



# Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra

## Evaluation report

June 2012

Research and Policy Centre

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a non-government, community-based organisation concerned with social justice. Based in Melbourne, but with programs and services throughout Australia, the Brotherhood is working for a better deal for disadvantaged people. It undertakes research, service development and delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating learning into new policies, programs and practices for implementation by government and others. For more information visit <[www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au)>.

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## Glossary

Accredited qualification	Accredited training leads to a formal qualification such as a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma. These qualifications are recognised across Australia in line with the common standards and assessment guidelines outlined in national training packages
Employment outcome	Completion of a minimum of 13 weeks paid employment
Employer-specific training	Training whose goal is to assist the participants to apply for positions in a particular industry or organisation. This training is usually organised in consultation with a specific employer or industry
Intake	The first meeting between the Work and Learning Advisor (WLA) and the member. The key activity is completion of the Client Intake Form
JobReady	The client data management software used at the CWLY
Job placement	Any type of paid work gained by the member after they complete an intake session with a WLA
Member	Any person who completes an intake session with a WLA and becomes a client of the Centre
Non-accredited qualification	Formal and non-formal training which does not lead directly to any form of external accreditation, award or qualification
Orientation	An information session delivered to people who register for Centre services, to outline the services offered and match the person to a Work and Learning Advisor
Work and Learning Advisor (WLA)	CWLY staff member who provides work and learning support services
Work and learning support	Case management style services that a member receives after orientation, intake and assessment with a WLA

### Case study – Zahra

Zahra was a humanitarian refugee from northern Africa who had arrived in Australia with no English or computer skills. She came to the CWLY because she wanted to find employment. Zahra took part in the Centre's English language and computer classes. Her Work and Learning Advisor supported her to apply for a part-time cleaning position with a private employer, providing training and support regarding the interview process.

Zahra was happy to take this role in the short term as it provided some income and an opportunity to improve her English and gain some Australian work experience. She continued to look for more permanent work with the assistance of the Centre. Another opportunity in child care arose in a locality close to Zahra's home. Many of the children were from Zahra's ethnic background and she was willing to learn and undertake the necessary training. She was offered a permanent role and her employer agreed to pay for her training as a qualified childcare worker. Zahra has longer-term plans to return to study to become a school teacher.

## Summary

The Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra (CWLY) was established as a demonstration project to test innovative place-based approaches to promote work and learning opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers in an inner-city neighbourhood with a high density of public housing and high concentrations of unemployment. The Centre was primarily funded by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the Innovation Fund over a three-year period from July 2009.

The Brotherhood's local service experience and Office of Housing tenancy data showed high levels of worklessness on inner-city Melbourne public housing estates. A baseline survey in 2009 found that 73% of those aged 18–60 years wanted to obtain paid work. The Centre therefore opened a shopfront entry point close to public housing, based on open-door, voluntary participation. The Centre has sought to develop a better coordinated service model by combining personal support with foundational and vocational skills and work experience with a direct line of sight to local employment opportunities. This model evolved over time as understandings about the client group and the services developed. Key elements of the model included:

- lower case loads to offer personalised assistance on a more flexible and responsive schedule
- individual needs assessments matched to foundational/pre-vocational skills and leading to vocational training
- access to motivational or psychological support on site for clients and provision of secondary consultations with Work and Learning Advisors
- outreach to public housing residents to foster engagement
- memberships offered to clients to promote participation in activities
- capacity for advocacy on behalf of clients to Centrelink and Job Services Australia (JSA)
- access to paid work and traineeships through open employers and social enterprises
- trial of engagement strategies aimed at 'hard-to-reach' residents.

As a trial of a new approach, there was a significant developmental phase to convert the aspirations set out in the Innovation Fund application into a service delivery model. Program logic was utilised to consider the assumptions about the intervention, develop a theory of change and identify outcomes. Primary data collection about activities and outcomes was developed in consultation with CWLY staff. The evaluation framework included both quantitative and qualitative strategies based on the program logic, but also incorporated a developmental approach to assist in reflection and adjustment of the model.

The Centre has exceeded its contract deliverables over the three years of the project. Since July 2009 information and advice has been provided to 1,755 people, with 1,384 (79%) provided with pre-employment intervention. This includes use of the Centre's resources (including informal training); case management support or direct access to training courses through the Group Training Organisation (GTO). The demand exceeded expectations and impacted on service delivery in a number of ways: increasing case loads for staff and curtailing the Centre's capacity to proactively engage with 'hard-to-reach' public housing residents.

The focus of this evaluation has been on the period from January 2010 to December 2011, after the development phase. Over this period, 479 people became clients and received work and learning support. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the clients were living in public housing and another 7% were in community or transitional housing at registration.



The overwhelming majority of clients were born outside Australia (98%) with more than half of them refugees (55%). The incorporation of the Given the Chance program into the Centre influenced this presenting demand. However, a key finding from the project is the significant *unmet* need for employment assistance from this group of jobseekers. A large proportion of clients (30%) were not receiving employment assistance through JSA. The Centre's open-door approach to reduce barriers to engagement and participation resulted in an influx of motivated jobseekers for whom the mainstream system was not proving effective.

A significant proportion of clients were actively engaged in some learning or work-related activity when they first contacted the Centre. This reflects their level of qualifications (30% with Certificate 3 or 4; 46% with diplomas or degrees) and previous work experience (90% had had a paid job in the past five years). Of those reporting their JSA status, the largest group were those in Stream 3 (26%), followed by Stream 1 (20%) and Stream 2 (18%).

Demand had been expected to come from highly disadvantaged jobseekers assessed as Stream 4. However, this was not borne out. Feedback from staff suggested that many clients were in less intensive streams within the JSA system than they should have been. This points to some inaccuracy in the process for assessing barriers to work using the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI):

- A range of personal issues (such as trauma and health problems) are not fully disclosed to Centrelink or JSA providers.
- The current JSCI process fails to capture the full range of barriers including ethnic bias or discrimination in the labour market.

These challenges from presenting demand led to changes in the model to ensure a stronger focus on engaging residents in the local public housing estates, through introduction of a waiting list, priority given to public housing residents by work and learning advisors with dedicated case loads, and collaborating directly with the Office of Housing to strengthen economic participation. This resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of clients assisted after the first year who were living in City of Yarra public housing (41%).

## Successful elements of the service delivery model

The work and learning support in the model comprised two core components: personal support (case management) through Work and Learning Advisors as a means to promote client engagement and capacity building; and both structured and informal group learning based on a full assessment of skill needs and aspirations. Personal support was considered essential. It included the development of rapport and a trusting relationship as a basis for motivation, individualised support and setting realistic goals leading to capacity building. Post-placement support for clients taking up work experience or traineeships was also a critical success factor. Skills development embraced practical and foundational capabilities including job searching, interpersonal or living skills and work culture skills (Crossing Bridges) needed to obtain and sustain a job. The Centre developed training opportunities for clients to match their learning needs—a Job Club (job search skills); interview skills training; English conversation classes; computing skills classes.

The Work and Learning Advisors played a vital role in modelling appropriate workplace behaviour and setting boundaries and expectations for clients as part of their becoming 'job-ready'. About 16% of clients were matched with mentors who provided support to build a bridge to employment for people from refugee backgrounds.

A challenge for the support staff related to external or structural barriers to work faced by their clients. The Work and Learning Advisors assisted in advocating on behalf of their clients to gain access to various non-vocational and work-related programs. However, staff felt they had limited



capacity to overcome labour market barriers such as employer discrimination or bias against particular groups.

A key development in 2010 was the creation of a specialist Employer Engagement position to undertake proactive outreach to prospective employers and to provide support to host employers to increase the chances of job sustainability. This approach was coupled with workshops conducted with specific employers that provided job-focused training tailored to the employers' needs to encourage them to diversify their recruitment of labour (Building Bridges).

The original intention of the CWLY approach was to build collaborative relationships with local JSA providers. Work and Learning Advisors reported varying success when advocating to JSA providers, with relationships described as ranging from 'extremely positive' to 'adversarial'. Access to Employment Pathways Fund monies to address barriers was problematic, as JSA providers preferred to use this resource for in-house training. Following limited success in obtaining funds from provider EPF or for outcome payments, a Business Development Officer was recruited to leverage JSA funding, with mixed results. By May 2012, 13 JSA providers have shared fee payments for outcomes achieved with 44 mutual clients, with the average contribution from providers being \$1,560 per client. Considering that over 200 Centre clients were engaged with a JSA, this low level of financial support underscores the ongoing difficulties in achieving effective collaboration with the JSA system under current arrangements.

## Challenges

As a demonstration model with a relatively short start-up phase, a number of challenges emerged over the first six months of delivery. These related partly to the initial reliance on the pre-existing Given the Chance program and the Brotherhood's GTO and RTO (Registered Training Organisation). In summary, the Brotherhood's organisational structures mirrored the external service system. While the aspiration was to develop and test an *integrated* service model, the governance arrangements and external contract reporting requirements for different services limited the Centre's capacity to implement such a model.

As part of the developmental approach, the researcher designed an integration framework to document the key elements that underpin client-centred service integration. This assisted Centre staff to consider how best to deliver such a service and to recognise elements that were beyond their control in an employment services environment characterised by high levels of contract management, regulation and compliance reporting. The overall finding from this process was that the Centre was working collaboratively with BSL's training divisions, with reasonable coordination across most integration variables. However, staff were keen to gain greater autonomy to deliver a seamless service with timely access to resources so as to achieve better outcomes for clients.

A key learning from the evaluation for such trials is the importance of having sufficient staff time and capacity to develop the infrastructure and a documented service delivery model that allows a robust evaluation to be fully implemented. The researcher spent considerable time on developmental activities, designing a core data collection strategy and facilitating reflection by Centre staff. This flexibility was welcomed by the Centre as a critical contribution to the development of the service model. However, it serves to show the importance of an adequate start-up phase for such trials.

During the three years of operation of the Centre, BSL has also undertaken a strategic review of its training provision and community enterprises within a restructured Employment and Training Division. In late 2010, the RTO incorporating the ACFE-funded Learn Local entity was separated from the GTO to create two separate business units to grow the range of training services and work placements in the context of the substantial reforms to vocational education and training in Victoria. The GTO has diversified its services to include employment pathways to a broader range of host

employers, beyond the BSL's enterprises. The majority of the latter enterprises relied on time-limited social procurement or government funding (for example through the Community Jobs Fund) and concluded operation in the past year. These changes, driven in part by external factors, have influenced the implementation of the Centre model.

## Training churn and credentialism

The clients assisted by the Centre were typically better educated than the overall population of highly disadvantaged jobseekers. Just over half (55%) had completed vocational qualifications in the past five years, with one in five having completed three or more qualifications. At the point of registration with the Centre, a substantial 42% were currently studying—half of this group at certificate level, 25% at high school, 18% at diploma level and 8% at university. This profile reflects the preponderance of overseas-born clients, with an average stay in Australia of six years. Many had gained tertiary or vocational qualifications overseas.

A common concern of clients was the lack of recognition of their qualifications or prior work experience—not only by employers, but also by JSA providers who 'encouraged' people to retrain, often in different industries or sectors. Centre clients frequently raised issues of ethnic bias or discrimination by employers. This was compounded by their weak social networks and connections into the world of work in their chosen occupations. With increased priority placed on human capital development by Australian governments by building the training system as a demand-driven, marketised sector, the evidence from this Centre supports emerging concerns about training churn and credentialism.

The Centre's increased focus on direct employer engagement was in part a way to overcome the ethnic penalty in a competitive labour market. Those jobseekers with limited Australian work histories and weak support networks are at a serious disadvantage in finding a sustainable employment pathway. This is not due to lack of motivation. Rather it reflects the structural and systemic barriers faced by migrant jobseekers: the lack of social trust and the overall lack of job opportunities.

Centre clients' low satisfaction with mainstream JSA providers also points to an inadequate engagement and assessment process to understand and document barriers to employment. By contrast, two barriers were given higher priority by Work and Learning Advisors: lack of appropriate foundational or soft skills for Australian workplaces, and poor written or spoken English. Providing both informal and structured learning opportunities to address these barriers and match individual needs became a feature of the Centre's approach.

There seem to be two key learnings from the Centre's experiences of work and learning support. First, training for training's sake does not lead to a paid job. Completion of a vocational certificate does not guarantee a job if the person's foundational capabilities do not make them employable. Second, personalised support that builds a relationship with jobseekers who face multiple barriers to work is essential to the effective assessment and resolution of those barriers.

## Client employment outcomes

Employment outcomes have been calculated for the 479 people registered as clients of the Centre in the period from January 2010 to December 2011. The job placement rate achieved for these clients has been 42%, with a 13-week employment outcome rate of 31%. This outcome rate compares favourably with national JSA Stream 3 and 4 data for CALD jobseekers by more than three percentage points.

Just over half of those taking up paid work were in casual employment (53%). Half (52%) obtained paid work in the open labour market; 29% were found work brokered by BSL and 19% took up a traineeship through BSL's GTO following work and learning support.

Focusing on specific subgroups, the highest job placement rates were achieved for JSA Stream 3 category jobseekers (45%) and those not in the JSA (44%). The job placement rate for JSA Stream 4 jobseekers was 29%.

Analysis of outcomes for the public housing residents indicates the success of the Centre, with employment outcomes consistent with the entire sample: 41% attained job placements and 27% employment outcomes (at 13 weeks).

The profile of those clients who lived in public housing was not significantly different from the overall client group in terms of JSA stream, cultural background or income support category. This points to an ongoing challenge in engaging the most disadvantaged residents. Some groups were under-represented at the Centre, including those on Parenting Payments and Disability Support Pensions. Despite the challenges in balancing high levels of demand for the Centre's services with effective and responsive engagement with these groups, the learning from the outreach elements shows the way to more effective engagement with the 'hard to reach' residents.

## Value-add elements at the Centre

In addition to the trial of the core service model, the Centre's activities included a range of value-adding elements which have contributed to its success and provided insights into more effective service delivery aimed at highly disadvantaged groups.

These elements have included collaboration with the Office of Housing to engage with tenants; specialist psychological support, funded by a philanthropic trust; research undertaken to explore in more detail the nature of assistance to women in public housing; and a new, trust-funded study in collaboration with Melbourne Business School to research employer barriers and benefits of taking on disadvantaged jobseekers.

## Sustainability implications

The Board of the Brotherhood has recently committed to continue the Centre's core service delivery model as an integral part of its Line of Sight strategy, based on the evaluation evidence to date and internal review. This will enable further refinement of the model with consolidation of the governance and organisational arrangements, clearer articulation of the integrated approach, enhancement of the direct employer engagement strategy and further development of the evidence base. The intention is to document the service delivery model over the next two years to support sustainability and replication.

The experience and results from the demonstration phase have been sufficient to encourage the Victorian Government to commit resources to replicate the approach in partnership with BSL and other local stakeholders. In 2011, the government committed \$4.6m for five Work and Learning Centres in areas with high concentrations of public housing residents. These WLCs are to be based on the CWLY service model. Learnings from the CWLY are being used to design the organisational arrangements, governance and service delivery at these new centres. A WLC Process Manual has been written and the JobReady database software is being adopted. It is anticipated that the evidence from these new Centres will be brought together with knowledge from the Centre in Yarra to inform potential reforms to active labour market programs, in particular to the JSA from 2015.

## Policy implications

Despite the challenges of implementation of an integrated service model, the Centre has provided valuable insights into more effective ways to engage and support disadvantaged jobseekers in public housing neighbourhoods, particularly refugees and new migrants.

While the Centre has not fully integrated assistance in its demonstration phase, it has been able to offer a better coordinated, responsive service by combining proactive engagement in the local community, personal support, flexible forms of pre-vocational skills and accredited training, and life skills education linked to real work experience. The place-based approach using an accessible shopfront location attracted unemployed groups, those not well connected to the JSA and those who were actively seeking work or were marginally attached to work. This unmet demand points to potential benefits of further improvements to active labour market policy to meet employer needs by building a more responsive employment assistance system.

The Centre's flexibility as a hub enabled the development of relationships with local community groups and services to reach out to public housing residents. The job outcomes achieved for the client group, albeit predominantly refugees and new migrants, suggest that the approach merits replication for other groups of highly disengaged jobseekers.

The key elements of the model that might be considered for broader application as part of active labour market reform directions include:

- a client-centred approach based on effective engagement and a trusting relationship
- continuity of support including post-placement follow-up through reduced case loads (1:60)
- skills development and training matched to individual aspirations, learning needs and employment pathways
- local engagement with employers (both open market and social enterprises) to provide work opportunities matched to jobseekers
- work and learning advisors with the skills, empathy and commitment to engage effectively with disadvantaged groups.

BSL's previous research and advocacy have pointed to the current weaknesses of employment assistance in achieving outcomes both for highly disadvantaged groups and for employers seeking entry-level labour. The evidence from the Centre's first three years adds weight to the arguments for further reform to the JSA that can support integrated and flexible service delivery at a local level. The indicative outcome rates suggest potential cost benefits of such approaches. However, this would require either additional investment in JSA budget allocations or redeployment of existing resources towards highly disadvantaged groups.

In essence, the evaluation points to the importance of a more personalised, supportive service model that tailors assistance to the capabilities of individual jobseekers and opens a direct path into paid work.

The learnings from the Centre also point to broader active labour market policy changes to overcome systemic or structural barriers faced by this jobseeker population. These include:

- review of the JSCI classification tool and assessment procedures to ensure that all the barriers to work are taken into account in allocating jobseekers to JSA streams, including personal factors, risk of ethnic bias and discrimination, period of unemployment (in country of origin as well as in Australia)

- stronger measures to ensure JSA collaboration with local services by sharing EPF and outcome fees for mutual clients
- examination of the prevalence of training churn and credentialism experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers through poor matching of skill needs to local job prospects
- consideration of effective workforce diversity measures and social procurement strategies to overcome ethnic bias and stimulate job opportunities
- examination of 'off-benefit' funding models to support integrated intermediate labour market (ILM) approaches using open employers and social enterprises, targeting disadvantaged groups in areas of high unemployment and using Newstart payments to contribute to paid work or traineeships
- labour market initiatives that support job retention and advancement for entry-level workers.

The BSL has committed to continue the Centre as the main entry point into its services for disadvantaged jobseekers for a further two years. Drawing on the findings from the demonstration, the challenge will be to implement further organisational changes to maximise the seamless delivery of client-centred assistance; to continue to focus on 'hard to reach' income support recipients; and to ensure the collection of high quality service data for monitoring and review.

Finally, it will be important to measure employment outcomes for clients of the Centre over a longer period to validate the reported findings and assess the sustainability of employment outcomes. It is recommended that comparative analysis of employment outcomes be undertaken with a matched sample of jobseekers using JSA services. As the present study was a developmental evaluation focused on the service delivery model, a financial analysis based on client outcomes was out of scope and premature. It is suggested that this research also be undertaken to measure the cost benefits in order to inform active labour market policy reform.

### Case study – Aazim

Aazim had worked as a skilled laboratory assistant, but he had difficulty finding employment when he arrived in Australia. Through one of the Centre's Work and Learning Advisors, he was linked with a mentor to support him in his search for work.

Aazim worked with his mentor to improve his computer skills, his job interview performance, organisational skills and time management. It became apparent that while Aazim had good technical skills, he struggled with English, particularly the pronunciation of terms specific to his field. He developed a strong relationship with his mentor who encouraged him through multiple job applications and rejections. After around eight months, Aazim found employment in a laboratory.



# 1 Introduction

The Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra (CWLY) was co-funded by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Innovation Fund for a three-year period from July 2009 to June 2012. The Brotherhood applied for Innovation Funding as an opportunity to develop and test a better integrated model of employment assistance for public housing tenants and other local residents on a pathway to social and economic participation. The resulting Centre for Work and Learning situated in Fitzroy (an inner suburb of Melbourne) in the City of Yarra commenced its development phase in July 2009 and opened its doors to clients in January 2010.

## Rationale for the Centre

BSL provides a wide range of services and programs, conducts research into the causes and effects of poverty and social exclusion, and seeks to influence social policy and practice at both a local and national level. The BSL strategy has centred its work on four life transition stages crucial to people's wellbeing: the early years of childhood, the transition through school to work, periods in and out of work, and retirement and ageing. In the 'working years' transition, a focus of BSL's efforts has been on developing more effective approaches to assist disadvantaged unemployed people into decent, sustainable paid work. BSL's service delivery experience through Job Network, JPET, PSP and DEN, together with our intermediate labour market models (including Given the Chance) had pointed to a form of assistance that might be more effective for highly disadvantaged jobseekers than current service models.

For some time, the BSL has been advocating for significant reform to the way in which employment services are delivered. The key message from the BSL's 2008 policy submission was a belief that the employment assistance system at that time (Job Network) was failing disadvantaged and marginalised Australians. This submission called for four key changes: simplification of the system, rebalancing expenditure, a focus on sustainable outcomes, and increased collaboration and choice (BSL 2008). The BSL's opinion was that the design of the new Job Services Australia system (which superseded the Job Network in 2009) went some way to addressing the weakness of the Job Network system, with a stronger focus on disadvantaged jobseekers and a more effective compliance system focused on re-engagement rather than penalty. The BSL continued to be concerned about the relatively poor outcomes for jobseekers living with multiple barriers (including people who are categorised as Stream 4). More recent submissions to government proposed that the JSA needed to be reconfigured to incorporate an integrated approach and direct connections to employers and 'transitional employment providers', with an increase in funding to provide more intensive support to disadvantaged jobseekers and a greater focus on sustainable employment outcomes (BSL 2011).

The question is what constitutes more effective assistance for disadvantaged jobseekers? The BSL considered that a better integrated approach combining personal support, soft and vocational skills development and work experience and aligned more closely with local employment opportunities was essential for improving outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers. If motivation is not the main barrier to employment, then what are the real barriers and how should they be addressed? What is it about integrated services that would overcome the limitations of the current JSA system? The Centre was an attempt by the BSL to answer these longstanding questions.

The Centre for Work and Learning Yarra was therefore conceived as a demonstration project that would test employment service approaches for people living in areas of high disadvantage and worklessness (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). It was initially imagined as a central point for a variety of employment services, employers and jobseekers. The Centre sought to establish an active presence in public housing communities in the City of Yarra. It intended to promote visibility

by working with public housing residents groups and by contributing to community development projects. It also intended to provide access to accredited and non-accredited training, offer life-skills training, promote entrance into unpaid work experience, and broker paid work experience positions with local employers.

Organisationally, the CWLY was placed within the Employment and Training Department (ETD). It is co-located within the ETD with two other BSL entities: the Group Training Organisation (GTO) and the Registered Training Organisation (RTO). The Centre was expected to work in an integrated fashion with the GTO and RTO to provide work and learning services. The GTO oversees traineeships and provides support to both employer and trainee in the workplace. The RTO provides accredited training for the GTO trainees and accredited and non-accredited public training. The GTO and RTO were long established services at the BSL with a history of close collaboration. ETD also included a range of community enterprises funded through a combination of social procurement, government grants and trading revenue to deliver real work experience to highly disadvantaged jobseekers as an intermediate labour market (ILM) approach. In the original Innovation Fund application, it was envisaged that the CWLY would coordinate with the GTO and RTO to provide client-centred, holistic and integrated employment and training services for highly disadvantaged jobseekers.

## **Employment in public housing estates**

The Centre was expected to work primarily in the three public housing estates in Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy. These three estates comprise high-rise towers surrounded by smaller areas of low-rise units. The City of Yarra has just under 5,000 dwellings managed by the Office of Housing (OoH), representing about 7% of Victoria's public housing and one-third of the state's high-rise public housing.

Families with children under the age of 16 in which no parent has reported earnings in the prior 12 months represent 74% of families living in the Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond estates. Rates of worklessness in single parent families are over 80%. The unemployment rate on these estates is typically over 50% (OoH 2008 unpublished data).

There is significant variance across the three estates in residents' country of birth and income support type signalling probable differences in work capacity, job readiness and entrenched disadvantage. Typically, 12% of residents were born in Australia, with large proportions born in Vietnam, Africa and China (OoH 2009). Approximately four in ten working age residents were on Newstart or Youth Allowance in 2009, with another 13% in some level of paid work. Across the three estates an average of 14% of tenants were on DSP and 17% on Aged Pensions.

The three estates have reported poor engagement with local Job Services Australia providers. Fitzroy and Collingwood estates participated in the Neighbourhood Renewal program (implemented by the Victorian Government's Department of Human Services) which sought to:

narrow the gap between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the State. It is an approach that brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to tackle disadvantage in areas with concentrations of public housing (DHS).

One element of the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy was the establishment of an Employment and Learning Network and an Industry Engagement Strategy that were intended to be linked into local businesses and meet the needs of the population.

When the CWLY opened, the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy was in its final six months and the Centre was seen as an avenue for continuing the Employment and Learning Network. Indeed most of this network became members of the Centre's Advisory Group, a consultative mechanism with the local community.

The employment survey of residents of the Fitzroy and Collingwood estates which was conducted as part of NR included questions to gain respondent attitudes to job opportunities and local employment services.

## Baseline profile of public housing residents 2010

One of the first activities of the Centre was a skills survey. As part of the initial development of the CWLY, the project team decided to 'piggy-back' on the 2009 Neighbourhood Renewal survey process of public housing tenants and undertake an additional optional survey.

The first purpose of the survey was to obtain a research profile of the public housing residents' current employment status, aspirations for work, and financial incentives and disincentives to work. The second was to obtain information about people's needs, activities and obstacles to work and learning, which could guide service development at the CWLY. In addition, where individuals chose to be identified, the survey served as an initial contact for possible registration with the CWLY.

The surveys were administered by residents who had been trained by the University of Melbourne in social survey collection techniques. The NR sample comprised 500 residents in Fitzroy, Richmond and Collingwood. The CWLY survey received 301 responses, which represented 60% of the NR survey sample. It should be noted that the CWLY responses represented 6% of the household population in the survey area (OoH 2009).

Relevant findings from the survey were as follows:

- One-third of respondents were receiving the Disability Support Pension (DSP).
- One-quarter were currently unemployed and 14% were employed to some extent.
- Seventy-three per cent of working age respondents stated that they would like to work in some capacity.
- Parents and people on DSP were more likely to state that they wanted part-time work.
- While fear of losing benefits is a consideration for people wanting to take up work, people were more likely to indicate that lack of confidence or a belief that they did not have the skills to work was a greater factor for them.
- Barriers to work included lack of job search or interview skills, lack of qualifications or skills, uncertainty about work, financial risks and caring responsibilities.
- Only one-third of respondents reported contact with local employment services (BSL 2010).

Analysis of the survey data resulted in the following pointers for the development of the Centre's service delivery. The first implication related to the reach of services and ensuring that the Centre did not just work with those who were readily identified as unemployed (those on Newstart and Youth Allowance), but also engaged with people who might desire paid employment, including sole parents and residents with a disability and a capacity to work. It would also be important to engage with those who were underemployed—those working part-time but seeking increased hours or further qualifications.

The second key point was that residents were aware only in general terms of the potential financial impact of paid work on their income support and concession entitlements as well as their rental payments to OoH. These cost considerations appeared to be an important factor in people's decisions about work. However, respondents did not know to what extent earned income would affect their entitlements. These findings supported the broad direction of the Centre in adopting a personalised form of assistance reflecting the diversity of backgrounds, skills and work histories of the resident population.

The survey also obtained respondents' attitudes to job prospects and local employment services. As Table 1.1 shows, residents generally thought there were limited job opportunities and did not have positive views of local employment services. While these indicators are attitudinal and reflect the views of a relatively small sample of all residents (about 30%) at that time, they support the proposition that mainstream employment services (JSA) struggle to engage with this population group who experience high levels of worklessness, weak social connections and deep social exclusion (Horn 2012).

**Table 1.1 Attitudes to job opportunities and local employment services on the Fitzroy and Collingwood housing estates, 2009**

Attitudes to	Fitzroy, %	Collingwood, %
<b>Job opportunities</b>		
Good	15	22
Average	28	33
Poor	32	45
<b>Local employment services</b>		
Good	13	23
Average	30	32
Poor	30	45

The learnings from NR experience and the stubborn levels of worklessness in the estates supported the case for targeted local approaches to better coordinate assistance that would offer working-age residents a pathway into training and employment.

## 2 The evaluation framework

An Evaluation Advisory Group was convened at the beginning of the Centre's implementation phase with their main task to inform and guide the design of the evaluation framework appropriate to the developmental approach of the Centre and the resources available.

The following evaluation questions were developed out of the initial consultations. They reflected the intent of the demonstration project to document the key components of the Centre's service model, measure its outcomes and identify the success factors that might be replicated or integrated into active labour market interventions.

- 1 To what extent has the trust-based, integrated nature of the CWLY contributed to beneficial social and employment outcomes for disadvantaged residents in and around Yarra?
  - What is the nature and extent of integration?
  - In what ways does the CWLY approach contribute to beneficial social and employment outcomes for disadvantaged residents in and around Yarra?
- 2 To what extent has the integrated, trust-based approach adopted by the CWLY benefited:
  - sole parents
  - DSP recipients
  - Newstart recipients
  - refugees and CALD groups
  - drug and alcohol users?
- 3 What elements of the CWLY approach can be replicated?

These questions were focused on measuring the outcomes of the project on the assumption that the service model and organisational arrangements would be well defined and implemented. However, in the first phase it became apparent that the Centre was an innovative approach with a new facility and staff, with varying conditions of delivery and an unknown client group. In this context, a developmental evaluation was more appropriate. The evaluation was therefore conducted in a spirit of innovation with action research elements to enable Centre staff to reflect and adjust service delivery as data and feedback became available.

Rather than being a 'traditional' evaluation *describing the story* of the Centre based on a definable 'dose' delivered through its activities, the evaluation has been *part of the story* of the Centre. This meant that the researcher was heavily involved in the development and reflection processes.

In an innovative setting, where the intervention does not yet meet evaluability criteria, the focus is less on measuring outcomes in a summative way and more on helping the project reach the point where it can be evaluated. This was the situation with the Centre.

The methodology which evolved over the three years therefore comprised the following core components:

- design and implementation of a survey of residents to provide up-to-date baseline data
- participant observation with the Work and Learning Advisors (WLAs), to deepen understanding of the case management model and how clients experienced the Centre.
- development of administrative and client management processes. Participation in these activities allowed the researcher to shape the Centre's primary data collection and reporting processes.

- development of a client management system (JobReady). The data dictionary incorporated variables to inform the evaluation. JobReady has also served as a case management tool for the WLAs.
- participation in organisational arrangements (staff and management meetings at the Centre and the BSL's Employment and Training Department). This embedded approach provided insights into the delivery and governance of the Centre and contributed to its development.
- outcomes measurement, built into the client management system by including variables to assess job placement and sustainability for participants
- interviews and focus groups undertaken in the third year with key stakeholders, including Centre clients and staff, and external service providers.

A summary of the elements of the methodology, including the process of obtaining ethics approval from the BSL's research ethics committee, appears in the Appendix. The evaluation plan developed at the start of the Centre provides a more detailed description of the planned approach (BSL 2010).

## **Limitations of the evaluation**

The design features of the Centre's service model meant that an experimental or quasi-experimental methodology to measure outcomes was not possible. Instead, the multi-methods design focused on documenting the approach through developmental activities with staff to enable reflection, review and adjustment of service delivery.

The intention was to undertake secondary analysis of JSA data (through DEEWR) to make comparison with the Centre on selected outcomes data and on key service model elements. However, there appear to be no publicly available reports that document the model delivered by JSA providers, due in part to the contract arrangements that create a competitive marketised program.

Further, evaluation resources were not sufficient to enable comparative data analysis of Centre outcomes with a sample of like JSA clients. Such a comparison would be limited due to the different design features of the Centre including voluntary, open-door access. However, it would be possible to make indicative comparison of job outcomes based on selected demographic and background client variables.

Consultations to develop the program logic led to the conclusion that the Centre would not meet key criteria for a comprehensive evaluation. As a demonstration project, the service model was not yet fully defined or documented as a measurable 'dose' and core data collection was still being developed.

The Victorian Government's commitment in 2012 to replicate the CWLY at five other locations also had some impact on the implementation of the evaluation. Resources at the Centre, including researcher time, were allocated to drawing out learnings from evaluation activities, in particular qualitative interviews with stakeholders, to assist in documentation and refinement of the service model that could be replicated at the five new sites.



### 3 The Centre model in development

This section describes the model as envisaged in the tender and at project commencement.

#### The model as described in the tender

The model as originally conceived was intended to increase work and learning opportunities and outcomes for public housing tenants living in the City of Yarra (more specifically, in the public housing estates of Collingwood, Richmond, and Fitzroy). Within these estates, the Centre was expected to assist Newstart or Youth Allowance recipients who have been classified as Streams 3 and 4 on the JSA system, people on Parenting Payments with school-age children, and people on a Disability Support Pension. The Centre was intended to be located in Fitzroy with satellite offices in each of the housing estates.

The Centre was proposed to create pathways for people who require intensive assistance to enter into the labour market. A model was imagined that integrated services (both within and external to the BSL), conducted engagement activities in the local communities, provided access to vocational and non-vocational skill development, and brokered positions between public housing tenants and local employers.

Community partners were expected to include Job Services Australia (JSA) providers, Centrelink, the City of Yarra, the Victorian Government Office of Housing (OoH), AMES, the North Yarra Community Health service, and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre. It was envisaged that the Centre would liaise with local JSA providers to coordinate individual support for the target group. BSL partners were expected to include its GTO, its RTO, social enterprises, the Given the Change refugee employment program, financial inclusion services and child and family support services.

The model was expected to address the diverse barriers that a person may experience in obtaining paid work in the local market. A range of activities would be conducted to assist with vocational and non-vocational barriers. The model also envisaged using a variety of engagement strategies including a baseline survey of estate residents, recruitment of residents to promote the Centre and collaboration with local Office of Housing (OoH) staff. Once clients were engaged with the Centre, it was expected that they would receive 'customer-friendly advice and support about employment opportunities, job-relevant training, personal development, and other social and community services' (BSL 2009, p. 7).

The Centre was also expected to broker relationships with employers in the City of Yarra to identify job opportunities for clients and to liaise internally with the BSL's GTO and RTO to provide traineeships and training options.

#### The model at commencement

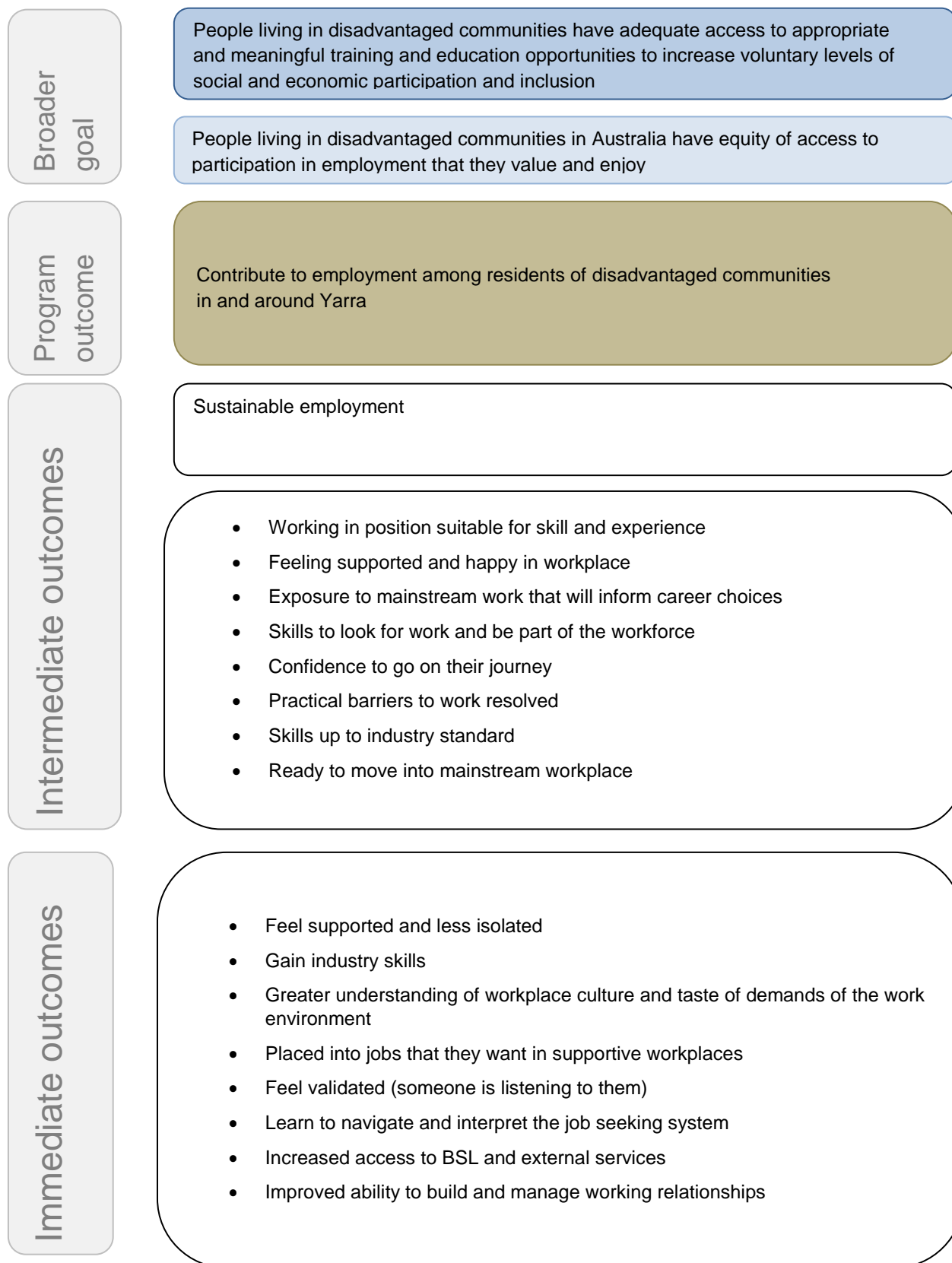
In early 2010, consultations with staff resulted in a theory of change and associated program logic (see Figure 3.1). This document was intended to be the basis for the evaluation, but is now more interesting as a historical document that captures the intentions and assumptions of the team at the beginning of the project.

The program logic model chosen for the Centre is called 'people-centred program logic'. People-centred program logic is based on generic theories of change, or understandings of how changes occur for a particular type of program. The theories of change used for this program logic were Bennett's Persuasion Logic and Social Capital Logic.

The theory of change for Centre services operated under two different sets of assumptions. The first was drawn from Bennett's Persuasion Logic Model and focused on behaviour change

generated by provision of information and skill development. The Centre team assumed that providing job-seeking skills and vocational skills would give people what they needed to enter the labour market. These skills could be provided by the WLAs (case management support), by accredited and non-accredited training and through traineeships.

The second assumption was drawn from social capital logic and centred on networks and relationships. It was that if you provide opportunities for clients to develop new relationships and networks, these networks will open up work opportunities. A focus of the Centre model is to overcome the lack of social support networks and weak social trust in the local community.

**Figure 3.1 Centre for Work and Learning program logic**

## 4 The implemented Centre service model

This section describes the service model that has emerged over the past two years. It is arranged according to the key elements of the model.

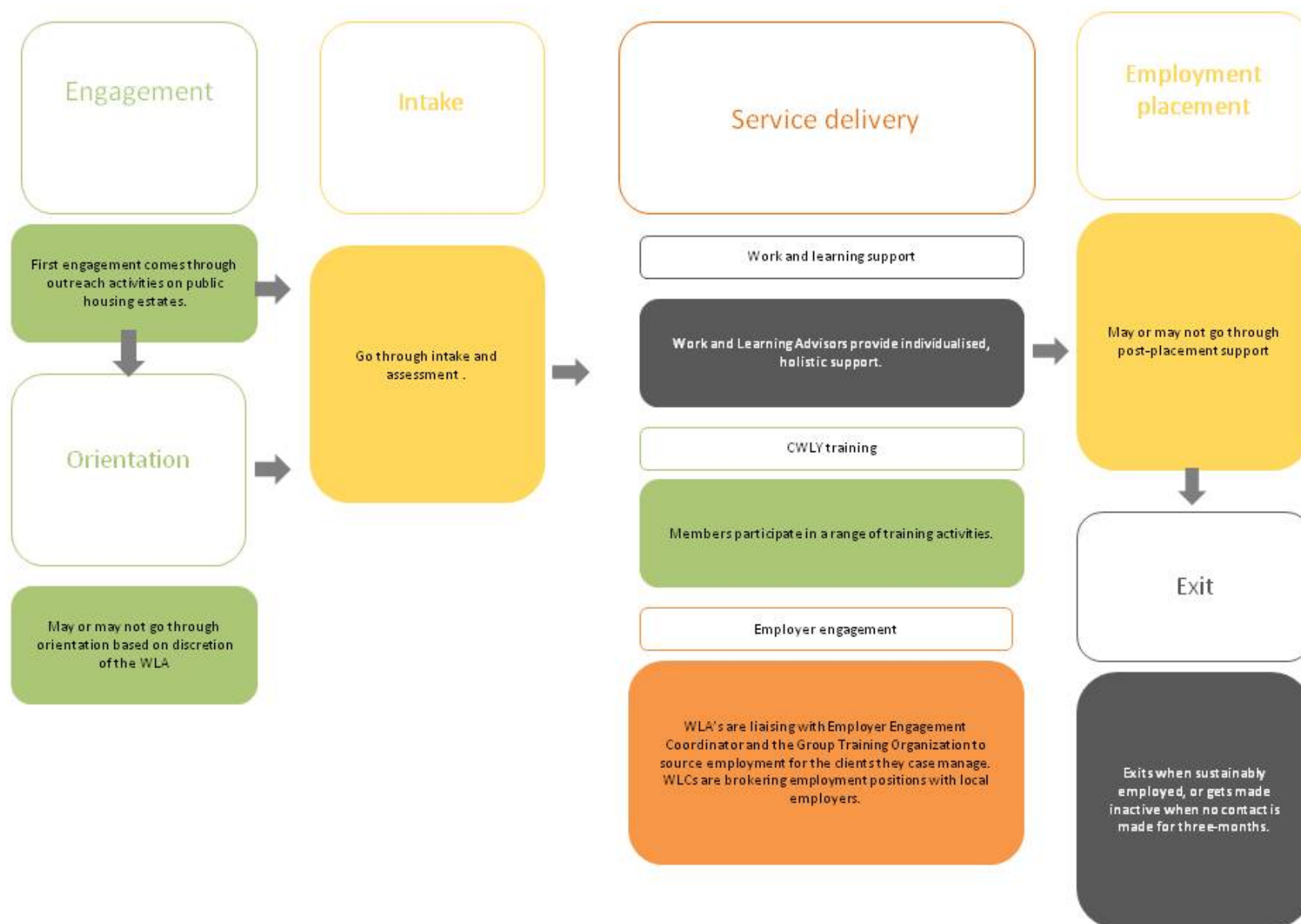
As an open-door model, the Centre provides a range of services for its clients, including non-accredited training in job searching, computer use, and English skills, as well as access to accredited training. It provides outreach to the local public housing estates and links to local employers.

The cornerstone of the Centre is case management, called 'work and learning support' in this document, and provided by the Work and Learning Advisors. This descriptor was adopted instead of the term case management to better capture the role undertaken the WLAs:

I suppose personally my view is that case management is a rather archaic term, rather patronising ... particularly given the different focus that we have which is about working with people ... I think that it's probably time to move on and coin a term that's more in keeping with the collaborative co-creative approach that we do with our clients ... to reflect the modern progressive thinking that we hope is at large. (WLA)

Figure 4.1 outlines the services offered as a linear pathway for a person 'travelling through' the Centre under four categories: engagement, intake, service delivery and employment placement. In reality, however, this represents a stylised picture as not all Centre service users access all four stages.

**Figure 4.1 Conceptual flow chart for the Centre for Work and Learning Yarra**



## Engagement

The tender expected that the Centre would engage with local residents through a range of outreach strategies, including peer awareness approaches, publicity about the Centre in Office of Housing communications with residents, and developing relationships with partner agencies and Job Services Australia providers.

The Centre was established as shopfront facility in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, opposite the Atherton Gardens housing estate. Potential clients made contact with the Centre largely through self-referral and presented to the Centre's reception to register for assistance. At first contact, each person was asked to complete a brief Client Information Sheet. This information was used to determine the appropriate assistance and pathway. In some instances, the person was assisted with information and referred to another service if employment assistance was not their presenting need. Otherwise, the person was referred either directly to a Work and Learning Advisor, into a specific training program, or to an orientation session to learn more about the Centre's services.

In February 2010 when the Centre opened, it was staffed by two Work and Learning Advisors (WLAs). One of these WLAs was the Given the Chance coordinator who brought a case load of 65 current clients as part of a management decision to integrate GtC into the Centre's activities. Because GtC is a program for refugee clients, the Centre opened with a client base that was exclusively of refugee origin and mostly African-born.

The Centre began with an open-door policy and a welcoming environment as one means of attracting reticent groups of highly disadvantaged jobseekers in the neighbourhood. It therefore did not restrict eligibility to clients living in Yarra public housing, though a stated desire to work was required.

Staff feedback indicated that most service users were self-referrals from the various communities who were already aware of or engaged in the Given the Chance program. Over two-thirds (68%) of registered clients reported hearing about the Centre through word of mouth.

From start-up until the end of May 2012, 1,755 people accessed the Centre. Of these 21% did not become clients: they either received advice, information and referral to other more appropriate services or registered for help but did not return to the Centre.

Those who became clients of the Centre could utilise its services in three main ways. First, they could use the range of informal, self-help or more formal activities on offer, such as the Job Club, IT classes, conversation circle or information sessions. Second, they could meet with a WLA to receive more intensive and personalised work and learning support. Third, they might be referred directly to the GTO or RTO to discuss and take up a structured training or work experience opportunity. The aggregate data for the three years to May 2012 shows that 1,304 people, or 79% of those accessing the Centre, made use of one or more of the above pathways.

In the two-year period from January 2010 to December 2011, 479 people (34% of those who registered) went on to receive work and learning support from a Work and Learning Advisor. The evaluation will focus on this cohort, reflecting the post start-up period.



The open-door, shopfront operational model created some stress for frontline staff due to the number of people registering for services. Case loads quickly filled up and this led to the introduction of a waiting list. Management feedback reported real surprise at the level of presenting demand for assistance. This volume had an impact on service delivery, firstly on WLA case loads and secondly on the time it took to begin outreach activities in the public housing estates, because Centre staff were reluctant to engage in outreach when they already had significant waiting lists.

During the second year, once initial data profiling of the client group had been undertaken, measures were introduced to adjust the focus of the Centre towards local public housing residents (see next section). As a consequence, the number of Yarra residents who received work and learning support shifted in line with the objectives of the tender, so that ultimately while only 33% of those who registered were from the City of Yarra, half of all clients who received work and learning support were living there. And two-thirds of those receiving work and learning support lived in public housing.

In summary, at the outset, the perspective of senior staff was that the centre would need to actively recruit clients by developing collaborative relationships with community services and local groups. The reverse occurred, with a rapid inflow of disadvantaged jobseekers and those seeking more work. Understandably, this served to distract the focus away from the 'hard to reach' public housing residents. This issue will be discussed in more detail later.

## **Outreach and engagement on public housing estates**

Once the under-representation of 'hard to reach' public housing residents was acknowledged, more focus was placed on outreach and engagement strategies. Two WLAs prioritised their case loads to undertake outreach services on the Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy estates.

To understand how the outreach activities evolved it is useful to understand the development of the relationship between the CWLY and the Victorian Office of Housing (OoH). When the Centre opened its doors in February 2010, the Fitzroy and Collingwood housing estates were in the last six months of the Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) project.

NR had several working groups, one of which was the Education, Employment and Learning working group with a membership of 39 including 14 active participants. Key informant interviews reveal that there was a lot of uncertainty and apprehension about what the end of Neighbourhood Renewal would mean for the two estates. The new Centre was seen as an extension of the NR approach, at least in the work and learning sphere, and OoH staff were keen to support its development. This reflected a commitment to address social exclusion and worklessness on the estates and, by doing so, to strengthen the rental revenue from tenants taking up paid work.

The Centre was keen to develop a relationship with the OoH as well as to obtain financial support from the DHS. The management at the Centre devised a funding mechanism based on the concept of memberships. The idea was to use this mechanism to charge JSAs to send their clients to the Centre for the services that a jobseeker might utilise. The OoH purchased 100 memberships for clients, giving preference to public housing residents who were not linked into JSAs.

The result was that the OoH became more strongly committed in the activities and outcomes of the Centre. OoH staff were instrumental in obtaining office space for WLAs to perform outreach activities on the estates and in introducing the WLAs to local networks and services.

In late 2010, the OoH created two new positions of Work and Learning Brokers (WLBs). One WLB was to work exclusively on the Richmond estate and the other on the Collingwood and Fitzroy estates. It was expected that these people would work closely with the WLAs to conduct work and learning activities on the estates.

In February 2011, the researcher conducted a process mapping exercise with the WLAs and WLBs to build their understanding about their roles. Key elements of the collaborative relationship included:

- WLBs undertook engagement activities on the estates to identify potential jobseekers who might be assisted by the Centre and to promote work and learning opportunities to residents
- WLBs sought to broker work opportunities through liaison with recruitment agencies and JSA providers and through building relationships with employers
- WLAs provided information about client work and learning needs to the WLBs.

## **The extent to which the outreach model was implemented**

The WLAs and WLBs held fortnightly meetings to coordinate activities and stay in touch about what was happening on the estates. The OoH and the WLBs worked closely with WLAs at the Centre to trial ways to engage residents. Strategies included:

- OoH staff on the estates were able to make appointments with the WLA on behalf of public housing residents
- WLBs were able to bypass the Centre's waiting list for services to ensure rapid engagement with interested residents.

Because the WLBs were not part of the Centre and not included in primary data collection, analysis of their activities and the number of clients that they engaged is not presented. Anecdotal feedback from WLAs and WLBs suggested that they were assisting some residents who were relatively isolated with low levels of social participation and a degree of reluctance to travel far for services. Developing such relationships with some of the 'hard to reach' group required a significant presence on the estates.

Of the two WLAs focused on outreach, one was located for one half-day a week at the Fitzroy estate and the other was located one half-day per week at the Richmond estate and another half-day at the Collingwood estate. Despite this more structured approach to the outreach activities, the provision of the service on each estate was limited to the above periods. This was compounded by WLA high case loads and incapacity to take on new clients. WLAs felt overwhelmed by the demand and took on larger case loads in an attempt to deal with the long waiting list for services. In late 2010, the WLAs were reporting case loads of over 100 people and in some cases over 120. Case loads were reduced to 60 to 70 clients in early 2011.

In consequence of high case loads, WLAs were less able to provide the in-depth assistance that some people needed to make any headway towards meaningful work and learning opportunities. This in turn kept people on case loads longer as they were unable to 'exit' services, and resulted in others 'falling off' and not being followed up. One-third (32%) of all clients who attended intake and started receiving work and learning services became 'inactive', meaning that no contact had been made with their WLA for three months or longer. This may have been due to their withdrawing from the labour market or experiencing ill health or other unknown reasons.

The WLAs originally envisaged that the WLBs would broker work and learning opportunities, with the WLAs taking on clients when needed to provide more intensive and personalised support. However, because of the WLAs' limited availability, the WLBs did not have access to a service into which they could always refer and felt that they 'were engaging for no purpose'. Staff expressed the need for engagement activities to be carefully coordinated with planning of case loads, staff numbers, and the flow of clients in and out of the Centre.

Staff agreed that up to six months presence in a community is needed before hard-to-reach residents will engage in services. The engagement process takes time in part because of a history

of time-limited or one-off services on public housing estates, which has engendered reticence among residents. Staff also reported that service fatigue is a significant challenge for any new service on the estate. This is especially the case for the Fitzroy and Collingwood sites, which have experienced eight years of Neighbourhood Renewal and some fairly intensive community consultation and stakeholder investment processes.

A key learning has been that building effective engagement strategies with the local community, local services and local employers is essential for the Centre to manage the balance between targeting the 'right' population, maximising their participation, and then working with clients for the appropriate amount of time to generate a sustainable work or learning outcome.

The Centre also gained valuable insights into planning to manage the demand for assistance and flow of clients in and out of the Centre. This included considering the appropriate case loads and number of staff, the length of time the person will require a service and planned exit strategies.

There was such a demand for Centre services that it struggled to manage the balance between providing support services as an open-door, shopfront model and dealing with the probable exit rate of clients achieving sustainable outcomes. In part, this also reflected external labour market factors relating to the impact of the economic downturn (post GFC) and restructuring.

This challenge was exacerbated by the fact that the Centre did not have clear entry criteria for services for the first 12 months. This lack of prioritising clients living in public housing in Yarra impacted on the Centre's capacity to engage with the 'hard to reach' cohort and to provide the optimal model of support in this first period.

Staff discussed the problem of being unable to immediately attend to a person's request for service, noting that some people can take a very long time to 'summon the courage' to make first contact. Extended waiting periods (up to six weeks to attend an orientation session in some cases) increased the risk that the 'most difficult to engage' would drop off before being picked up by a WLA. The WLBs were able to refer prospective clients on the estates directly to WLAs, but the Centre was already overwhelmed with a long waiting list and WLAs were grappling with large case loads.

Our assessment from the staff feedback indicates that the strategies developed to communicate the centre's activities and to engage with public housing estate resident groups was effective. This is supported by the increased proportion of Yarra public housing residents among clients over the second and third years.

As a developmental approach building on existing organisational structures in BSL and external (NR) community services on the estates, the Centre inevitably faced challenges in managing demand and client flow. A key learning for replication is to invest sufficient time in pre-service planning to articulate the service delivery model using considered assumptions about the local target population, client flow rates and case loads that can be monitored and adjusted in a timely manner.

## Orientation

The usual pathway for new clients was to register for services and then attend an orientation session. The orientation session was intended to assist potential clients to understand the services offered by the Centre and the world of work and training. Over the 2 years to December 2011, 389 people were invited to an orientation, with 270 (69%) attending. Another common pathway was for people to complete the intake process directly with a WLA rather than attending an orientation session. Clients who were already Given the Chance clients when the Centre opened and clients

who were contacted through outreach activities did not attend orientation. After attending orientation, the person was assigned to a WLA, who made contact to arrange an intake meeting.

Another purpose of the orientation was to assess and understand work and learning goals with a view to matching each client with the most suitable WLA. It was recognised that WLAs have individual skills, backgrounds and expertise for working with certain issues. Orientation was a strategy therefore to match the worker and the client as part of a personalised service.

Due to the high numbers of people registering, the average waiting period between registration and orientation was eight weeks. Clients who participated in interviews provided positive feedback on the orientation sessions, although some expressed concern at the waiting period between registering and orientation:

It was great. I was able to look around and see a diversity of backgrounds. I felt like I was there as a person. The facilitator was very patient with everyone, and did not treat anyone differently. Felt equal. (Centre client)

I was told it would take about six to eight weeks before someone would get back to me. I could not believe it; I was desperate for a job. I didn't give up, I continued with studies, and looked for alternative help. I was eventually phoned after around four weeks, and attended a session. (Centre client)

## **Intake**

A personal intake interview was the first stage in the provision of work and learning support by a WLA. This involved collecting information about the person's work and learning history, income support and housing circumstances, as well as other demographic and administrative information. A computerised client intake form was developed over the first year in collaboration with the WLAs and provided critical core data for the Centre.

The information collected at intake served two purposes. It assisted the WLA to build an understanding of the person's work readiness, prior work and training experience and barriers to taking up paid work. This was the first stage in conducting an assessment about the client's work and learning needs and goals. In addition the data was used (with consent) for evaluation purposes.

## 5 Profile of Centre clients

The following profile focuses on the 479 people who became clients of the Centre and received work and learning support in the two-year period to December 2011. This does not include people who made initial contact with the Centre but only received one-off advice or referral, or those who registered and used the self-help resources.

Table 5.1 provides selected demographic data on the client group. Over half were male and one half were parents. Over three-quarters were aged 40 or younger, with 4% of clients aged under 18 years. Nearly two-thirds of clients were living in public housing at registration and 25% in private rental accommodation. Half of all clients were living in the City of Yarra, reflecting the initial 'open door' whereby word of mouth encouraged jobseekers to access the Centre's services. Among the clients from the City of Yarra, nine out of ten were living in public housing. By contrast, over half (55%) of those from elsewhere were renting privately.

**Table 5.1 Selected demographic data on Centre clients**

Characteristic	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	54.8
Female	45.2
<b>Parent with child/ren</b>	49.9
<b>Mean age of youngest child</b>	6 years
<b>Mean age</b>	33 years
<b>Age group</b>	
<25 years	23.6
25–30	21.9
31–40	31.1
41–50	18.2
51–64	5.2
<b>Housing</b>	
Public housing	65.1
Private rental housing	25.0
Community housing	3.6
Transitional housing	3.0
Other	3.3
<b>Living in the City of Yarra</b>	50.2
<b>Total number of clients</b>	<b>479</b>

Note: Missing data excluded

### Client background

There were high numbers of former refugee and non–Australian born clients (Table 5.2). Three-quarters (74%) of clients were born in Africa (the largest cohort from East Africa) and 22% from Asia (mainly from South-east Asia).

This is due to the Centre incorporating the Given the Chance program. The Centre had an almost exclusively refugee client population when it started. As awareness of the services spread through word of mouth, this encouraged demand from jobseekers with these backgrounds. Overall, 55% of clients had been refugees and 8% asylum seekers. Just 3% of clients had been born in Australia.

Not all clients, however, were recent arrivals: the average period lived in Australia prior to accessing the Centre was 5.9 years (median 4 years).

The high proportion of African-born and refugee clients had a particular set of skills, work experiences and barriers to work. The impacts of this dominant client group were felt in service delivery and outcomes as discussed in the following sections.

In summary, the open-entry and self-referral in the first year meant that the Centre tended to attract jobseekers who were actively engaged in work and learning activities, were motivated to find work, and yet despite their active job searching continued to struggle to find sustainable work.

The WLAs assessed each client's spoken and written English as part of their skills audit. As Table 5.2 shows, the client group typically had relatively limited English: 41% had poor spoken English and 35% poor written English. This posed an ongoing barrier for many in obtaining paid work.

**Table 5.2 Background data on Centre clients**

Characteristic	%
<b>Region of origin</b>	
Africa	73.6
Asia	21.9
Australia/NZ	2.1
Other	2.4
<b>Visa status</b>	
Australian citizen	51.3
Australian resident	36.5
NZ citizen	2.0
Spousal visa	4.6
Bridging visa	4.3
Other	1.3
<b>Length of time from arrival to Centre intake</b>	
Mean period	5.9 years
Median period	4.0 years
<b>Level of spoken English</b>	
Poor/very poor	35.4
<b>Level of written English</b>	
Poor/very poor	40.9
<b>Total number of clients</b>	<b>479</b>

Missing data excluded

## Main source of income

A large proportion of clients were on working age income support benefits (37% Newstart Allowance and 9% Youth Allowance) at intake (Table 5.3). A significant minority—one in five—were reported as not being on benefits or pensions. It should be noted that a third of clients did not report their source of income. Among the clients from the City of Yarra, 85% were receiving income support payments, with a higher percentage (7%) on Disability Support Pension. Despite this higher figure, the Centre has been less successful in engaging people on DSP living on the estates, who represent about 14% of all tenants.

**Table 5.3 Main source of income at intake**

Income source	%
Newstart Allowance	37.5
Youth Allowance	8.8
Parenting Payment	16.9
Disability Support Pension	4.1
Austudy	3.8
Carer's Allowance	0.9
Other/not specified	7.2
Not receiving payment	20.9
<b>Total number of clients</b>	<b>320</b>

Missing data excluded



## Work and learning history

Despite some missing data on work and learning variables, it is possible to compile a useful profile of the prior experiences, education and qualifications of the client group. Many clients were already actively engaged in some type of learning or work activity when they first contacted the Centre.

Nearly one-third (31%) were studying full-time and 11% part-time at registration. Of the students, one-quarter were enrolled at secondary school; 22% were studying at certificate levels 1 or 2; 23% at level 3 and 4% at level 4. However, 18% were studying at diploma level and 8% were at university.

Approximately 55% of clients reported having undertaken vocational learning within the past five years. Of this cohort, nearly half (44%) had attained two or more vocational qualifications (not including English qualifications) in the period.

We have data on work history for 302 (that is 63%) of the 479 clients who received case management support. One-quarter (27%) reported being in some type of paid work at the point of registration. In their most recent job, only a small proportion (19%) had held a permanent position, 66% had done casual work and 15% had been employed on contract.

Nine out of ten clients (88%) reported having had paid employment in the past five years. The majority of this group had been employed in Australia, but 31 clients (10%) had worked overseas in that period, reflecting their shorter time here. When asked how many positions that they had held in the past five years, 59% reported having two or more positions. Nine per cent reported having four or more paid jobs. When it came to working conditions, 59% (n=139) of clients who had worked in Australia reported only having had casual jobs over the past five years, 18% reported having contract positions and 22% reported having a permanent position over that period.

This profile reflects a client group well activated to search for work, having completed education and training qualifications and most likely to have had paid work since arriving in Australia. However, as with other disadvantaged jobseeker groups, their challenge is as much about job retention and advancement as it is about finding a job. As a generalisation, the Centre's client group has not been facing entrenched disadvantage with minimal attachment to the world of work.

## Engagement with Job Services Australia

Data on the client's JSA service stream was available for about two-thirds of the total group. Nearly one-third (30%) were not engaged with a JSA at the point of registration with the Centre (Table 5.4). This level of non-participation in the main employment service system is consistent with the high proportion of clients (21%) not receiving government income support payments. Of those responding to the question on JSA status, one-quarter were in Stream 3 (26%), followed by Stream 1 (20%), Stream 2 (18%), and Stream 4 (7%).

**Table 5.4 Job Services Australia stream of Centre clients**

JSA stream	%
Stream 1	19.9
Stream 2	17.5
Stream 3	25.9
Stream 4	7.1
No JSA	29.6
<b>Total number of clients</b>	<b>297</b>

Missing data excluded

The expectation of Centre staff was that demand would come from highly disadvantaged groups assessed as Stream 3 or 4. However, this was not borne out by the above data. Feedback from

staff suggested that many clients were in less intensive streams within the JSA system than they should have been, as they required more intensive support to achieve a job pathway. Several explanations have been proposed for the relatively low proportion of Stream 3 and 4 jobseekers among the Centre's clients:

- The client group comprises jobseekers who score relatively low on the key components of the Jobseeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) used to assign them to JSA streams, reflecting relatively high levels of education, qualifications and prior work experience.
- The open-door feature of the Centre resulted in jobseekers with higher motivation and capabilities seeking assistance.
- The 'hard to reach' cohort of public housing residents required a stronger and more proactive outreach strategy that proved difficult to implement in the face of high levels of demand through the open door and consequent waiting lists for work and learning support.
- A range of personal issues (such as trauma and health problems) are not fully disclosed to Centrelink or JSA providers.
- Many Stream 1 and 2 clients had additional barriers to obtaining work, which are not assessed or taken into account by the JSCI process. These include discrimination or ethnic bias in the labour market and worklessness before entry into Australia.

This points to a level of incompleteness or inaccuracy in the process of assessing barriers to work using the JSCI to determine the level of assistance offered to job seekers. This limitation of the system has been found in previous research (Parkinson & Horn 2002; Churchill 2008).

The high proportion of clients not on income support payments and not participating in mainstream employment assistance raises some concerns about the coverage of current active labour market interventions. This group were presenting at a voluntary shopfront service wanting to find work or improve their job prospects. This suggests that the current JSA system may be missing a group of jobseekers who could be helped into sustainable paid work; however, additional research to more fully document their circumstances and experiences is required.

## 6 Work and learning support

Work and learning support was the core component of the Centre's service model and comprised two key forms of assistance. The first was a case management approach which used personal support and a trusting relationship to promote client engagement and offer capacity or skill building according to individual circumstances and needs. A strong understanding of the client's personal circumstances relevant to work and learning, their foundational capabilities, work skills and aspirations was fundamental to identifying appropriate opportunities and matches with mentors and employers.

The second form of assistance comprised structured and unstructured group learning opportunities for people receiving case management. These skill building opportunities were seen by the WLAs as a way to keep people engaged with the Centre independent of the support they might receive from their individual worker. The training offered by the Centre could be grouped into the following categories:

- 'drop-in' training run weekly or fortnightly, usually focused on English skills, job seeking, and computer skills
- pre-booked training run by the Centre, addressing general job seeking and work skills
- employer-specific training that provides guidance on particular job applications.

The initial framework for work and learning support was derived from the Given the Chance program which provided case management support for refugee clients in supported job placements. The Given the Chance model was based on a combination of personal support, education and skills building for refugee clients with engagement, education and advocacy with employers. The clients were matched with community members as mentors to receive vocational counselling and job seeking support. Case management centred on support in the recruitment process (job search), mentoring on Australian workplace culture and advocacy on a one-to-one basis with local employers.

At the beginning, the Centre drew on the experience and learning from Given the Chance to expand the approach beyond the latter's brief. However for most of the life of the Centre to date, work and learning support was delivered under a set of largely informal and undocumented frameworks. Part of the purpose of the evaluation<sup>1</sup> and the associated data collection was to capture and document the framework for service delivery. This was turned into a Process Manual for Work and Learning Centres (BSL 2012a).

The following description of work and learning support is based partly on participant observation, watching the WLAs perform their roles. The WLAs also participated in semi-structured interviews for the evaluation, to complement the participant observation material.

### Personal support and relationship building

The WLAs considered personal support for the client as an integral part of the work and learning support process. Personal support centred on building rapport with the individual and demonstrating a commitment to assist them to develop and achieve work and learning goals.

Personal support was seen as a mechanism that assisted the delivery of other work and learning support services. Continuity of support was seen as a tool for keeping a person engaged during intake and throughout the work and learning support process, helping them make decisions about short and long-term working goals, and assisting individually tailored capacity building:

<sup>1</sup> In line with the 'developmental evaluation' approach which used evaluation methods to assist the program to develop a set of testable frameworks.

I've had clients who sometimes talk about things that have happened to them in the past, particularly when you do the intake form, when you're talking about their journey or their work and work history. Sometimes they start talking about their experience in refugee camps. I think it's important to be empathetic and understand where they're coming from and to listen. Not necessarily to sort of go that next step and be the counsellor, but just to be able to understand where he's coming from. And sort of help them to move forward and do what we're there to do, which is to help him move towards his career. (WLA)

The personal connection between a WLA and client also provided an incentive for the WLA, as both the WLA and the member became invested in the outcomes of the relationship and gained personal reward:

I think [I enjoy] the people interaction, chatting to people and getting to know them, they get to know you, and the support that a case manager can give. And helping people, helping people and watching them on their journey and watching them grow and then when they come in with a big smile on their face and that's the reward, you know, that's what I love about this kind of work. (WLA)

The WLAs discussed the sensitivity of providing personal support to a client within the constraints of the role:

I think we have a role that's limited. We can't ignore the issues that might emerge with a person in a discussion or dialogue with a person but nor can we get involved in stuff that isn't really in our area. I think it would just be essentially a matter of making sure the person is connected with the right agencies or providers that can help them to deal with the presenting issue and then to check in with them to see if things are tracking the way they need to. Perhaps drawing on your network of providers in other places to make sure that they're getting the right sort of service and the access to service.

Personal support is about smoothing the way to assist the person to attain their work and learning goals and also to effectively link people into the appropriate type and level of assistance. Sufficient rapport or trust with the client is essential to full disclosure and assessment of their barriers to work and learning. Personal support is also a means to build up the client's confidence and self-esteem to take the next steps on a work pathway that meets their needs and aspirations. For many clients with multiple obstacles to work this is not a straightforward process.

## Practical skills in job searching

Skills development centred on two skill sets. The first set involved the practical skills needed to look for and apply for positions (job search). The second set of skills involved the cultural and interpersonal skills needed to enter the workplace.

A core part of work and learning support provision was help with the 'nuts and bolts' of job searching and making job applications. This included helping people look for positions, write résumés and cover letters and practise interview skills. The WLAs focused on building the client's skills to complete job search tasks, rather than just doing them for the member.

Well it'd be really easy just to whip up a résumé for a client in half an hour to save time and be efficient and help post them up and get them into a job, but if you don't sort of take the time and allow the client to type it up themselves, even if it's painstakingly one letter at a time, then they'll never have ownership over their résumé and they won't understand what it says. And they won't be able to sort of sell themselves while using it, or understand why the ... skills that they've learnt from their past jobs are important. I think it's important for them to ownership over it and to know how to do it themselves ... instead of handing in regurgitated stuff that they've had before. (WLA)

One WLA described the pleasure of watching clients making small, incremental steps to build the skills needed to look for work, even though they were not yet self-sufficient:

I think the changes that I see, at the beginning some [clients] who were coming in, they would be late, or they just won't show up. But then they start to come on time, and come early, and they start to follow the procedures that the Centre has. Sometimes if I'm running late, instead of just sitting waiting for me, they'll show initiative, and go and sit on the computer, and before they came here they never knew how to use the computer before, and now they can now log on to the computer, log into their email, send their emails, and they can do that before we start our session. That to me is a huge leap in their capacities to engage with the outside world—obviously a lot of looking for jobs is online. They can do things that they couldn't do before, and that to me is really rewarding. (WLA)

The Centre ran a variety of informal but structured training that was designed to assist people in their job searching skills. The following outlines four types of training offered to clients.

## **Job Club**

Job Club is a job search session supervised by a WLA and a trained volunteer of the Centre. Clients are able to research job opportunities and apply for positions with experts to guide them and answer questions. While clients are encouraged to book a place, Job Club is open to 'drop-ins' and is an informal session, without a fixed schedule.

## **Interview skills training**

These fortnightly sessions are designed for clients who are considered job-ready by the WLA but needed assistance in the interview process. The training focuses on verbal and nonverbal communication, interview protocols and preparation, and building confidence.

## **Conversation circles**

These circles are designed for clients who have reasonable 'everyday' English, but have difficulty understanding instructions and making themselves understood. Special attention is paid to pronunciation and workshop content is based on themes such as opening and closing a conversation or giving, receiving and clarifying instructions. These workshops are designed around vocational situations relevant to the aspirations of clients such as child care, aged care or administration (office environment).

## **Computer classes**

Two types of computer classes have been developed at the Centre. One type is targeted at clients with very little understanding of computers, and the other at people who are familiar with computers, who want to work in an office environment, and who need to bring their computer skills up to a competitive level in the marketplace. There have been 127 participants in computer classes.

## **Other training**

In addition to the above regular training, purpose-designed learning or skill building opportunities are provided by the Centre as needed. For example, a one-day workshop on job search was delivered to a small group of Sudanese young women living on one of the public housing estates. As with many of these activities, there was a dual purpose: to build individual capabilities and also to strengthen engagement with the Centre as a stepping stone to work and learning. The Centre has also implemented a weekly two-hour discussion group for new migrants and recent arrivals partly as an engagement strategy but also with the practical aim of raising understanding of the services and assistance available to them.

## Demonstrating ‘appropriate’ workplace behaviour

Work and Learning Advisors saw it as their responsibility to model the type of behaviour that a person could expect in the Australian workplace. That was particularly relevant to overseas-born clients who benefit from exposure to the cultural patterns of Australian workers, but also to people who have not worked in mainstream employment for some time and who need to better understand workplace culture.

WLAs talked about the need to quietly set boundaries with clients in a supportive and respectful way. They discussed boundary setting as an important factor in helping a person to become job-ready and to appreciate the type of behaviour expected in the workplace:

So if a client comes in and is continually not coming on time and is late and expects to see me at all different hours, I need to be able to be a bit authoritative, because there's a need in the workforce for boundaries.(WLA)

## Dealing with structural issues

Working with structural barriers to work was perhaps the most challenging component of the work and learning support role. WLAs described various activities undertaken to address structural issues faced by clients, including work to build social networks, advocacy with external services and systems (for example, Centrelink, health, housing) and facilitating access to relevant services.

But WLAs had limited capacity to bring about the kind of structural change needed to create a more accommodating labour market for people living in disadvantaged communities. At best, the WLA acted as a guide or advocate for the client, providing information, acting as a personal cheerleader and supporting them through work and learning processes. Staff acknowledged their limited capacity to achieve job outcomes with clients solely by helping them navigate systems and structures. Consultations pointed to the external, demand-side barriers faced by highly disadvantaged jobseekers, including lack of entry-level jobs (especially permanent jobs) and employer barriers relating to ethnic bias or discrimination.

A proactive approach was developed over the project to address employer reticence to take on disadvantaged job seekers through a range of strategies, including the Building Bridges training for employers and direct employer engagement (see below).

## Building networks

The WLAs had the opportunity to link some clients to mentors (usually volunteers) and occasionally directly to potential employers. They were able to refer clients into the mentoring program, which paired trained volunteer mentors with clients. Through their personal networks, mentors were often able to build connections into the mainstream labour market for newly arrived refugees who have yet to build their own networks. Over three years, 84 matches have been made between volunteer mentors and clients.

Other opportunities to build links with employers came through the workshops facilitated by the WLAs, designed to assist clients through the application process for jobs with specific employers. This kind of training is suitable for people who are job-ready but need some support with locating job opportunities and completing an application.

One example was the workshop undertaken with a large retail business. In June 2010 the Centre approached the business as an employer which could potentially offer entry-level positions to clients. The Centre staff designed a training session for interested clients. The business helped to develop the training, with the content tailored to applying for a position in its workforce. This course attracted 34 participants.



Other workshops involved:

- Victoria Police – to help people understand the police force application process (part of a wider police recruitment strategy operating at the time), attended by 22 participants.
- a National Bank assessment – preparing people to go through the bank's job application process.
- Public Tenant Employment Program – preparing people to apply for positions with the PTEP program operated by the Victorian Office of Housing to provide jobs for public housing residents as a social procurement model.

The common characteristics of these approaches are evident. They involve proactive engagement with potential local employers to overcome limited prospects for individual jobseekers with weak networks and job search skills. They help to overcome potential prejudice against disadvantaged jobseekers through a tailored training workshop to support the matching and application process. The Centre acts as a job broker, bringing jobseekers and employers together. Such workshops exemplify better integrated local approaches to achieve job outcomes for disadvantaged groups and recruitment solutions for businesses.

## Advocacy with JSA providers

The Centre for Work and Learning developed good relationships with two JSA providers, Sarina Russo, in Fitzroy, and Sign On, situated in the Yarra Employment Services Area, but working out of Prahran. However, most contact between the JSA providers and the Centre occurred informally when WLAs were attempting to advocate on behalf of individual clients.

The original tender to DEEWR for the Centre did not provide in the budget brokerage funds attached to clients. This constrained the support which the WLAs could provide, as they were unable to assist with the purchase of learning materials or equipment or to address other non-vocational barriers. For example, only 40% of clients owned a car and only 54% had a drivers licence. This adversely affected their capacity to get to training or job interviews or obtain paid work. Brokerage monies like the Employment Pathway Fund (EPF) for JSA clients are a valuable resource to address these barriers.

The WLAs would often advocate for clients to their JSA provider to seek funding from their resources consistent with the client's employment pathway plan. The WLAs reported mixed success when seeking this assistance. They reported that relationships with JSA providers ranged from 'extremely positive' to 'adversarial'. WLAs also frequently acted as advocates when clients had disputes with their JSA provider. In this environment, relationship building with JSA providers proved challenging for WLAs.

Following limited success in obtaining funds from JSA provider EPF or outcome payments, a Business Development Officer was recruited to leverage JSA funding—also with mixed results. A total of 13 JSA providers shared fee payments for outcomes achieved with 44 mutual clients. However, two providers contributed payments for nearly half these clients, while eight providers made payments for outcomes for only a single client each. The average contribution from providers has been \$1,560 per client. Considering over 200 jobseekers were registered with JSA, this low level of financial support underscores the ongoing difficulties in achieving effective collaboration with the JSA system under current arrangements. In particular, JSA providers were less disposed to provide resources from the EPF as their preference was to use this money on in-house training. Thus two-thirds of the Centre's income from JSA providers was from outcome fees.



## The Work and Learning Advisor role

Because personal support is such a crucial component of the work and learning role, consultations with the WLAs included discussion on attributes needed to be effective. The WLAs considered that having a demonstrated commitment to the wellbeing of the Centre clients, together with the capacity to learn on the job, was more important than having prior experience in the job services system. The following perhaps typified their perspective:

How do you recruit for it? Well you step outside the industry standards, I think, so-called standards and the worst thing you can do is bring on board in this situation people who have cut their teeth in the job network. I think what you have to look for is a background that reeks of personal commitment to improving the lot of individuals whether they be disadvantaged or not disadvantaged and I think you also need to recruit people who are flexible enough to be able to roll with the punches that occur. (WLA)

The WLAs mentioned the following attributes as necessary to do their work: patience; flexibility; motivation; ability to set boundaries; understanding and empathy; capacity to work towards long-term goals; and 'being comfortable with chaos'.

In addition to staff attributes, an important ingredient for effective work and learning support was the culture within the Centre where staff needed to model good workplace conduct. Every appointment was seen as an opportunity for the client to demonstrate job readiness. The Centre's resources were to be used for the purposes of job searching by clients. Clients were able to engage with and gain support from other jobseekers using the Centre. Staff set expectations for clients at the beginning and reiterated these consistently.

## Employer engagement

In late 2010 an Employer Engagement Coordinator was employed by BSL. This position was intended to work between the Centre and GTO, and represented a significant collaboration between the two services. The aim was to identify opportunities for engagement with local employers including labour market growth prospects, facilitate placement of clients into mainstream employment, and provide support to host employers. It was expected that the Employer Engagement Coordinator would be responsible for sourcing employment for Centre clients and GTO trainees.

This approach can be seen as part of the developmental process, based on the experience and learnings of the demonstration project in its first year, to strengthen direct employer engagement. Despite the impact of the GFC on employment growth, the Centre staff continued to be optimistic about the work opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers in the region.

In January 2011 a revised strategy for employer engagement was finalised with input from the RPC researcher leading the evaluation effort. The approach was similar to the work and learning support model in the sense that it focused on one-to-one engagement and support for potential employers and businesses. A stronger strategic basis for activities centred on local labour market analysis to identify industries and sectors with good job prospects aligned with the client population.

Organisational restructuring within business development and partnerships section of the BSL Employment and Training Division resulted in clearer decision making and strategic directions for employer engagement. At the commencement of the Centre, BSL operated a number of community enterprises that offered traineeships and paid work experience for highly disadvantaged jobseekers based in the intermediate labour market approach. The majority of these enterprises were funded from social procurement (for example the Public Tenants Employment Program) or time-limited government grants (for example, Community Jobs Fund). Despite growing support for the role of social enterprises in Australia in offering employment pathways for disadvantaged

groups, very few become financially self-reliant based on trading revenue. One of the strategic decisions has therefore been to focus more effort on direct work placements with open or mainstream employers.

The recent Employer Engagement focus has been placed on proactive searching and engagement of potential employers to build a strong relationship to meet their hiring needs by linking them with jobseekers who have the appropriate skills to be productive and reliable workers. Passive job search and matching processes are inadequate to overcome the barriers to paid work for disadvantaged groups. In a highly competitive labour market, proactive strategies appear to be important to privilege these groups through brokering opportunities, building workforce diversity commitments and matching jobseeker skills to specific roles.

Over the evaluation period, 27 businesses have committed to taking on Centre clients as employees or trainees. Nearly half have been social or community enterprises (auspiced either by the BSL or other not-for-profit organisations) and four Victorian departments or local government agencies and nine private businesses have taken on a total of 184 jobseekers. The wide range of industries has included construction, education, administration, retail, health and community services, finance and agriculture. Altogether 71 line managers have been engaged and supported through these placements, indicating the level of post-placement support required to maximise the chances of the job being retained.

The key learnings to date have been:

- A targeted and well-resourced engagement role is essential to match local employers with disadvantaged jobseekers.
- Ongoing post-placement support is required for both employee and employer to make sure the job sticks.
- Social procurement can provide the incentive to create jobs for disadvantaged jobseekers, but employers need support to fulfil agreements.

## **What clients thought of work and learning support**

A small number of face-to-face interviews were undertaken with Centre clients to provide qualitative data on their experiences and related job search issues. In order to obtain a mixed sample based on client pathways, clients were grouped into the following categories:

- clients who had been seeing a WLA for more than six months and had been unable to get a job
- clients who were employed
- clients who had been active for more than three months, but had become inactive.

The fifteen interviewees were selected at random from these groups. The small sample, combined with the fact that clients were more likely to agree to participate if they had a positive experience of the Centre, may have affected the responses to some extent.

Those interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. One of the key messages from their responses concerned the barriers they perceived to entry into the labour market. The issue of discrimination featured prominently, reflecting the profile of clients with many having migrated from Africa.

Respondents believed that certain jobs were not available to them due to the fact that they were not Australian-born and/or because of their African origin. The reasons for this discrimination included a lack of recognition for prior experience working in their country of origin, discrimination

because of skin colour, ethnic bias and a lack of networks in preferred industries. Even when participants held qualifications recognised in Australia, they still reported experiencing these barriers to obtaining work in their area of choice. One client had over 10 years professional experience in his home country:

We come along with overseas qualifications, and they say 'We don't recognise your qualifications'. So we get more qualifications and they are still saying the same. (Centre interviewee)

One client described the discrimination as 'the expectation of certain jobs for certain people'. This participant had postgraduate qualifications in social sciences but felt he was being pushed into aged care by his JSA provider. Even in this industry he still experienced discrimination in obtaining employment:

I don't mind working in aged care or working as a cleaner, but even those opportunities you can't get. There are people who have not been to school getting these jobs. You are not regarded as equal. Or I have other friends that say that you should go and drive taxis. That is what I mean by the expectation of certain jobs for certain people. (Centre interviewee)

With regard to what clients appreciated about the work and learning support they received at the Centre, they frequently mentioned the following:

- help applying for jobs, including interview practice
- assistance with computer skills
- assistance with skills to understand the Australian workplace culture.

However feedback from those interviewed was overwhelmingly centred on personal support and how it fostered a relationship where skill development and capacity building took place. One female respondent commented:

She [the WLA] told me about life. Before I cannot talk to people, I cannot talk face to face. [The WLA] gives me a lot of advice, how to talk to people, how Australian people like to talk eye-to-eye. For [an African] woman, you can't look at someone in the eye. Before I couldn't do that. (Centre interviewee)

Respondents also talked about the sense of support and friendship in working with the WLAs:

If I need something, I ask her, she is good for me. She is supportive and friendly. She is helping me with cover letter and résumé, and job search for me. Sometimes if I need something like advice, I will talk with [her] ... I want to thank [her], she is good for me, she is my friend. (Centre interviewee)

At BSL, they are there no matter what. There are other areas that they help with other than employment. There is a real sense of belonging, even if your need is not met, you always felt as if they heard you. (Centre interviewee)

It is interesting to contrast respondents' experiences with the Centre and with their Job Services Australia (JSA) provider. They consistently stated that they had poor experiences with JSA providers and said that most JSA staff did not invest time in helping a person become job-ready.

I had to go to an appointment once a month and my experience has been that they really do nothing. When you go to the JSA they ask you for a résumé. Whatever your résumé is that is what they will accept. Unlike [at the Centre for Work and Learning] where we both sit down and go through the résumé and you do the application and you tell us when there is a job and ask us if we would like to be put forward for the job. The JSAs don't do anything. It is not only me, it is [the same] for most of the community out there. They are obligated to go because of Centrelink otherwise no-one would go there. (Centre interviewee)

There was significant disillusionment about the purpose and utility of JSA among those interviewed. The prevailing feedback was that the providers were focused on process and procedure to the detriment of client support, and that JSA staff were not actually interested in providing job seeking assistance:

Most of my experience has been that they will tell you that they [the JSA] are not there to find you a job. Some of the Job Services Providers tell you that. That is why a lady [a client of JSA] lost it at them as they told her that they were not there to find her a job, and she said 'What are you actually here to do?'. So it is confusing for me. The next time I go back I really need to ask them what are the JSAs really there to do. (Centre interviewee)

Several clients preferred the Centre over their JSA provider because they had more freedom and time with resources such as computers, printers and telephones:

They provide you with a telephone and a computer but even with the computer we have no time to use it. [At the JSA] You cannot use the computer for more than one hour. How many jobs can you find? [When you use the] telephone they connect it for you and often the line is busy so you have to wait sometimes 10–15 minutes. There might be three people waiting to make calls. At my JSA there are only three computers and considering the amount of people that go there it is not enough. [At the Centre] they allow you to print. I would rather come here to the [Centre] because I can have more time here. (Centre interviewee)

One woman recounted being told by a JSA staff member that she should not be looking for work:

I saw JSA, I went and said 'I have a child', they look at me and they say, 'Why do want you to get a job? Why don't you stay home and look after your child?' I said, 'I'm a single mother. I have a little baby ... I really want to get a job'. Make me cry. (Centre interviewee)

At the end of each interview, the client was asked, 'If you were to recommend the Centre or a JSA to a friend, who would you recommend?' Respondents nearly always answered that they would recommend both the JSA and the Centre at the same time, although they preferred the services of the Centre:

You have to try both, because if you are looking for work you have to ask around. You can't stick on one side. Both sides might help you. But the CWLY, they teach you everything. They help you, with the job interview, how to dress, how to answer questions. (Centre interviewee)

As stated above, the views of the small sample of clients interviewed cannot be generalised to all disadvantaged jobseekers. However the consistency of their experiences combined with the high level of demand presented at the Centre reinforces broader concerns about the responsiveness and effectiveness of JSA for highly disadvantaged groups, and in particular new migrants.

Their responses also support the argument for the more intensive and personalised support model that has evolved at the Centre, based on lower case loads (1:60) and flexible delivery that encourages engagement, rapport and disclosure of all barriers, as a foundation for coordinated activities based on an employment pathway plan.

## 7 Challenges faced by the Centre

The work and learning support model, while building on the existing Given the Chance approach, experienced challenges in the early days of its life in part because of the absence of well-articulated and consistent service delivery processes. This was not unreasonable as the Centre was set up to demonstrate a new approach to a highly disadvantaged jobseeker population that in the main had not been helped into sustainable jobs by the mainstream employment service system. In addition, the Centre was built onto existing BSL organisational structures and governance arrangements, and linked to programs that already had contractual obligations with their own separate reporting and accountability requirements. This posed challenges for implementation of a client-centred model at the outset.

Ideally, a pre – start up phase would have articulated a service delivery model with a Process Manual and clearly defined inputs and outputs. In practice, however, there were no eligibility criteria for prioritisation of assistance in the first 12 months, even though the Centre’s objective was to work with disadvantaged communities in the City of Yarra.

The lack of prioritisation coupled with unexpectedly high demand for services had a number of consequences. Firstly, there was a long waiting list, so that people who progressed through intake needed to be relatively motivated. People who had experienced barriers to accessing services or who felt ambivalent about work and learning support were less likely to wait to be seen by a WLA. This was a significant issue considering that the Centre intended to assist people who had been disengaged from the world of work, who would benefit from a responsive and timely intervention.

Secondly, these factors meant that it was more difficult to carry out engagement activities. WLAs sought to further engage people living on public housing estates they considered ‘hard to reach’, but felt constrained by the high waiting lists and knowing that, once engaged, people were waiting approximately two months to attend an orientation session.

Thirdly, the demand for service led to some very high case loads, with some WLAs reporting up to 120 clients—on a par with mainstream JSA providers. These case loads were much too high given the population being served, who frequently presented with complex issues and required considerable support. It also increased the stress levels of the WLAs, who reported being overwhelmed by the demand and by their case loads in the first year.

The lack of a clearly defined case management model was another issue for the WLAs. It did have some advantages, as it allowed WLAs greater flexibility; and it is arguable this flexibility may have contributed to a more client-centred approach. The unstructured framework also enabled the Centre to test innovative approaches to working with clients and it is clear that over time an informal framework evolved, as the team developed a shared set of values and attitudes towards work and learning support.

However, the absence of a well-defined operating model (for example, maximum case loads, minimum face-to-face contacts with clients over time) also meant that service delivery could be quite variable. This limited the scope for a summative evaluation that clearly associates key elements of the service delivery model with outcomes or benefits.

A particular challenge was the lack of clear guidance on exit strategies. There were no clear criteria for when a client should ‘exit’ the Centre or how long a client should stay on a case load. In the absence of clear exit guidelines, WLAs were asked to label clients as ‘inactive’ should the member not have had contact with the WLA for the previous three months. The WLAs were reluctant to mark clients as inactive, commenting that clients frequently ‘dropped off the books’ for extended periods, only to reappear suddenly. One WLA stated that each member of her case load had ‘a part of my [her] brain allocated to them’—meaning that she felt a sense of connectedness and

responsibility to her clients. The WLAs could have benefited from guidance that promoted clearer boundaries for service provision.

The second reason that the WLAs were reluctant to exit clients from their case loads was related to the types of employment outcomes that clients attained. Over half of job placements were into casual positions; and on average those obtaining paid work were employed for 27 hours per week. The preponderance of part-time and casual work meant that many people did not stop looking for work, even after they had a job placement registered through the Centre. This insecurity of paid work resulted in some clients not exiting the Centre and staying on WLA case loads even after having attained a job placement. The evaluation data shows that only 10% of clients had been formally exited, with 31% recorded as inactive at the end of December 2011.

This last issue points to one of the critical limitations of employment assistance which relies predominantly on job search and job placement support. The adoption of an individualised and tailored form of personal support to disadvantaged jobseekers is insufficient by itself to overcome the structural barriers, for example the lack of entry-level jobs.

Despite the above challenges, particularly at the beginning of the Centre's life, there are clear learnings about the delivery of client-centred support that have emerged out of the project to date.

## **The challenge of integration**

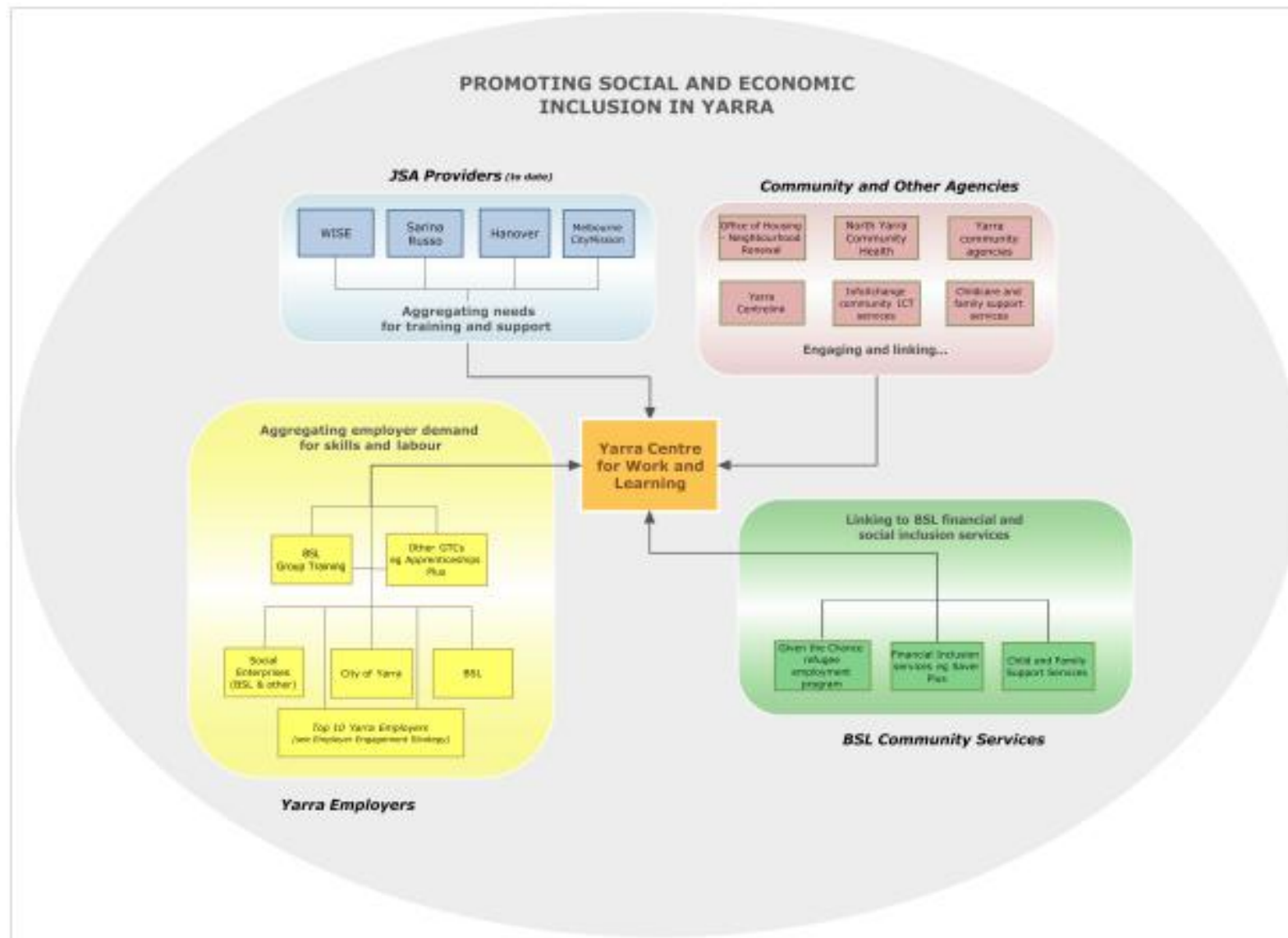
The aim of the Centre was to increase work and learning opportunities for clients by integrating services and support to offer a more client-centred and personalised form of assistance. Figure 7.1 describes the internal and external relationships which were anticipated to form the basis for promoting social and economic inclusion in Yarra. It was hoped that collaboration with JSA providers would provide a referral pathway for clients as well as a collaborative approach to delivery of training and support. Links with other community and government agencies would provide two-way referral pathways for clients. Pathways for clients into supported job placements would be created through links with the BSL's GTO and external GTOs and through more direct engagement with local employers. It was important to consider the nature of integration applicable to the Centre.

## **What is an 'integrated' service?**

It has been recognised that an integrated approach to service delivery enables 'joined up' responses to problems which can be resource-effective; enables more efficient sharing of knowledge and resources; and can lead to long-term solutions and foster responsibility for outcomes (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010). 'Integration' is commonly used as a catch-all concept representing an ideal approach to the configuration of a range of services. In practice, there exists a continuum ranging from low-level information sharing and communication, through coordination to more formal or structured unification involving consolidation and integration of service delivery for clients (Konrad 1996). Services or programs sit on the continuum depending on the nature and range of relationships for 'joining up' from co-location, cooperation, coordination to integration (Bond 2010).



Figure 7.1 The CWLY Network as outlined in the tender submitted to DEEWR





## Mapping integration

A component of the evaluation involved examining the nature and extent of integration at the Centre. Key dimensions which affect the level of integration include the internal/external partnerships, target populations, consistency of goals, program policies, contractual obligations and applicable legislation, and the governance structure for the service delivery model.

In order to assess the nature of integration that had taken place from a staff perspective and to facilitate discussion regarding how further integration might be achieved within existing structures, an integration framework was developed.

The integration framework drew upon Brechman-Toussaint and Kogler's (2010) distinction between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to integration. Top-down approaches are based on government policies, regulations and funding structures designed to support integration, whereas bottom-up approaches are understood as attempts by services and workers to integrate assistance in the absence of explicit government policies or initiatives (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010). Bottom-up approaches typically include common assessment processes and shared client data collection, coordinated case management and the planned facilitation of strong relationships between agencies. The authors argue both approaches have strengths but acknowledge that each is weakened when implemented without the other.

## The integration framework

The integration framework was conceived as a matrix comprising a set of operational variables assessed against three levels on the integration continuum. Sixteen operational variables were defined which might impact upon the nature and extent of integration (Table 7.1). These variables were then clustered into four groups: external variables; internal organisational variables related to high level strategy; variables relating to the management of direct services; and variables related directly to service delivery.

Of particular relevance to the Centre's aim to offer a seamless service to clients was the internal relationship between the Centre, the GTO and the RTO. This was a focus of the mapping exercise.

**Table 7.1 The integration framework: operational variables**

Operational variable	Definition
<b>External to the service</b>	
1. Government policy	Federal and state government policies which shape the environment in which services at the RTO, CWLY and GTO are delivered
2. External funding mechanisms	Federal and state government funding, relevant legislation which guides funding, and reporting requirements and conditions
3. Inter-agency agreements	Official procedure and protocol which guides interaction with services that are external to the BSL
<b>Strategic level</b>	
4. Internal governance	Formal mechanisms that provide strategic oversight to services
5. Internal funding mechanisms	The flow of money through the organisation
6. Staff identity	How the staff identify themselves within and between services
7. Relationship building	Formal strategies for relationship building
8. Marketing and branding	How the services portray their identity to the outside world
<b>Management</b>	
9. Reporting	Formal structure for reporting from direct services
10. Management	The structure of management of direct services and the scope and nature of management
11. Service policy and procedures	Formal mechanisms that provide oversight and guidance on operational behaviour
12. Human resources	Persons tasked with recruitment, and processes of induction
13. Data management	Process for management of service data, including client data
<b>Service delivery</b>	
14. Reception and office management	The extent to which reception and office management should be shared between the three organisations
15. Intake and assessment	Process of intake and assessment of clients
16. Case management	Processes for case management, and who is tasked with the case management role

Staff were asked to assess the extent of integration for each of the above variables in terms of three categories along the continuum—‘co-location’, ‘coordination’ and ‘integration’—using a numerical score (1 to 10). The mapping exercise was undertaken with 20 participants after the service delivery model had settled down at the Centre. The full description and results of the integration framework project are reported in a separate document (BSL 2012 forthcoming).

## Results of mapping integration

The mapping of the extent to which the Centre and its related internal training entities (GTO and RTO) were integrated indicated that staff considered that there was a moderate level of *coordination* in the assistance available to clients. This self-assessment is understandable in the context of the relatively short implementation phase for the Centre, the existing organisational structure and culture within the Employment and Training Division, and of course the innovative approach of a demonstration model.

The external factors (federal and state government policy, funding and regulatory requirements and inter-agency relationships) were found to be the least integrated (average score 2.6 out of 10) of the four groups of variables. This reflected the distinct policy, funding and regulatory environments for the GTO, RTO and the Centre. The highly regulated policy context for GTOs and RTOs limited the extent to which these entities were able to modify their services and which clients they could

support. The individual program requirements were not necessarily problematic in their own right, but interacted in a complex manner to prevent a truly client-focused approach.

The recent reforms to training provision to increase capacity through a demand-driven system with changing funding for the GTO and RTO, together with the open-door policy of the Centre, posed the greatest challenge to the capacity of the three entities to integrate.

While the Victorian Training Guarantee has improved access to vocational education and training (VET) for many people, the restriction of funding to courses at a higher level than previously attained had particular consequences for the CWLY clients and the integration of services. The Centre clients' existing certificates meant that many were not eligible for the courses and traineeships offered by the RTO and GTO, regardless of whether they wanted to do a certificate at the same level but in a new area or whether their existing qualification had been inadequate to enable them to find employment. In 2010 approximately 76% of clients presenting to the Centre had a previous vocational or tertiary qualification, yet WLAs reported that many clients had undertaken vocational training which had been poorly delivered or was not in line with their employment goals.

Staff indicated that limited formal processes were in place for sharing information about external relationships, although informal information sharing was taking place. Several initiatives were created in response to the desire for a more integrated approach to managing external relationships.

The CWLY and GTO shared a Business Development Officer who was responsible for managing relationships with JSA providers to seek to share EPF monies and outcome payments for mutual clients. The CWLY, GTO and RTO also developed a more coordinated approach over time to working with community agencies, especially those that work with public housing residents, although more work could be done to optimise these.

The role of Employer Engagement Coordinator was also created to work across the Centre and GTO to develop relationships with key employers, thus strengthening collaboration between the two services. It is intended that the Centre and GTO will build an even stronger direct engagement with potential employers. This new approach reflects the lessons of the previous two years and will involve close matching of clients to job placement opportunities.

Staff recognised that the Centre, RTO and GTO performed different functions which would potentially make a common governance model difficult. On the other hand, they indicated the need for the three programs to set clear and common program goals and to determine responsibility for the delivery and development of integrated services. The separate sources of funding and budgets, while providing financial transparency, also worked against greater integration as it was unclear which area might bear which costs. In some respects these internal issues mirrored external systemic constraints to integrated delivery.

Staff indicated initial confusion about their identity within the Employment and Training Division and a desire to identify as part of their own service area, necessitating greater clarity from senior management regarding the 'joined up' objectives. Staff identities were also partly influenced by the separate organisational structures that existed prior to the Centre. Considerable efforts were subsequently made to ensure whole department involvement in planning and team-building activities.

Another key area in the provision of an integrated service was the collection and management of client data. Konrad (1996) argues that perhaps the truest measure of the extent to which a human services intervention is integrated is the degree to which the information systems for client eligibility, service use, tracking, payments and outcomes are linked. At the time of the integration review, the Centre, RTO and GTO had separate mechanisms and procedures for collecting and retrieving client data and service information. The developmental work undertaken by the evaluator

led to the creation of a shared client database for the Centre and GTO. Work to improve the quality of client data has been ongoing.

The coordination of data across these two services has resulted in time savings and efficiencies for staff as well as for clients moving between services. It has also allowed information sharing regarding Centre clients who might be eligible for job placement opportunities with the GTO, and for GTO clients exiting job placements who might require job searching assistance from a WLA.

Yet barriers remained to incorporating the RTO in the integrated data collection and management system—mostly due to the use of a separate system required by an external body and the mandatory reporting of particular information as part of the contract.

A number of issues around the integration of direct service delivery were discussed by staff during the integration review. These included a shared reception position for the building housing the Centre, RTO and GTO, which played a vital role in fielding new client inquiries, providing information about all services, conducting intake of new clients and providing referrals to internal and external services. Subsequent to the integration review, steps were taken to create a common intake and assessment process for the CWLY and GTO. The issue of case management of clients of both the CWLY and GTO was also discussed. It was considered that the roles of the WLAs and GTO Field Officers fulfilled different functions which meant that full integration of the roles was not desired. However, the need for improved communication and handover processes between the two services was raised by staff.

While many of these challenges, particularly the internal management factors, were resolved subsequent to the mapping process, the *external* obstacles to integration were unable to be resolved. For the most part these were determined by ongoing contractual obligations for funding. In one sense the Brotherhood's services within the Employment and Training Division reflect the broader external program environment, where funding and reporting requirements are tightly managed with narrow performance criteria that limit flexibility in service delivery, reduce efficiency and constrain capacity to offer a fully integrated service that places the client at the centre of assistance.

There is increasing recognition of these constraints, particularly in assisting people in the community who face multiple barriers to social and economic participation and entrenched disadvantage. The challenge remains how to 'institutionalise' place-based services to deliver an integrated model of assistance with sufficient flexibility to support effective interventions.

### Case study – Sally

Sally was a single mother with a young child. She was not required to engage in job searching activities but wanted to find work and was attending a JSA provider on a voluntary basis. She had previously undertaken a Certificate III in Aged Care with an RTO, but subsequently discovered she had not completed the final module. Without the complete qualification she was struggling to find employment in aged care. She was frustrated with the level of support offered by her JSA provider and approached a CWLY Work and Learning Advisor on the housing estate where she lived for assistance. The advisor, having listened to Sally's circumstances, advocated on her behalf with the JSA provider to secure funding for her to complete the final module of her course.

## 8 Outcomes achieved by the Centre

The program logic for the Centre's activities described the key outcome as to 'contribute to employment among residents of disadvantaged communities in and around Yarra'. This high-level outcome was based on achievement of sustainable employment for clients of the Centre through activities described above that contributed to the attainment of immediate and intermediate outcomes (see Figure 3.1).

The Centre exceeded the targets agreed as the contract deliverables for the three years from July 2009 to June 2012. These included a combination of output and outcome variables as shown in Table 8.1. In addition to the high level of demand at the Centre, the data shows that 500 service users or 36% of those provided with pre-employment intervention were assisted into employment.

**Table 8.1 Key deliverables for the Centre, July 2009 to June 2012**

Indicator	Deliverable	Actual
People provided with information and advice	1,252	1,755
People provided with pre-employment intervention	575	1,384
Number of mentor matches with clients	76	84
Clients placed into employment or traineeship	321	500
Clients achieving employment retention outcomes (13 weeks)	179	352
Clients provided with post-placement support	166	642

The evaluation of the Centre's outcomes relied on the primary data collection in the JobReady database at four time intervals: baseline client data at first point of contact, data at the point of achieving a job placement, follow-up data at 13 weeks after the point of employment and additional follow-up at 52 weeks after the point of employment.

Reliance on employment outcomes was consistent with the program logic and with the Commonwealth Government's reporting of the outcomes of employment assistance achieved by its main labour market programs, including the JSA and Disability Employment Services.

Many of the WLAs expressed concern about the single measure of employment attainment being used as the main yardstick for assessing 'successes for the project. Their most significant concern was that a job placement did not adequately measure people's progress towards work: although a client might not have attained an employment outcome during the measurement period, s/he might attain a job placement in the future which could be attributed to the Centre.

Second, the WLAs recognised the value of working with clients to achieve long-term goals and not prioritising immediate employment. Most of the WLAs and the clients indicated that the quality of service, the way clients were treated and the mutual respect they had for each other were also significant benefits. WLAs expressed concern at the short-term focus on an 'employment placement at all costs' in employment services, preferring to value a stepping-stone approach that would result in sustainable employment outcomes in the longer term.

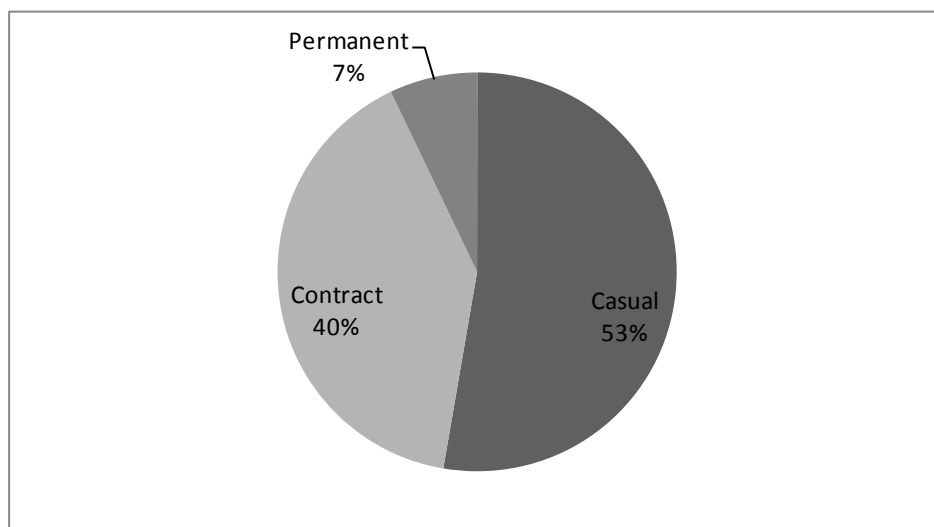
### Employment outcomes

The detailed reporting and evaluation of employment outcomes data covers the two-year period from early 2010 to the end of December 2011. As explained previously this excluded the start-up phase. The end date excludes the final six months to enable 13-week employment retention data to have been obtained and reported. The evaluation data set comprised 479 clients who registered with the Centre and received work and learning support.

The job placement rate achieved for Centre clients receiving work and learning support has been 42% (200 people). Just over half of those taking up paid work were in casual employment (53%).

The high numbers of contract positions (40%) can be explained by the placements in the Brotherhood's GTO (which are all classified as contract positions) and through private employers. Only 7% of placements were reported as permanent jobs (see Figure 9.2).

**Figure 8.2 Conditions of paid work obtained by Centre clients**



Half (52%) of those who obtained paid work found employment in the open labour market: this means that they obtained a position through competitive recruitment which was not brokered through the BSL. Another 29% were found work brokered through the BSL. These two groups involve paid placements in private companies. The other 19% took up traineeships through BSL's GTO, intended as time-limited contract positions, ranging from 12 weeks to one year, which are designed to provide an accredited qualification as well as practical on-the-job work experience combined with personal support.

This outcomes data is considered a conservative estimate of the benefits achieved for people using the Centre. It does not include the one-off advice and referral provided to nearly 400 people accessing the service. Nor does it include those clients who returned to education or learning and who gained intermediate outcomes such as increased confidence, skills, understanding of workplace culture, English language competencies or the resolution of practical barriers to a work pathway. Finally, this analysis does not include service users who did not become clients with a WLA, but who accessed a direct traineeship through the GTO.

The WLAs contacted clients 13 weeks after their initial job placement to check on their circumstances and employment conditions. The overall employment outcome rate at 13 weeks has been 31%. At the end of December 2011, 162 people who had obtained a job were eligible to have their 13-week outcome data collected: 135 clients were still employed at this interval. This represents a retention rate of 83% for this sample.

Direct comparison with DEEWR labour market assistance outcomes data is limited for several reasons:

- the voluntary nature of entry and support provided by the Centre
- a significant proportion of Centre clients were not on income support or engaged with JSA or DES
- the fact that JSCI data is not available to compare the Centre client cohort with a sample of JSA clients



- published JSA employment outcomes data which is not a direct match to the characteristics of the client group
- concerns that some Centre clients had been wrongly allocated to a lower JSA stream.

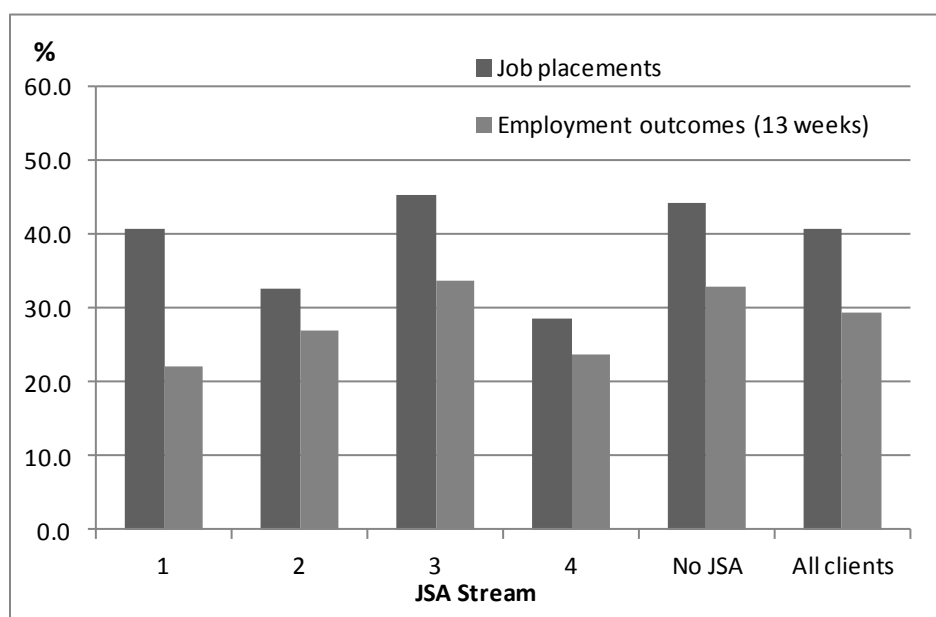
Despite these limitations, indicative comparison is possible using the 13-week employment outcomes data. Figure 8.3 shows the job placement and 13-week employment outcomes data for those clients with a reported JSA status (who made up 62% of the 479 clients). In terms of job placement rates, the lowest performance as expected was for Stream 4 at 29%, followed by Stream 2 at 33%, Stream 1 at 41% and Stream 3 at 45%.

The highest 13-week employment rates have been achieved with Stream 3 (34%) and those with no reported stream (33%). Surprisingly, the employment outcome rates were a relatively low 22% for JSA Stream 1 jobseekers, 27% for Stream 2 and 24% for Stream 4 job seekers.

The overwhelming majority of clients were born overseas, coming from Africa, China and South-east Asia. A substantial proportion had poor or very poor English. The most recent DEEWR data on JSA employment outcomes also vary significantly across both streams and equity groups. As an indicative comparison, in the 12 months to September 2011 the employment outcome rate for CALD jobseekers nationally across all streams is 41%; for Stream 3 CALD jobseekers the equivalent rate is 30% and for Stream 4 it is 21% (DEEWR 2011). The employment outcomes achieved by the Centre therefore compare favourably with national JSA Stream 3 and 4 data for CALD jobseekers (by a margin of about three percentage points). It should be noted that the majority of the Centre's clients have been refugees or humanitarian migrants and therefore can be reasonably assumed to have greater barriers to work compared with the broader CALD population of jobseekers.

Additional analysis of employment outcomes data over a longer period to include a larger sample is yet to be undertaken—ideally matched against a comparison sample of DEEWR data for jobseekers who have similar attributes. It is also intended to measure the longer term sustainability of employment when sufficient CWLY clients are able to be followed up 12 months after job placement. Indicative early data analysis to the end of May 2012 has found that 60 clients were eligible for a 52-week post – job placement follow-up. Twenty-three (38%) were still in paid work; seven (12%) were not working; but half of the 60 were unable to be interviewed.

**Figure 8.3 Job placement and employment outcomes (13 weeks) by JSA Stream**



## Employment outcomes for public housing residents

One of the premises for the Centre was that the JSA system was unable to provide meaningful assistance to public housing tenants who experience high levels of worklessness and social exclusion. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the client group were living in public housing and another 7% were in community or transitional housing at registration. Strategies to increase the participation of local public housing residents were effective in the second and third years. But how successful has the Centre been in achieving employment outcomes for this client group?

Analysis of outcomes for public housing residents (City of Yarra) indicates success, with their outcomes consistent with those achieved with the broader client group. Forty-one per cent attained job placements (compared to 42% of all clients) and 27% attained employment outcomes at 13 weeks (compared to 31% of all clients). The profile of the public housing cohort was not significantly different to the overall client group in terms of JSA streams, cultural background or income support category. However, other factors relating to their tenure in public housing may have contributed to the somewhat lower employment rate, for example recurring health problems or caring responsibilities.

However, compared to the overall public housing resident profile in the area, particular groups were underrepresented at the Centre, including those born in Australia, those on Parenting Payments and Disability Support Pensions. The above job outcome rates do indicate the potential effectiveness of the Centre's service model in engaging and supporting public housing residents to overcome current systemic and personal barriers to taking up work.

## Who gets employment outcomes?

### Prior participation in study or work

Nearly half (42%) of clients were studying at the time of their registration with the Centre. Analysis indicates no significant differences in employment outcomes between those studying at registration and those not studying. This aggregate data may hide variance between clients studying at different levels, such as certificate level versus diploma or university levels. However, the small sample size prevents subgroup analysis at this time. It might have been expected that those studying would be more likely to gain paid work. The absence of this effect supports an explanation that other factors—either personal or systemic—act as barriers to employment for this client group.

A quarter of clients (27%) were reported to have some paid work at registration, with three-quarters of these in casual or contract jobs. Those who were employed to some extent when they registered were far more likely to attain a job placement: 40% of clients who obtained a job outcome had been employed at registration compared to 19% of people who did not attain employment. This is not surprising as there is a significant correlation between prior work experience and probability of entering paid work. However, this finding shows the benefits of recent work experience in providing the foundational or soft skills that are important to an employment pathway.

### Level of contact with the Centre

Two indicators have been used to assess the association between job outcomes for clients and level of engagement or contact with the personal support offered by the WLAs: length of time as a client and number of sessions with their WLA.

The mean length of time between intake and employment for those who have obtained a job has been 5.5 months. This compares with a much longer duration of support for those who have not achieved a job outcome since intake—on average 9.7 months. This in itself is not surprising.

Looking at the level of contact with their WLA, those who achieved a job outcome averaged 12 sessions with their WLA. This contrasts with an average of 6 sessions for those who had yet to obtain a job placement. On face value, this suggests that with this cohort of jobseekers a more intensive level of support—averaging 2 sessions per month—may be linked to a greater prospect of achieving employment. Those who had not achieved a job outcome had averaged about one session every 7 weeks. Not surprisingly then, people who are able to engage more consistently are more likely to attain a job placement. Notwithstanding their particular backgrounds and circumstances and the extent of barriers to employment faced by the Centre's client population described previously, this finding appears to have general applicability. Frequent contact to successfully engage disadvantaged jobseekers and to offer a sufficient level of personal support seems to play a significant role in assisting them to obtain a job placement.

## 9 Discussion

The Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra was established as a demonstration project to test innovative place-based approaches to promote work and learning opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers in an inner-city neighbourhood with a high density of public housing and high concentrations of unemployment. The Centre was primarily funded by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the Innovation Fund over a three-year period from July 2009.

The proposition behind the Centre was that current employment assistance is failing to engage or help the target population of highly disadvantaged unemployed people. A survey of 301 public housing residents conducted at the end of 2009 found that a quarter were unemployed but that 73% of those aged 18–60 years *wanted* to obtain paid work (Siegmann 2010). While the sample may not be representative of the broader in-scope population, important insights for shaping the Centre's service were obtained from their responses, including:

- residents' lack of understanding about the potential impact of paid work on income support entitlements
- concern about loss of entitlements and disincentives to take up paid work
- weak engagement by JSA providers with jobseekers: one-third of those wanting to work reported contact with a JSA provider in the previous year
- low level of satisfaction reported by those who had used job services (BSL 2010).

As a consequence of these findings, the Centre sought to implement an innovative service delivery model through a shopfront entry point close to public housing, based on open-door, voluntary participation. This model evolved over time as understandings about the client group and efficacy of service delivery developed. Key elements of the model included:

- lower case loads to offer personalised assistance on a more flexible, responsive schedule
- individual needs assessments matched to foundational/pre-vocational skills leading to vocational training
- access to motivational or psychological support on site for clients and provision of secondary consultations with Work and Learning Advisors
- outreach to public housing residents to foster engagement and participation
- memberships offered to clients to promote participation in activities
- capacity for advocacy on behalf of clients to Centrelink and Job Services Australia
- access to paid work and traineeships through open employers and social enterprises
- trial of engagement strategies aimed at 'hard-to-reach' residents.

Underpinning the service delivery model was a hypothesis that a better integrated approach would be more beneficial to social and employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers. As a trial of a new approach with staff recruited for the project, there was a significant developmental phase to convert the aspirations set out in the Innovation Fund application into a service delivery model. Program logic was utilised to consider the assumptions about the intervention, develop a theory of change and identify key outcomes. Primary data collection on activities and outcomes were developed in consultation with Centre staff over the development phase. The evaluation framework included both quantitative and qualitative methods based on the program logic, but took on a developmental approach to assist in reflection and adjustment of the model by Centre staff.

## The profile of clients and impact of ‘open-door’ access

The focus of this evaluation has been on the period from January 2010 to December 2011, after the development phase. Over this period, 479 people became clients and received work and learning support. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the clients were living in public housing and another 7% were in community or transitional housing at registration. The profile of this client sample is representative of the larger cohort of Centre service users over the three years from start-up.

The overwhelming majority of clients were born outside Australia (98%) with over half of them refugees (55%). The incorporation of the Given the Chance program into the Centre influenced this presenting demand. However, a key finding from the project is the significant *unmet* need for employment assistance from this group of jobseekers. A large proportion of clients (30%) were not receiving employment assistance through JSA. The Centre’s open-door approach to reduce barriers to engagement and participation resulted in an influx of motivated jobseekers for whom the mainstream system was not proving effective.

A significant proportion of clients were actively engaged in some learning or work-related activity when they first contacted the Centre. This reflected their level of qualifications (30% with Certificate 3 or 4; 46% with diplomas or degrees) and previous work experience (90% had had a paid job in the past five years). Of those reporting their JSA status, the largest group were those in Stream 3 (26%), followed by Stream 1 (20%) and Stream 2 (18%).

Demand had been expected to come from highly disadvantaged jobseekers assessed as Stream 4. However, this was not borne out. Feedback from staff suggested that many clients were in less intensive streams within the JSA system than they should have been. This points to some inaccuracy in the process for assessing barriers to work using the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI):

- A range of personal issues (such as trauma and health problems) are not fully disclosed to Centrelink or JSA providers.
- The current JSCI process fails to capture the full range of barriers including ethnic bias or discrimination in the labour market.

These challenges from presenting demand led to changes in the model to ensure a stronger focus on engaging residents in the local public housing estates, through introduction of a waiting list, priority given to these residents by work and learning advisors with dedicated case loads, and collaborating directly with the Office of Housing to strengthen economic participation. This resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of clients assisted after the first year who were living in City of Yarra public housing (41%).

## Successful elements of the service delivery model

The core delivery of work and learning support comprised two components: personal support (case management) through Work and Learning Advisors as a means to promote client engagement and capacity building; and both structured and informal group learning based on a full assessment of skill needs and aspirations. Personal support was considered essential. It included developing rapport and a trusting relationship as a basis for motivation, individualised support, and setting realistic goals leading to capacity building. Post-placement support for clients taking up work experience or traineeships was also a critical success factor. Skills development embraced practical and foundational capabilities including job searching, interpersonal or living skills, and work culture skills (Crossing Bridges) needed to obtain and sustain a job. The Centre developed training opportunities for clients to match their learning needs—a Job Club (job search skills), interview skills training, English conversation classes and computer skills classes.

The WLAs played a vital role in modelling appropriate workplace behaviour and setting boundaries and expectations for clients as part of their becoming 'job-ready'. About 16% of clients were matched with mentors who provided support to build a bridge to employment for people from refugee backgrounds.

A challenge for the support staff related to external or structural barriers to work faced by their clients. The WLAs assisted in advocating on behalf of their clients to gain access to the range of non-vocational and work-related programs. However, staff felt they had limited capacity to overcome labour market barriers, such as employer discrimination or bias against particular groups.

The original intention of the CWLY approach was to build collaborative relationships with local JSA providers. WLAs reported varying success when advocating to JSA providers, with relationships described as ranging from 'extremely positive' to 'adversarial'.

Following limited success in obtaining funds from provider EPF or for outcome payments, a Business Development Officer was recruited to leverage JSA funding with mixed results. By May 2012, 13 JSA providers shared fee payments for outcomes achieved with 44 mutual clients, with the average contribution from providers being \$1,560 per client. However, two providers contributed payments for nearly half these clients, while 8 providers made payments for outcomes for only a single client each. Considering that over 200 Centre clients were engaged with a JSA provider, this low level of financial support underscores the ongoing difficulties in achieving effective collaboration with the JSA system under current arrangements. In particular, JSAs were less disposed to provide resources from their EPF monies, as their preference was to use this resource on in-house training. Thus two-thirds of the income from JSA providers to the Centre was from outcome fees.

A key development in 2010 was the creation of a specialist Employer Engagement position to undertake proactive outreach to prospective employers and to provide support to host employers to increase the chances of job sustainability. This approach was coupled with workshops conducted with specific employers that provided job-focused training tailored to the needs of the employer to encourage them to diversify their recruitment of labour (Building Bridges).

## Challenges to integration

As a demonstration model with a relatively short start-up phase, a number of challenges emerged over the first six months of delivery. These related partly to the initial reliance on the pre-existing Given the Chance program and the Brotherhood's GTO and RTO delivery. In summary, the Brotherhood's organisational structures mirrored the external service system. While the aspiration was to develop and test an *integrated* service model, the governance arrangements and external contract reporting requirements for different services limited the Centre's capacity to implement such a model.

As part of the developmental approach, the researcher designed an integration framework to document the key elements that underpin client-centred service integration. This assisted Centre staff to consider how best to deliver such a service and to recognise elements that were beyond their control in an employment services environment characterised by high levels of contract management, regulation and compliance reporting.



The overall finding from this process was that the Centre was working collaboratively with BSL's training divisions, with reasonable coordination across most integration variables. However, staff were keen to gain greater autonomy to deliver a seamless service with timely access to resources so as to achieve better outcomes for clients. The absence of a flexible Employment Pathways Fund and the reluctance of JSA providers to share this resource exemplify the challenges staff faced.

## Training churn and credentialism

The clients assisted by the Centre were typically better educated than the overall population of highly disadvantaged jobseekers. Just over half (55%) had completed vocational qualifications in the past five years, with one in five having completed three or more qualifications. At the point of registration with the Centre, a substantial 42% were currently studying—half of this group at certificate level; 18% diplomas and 25% at high school. This profile reflects the preponderance of overseas-born clients, with an average stay in Australia of six years. Many had gained tertiary or vocational qualifications overseas.

A common concern of clients was the lack of recognition of their qualifications or prior work experience—not only by employers, but also by JSA providers who 'encouraged' their clients to retrain, often in different industries or sectors. Centre clients frequently raised issues of ethnic bias or discrimination by employers. This was compounded by their weak social networks and connections into the world of work in their chosen professions or vocations. With increased priority placed on human capital development by Australian governments by building the training system as a demand-driven, marketised sector, the evidence from this Centre supports emerging concerns about training churn and credentialism.

The increased focus on direct employer engagement by the Centre was in part a way to overcome the ethnic penalty in a competitive labour market. Those jobseekers with limited Australian work histories and weak support networks are at a serious disadvantage in finding a sustainable job pathway. This is not due to lack of motivation. Rather it reflects the structural and systemic barriers faced by migrant jobseekers: the lack of social trust and the overall lack of job opportunities. This finding is backed up by previous research showing that other disadvantaged groups face similar demand-side barriers, including people with a disability, young adults and mature-age workers (see, for example, VECCI 2009).

Centre clients' low satisfaction with mainstream JSA providers also points to an inadequate engagement and assessment process to fully understand and document barriers to employment. By contrast, two barriers were given higher priority by Work and Learning Advisors: lack of appropriate foundational or soft skills for Australian workplaces, and poor written or spoken English for the workplace. Providing both informal and structured learning opportunities to address these barriers and match individual client needs became a feature of the Centre's approach.

There seem to be two key learnings from the Centre's experiences of work and learning support. First, training for training's sake does not lead to a paid job. Completion of a vocational certificate does not guarantee a job if the foundational capabilities of the person do not make them employable. Second, personalised support that builds a relationship with jobseekers who face multiple barriers to work is essential to the effective assessment and resolution of those barriers.



## Client employment outcomes and benefits

The Centre has exceeded its contract deliverables over the three years of the project. From July 2009 to May 2012, information and advice over this period has been provided to 1,755 people with 1,384 (79%) provided with pre-employment intervention (BSL 2012). This includes use of the Centre's resources (including informal training); case management support or direct access to training courses through the GTO. Over this period 500 people (36%) have been placed into employment or a traineeship.

The job placement rate achieved for Centre clients who received work and learning support, has been 42% with a 13-week employment outcome rate of 31%. The employment outcomes achieved by the Centre compare favourably with national JSA Stream 3 and 4 data for CALD jobseekers (by a margin of about three percentage points).

Just over half of those taking up paid work were in casual employment (53%). Half (52%) obtained paid work in the open labour market; 29% were found work brokered by the BSL and 19% took up a traineeship through the BSL's GTO.

This outcomes data is considered a conservative estimate of the benefits for clients using the Centre. It does not include the 'one-off' advice and referral provided to over 400 people accessing the service. Nor does it include those clients who returned to full-time education or training, or who achieved intermediate outcomes that improve their prospects of obtaining a job.

Focusing on specific subgroups, the highest job placement rates were achieved for JSA Stream 3 category jobseekers (45%) and those not in the JSA (44%). The job placement rate for Stream 4 jobseekers was 29%.

One of the premises for the Centre was that the JSA system was unable to provide meaningful assistance to public housing tenants who experience high levels of worklessness and social exclusion. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the client group were living in public housing and another 7% were in community or transitional housing at registration. Assessed against the Centre's objective to focus on those in public housing in the local area, the level of presenting demand in the first six months meant that this target population were underrepresented. This led to adjustments in the service delivery model to rebalance the effort to local public housing residents. Specifically, more proactive outreach and engagement strategies were implemented with the support of the Office of Housing. These were effective, as indicated by the increased proportion of the client group living in public housing in the second and third years. Nine out of ten clients from the City of Yarra were living in public housing.

Nearly two-thirds of clients were in public housing. Analysis of outcomes for public housing residents indicates the success of the Centre, with employment outcomes consistent with the entire sample: 41% attained job placements and 27% employment outcomes (at 13 weeks).

The profile of those clients who lived in public housing was not significantly different to the overall client group in terms of JSA streams, cultural background or income support category. This points to an ongoing challenge in engaging the most disadvantaged residents. Some groups were underrepresented at the Centre, including those on Parenting Payments and Disability Support Pensions. Despite the challenges in balancing high demand for the Centre's services with effective and responsive engagement of these groups, the learnings from the implementation of the outreach elements show the way to more effective engagement with 'hard to reach' residents (see below).

## Value-add elements at the Centre

In addition to the trial of the core service model, the Centre's activities included a range of value-adding elements which have contributed to its success and provided insights into more effective service delivery aimed at highly disadvantaged groups.

## Collaboration with the Office of Housing

A collaborative approach with the OoH has resulted in a number of initiatives that seek to ensure a better integrated form of assistance:

- funding of 100 Centre memberships for public housing residents who were not linked into employment services, to enable targeted assistance
- proactive support from OoH to facilitate outreach activities on estates
- resourcing of two Work and Learning Brokers to promote engagement, facilitate work opportunities and identify potential jobseekers among residents
- identification of financial disincentives for residents to take up paid work, and the trial of information strategies (rent calculator)
- recommendations for housing policy changes to overcome disincentives to paid work for tenants.

## Mental health support

Incorporated into the Centre's service delivery was the provision of specialist psychological support through philanthropic trust funding to continue a previous trial of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model within an employment services setting. The findings from that trial are documented in a separate report (Bowman & Lawlor 2010). The funding originally provided to trial IPS enabled us to examine the implementation and adaptation of an evidence-based practice and to develop a non-stigmatised place-based approach that works with existing services to best meet the needs of highly disadvantaged jobseekers with mental health issues.

The psychologist worked in an integrated fashion with staff in the Centre, providing direct support to clients who had experienced trauma or distress, as well as secondary consultations to staff and group activities such as stress management and psycho-educational sessions. The weekly group sessions provided an opportunity to learn and practise methods of managing stress and anxiety.

## Developing gender-responsive services

A third value-add to the Centre has been the research undertaken to explore the nature of assistance to women in public housing. Funding was successfully sought from a philanthropic trust in 2011 to undertake a study to inform the development of Centre services to better meet the learning and work needs of women in public housing. The study examined the factors that shape women's engagement with learning and work and considered how services might become more responsive to the needs of women, especially those who have a migrant or refugee background (Bowman & Mui 2012 forthcoming).

This study has developed a toolkit which comprises three key elements. The first component, a *Framework for action*, identifies key elements of gender and culturally responsive services. It also provides services and program developers with the tools to critically reflect on how they are meeting the needs of diverse communities. The second component, *Issues and approaches*, briefly canvasses issues of gender inequality as they affect learning and work for women who live in public housing. Some of these issues informed the development of the gender and culturally responsive toolkit. The third component of the toolkit provides links to resources.

The resources will be available on the BSL website and the *Framework for action* will be included in the practice manuals provided to the five new Centres for Work and Learning in Victoria.

## Employer engagement research

Research shows that the application of progressive diversity principles can improve a business's bottom line and demonstrate its social credentials. There are thus both economic and moral arguments in support of strategic approaches to achieve worker diversity.

The Brotherhood is collaborating with the Melbourne Business School, through its Asia Pacific Social Impact Leadership Centre, to undertake research focusing on employer barriers and benefits. This study, funded through a grant over two years from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, will utilise the integrated service model as it evolves through the Centre for Work and Learning Yarra to increase understanding of the attitudes, behaviours and barriers faced by participating employers who take on disadvantaged jobseekers. The findings will be used to influence reforms to active labour market interventions and workforce diversity policies to enable a more efficient take-up of disadvantaged jobseekers into work, thereby reducing welfare costs for governments and providing more effective recruitment solutions for employers.

## Insights from implementation of a demonstration model

The Centre received DEEWR Innovation Funding for a three-year period that has been matched by BSL to provide the core resources to develop, implement and evaluate the approach. The budget forecast made assumptions about the level of cooperation with JSA providers that would result in income from EPF and outcome fees to be shared for common clients. This did not eventuate, resulting in innovative strategies to increase income, including client 'memberships' sponsored by external agencies. Meeting the budget posed challenges for the management team seeking to test an innovative service model in a difficult environment.

The three-year funding period has also created its own challenges. While BSL was not starting from scratch, having had long experience in delivering employment assistance and training services, the short developmental period created pressures and limitations. In particular, key elements of the service delivery model such as intake, case loads and exit procedures were not articulated in a process manual. In the first six months, the absence of a core client data collection limited the capacity of managers to monitor client profile and progress. This is not a criticism of Centre staff. Rather it reflects the inherent challenge in designing and implementing a unique service model in a short period.

A key learning from the evaluation for such trials is the importance of having staff time and capacity to develop the infrastructure and document a service delivery model that meets the criteria for a robust evaluation. The researcher for the evaluation spent considerable time on developmental activities, design of a core data collection strategy and facilitating reflection by Centre staff. This flexibility was welcomed by the Centre as a critical contribution to the development of the service model. However, it serves to show the importance of an adequate start-up phase for such trials based on a sound theory of change.

This challenge was increased for the Centre due to the existing organisational structures and accountability requirements within the BSL's Employment and Training Division into which the new Centre was placed. In many respects, the Centre in seeking to be an integrated or 'joined up' model has faced comparable challenges within BSL to those encountered in the silo-centred employment assistance in the external environment. As the assessment of 'integration' has indicated, an integrated client-centred service model has not yet been fully implemented. The constraints include both internal BSL and external factors, as well as government funding contractual obligations.

During the Centre's three years of operation, BSL has also undertaken strategic review of its training provision and community enterprises within a restructured Employment and Training Division. In late 2010 the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) incorporating the ACFE-funded Learn Local entity was separated from the GTO to create two separate business units to grow the range of training services and work placements in the context of the substantial reforms to vocational education and training in Victoria. The GTO has diversified its service model to include employment pathways to a broader range of host employers, beyond the BSL's enterprises. The majority of the latter enterprises relied on time-limited social procurement or government funding (for example through the Community Jobs Fund) and concluded operation in the past year. These changes, driven in part by external factors, have influenced the implementation of the Centre model.

The relatively short demonstration period places limitations on building a robust evidence base. The outcome measurement has focused on job placements and 13-week employment retention. The intention has been to also collect 52-week employment retention data to assess sustainability of economic participation. The short period of service delivery (post start-up phase) limits the potential to follow up a sufficient sample of exited clients within the reporting timeframe.

The ending of the three year DEEWR funding has also placed strain on the Centre's operations, as the focus in the final six months shifted to review, consideration of strategic directions and potential wind-down if additional resources did not eventuate. The internal review process has shown the importance of a longer timeframe (five years) to develop, deliver, adjust and evaluate this type of innovative model to addressing entrenched disadvantage. This would enable a developmental phase to clearly articulate the service model and to consolidate governance and organisational arrangements, followed by an adequate delivery period of the model that minimises mission drift, adjusts according to emerging data and external change, and allows a more robust evaluation. Ideally, a comprehensive evaluation (incorporating quasi-experimental methods) should only be implemented once the intervention meets evaluation criteria. This was not possible within the project period.

## **Sustainability implications**

The Board of the Brotherhood has recently committed to continue the Centre's core service delivery model as an integral part of its Line of Sight strategy, based on the evaluation evidence to date and internal review. This will enable further refinement of the model with consolidation of the governance and organisational arrangements, clearer articulation of the integrated approach, enhancement of the direct employer engagement strategy and further development of the evidence base. The intention is to document the service delivery model over the next two years to support sustainability and replication.

The experience and results from the demonstration phase have been sufficient to encourage the Victorian Government to commit resources to replicate the approach in partnership with BSL and other local stakeholders. In 2011 the government committed \$4.6m for five Work and Learning Centres in areas with high concentrations of public housing residents. These WLCs are to be based on the CWLY service model. Learnings from the Centre are being used to design the organisational arrangements, governance and service delivery at these new centres. Several manuals, including a Process Manual, have been written as a guide for service delivery and the JobReady database software is being adopted (BSL 2012b). It is anticipated that the evidence from these new Centres will be brought together with knowledge from the Centre in Yarra to inform potential reforms to active labour market policies, in particular reforms to the JSA from 2015.

## 10 Conclusion

The Centre for Work and Learning Yarra has exceeded its key deliverables as a government funded innovation project over its first three years. The job placement rate achieved for Centre clients has been 42%. The 13-week employment outcomes achieved by the Centre compare favourably with published national JSA Stream 3 and 4 data for CALD jobseekers by a margin of three to four percentage points. Analysis of outcomes for public housing residents also indicates the effectiveness of the approach, with their outcomes consistent with those achieved with the broader client group: 41% attained job placements, and 27% attained employment outcomes at 13 weeks (compared to 42% and 31% of all clients).

The Centre has provided valuable insights into more effective ways to engage and support disadvantaged jobseekers in public housing neighbourhoods, in particular refugees and new migrants. Its success to date is resulting in replication of the approach through funding of five new Centres by the Victorian Government.

While the Centre has struggled to *fully* integrate assistance in its demonstration phase, it has been able to offer a better coordinated and responsive service by combining personal support, flexible forms of life skills education, pre-vocational skills and accredited training linked to real work experience. The evaluation data supports the argument for more intensive support through work and learning advisors than is currently offered by the JSA to highly disadvantaged groups. This enables stronger relationships to be established with the individual client as a foundation to assistance tailored to their needs and aspirations.

The place-based approach using an accessible shopfront location led to unexpectedly high demand by unemployed people disengaged from paid work but not well connected to the JSA who were actively seeking a job or were marginally attached to work. This unmet demand points to potential benefits of further improvements to active labour market policy to meet employer labour needs by building a more responsive employment assistance system.

The Centre's model enabled the development of collaborative relationships with local community groups and services to reach out to public housing residents. The high level of community demand for assistance affected the Centre's capacity to implement the targeted engagement strategies in the first year of operations. A key learning for the Brotherhood has been the importance of an adequate developmental phase at the beginning of such innovative models to articulate the approach, build collaboration with key stakeholders, implement critical infrastructure and develop the operational parameters to give clear guidance to service staff.

The employment outcomes achieved for clients, albeit predominantly made up of refugees and new migrants, suggest the approach has broader merit for replication of its key elements for other groups of highly disengaged jobseekers. The key elements of the model that might be considered as part of active labour market reform measures include:

- a client-centred approach based on effective engagement and a trusting relationship
- continuity of support including post-placement follow-up through reduced case loads for work and learning advisors (1:60 ratio)
- skills development and training matched to individual aspirations, learning needs and employment pathways
- proactive engagement with local employers (businesses and social enterprises) to provide work opportunities matched to jobseekers
- work and learning advisors with the skills, empathy and commitment to engage effectively with disadvantaged groups.



BSL's previous research and advocacy have pointed to the weaknesses in the provision of employment assistance both in outcomes for highly disadvantaged groups and for employers seeking entry level labour (BSL 2011). The evidence from the Centre's first three years adds weight to arguments for further reform to the JSA that can support integrated and flexible service delivery at a local level aimed at highly disadvantaged groups. The indicative outcome rates suggest potential cost benefits of such approaches. A four percentage point improvement in job outcomes (off benefits) for 100,000 long-term unemployed would deliver about \$50m savings in income support payments alone per annum. However, this would require either additional investment in JSA or redeployment of existing resources towards highly disadvantaged groups.

In essence, the evaluation points to the importance of a more personalised and supportive service model that tailors assistance according to the capabilities of individual jobseekers and opens a direct path into paid work.

The learnings from the Centre also point to broader active labour market policy changes to overcome systemic or structural barriers faced by this jobseeker population. These include:

- review of the JSCI classification tool and assessment procedures to ensure that all the barriers to work are taken into account in allocating jobseekers to JSA Streams: including personal factors, risk of ethnic bias and discrimination, period of unemployment (inclusive of spells in country of origin)
- stronger measures to ensure JSA collaboration with local services by sharing EPF and outcome fees for mutual clients
- examination of the prevalence of training churn and credentialism experienced by disadvantaged jobseekers through poor matching of skill needs to local job prospects
- consideration of effective workforce diversity measures and social procurement strategies to overcome ethnic bias and stimulate job opportunities
- examination of 'off-benefit' funding models to support integrated intermediate labour market (ILM) approaches using open employers and social enterprises, targeting highly disadvantaged groups in areas of high unemployment, using Newstart payments to contribute to paid work or traineeships
- labour market initiatives that support job retention and advancement for entry-level workers.

BSL has committed to continue the Centre as the main entry point into its services for disadvantaged jobseekers for a further two years. Drawing on the findings from the demonstration, the challenge will be to implement further organisational changes to maximise the seamless delivery of client-centred assistance, to continue to focus on 'hard to reach' income support recipients, and to ensure the collection of high quality service data for monitoring and review.

Finally, it will be important to measure employment outcomes for clients of the Centre over a longer period to validate the reported findings and assess the sustainability of employment outcomes. It is recommended that comparative analysis of employment outcomes be undertaken with a matched sample of jobseekers using JSA services. As the present study was a developmental evaluation focused on the service delivery model, a financial analysis based on client outcomes was out of scope and premature. It is suggested that this research also be undertaken to measure the cost benefits in order to inform active labour market policy reform.



## Appendix: Evaluation methodology

### 1. Workshops

#### Program logic

A program logic was developed to provide a framework for data collection and the evaluation. The logic was developed at a workshop in March 2010. Feedback from Centre staff and the Evaluation Advisory Group resulted in refinements to the program logic in August 2010.

#### Employer engagement

In January 2011 the Researcher worked with the Employer Engagement Coordinator and two other management staff in the Employment and Training Department to develop a program logic which described the expected outcomes for the employer engagement strategy.

#### Engagement workshop 1

In March 2011 a one-day workshop was held with two WLAs and two Work and Learning Brokers (WLBs) who were employees of the Office of Housing working on the public housing estates in the City of Yarra. The purpose was to build a shared understanding of the roles of the WLAs and the WLBs. The processes for engagement between the WLAs, WLBs and public housing tenants were considered.

#### Engagement workshop 2

In November 2011 a workshop was held with seven WLAs to explore how best to conduct engagement activities on housing estates and define the expected outcomes. A student on placement undertook some analysis of approaches for engaging with people and services in public housing estates as preparation for this workshop.

### 2. Collection of client and service data

The Researcher was able to have significant input into the development of Centre processes and procedures and worked closely with the Centre team as they became established to embed data collection into the work and learning support processes. The design and implementation of a core data collection for reporting and evaluation purposes was undertaken in the first 12 months in collaboration with WLAs. The extended developmental phase accounts in some part for the level of missing data in this phase.

The evaluation data came from the following forms that WLAs used in the course of their duties:

- client registration form
- client intake form. This included a consent form where the client was able to consent to their data being used in the evaluation. The evaluation only used client data for those who had given explicit consent
- job placement form
- employment outcome at 13 weeks form

The WLAs were responsible for collecting this data and the Researcher was responsible for data quality and ensuring that data was collected and entered. Data was coded into SPSS for analysis.

### 3. Interviews with staff and clients

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and clients of the Centre and these interviews were coded thematically. The following staff participated in semi-structured interviews:

- five Work and Learning Advisors
- three management and coordinating staff at the Centre
- four clients of the Group Training Organisation
- two clients of the Registered Training Organisation
- five management staff in the Employment and Training Department.

Fifteen clients of the Centre also participated in interviews and were selected by purposeful sample based on a stratified sampling frame using the following categories:

- clients who have been seeing a WLA for more than six months and had not been able to get a job
- clients who were employed
- clients whom the WLA saw for more than three months, but who then disengaged from the Centre.

### 4. Participant observation

Participant observation at the CWLY was conducted over the life of the project. The purpose was to attain an in-depth knowledge of the Centre as well as contribute to the development of internal processes that would harmonise with the evaluation activities.

The outcomes of this participant observation included data collection systems that were fully embedded into the case management process as well as internal reporting systems that were harmonised with the data needs of the evaluation.

The framework for participant observation was based on the work of Michael Patton. Patton outlined a number of variables for the implementation and conduct of participant observation.

## 5. Ethics

The following processes and procedures were in place to ensure adherence to the BSL's ethics in research policy. Ethics approval was obtained from the BSL's Ethics Committee.

Service access	<p>It is important that CWLY clients participating in research understand that their participation in CWLY is not dependent on their participation in research activities.</p> <p>Each interview participant will receive an ethics and confidentiality statement. This statement explicitly indicates their rights to either not consent or withdraw their consent to research at any time with no implications for service delivery.</p> <p>Each interview participant who is a member of Centre will sign a consent form indicating that they understand the above.</p>
Confidentiality and intellectual property	<p>To ensure that people have a right to confidentiality and a right to assert ownership of intellectual property, research participants will have two options presented to them on their consent form. The first option is for all data collected to remain confidential. The second option is for the person to have the right to have their name attached to any their quotes used in the research project. If the person selects the second option, the quote will not be used with their name unless we have the participant's express approval.</p>
Consent	<p>All interview subjects will receive a plain English statement.</p> <p>All CWLY clients sign consent for case records to be accessed by the researcher when they join the Centre. When they join they also are given the opportunity to decline to be contacted by the researcher.</p> <p>All consent for interviews will be in writing.</p>
Translators	Translators will be used as required.
Data security	Hard-copy data will be stored securely. Soft-copy data will be stored under code so that the participant cannot be identified.

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