see Table 5.1). Of the 153 clients who responded to this question, most had been looking for work for more than six months and 42% were long-term unemployed—that is, looking for work for longer than one

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[19] Survey data. n = 145 (no response= 16). Percentages do not add to 100% as respondents could select more than one response.

year.[20] One in five (22%) were very long-term unemployed, having been looking for work for two years or more.

Table 5.1   Length of time looking for work

Length of time	Clients	
	n	%
Less than 1 month	18	12%
Between 1 month and 6 months	37	24%
Between 6 months and 1 year	34	22%
1 to less than 2 years	31	20%
2 to less than 5 years	23	15%
More than 5 years	10	7%
Total	**153**	**100%**

Missing data =8

The surveyed asked clients were also asked what was the main reason they had stopped working in their last job (if any) and were provided with response options. The most common reasons, selected by nearly one-third of clients (30.7%; n = 39) were[21]:

- The job was temporary or seasonal (25 responses); or

- They were laid off or no work was available (14 responses).

One in ten surveyed clients (10%; n = 13) had left their last job due to having children or caring responsibilities. Sickness, disability or injury had caused a further 9% (n = 11) of surveyed clients to leave their previous employment.[22]

One in seven (14.1%, n = 18) clients had never had paid work before. Around half of this group were young people below the age of 23 and the others were single parents, migrants and refugees or had a disability; these characteristics might explain why they had not been previously employed.

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[20] Survey n = 153 no response=8
[21] Survey n = 127
[22] Survey n = 127

6 Engaging clients in work and learning

A feature of the WLCs is their capacity to engage members of the community, particularly people facing significant disadvantage, on a voluntary basis and without referrals from Centrelink.

Voluntary clients

Under the Work and Learning Centre approach, clients engage with the service on a voluntary basis, without sanctions or penalties for failing to attend. The fact that around two-thirds (65%) of WLC clients are also clients of a JSA provider suggests a considerable demand for employment support that is not currently being met by the mainstream system (see Table 6.1).

The WLCs also provide support for jobseekers facing disadvantage who want to work but are ineligible for support, or are only entitled to minimal assistance, from the JSA system. As at 31 January 2014, 14% of clients for whom data was obtained were Centrelink customers but not required to be registered with a JSA provider. Another 11% (n = 96) were not receiving Centrelink payments *and* not linked with a JSA provider; of these almost a third (n = 29) were migrants and another third (n = 30) were DHS clients. These WLC clients receive no support from JSA.

Around 10% of clients were voluntarily registered with a JSA provider. These clients are only eligible for limited support—usually one interview with some assistance with updating a résumé or access to computers for job searching—either because they were not receiving income support or were receiving Centrelink payments that did not have employment activity requirements.

Table 6.1   Clients' income support and JSA status

Income support and JSA status	%
On Centrelink payments and required to be registered with JSA	65%
On Centrelink payments, not required to be registered with JSA	14%
No Centrelink payments, not registered with JSA	11%
On Centrelink payments and registered with JSA but not required to be	8%
Registered with a JSA but not on Centrelink payments	2%
Total	**100%**

n = 857, missing data= 490

Referral pathways

Routine data collected by the WLCs shows that their most common source of referrals is actually mainstream JSA employment services providers. These referrals account for 41% of clients (n = 444).[23] Another 36% of clients coming to the WLCs have heard of the service through word of mouth within their networks in their community. Other sources are shown in Table 6.2.

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[23] JobReady data January 2014 Missing data (n = 253) (Total clients N = 1346)

Table 6.2   Client referral source

Source	%
JSA	41%
Word of mouth	36%
Care worker or community organisation	9%
Noticeboard or mail-out	7%
School, GTO or RTO	3%
Newspaper, Internet and other media	3%
Walked past WLC	1%
DHS	0.5%
Total	**100%**

Source: Routine data January 2014

This data suggests that many of the WLC clients had failed to find employment despite the best efforts of local job service providers.

The high level of referrals from these providers suggest that the WLC model offers a second chance for a highly disadvantaged client group who have been otherwise failed by the employment services system.

Of the clients who responded to client surveys and who had been referred by a JSA provider (n = 56), almost three-quarters (73%) had been unemployed for more than six months. Half (50%) were long-term unemployed, that is looking for work for more than one year, despite having been receiving support from a JSA provider.

Of the clients who had been looking for work for less than one year, the majority (82%) faced other barriers to participation such as age (too young or too old), parenting and care responsibilities, health or disability or English as a second language.

The WLC model and JSA providers: a complementary approach?

Given the number of referrals from JSA providers, a focus group and an interview with a local JSA provider were undertaken to provide further insight. This additional research confirms that WLCs provide an important service for jobseekers who need more support than JSAs can provide. As the local JSA provider manager observed:

> The WLCs are able to offer that extra support. As a JSA, in comparison, we're a bit limited in providing that additional support, because we service such a large number. Our service doesn't extend that far ... Because the WLCs are in highly disadvantaged communities, the clients in this area do need that additional support. Our clients include youth, mature-aged jobseekers, single parents—the more difficult ones really. If we can place someone into employment straight away, we will, but for those who we can't, the WLC can offer that extra support.

Despite their desire to work, people who have been unemployed for a long time or out of the labour market due to disability, ill-health or caring responsibilities often need additional guidance and support to navigate learning pathways. They also often require and direct links to employers. The local JSA provider manager observed that WLCs provide tailored support and can offer their clients:

> that bit of direction. Many clients don't know what they want to do, where to go. Our preference is also to send our clients to the WLC for training—because they get that additional support. I know the staff at the WLC will even go to clients' houses to pick them up—and some of them need that support ... The WLCs also have relationships with local businesses that are prepared to give disadvantaged people a go. It's a pathway to employment—with employers who actually have an understanding of what the barriers are, whereas a lot of employers won't take on these clients.

Given that many WLC clients are also clients of local JSAs, the client focus group sought to explore why people might also attend a WLC, especially since attendance is voluntary. The results indicated the WLC clients wanted to work and wanted to find assistance that would help them get there. In particular, focus group participants observed that their local WLC offered a more personal approach and support that they could not get from their JSA provider.[24] For example, one man who had lost his job after losing his drivers licence needed to learn computer skills to search or apply for jobs on line. His JSA provider had told him that he could use their computers, but no-one was available to teach him how, so he had sought assistance from his local WLC.

Another focus group participant indicated the need for better liaison and communication about employment opportunities from the JSA provider. She said that her JSA provider was submitting her CV for jobs without her knowledge:

> Mine will just put in my CV, if he can get around to doing it, and then three weeks later I will get a letter saying I didn't get a job that I didn't even know I had applied for. I'll get a random call from 'blah, blah' saying, can you come in for an interview, we got your résumé, and I'll be like ,'Oh, ok —who the hell are you? (WLC client)

In contrast, a WLC client commented on the follow-up support he had received from the WLC after commencing a traineeship:

> When I did start working, my WLA [Work and Learning Advisor] would come in every two weeks or so, just for 15 minutes to see how I was going. She also helped me draw up a pathway of what my goals would be for the next few weeks, then months, then years. So they're still there, once you've got a job. Just because you've been put somewhere, doesn't mean they forget about you. That makes a difference, [but] ... at [JSA] you're just another number. (WLC client)

JSA funding arrangements limit the nature and extent of support that can be provided to jobseekers, particularly after placement, whereas the WLCs can provide longer term support so that people not only get jobs but are supported to keep them. The JSA manager observed:

> Once they're finished, the WLCs continue to service [clients] and try to place them, even when they've finished training. Even after the 26-week outcome, the WLCs are still helping them, whereas our funding doesn't allow that—after 26 weeks they're on their own.

The WLC also worked with clients who were not eligible for intensive support within the JSA system, despite facing many barriers to employment (see Ravi's story) .

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[24] Focus group with 7 clients from one WLC conducted in April 2014 (names have been changed).

Box 6.1   Ravi's story

Ravi had migrated to Australia from India in 2011 after marrying a woman who lived in Australia. Back home he had worked as an accountant and travel agent but he struggled to find employment in regional Victoria. Ravi completed several accredited courses including a Certificate III in Aged Care and Home and Community Care but still had no success in finding work. In 2012 his first child was born with major health problems. Ravi continued studying English online so he could care for the child while his wife worked as nurse. While his daughter's health improved, her condition meant that she could not go to child care. At the time of the focus group, Ravi was looking for work in aged care, but needed flexible hours to allow him to care for his daughter and fit around his wife's shifts. Ravi commented on the assistance he had received from his JSA:

When I went to Centrelink I was given a service provider. I asked what they would do, but when I went to them they said, 'You are in Stream 1—we are helping people who are in Stream 3 and 4 who are waiting to get a job'. After that they can look at my matter. [I had] only one meeting and that's all. At that time, my daughter is very ill. My wife is the only income [earner] and they have decreased her shifts. Our repayments are difficult. I asked if they could put me in Stream 3 or 2 to help me get a job. The lady said that—the service provider said—I needed to speak to Centrelink. But Centrelink said that I need to ask my service provider. My JSA said 'You can use the booklets and materials— that's all the help we can give—but you have only one consultation'.

The Work and Learning Centre staff were working with Ravi to assist him to find employment to meet his specific needs.

7 Learning and employment pathways

Training pathways

The WLCs work with clients to identify learning pathways, combining accessible, non-accredited training and pathways into accredited vocational training, linked to employment. A key feature of the WLCs is the development of accessible, tailored non-accredited training for clients.

The accessibility of these courses has resulted in very high levels of participation. By January 2014:

- 86% of clients have taken part in some form of non-accredited training

- 93% of clients have completed this training.

As part of the ongoing development of their pathway plans, clients also meet regularly with their WLA to consider more formal education and training options, in line with their interests. Many training courses offered to WLC clients are also linked to skill shortages or employment growth within the local area. This sits in contrast with the mainstream employment services system, which jobseekers report often encourages training regardless of jobseekers' needs and aspirations and whether there are jobs available (BSL 2012).

By January 2014, nearly half of WLC clients with active pathway plans (44.7%; n = 494) had engaged with accredited training. Over half of these (261) had completed their accredited training.[25] The courses undertaken indicate that the clients are engaging in higher levels of accredited training and education:

- Over half (54%) enrolled in a Certificate 3 level or higher

- 29% enrolled in Certificate 2 credentials

- 17% enrolled in Certificate 1 training.[26]

Bridges to work

Employment outcomes

Despite the significant challenges facing WLC clients, including poor local labour market conditions in rural and regional areas, lack of transport, lack of credentials, and personal and other impediments, as at 31 January 2014:

- 536 clients (49%) had secured employment.

- Over half (55%) of these (n = 290) were still employed 16 weeks later.[27]

Considering many WLC clients' lack of success through JSA providers, and their barriers to work, this level of employment outcomes is significant. Work and Learning Centres are playing an important role in linking clients with employment opportunities, supporting the notion that through organisational networks and links with employers, the Centres can create a 'bridge' to employment.

Hours of work

While the numbers of employment placements and outcomes are common measures of success for employment services, the quality and sustainability of employment are also important—particularly since those most disadvantaged in the labour market are often 'churned' between short-term jobs and reliance on income support.

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[25] Headline report 31 January 2014
[26] Quarterly report 31 December 2013
[27] Headline report 31 January 2014. Note that 16 weeks has been agreed as a key indicator of job retention for WLC clients, in line with other Victorian Government programs. This is slightly longer than the 13-week measure used by the JSA system.

Of the WLC clients sustaining employment for 16 weeks, 45% had obtained work in excess of 31 hours per week.[28] The measure of 'full-time' employment within the JSA system is 35 hours, which makes a direct comparison difficult. Nevertheless, the WLC outcomes compare favourably with those achieved for more disadvantaged clients in the mainstream system (Department of Employment 2013).

Analysis of outcomes data suggests that those who had jobs with more hours were more likely to remain in work and achieve the 16-week outcome than those with very part-time jobs (less than 15 hours). The client surveys suggest a similar pattern. Of the 58 exit survey respondents who had gained employment outcomes, 28 (44%) had gained full-time employment. Of the 56% who were working part-time, just over half (52%) indicated that they would like *more* hours of work.[29] Analysis of the industries of employment of those clients who wanted more hours points to the broader labour market challenges of looking for entry-level employment. Of those wanting more hours, 42% were personal and aged care workers; 28% were working in hospitality and retail; 14% were working in warehousing and logistics. Longer-term monitoring of outcomes is necessary to see whether clients with shorter hours gain more hours over time.

Conditions of employment

Of clients who commenced paid work, 30.0% (n = 128) did so in permanent jobs, 23.7% (n = 101) on temporary contracts and 46.2% (n = 196) as casuals[30]. Around two-thirds of those commencing on temporary contracts were in apprenticeships and traineeships, positions which aim to increase skills through accredited training and time-limited employment, leading to better future employment prospects.

By 31 January 2014, 26 clients had already moved to permanent positions from a casual or contract job during their initial 16 weeks employment.[31] While further tracking is required, this suggests that the types of employment achieved by some clients represent success not only in terms of short-term retention but also in improved conditions, making it more likely that clients will retain employment over the longer term.

Industries and occupations

The industries in which most clients gained employment were administrative and support services; health care and social assistance; transport, postal and warehousing; and accommodation and food services (see Table 7.1).[32]

Table 7.1   Industries in which WLC clients gained employment

Industry	%
Administrative and support services	18%
Health care and social assistance	17%
Transport, postal and warehousing	17%
Accommodation and food services	10%
Other services	9%
Retail trade	7%
Public administration and safety	7%
Manufacturing	6%
Education and training	4%
Construction	2%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1%
Arts and recreation services	1%
Information, media and telecommunications	1%
Total	**100%**

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[28] Quarterly reports to 31 December 2013
[29] One respondent in part-time work did not answer this question.
[30] JobReady January 2014 (n = 426)
[31] JobReady data January 2014
[32] n = 511 missing data: n = 26

These are industries in which entry-level roles are relatively common and there is employment growth. As four of the five WLCs are outside metropolitan Melbourne, the profile of industries and sectors where jobs have been obtained may reflect regional economies.

Overall, the WLCs appear to be successful in enabling their clients to obtain jobs with more hours and better conditions than before.

Finding work

The client surveys provide insight into how clients who were employed at exit had found out about their current job, although sample sizes are small. Just over half (51%, n = 57) indicated that they had heard about their current job through their Work and Learning Centre and a quarter (25%, n = 14) through their JSA provider. Another 17% found employment through word of mouth (friends or family) and only 7% found work through formal job advertisements.[33]

These results suggest that for the majority of clients, the WLC is providing the primary link to employment. For those clients who found out about job vacancies through other sources, such as JSAs or word of mouth, it is likely that the intensive support provided by WLCs helped them to secure their jobs. The results also raise the difficulty of attributing outcomes to only one service, and point to the complementary relationship between some JSA providers and WLCs, elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Outcomes for clients referred by JSAs

Given that a substantial cohort of the WLC clients had been referred by local JSA providers and had been unsuccessful in gaining employment despite looking for work for more than six months, the employment outcomes achieved so far for this group are particularly promising.

By 31 January 2014, 44% of the 444 JSA referred clients had been placed into paid work (n = 196). Of those placed into work, the majority (59%) retained their employment for 16 weeks (n = 116):

- 31% of these jobs were permanent
- 39% of these jobs were full-time.

A further 25 clients (13% of those placed in employment) were employed but had not reached the 16-week milestone at the time of data collection.

Client feedback about WLC assistance

The surveys conducted with clients also provide insights into clients' satisfaction with their experience at the WLCs, and confirm important aspects of the model. One positive feature of the model is the strong relationship and trust developed between the client and their Work and Learning Advisor.

Clients surveyed at exit overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed that:

- their Work and Learning Advisor had provided them with helpful support (98%)
- attending the WLC had improved their chances of finding a job (95%)
- since attending the Centre they had a clearer idea of their skills and abilities (94%) and increased confidence (93%)
- they had a clearer idea of the employment pathways available (87%)[34]

Clients surveyed at exit were also very positive about the training and employment opportunities they received, agreeing or strongly agreeing that the WLC had helped them to engage in further training or study (78%) and find paid work (77%). In addition, 74% of clients surveyed at exit agreed or strongly agreed that they had been helped to address barriers that had prevented them from working in the past.

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[33] A total of 58 exiting clients indicated they had found employment. One did not respond to this question. N = 57).
[34] Survey, Exit only n = 87 (3=no response)

8 Progressive outcomes

The client surveys also revealed other important outcomes for clients, particularly for those who had been placed in employment.[35]

Income

Surveyed clients were asked to record information about their incomes, both the amount and sources. A comparison of the incomes of clients at entry and exit indicated that exiting clients were significantly better off. The average fortnightly income (after tax) for clients at entry was $558 compared with $933 for the clients surveyed at exit.

Figure 8.1   Clients fortnightly income, entry and exit surveys
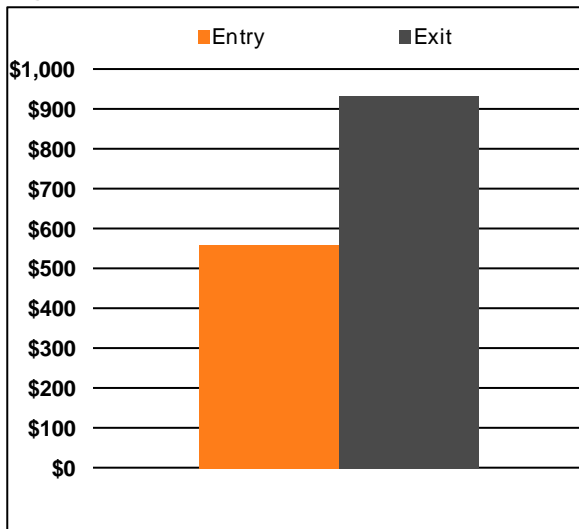
There was also a striking difference between the main sources of income for the two groups at entry and exit. Asked whether their main income came from wages/salary/own employment, Centrelink payments or another source, only 9% of clients surveyed at entry described wages as their main source of income, however this increased to 58% for clients exiting the centres (see Figure 8.2.[36]

**Figure 8.2   Main source of income, entry and exit surveys**

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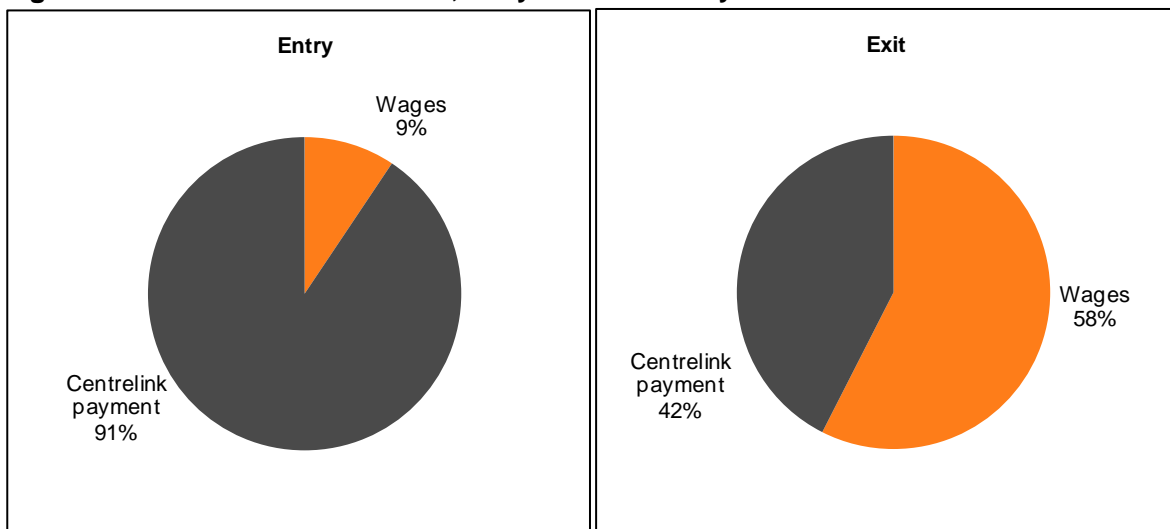
[35] Note, however that caution is needed when interpreting the survey results as the entry and exit surveys were administered to different groups.
[36] Entry survey, n = 64 (7 no response). Exit survey, n = 80 (10 no response). No-one indicated another source of income.

Attitude and confidence

The exiting group of surveyed clients also indicated more positive attitudes than those surveyed at entry.[37] This is particularly striking in relation to confidence, with 81% of those surveyed at exit agreeing with the statement 'I am a confident person' compared to 64% of those surveyed at entry (see Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3   WLC client attitude and confidence at entry and exit
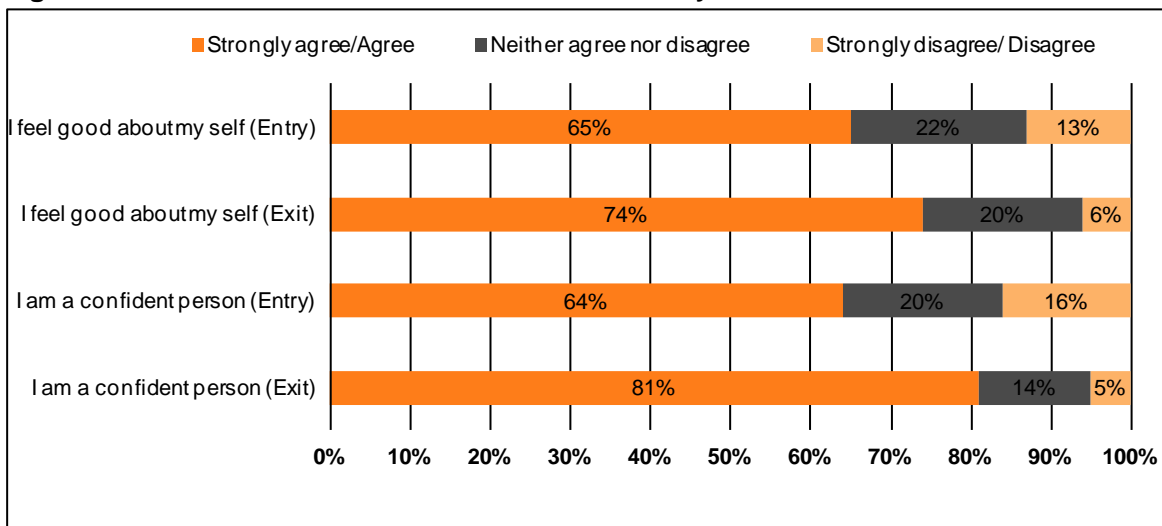
Almost all the survey respondents at exit agreed with the statement 'I do my best and if I make a mistake I try again' compared to 88% of those surveyed at entry, and an increased proportion surveyed at exit agreed with the statement 'I usually get on well with people' [38] (see Figure 8.4 below).

Figure 8.4   WLC client resilience and people skills at entry and exit
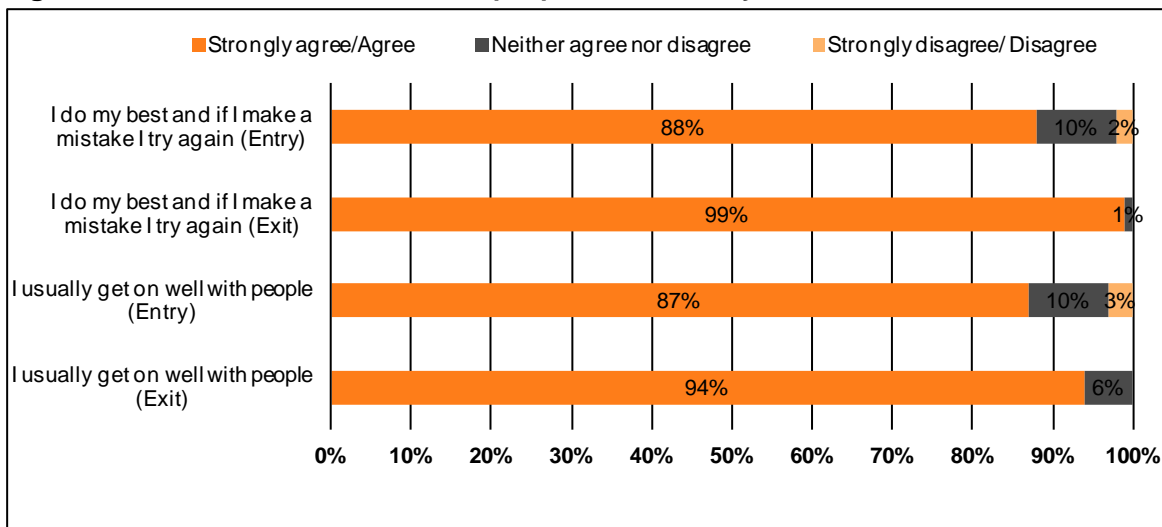
Clients surveyed at exit were more likely to strongly agree with the statements 'I am willing to take on responsibility' (42%, compared with 28% of those surveyed at entry); ('I care about my appearance' (33%, compared with 18%); and 'I am well organised' (33%, compared with 20%.

Those clients who were surveyed at exit were also more likely to strongly agree that work was an important part of their identity (40% at exit, compared with only 26% of those surveyed at entry) and

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[37] Surveys. There were 70 responses to the statement 'I am a confident person' at entry and 88 at exit (2 skipped the question); and 69 responses to the statement 'I feel good about myself' at entry and 88 at exit (2 skipped the question).
[38] Surveys n = 70 at entry; 88 at exit (2 skipped the question)

strongly disagree with the statement 'I have little control over the things that happen to me' (24% at exit, compared with only 5% of those surveyed at entry).

The positive, strengths-based approach of the centres also appeared to have had an impact on clients' perceptions of themselves and how they are perceived by others. A very high 96% of clients who were surveyed at exit agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I generally feel very capable', compared to 75% of the clients surveyed at entry. Similarly, 97% of clients surveyed at exit agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'people I know tell me I'm competent', compared with 73% of clients surveyed at entry.

Life satisfaction

The WLC clients were asked how satisfied they were overall, with their lives, on a scale from 1 =very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied. Clients who completed the survey at exit had higher scores of life satisfaction compared with those surveyed at entry (see Table 8.1). The average score for WLC clients surveyed at entry was 6.2 while the average score at exit was 7.5. [39]

Table 8.1   Life satisfaction scores, entry and exit surveys

All things considered how satisfied are you with your life?	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
Very dissatisfied 1	4	6%	0	0%
2	1	1%	1	1%
3	2	3%	2	2%
4	5	7%	6	7%
5	15	21%	5	6%
6	11	16%	12	14%
7	12	17%	19	22%
8	10	14%	17	20%
9	6	9%	12	14%
Very satisfied 10	4	6%	12	14%
Total	**70**	**100%**	**86**	**100%**

Collectively, these findings suggest that in addition to gaining employment, the WLC approach is increasing clients' self-confidence and general employability skills. The personal support from Work and Learning Advisors and the tailored non-accredited training which focus on enhancing self-confidence, problem solving and the ability to get along appear to be successful. These factors are not only important for clients' own feelings of wellbeing and life satisfaction but are qualities that employers look for when recruiting jobseekers.

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[39] Surveys. Entry (n = 70); exit (n = 86)

9 Community participation

Given the WLC's links within local communities, the survey questions also explored the extent of clients' engagement with their communities and participation in a range of activities. While the results did not indicate any major differences between client groups at entry and exit, they do provide an insight into clients' links with others in their communities and activities.

Sense of community

The surveys revealed that despite living in areas which can be broadly characterised as 'disadvantaged', WLC clients were generally satisfied with their neighbourhoods, agreeing that people in their neighbourhood could be trusted and that neighbourhood safety was satisfactory. Surveyed clients were also more likely to agree than disagree with statements regarding people in their neighbourhood helping each other out and sharing values, although the most common responses were 'neither agree nor disagree', suggesting some ambivalence. Surveyed clients were most equivocal in relation to the statement 'I feel a strong sense of identity with my neighbourhood'.

Clients were asked how many of their close friends or family members were engaged in paid work (see Table 9.1). While around half of all surveyed clients indicated that 'all or most' of their friends and family were engaged in paid work, nearly two-fifths (39%) identified only a few or some. A small number of clients 4% indicated that no-one in their close networks was employed. [40]

Table 9.1   How many family members or close friends have paid work?

	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
All or most	37	53%	39	49%
Few or some	24	34%	34	43%
None	4	6%	6	8%
Don't know	5	7%	1	1%
Total	**70**	**100%**	**80**	**100%**

Consistent with other research findings concerning residents in disadvantaged communities, the WLC clients had strong bonding networks. Almost all surveyed clients (95%) indicated that they had been in contact with friends or family members who did not live with them during the past six months[41]. Clients surveyed when starting out with a WLC were more likely to be in contact with family and friends at least once a day (35%), compared to only 24% of exiting clients. Clients exiting a WLC were more likely to be in contact with friends and family at least once a week (60% compared to 45% at entry). These changes might reflect the challenges for clients who have gained employment maintaining the frequency of contact within close networks due to lack of time.

Participation in leisure activities

Surveyed clients at entry and exit were asked how frequently they participated in activities including attending a club, group or society; going to a hotel or pub; watching live sporting events; going to a place of worship; chatting with neighbours; eating out; going to the movies; visiting family or friends; and playing sport or going to the gym.

The most common activities engaged in by clients at both entry and exit were visiting family and friends and chatting with neighbours. There was little difference between the two groups' engagement in most

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[40] Survey Entry (n = 70) and exit (n = 80) (no response = 11)
[41] Survey Entry and exit (n = 140)

activities. However, the exit group members were more likely to eat out[42] and play sport or go to the gym[43] and to do so more frequently (see Figure 9.1 and Figure 9.2).

The higher incomes of clients who have moved into employment might enable greater participation in activities that cost money such as attending the gym or eating out. More frequent eating out also might reflect having less time to cook due to increased working hours.

Figure 9.1   Frequency of eating out in the past month
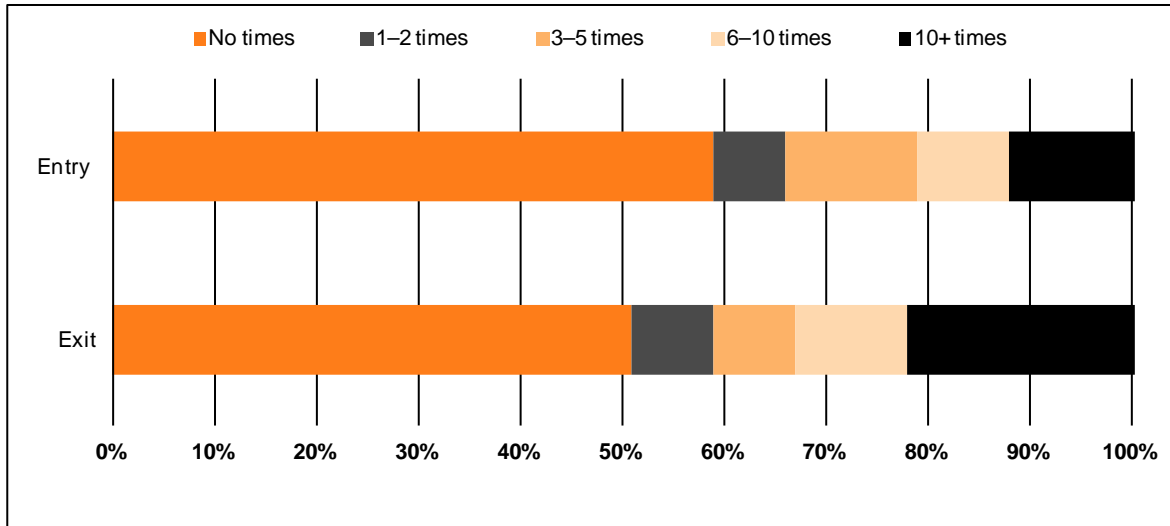
Figure 9.2   Frequency of going to the gym or playing sport in the past month
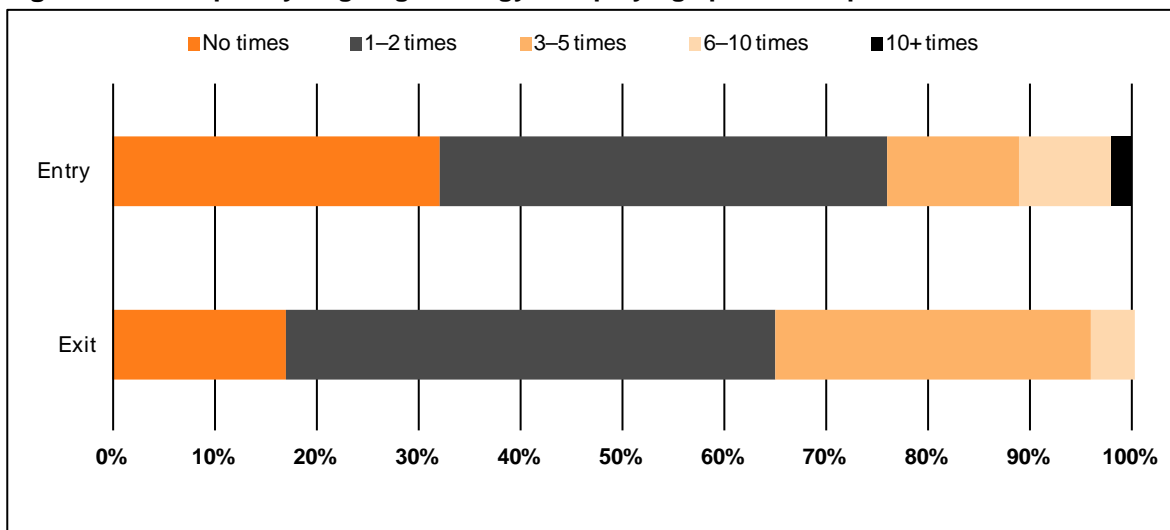
Clients were also asked whether they *would have liked* to participate in the same list of social activities, and if so, the main reason(s) why they did not (see Table 9.2). For both groups, lack of financial resources was the dominant barrier reported, however for the exiting surveyed clients, finances were less likely to be a barrier to social participation and lack of time was more likely to be a reason for non-participation. While 79% of clients surveyed at entry indicated that financial reasons were the main reason for not participating, only 50% of exiting clients indicated that this was the case. [44]

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[42] Surveys: Entry (n = 56); Exit (n = 66)
[43] Surveys: Entry (n = 49); Exit (n = 54)
[44] Surveys: Entry (n = 50; 21 skipped question) Exit (n = 56; 24 skipped question)

Table 9.2   Reasons for not participating in leisure activities, entry and exit surveys

Reasons for not participating in leisure activities	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
Financial reasons	40	79%	33	50%
No transport	19	24%	11	17%
No time	8	10%	12	18%
Health reasons	5	6%	4	6%
Not convenient	3	4%	4	6%
No groups in local area	3	4%	1	1.5%
No childcare available	1	1%	1	1.5%
Total	**79**	**128%[1]**	**66**	**100%**

[1]Totals more than 100% because respondents chose more than one reason

Significantly, lack of transport was the second most common reason for non-participation, although WLC clients surveyed at entry were more likely to identify this reason (24%), compared to 17% of exiting surveyed clients. Health problems were also identified as a barrier to participation by 6% of surveyed clients at entry and exit.

In 2012 the National Social Housing survey gathered information on feelings of social inclusion among social housing tenants, measured through separate attributes of 'feel part of the local community', 'feel more able to improve job situation' and 'feel more able to start or continue education/training'. Only 43% of public housing tenants who responded reported that living in public housing had improved their sense of social inclusion within their community (lower than tenants living in Indigenous housing (57%) and mainstream community housing (50%) (AIHW 2013). Aside from the general benefits to individuals and communities from social and community engagement, such engagement may provide bridging networks which are a possible source of employment opportunities. For this reason, it is important to consider ways to address barriers to participation in civic and social groups for unemployed people; people in public housing and others on low incomes.

10   Housing

Another focus of the client surveys was housing tenure and satisfaction with housing circumstances. The findings indicated that at the time the research was conducted, that clients at entry and exit had similar housing tenure profiles. Surveyed clients were also asked how satisfied they were with their housing tenure, with a score between 1 = not satisfied and 10 = very satisfied.

Overall, clients who had exited a WLC were more likely to be satisfied with their current housing situation than clients commencing, although more research is needed to ascertain the reason. For example, it might be that exiting clients had improved their housing circumstances due to entry into paid employment. Alternatively, their responses might simply reflect existing differences between the two groups' housing tenure.

Overall, survey respondents were more satisfied than not with their current housing. Not surprisingly, perhaps, those most satisfied with their housing were the small group of respondents who owned their home or were paying off their mortgage, with an average score of 7.6. Those living rent-free (mostly living with family) had an average score of 7.1, while private renters (average score 6.6) and community housing (average score of 6.6) reported similar, lower levels of satisfaction. Those least satisfied with their housing were public housing tenants, with an average satisfaction score of 6.2.

Surveyed clients who were dissatisfied with their housing were then asked whether they were looking for alternative housing and whether there were barriers to this (see Table 10.1). For clients surveyed at entry, the main barrier preventing them from finding alternative housing was lack of employment (63%), followed by unaffordable cost (53%). Lack of rental history (16%) and the location of affordable housing (16%) were also identified. By contrast, exiting clients most often identified the unaffordable cost of alternative housing (69%) as the main barrier. Only 13% of clients at exit identified lack of employment as a barrier and a similar proportion identified lack of rental history.

Table 10.1   Barriers to finding alternative (more acceptable) housing

	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
I'm not currently employed	12	63%	2	13%
Alternative housing is too expensive; not affordable	10	53%	11	69%
Available accommodation is in poor locations	3	16%	0	0
I have no rental history / references	3	16%	2	13%
I face discrimination in the rental market	2	11%	0	0
My health or disability	2	11%	0	0
Available accommodation is poor quality	1	5%	0	0
I have a poor rental history	1	5%	1	6%

These results suggest that housing affordability may continue to present barriers to WLC clients even after they have gained employment, at least in the short term. As the Inquiry into the Adequacy and Future Directions of Public Housing in Victoria noted, 'for most tenants [...] achieving an income to exit to the current rental market is potentially challenging' (Victorian Parliament Family and Community Development Committee 2010, p.16). Other research confirms that those more likely to exit public housing are employed tenants earning high incomes (AHURI 2009). Altogether, this data suggests that if one objective of providing employment assistance to public housing tenants is to promote exits into the mainstream housing market, support will be necessary to ensure tenants not only secure work in the short term, but retain employment and increase their hours or advance their positions in the longer term before an impact is seen on exit rates. The WLC focus on both immediate job opportunities and longer-term career pathways is more likely to achieve this that mainstream services which focus on short-term

employment. However further research will be necessary to examine the extent to which the targeted assistance and career planning provided through WLCs affect clients' housing trajectories in the longer term. Conversely, it is important to acknowledge research findings that indicate that security provided by public housing itself plays an important role in economic participation, particularly for tenants with unstable and fractured family, employment and housing histories (AHURI 2009).

11 Conclusion

A 'second chance' employment program

It is clear that the areas in which WLCs are located all experience high levels of unemployment and disadvantage. WLC clients face a range of significant individual and structural barriers to securing and retaining employment—particularly lack of skills and qualifications and lack of work experience. Many have histories of insecure employment. Four of the five WLCs are located in regional areas with limited public transport, yet fewer than half the clients have a car or a drivers licence. Many clients have caring responsibilities, disabilities or ill health which make finding work difficult. Some are refugees and migrants facing employer discrimination, lack of Australian work experience and limited networks. These groups are not well served by mainstream employment services. They want to work, but need to be linked in to the right networks and provided with tailored support so that they can take advantage of available opportunities.

The finding that 41% of WLC clients are referred by JSAs, and 35% hear about WLCs through word of mouth (many of these also JSA clients) suggests that many disadvantaged jobseekers are not adequately served by the mainstream system, a fact recognised by providers and their clients. Disadvantaged jobseekers in these communities are being referred by mainstream job service providers or using their own initiative to seek out support to find a job. **WLCs are therefore providing a second chance for those who have been failed by the employment services system.**

Investing in future employability

Initial findings also indicate that investment in these jobseekers pays off. Compared to clients surveyed at entry, WLC clients at exit reported:

- increased income

- less reliance on income support payments

- increased confidence

- greater life satisfaction.

The Work and Learning Centre approach invests in individual jobseekers through harnessing the goodwill and social capital of communities. WLCs not only assist their clients to pursue further education and training and to find employment, they work with clients to identify possible career paths and navigate the labour market. The focus on employability, including increasing confidence, reliability, ability to get on with others and problem solving provides clients with skills that will assist them to remain employable in the future, even if their current employment does not continue.

Initial findings suggest, however, that in the short term increased incomes from paid work were not sufficient to enable clients dissatisfied with their housing circumstances to find alternative accommodation.

An effective model built on community trust

The WLC service delivery model is essentially based on trust and relationships, at both the individual jobseeker level and the community level. This research provides some insight into the effectiveness of this approach. At the individual client level, this research has highlighted the importance of the relationship between clients and the WLCs. In particular, clients value the individual tailored support provided by their Work and Learning Advisors. Client feedback suggests that the personalised support they have received has helped them to engage with training and education, gain confidence, and improve their chances of finding paid work.

At the community level, the WLCs link into and harness their networks to identify opportunities for clients. As UK social policy researcher, Matt Padley (2013, p.344) suggests, there is an increasing need

for services that are 'responsive to local circumstances and, crucially, harness the capacities of communities to identify and solve their own problems'. He suggests a key factor in delivering and developing strong civic communities is building social trust and reciprocity, and that this is best delivered through collaboration between communities and community members, local institutions and central government. The success or failure of such collaboration is 'likely to rest on the development of communities and shared lives: communities strong in social trust and capital'.

Other researchers have suggested that community organisations may be able to build relationships within particular communities more easily, and with greater flexibility and innovation, than large public bureaucracies (Sullivan et al. 2013). The WLC model provides a working example of such an approach.

As more clients exit the five WLCs, more comprehensive analysis of the outcomes achieved will become possible. Further research will be necessary to ascertain clients' longer-term employment retention and advancement and the impact of employment on their housing trajectories, particularly those of public housing tenants. However, this preliminary snapshot indicates that this innovative approach is having a real impact on the lives of many Victorians.
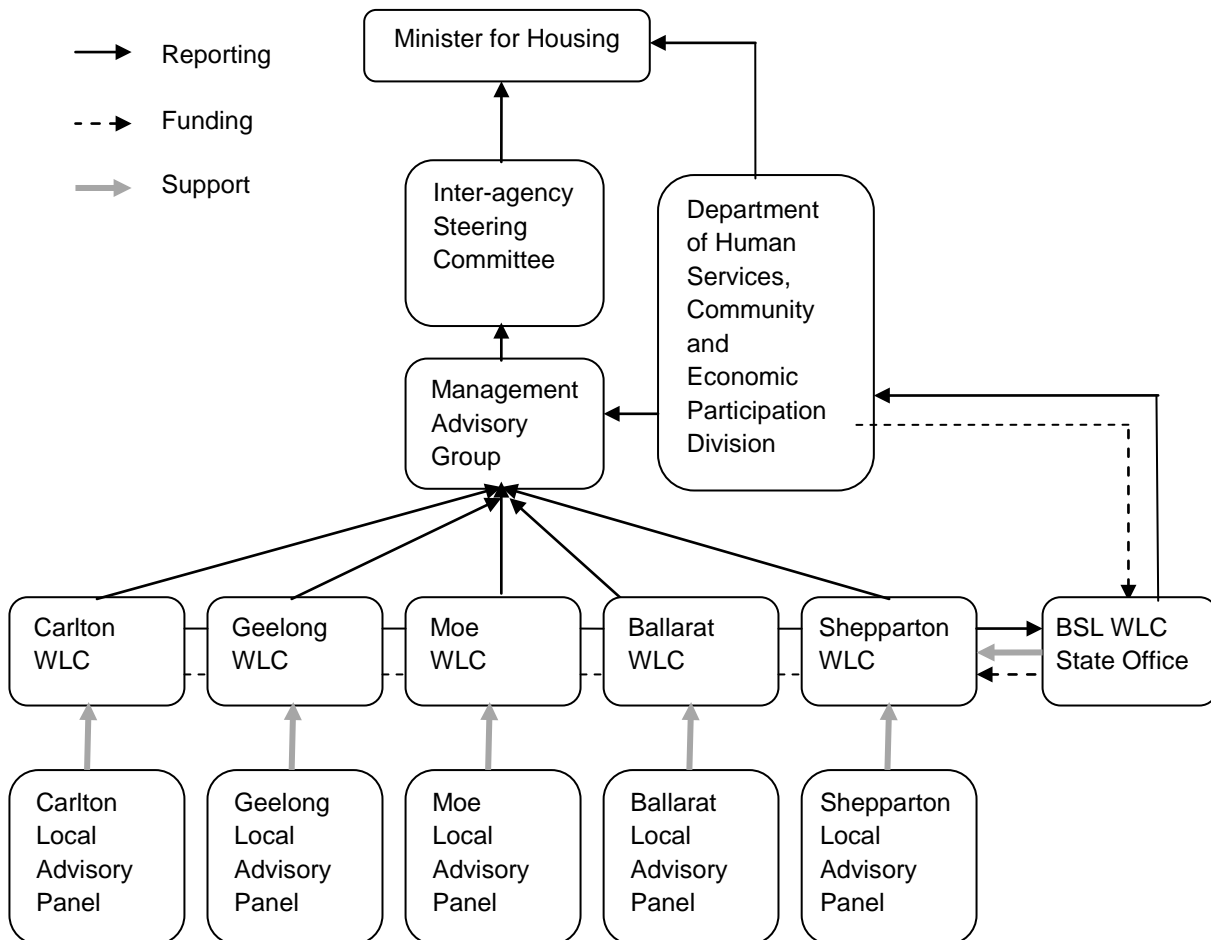
Appendix: Work and Learning Centres governance arrangements

Key:

→ Reporting

- - → Funding

→ Support

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                        │ Minister for Housing  │◄────────────┐
                        └──────────────────────┘              │
                                   ▲                           │
                        ┌──────────────┐      ┌────────────────────────┐
                        │ Inter-agency │      │ Department             │
                        │ Steering     │      │ of Human               │
                        │ Committee    │      │ Services,              │
                        └──────────────┘      │ Community              │
                                   ▲          │ and                    │
                        ┌──────────────┐      │ Economic               │
                        │ Management   │◄─────│ Participation          │
                        │ Advisory     │      │ Division               │
                        │ Group        │      └────────────────────────┘
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```

| Carlton WLC | Geelong WLC | Moe WLC | Ballarat WLC | Shepparton WLC | BSL WLC State Office |

| Carlton Local Advisory Panel | Geelong Local Advisory Panel | Moe Local Advisory Panel | Ballarat Local Advisory Panel | Shepparton Local Advisory Panel |

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