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“Building Pathways to a Brighter Future”

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Deakin University
May 2012
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Executive Summary

*Pathways to a Brighter Future* is an excellent and highly effective program that has an average 71.5% success rate (from recruitment to completed training and employment) where other program average around 45%, effectively training 67 students at an average cost of $5 300 per student. It recruits long term unemployed people from the northern suburbs of Geelong and engages them with TAFE level training and work experiences in areas of identified skill shortages. It deserves to be continued and replicated in other localities.

The program is well founded on abstract principles for addressing poverty, actively engages the area and the target group with dedicated and locally based staff, has clear criteria and screening processes for recruitment, strong links with training providers and local employers who needed labour and were willing to participate in their mentoring. It also has a high success rate and a good reputation, being approached by employers for staff and with another 120 unemployed people seeking assistance from its staff.

Overall the program met its objectives and exceeded those of comparable programs.

Research based on a literature survey and a sample of interviews with the *Brighter Future* workers, trainers, trainees and employers conducted over March 2012 has identified some areas for improvement and these comprise the Report Recommendations:

For Northern Futures:

Overall the program is very dependent on high quality inter-personal relationships. This is its great strength but also a source of vulnerability in that, for example, a key Northern Futures staff person with substantial personal contacts could leave. It would be very difficult to replicate such relationships quickly and effectively. I therefore recommend:

- At least two Northern Futures staff are engaged with key employers to ensure some back up in contacts and expertise.

- Formal mentoring and training for those who are overseeing the program ie the *Building Brighter Future* workers themselves, to ensure common levels of information, systematic support and career planning to limit burnout and enhance performance.

- A standardised electronic record system for monitoring students in each program – recruitment, attendance, work placements and any issues - as well as to document follow up contacts and employment for a period of 12 months.

- Before any new program commences adequate time needs to be available to develop educational and employer links and staff capacity.
• There are drop outs and screening of possible recruits and it is clearly difficult to fill all of the training positions available, especially in Aged Care. So there should be more active recruitment and a larger initial intake to achieve targets.

For the Training Providers:

• An improvement to the TAFE programs would involve building in job presentation skills in an additional short course.

• Recognition that what is being taught are not just skills but confidence and social aptitude to facilitate job readiness

For G21:

• Lobby for and perhaps fund the expansion of the Learner Driver support program, to enable more young and disadvantaged people to learn how to drive as one way of addressing the critical mobility problem in northern Geelong

• Further review of the public transport system to mesh its timetables and routes with needs in the northern suburbs of Geelong

For other regions:

• Any region or locality seeking to replicate this program needs to have quality information on the local skill shortages and to target their training and work placements to those sectors.

• Whatever organisation oversees such a program has to have good relationships with major employers in the sectors of skill shortage, to establish sites for workplace visits, mentoring and training as well as potential employment. This ensures that the program is self-sustaining, in meeting both the needs of employers and the long term unemployed.

• The program can be presented as one that will potentially assist in filling skills gaps and as one that can enhance the morale of existing employees through interaction with the trainees. It is also one aspect of corporate social responsibility in a region, helping the community and the image of the company.

• It is best if local employers and trainee venues are connected to local trainees as mobility is often a key cost and issue
Background

Introduction

While currently Australia has historically low levels of unemployment – hovering around 5% - there are still social groups and regions where unemployment rates remain stubbornly high. For the individuals concerned, their families and communities, unemployment remains a scourge that limits income, self esteem and well being (Brewer 1980). While the reasons for high levels of unemployment in particular localities may well be structural – relating to, for example, the closure of major employers – solutions do not always have to be at this level. For the long term unemployed often have a host of personal issues associated with substance abuse, low levels of education, domestic violence, sickness, disability, mental illness, immobility and age that not only inhibit their ability to seek work and training while these same issues generate genuine anxieties from potential employers. But there are programs which have attempted to address these concerns – of employers and the long term unemployed - one of which in the northern suburbs of Geelong is the subject of this evaluation.

*Pathways to a Brighter Future* aims to provide intensive training and job support to individuals who have backgrounds of generational disadvantage and long term unemployment from within the Corio Norlane areas. It recognises the needs of this particular sub-group of long term unemployed individuals who do not always respond positively to traditional training and job service assistance. The program also connects those students it trains to employers in areas of labour shortage – Aged Care, Transport and Logistics and Hospitality.

It is vital to know if such a program is being effective, whether it is delivering on its stated objectives, meeting the desires of the unemployed people involved and addressing the needs of employers. Such is the purpose of this evaluation. It will not only give insights into the current program – its strengths and weaknesses – as the basis for its improvement, but also provide the foundation on which further programs can be developed and delivered in the Geelong region and elsewhere.

This report will firstly contextualise this program within Australia and the region before focusing on Corio-Norlane and the *Pathways to a Brighter Future* program. The brief literature review will draw out some of the key criteria by which comparable programs have been assessed before the focus shifts to the particular program and, using primarily qualitative methods, draw out its objectives and then assess whether these have been realised: for the unemployed, for those administering the program, for the trainers and the employers.
Unemployment and training programs in Australia

Despite relatively low levels of unemployment in Australia over the last few years – down to 5.3% in August 2011 (Australian Country Monitor 2011) - there remain groups in the population who continue to experience long term unemployment. Thus in May 2009 of the 310 000 people who received Newstart and Youth Allowances, more than 50% had received those payments for more than one year, 220 000 for more than two years and 110 000 for more than five years. Such long term unemployment is associated with declining health and social exclusion. Of the long term unemployed, such as those who received Intensive Support Customised Assistance, 65% lacked year 12 qualifications or equivalent (compared to 33% of those of working age in the overall population) and 20% reported their main barriers as disability, 15% reported being “too old” while 35% had mental health issues (Davidson 2011). The characteristics associated with high unemployment also include Indigenous background and a host of other social barriers: homelessness, addictions, immigrant status and public housing tenancy.

While some social groups are particularly vulnerable to long term unemployment, so too are specific localities associated with job losses. So for example the northern suburbs of Adelaide have both high levels of public housing tenants and people with poor education and employment experiences. This is also the area that has borne the brunt of recent service closures and manufacturing layoffs (Beer 2009).

In terms of how unemployment has been addressed by Australian governments, from the 1980s and 90s the emphasis was on training and work experience; with programs dominated by labour market assistance. From 1997, however, there was a shift to job search assistance with a “Work First” emphasis. The employment outcomes of the major employment programs from 1996 to 2009 hover around 45% (up from 30% in the early 1990s), three months after assistance was rendered. What was associated with successful programs has been called the “Social resource link” meaning the number of employers involved in any program, the labour information provided, the number of local social resources mobilised and the number of employer and employment forums (Wu et al. 2010).

As to how such programs should be evaluated, there are a range of standard evaluation methods – see, for example Bacher 2003; Stufflebeam et al 2000; Owen 2006; Werthen et al 1997; Yagidis and Weinbach 2005 – and some examples of evaluating employment programs within Australia – such as Barnett and Spoehr 2008; Chapman 1994; DEEW 2008; Dockey and Webster 2002; Erebus 2007; Davidson 2011; Stokes and Tyler 2001 – and offshore (Bruttel and Sol 2006; SEEP 2009). In assessing these efforts Davidson (2011) notes that many are limited by their focus on average outcomes rather than the experiences of those involved and their overall costs and benefits, that they also focus on short term rather than longer term effects and concentrate on one program which therefore does not reveal much about their broader policy or economic environment. In this evaluation of the
**Pathways for a Brighter Future** many of these limitations will necessarily be replicated because this particular program has only been going for 12 months and the evaluation is occurring just as the program ends. Also because of time constraints, it cannot be compared to other like programs in the region. However, this assessment does focus on the experiences of those involved and considers the overall costs and benefits. Other studies have revealed the need to customise the assessment of the collaborative model developed in this region and to consider its impacts on all involved as well as its implications for the well being of participants. It is these models that are followed here.

**Geelong**

Geelong is Victoria’s second city. Located one hour from Melbourne, it is increasingly drawn into the orbit of the metropolis through improved rail and road connections, limited local employment options and diverging house prices. But it is also a city divided, registering on its urban and social fabric some of the more dramatic changes in the recent economic geography of the nation.

Around its refurbished waterfront, there are now expensive Nonda Kastalides apartments, a Sheraton Hotel and up-market bars and restaurants. It is a boulevard of realised dreams as the city from the 1980s began the process of re-inventing itself. For this regional city of 220,000 had been hard hit by the demise of Australian manufacturing – first textiles and footwear in the 1970s and then the closure of the International Harvester truck making plant in the 1980s. The 1990s opened with the collapse of the locally based Pyramid Building Society and it was joined by the long wind down of the city’s biggest employer – who once boasted how “Driving a Ford drives Geelong” - as new technologies as well as international rationalisation meant the end of many local car making jobs at the Ford plant (Johnson 1990).

Along with the physical trappings of this city of spectacle, with its revitalised Central Activities District, gentrified inner neighbourhoods, bustling waterfront and arts precinct, went an economic diversification, as the City by the Bay moved to become a service centre. As a result, the largest employers are no longer the manufacturers, but health, education and welfare organisations, well served by growing numbers of arts, recreation, food and accommodation workers. Not only is such a change reflected in the city centre, but it is registered in the economic structure of the city. Thus in 2006 Geelong only had 14.4% of its workforce in Manufacturing, compared to 30% thirty years earlier. Indeed the major growth engines of employment are now in the Service sectors – Retail (employing 14%), Health (12%), Education (8.6%) Accommodation and Food (6.4%) (City of Geelong 2010).

Such a story is registered on the social geography of this city. While now there is only 14% of the workforce engaged in Manufacturing, in the northern suburbs of Corio and Norlane – built in the 1950s through to the 1970s to serve the Ford plant, the Shell Oil Refinery and
International Harvester - over 20% work in industry. This area is further distinguished by its quantity of public housing (22% in Norlane, 10% in Corio) and, since the 1970s downturn in manufacturing, by a host of social problems (City of Geelong 2010).

The northern suburbs of Geelong have long been associated with industry and social disadvantage and these elements have worsened with the continued decline of manufacturing. Here then, in what used to be the industrial powerhouse of the city, there are now high levels of unemployment, limited educational qualifications, and a concentration of low income households. This is not just the etching of class onto the city, but the exacerbation of such social division by economic restructuring and social stigmatisation. Thus in Norlane in 2006 only 4.5% of individuals earned more than $1000 per week, whereas 14.6% of those in Greater Geelong did. More serious, was the proportion of households on low incomes – (less than $500 per week in 2006) – 28% in Corio and 40.3% in Norlane compared to 16% in the whole of Geelong (City of Geelong 2010). Recent research on this area has shown:

- The Corio area (incorporating Corio, Norlane, Bell Post Hill and Bell Park) has an unemployment rate of 9.2%, significantly greater than Geelong (6.3%), Victoria (5.4%) and Australia (5.1%)
- Over 75% of longer term jobseekers face significant barriers to permanent employment because of a lack of basic education, social barriers and/or behavioural and attitude issues
- The lack and/or cost of public transport are reasons commonly given by Corio Norlane residents to explain why it’s difficult to access further education or participate in the workforce
- In Corio Norlane the completion rate (Year 12 or equivalent) for the total population is 22.9% compared with Melbourne at 48.5% and Victoria at 44% {ABS 2006; Pathways nd).

Northern Geelong is therefore an area beset by social disadvantage. The measures of such disadvantage are exacerbated by its related poor image. Thus in a survey of residents in 2000 Deborah Warr recorded how it is perceived by those outside – as the Bronx of Geelong, as the ghetto. As one respondent noted: ‘nobody wants to be here and we haven’t got no choice. Like in LA, they’ve got their trailer park trash and in Geelong you’ve got Corio and Norlane trash’ (Warr 2005:299). She also documented how the area is one with a strong sense of community and with the existence of many initiatives to improve its economic base and urban fabric. Overseen by a number of government departments over the early 2000s there was a co-ordinated program of neighbourhood renewal and community rebuilding. There is also a strong contingent of community groups working to improve the area and the facilities available to its people, one of which is Northern Futures.
Northern Futures

In August 2007, a Geelong Northern Suburbs Jobs Summit led by State and Federal members of parliament brought together representatives of business and community sectors as well as local residents to discuss employment issues in the northern suburbs of Geelong. As a result of this summit, a steering committee - known as Northern Futures - was established to take the lead in planning and leveraging whole of government and community support to minimise the social and economic impact on Geelong’s 3214 suburbs.

In September 2008, a Northern Futures “3214 Way Forward” Forum was held, bringing together leaders from the broad spectrum of government, industry, health, education and employment services to agree on a course of action for the next three years. The end result was the Northern Futures Strategic Plan – The Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Social Transformation (2009-2013) that has helped to guide the work of Northern Futures to date (http:www/northernfuturesgeelong.net.history/html Accessed 28.2.2012).

Northern Futures aims “To create a sustainable 3214 community by strengthening the local economy and linking the needs of community and employers”. One effective way of delivering on this Vision and at the same advancing commitments to Opportunity, Enhancement, Inclusiveness and securing real Achievements is to train long term unemployed people in such a way as to boost their skill levels and engagement with potential employers. The work of Northern Futures is conceptualised within a broad theoretical frame based on the work of Ruby Payne on how to build on working class strengths while also addressing whole of life limitations – in education, cultural capital, confidence as well as associated problems of illness, mental health, substance abuse, disability and marginal housing (Payne 1996).

Thus the Northern Futures “Pathways to a Brighter Future” project aims to connect the Gordon Institute and local employers to jointly develop and deliver TAFE level qualifications and work experience in areas of known skill deficiency and need – in Logistics, Hospitality and Aged Care. Funded by a Federal Government grant of $355 000 via the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations from its Innovation Fund, the project is to fund training opportunities for long term unemployed people from within the 3214 region. Running over 12 months, there is a sequence of recruitment – of trainees and employers – training and work placements in each of the three areas of Logistics, Hospitality and Aged Care.
Pathways to a Brighter Future Program

*Pathways to a Brighter Future* aims to provide intensive training and job support to individuals who have backgrounds of generational disadvantage and long term unemployment from within the Corio Norlane areas. It recognises the needs of this particular sub-group of long term unemployed individuals who do not always respond positively to traditional training and job service assistance. High need, long term unemployed individuals require more intensive support that traditional service providers are not always equipped or resourced enough to provide.

Based on a successful pilot program carried out by Northern Futures in 2010, the program uses a ‘hands on’ approach to the skills training and employment process. Overseen by Northern Futures, the program team is located in the heart of Geelong’s northern suburbs (Rose Avenue Norlane) and as such has an intimate knowledge of the issues and opportunities that face the community there. Half of the overseeing staff live in the area and most have grown up and been educated in the area. They are tasked with offering dedicated time and resources to provide pastoral care and help manage and overcome the day to day barriers that often prevent this particular population group from successfully participating in training programs. Staff are available on call to manage issues immediately as they arise so that drop out rates are minimised and participating individuals have the best chance of gaining their qualification and moving into ongoing employment.

In conjunction with G21 and the City of Geelong Economic Development Unit, a number of key areas of skill shortage were identified and it was these industries that were the focus of the *Pathways to a Brighter Future* program. One Logistics group was run from August 2011 and they graduated in November 2011 and one started in February 2012 and graduated in April, 2012. Aged Care started 13th of October and graduated in late March. Hospitality Certificate II training started 29th of September and finished in late April 2012. The Gordon Certificate II in Kitchen Operations started 4th of October and they graduated on 30th of March. The ACT Certificate II in Hospitality began on 6th of February and graduated at the end of March. This program therefore provides training in three core industries that have identified skills shortages, providing participants with Certificate level qualifications. With a focus on the principles of applied learning, the program provides an approach to the learning experience to better accommodate participants – many of whom will have long been disconnected from the education system. This is achieved through a mix of on site training with local industry, classroom sessions held in the northern suburbs and supported study days with program mentors. By changing the shape of the learning environment and with the support of industry partners, participants gain formal qualifications while making important connections with employers in their own community. The model is based on partnerships – between employers, *Brighter Future* workers and training providers – as well as client-centred.
Information on the program – how it recruits, how the training occurs, work placements and various outcomes, was derived from a series of interviews: with all key Northern Futures staff involved in the program, and interviews with a sample of trainers, employers and employees. All were conducted under the ethical guidelines of Deakin University (HAEG AE 12-14), with each respondent given a clear written statement of the project and asked to sign an Informed Consent Form. Notes were taken at the time of interview and are stored in a secure location at Deakin University. All information is treated as confidential and will be presented in a way that does not allow individual identification. Details of respondents are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Futures staff</strong></td>
<td>Four (4) All front line staff and manager. Lou Brazier (Executive Officer, Northern Futures) Helen Long (Logistics and Program Manager) Hayley Bellwood (Hospitality) Di Giddings (Aged Care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trainers</strong></td>
<td>Aged Care Hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trainees</strong></td>
<td>Aged Care – 2 Hospitality – 2 Logistics – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employers</strong></td>
<td>Godfrey Hirst Target Distribution Wettenhalls Transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evaluation criteria**

The ways in which the *Pathways for a Brighter Future* program was evaluated emerged from three main sources:

1. Existing literature and other evaluations,

2. The objectives set by Northern Futures for itself

3. Others emerged from conducting this evaluation, primarily the interviews

1. **Existing literature and other evaluations**

From the brief literature survey summarised above, the key criteria which emerged for assessing the effectiveness of any training and unemployment placement program were:

- The percentage of those who entered and then completed the program of training and work placement. An outcome of around 45% of those who began a program, proceeded through training and then effected a successful
transition to ongoing employment is deemed as good by a number of evaluations

2. The objectives set by Northern Futures for itself

- The successful completion of the training by participants, job placements achieved and retention of individuals within these jobs. The objective is to achieve 35 general employment outcomes, 15 traineeships and 10 apprenticeships as a result of the program.

- Recruitment: Take long term unemployed with a mix of disadvantages which renders them ineligible or poor performers in other training programs

- Training: Train those students in the northern suburbs and place them with employers in the region

- Outcomes: As well as achieving training success there was also a number of larger Australian government agendas that were being pursued in this program, including to reduce disadvantage, increase opportunities for social, civil and economic participation, build partnerships with key stakeholders, develop tailored services for each participant, address their barriers to success and deliver a locational/place-based approach to solving a key problem for the 3214 region (Pathways nd)

- Develop a range of social skills that will enhance employability in the future

- 75-80% completion

3. Ones which emerged from conducting this evaluation

- Sustaining the program over the long term. This is not only a matter of funding – though this is an ever present concern – but also relates to the possible burn out of the dedicated staff needed to make the program work

- Ensuring the ongoing conviviality and effectiveness of the partnerships which are critical to the success of the program, especially between the Northern Futures workers and the key training providers and employers

- The costs compared to the benefits of the program. Is this the best way to spend $355 000 to generate around 60 formally trained and job ready, preferably employed people?
The process of evaluation – methods

This evaluation briefly collated comparable studies before focusing on the stated objectives and experiences of a sample of those involved. An examination occurred of the documentary evidence on the numbers of students and employers in the program since its inception and any existing tracking of the outcomes of the training and employment placements. Then a small sample of employers, trainers and employees referred by the Pathways to a Brighter Future staff was interviewed using a semi-structured schedule (see Appendix 1 for the schedule). Methods were primarily qualitative, with the students/trainees, their teachers and employers offering their own assessments on the nature and success of the program.

Aim: To critically assess the successes and limitations of the Northern Futures Pathways to a Brighter Future Program to improve its effectiveness.

This was to be achieved by collating the views of the students, educators, Pathways staff and employers on the strengths and weaknesses of the Pathways to a Brighter Future program. Insights into the program will be used to better inform its key stakeholders, especially Northern Futures, G21, employer groups and other relevant levels of government.

The overall objective is to produce more responsive and effective training programs in meeting the needs of students and employers and reduce long term unemployment in northern Geelong.

Methods

1. Brief literature review of extant evaluations, collation of existing successful comparable programs, analysis of any relevant documentation on the Northern Futures project
2. Deakin University Ethics Committee approval. Interviews with a small sample of key stakeholders – Northern Futures staff, trainees, employers, and educators.
3. Data analysis and preliminary report preparation
4. Final Report to Northern Futures and G21 which might also be disseminated more widely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Literature review and documentary analysis</td>
<td>Existing reports and evaluations of employment programs in Australia. Existing information on the Northern Futures project, the numbers of students and employers involved and outcomes for both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interviews</td>
<td>A semi-structured interview schedule with a small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and Conclusions

The results tabled below emerge primarily from the field research conducted over March 2012. A key set of documents are the Milestone Reports on the 2011 iteration of the program, relating to Teaching Program 1. A summary of the one for January 31, 2012 is given below. The gaps in the information highlight some of the problems in record keeping uncovered in the course of the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Numbers in: Logistics</th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Aged Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and work experience</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Completion (From recruitment to completed training)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition there were those courses which were run from October 2011 until April 2012. It was these courses that are the main subject of this research. In summary the outcomes of
those are indicated below, with the proviso that students had only just completed at the
time of interview and therefore only limited employment would be expected. Significantly
they average a 83% completion rate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th>Hospitality</th>
<th>Aged Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>15 + 16 = 31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90% Completion</td>
<td>66.6% completion</td>
<td>92% completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In employment</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(April 2012)</td>
<td>94% From recruitment to employment</td>
<td>70% From recruitment to employment</td>
<td>55.5% From recruitment to employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall there is a Completion of Training Rate of 83% and an Employment Rate of 71.5%.

Interviews with the key participants revealed the following about the program:

Recruitment

The aim is to recruit long term unemployed people from the 3214 Corio-Norlane area who have been unable to sustain training or work placement with an existing job agency (Pathways nd). Referrals are usually via these agencies (JSAs – Job Services Australia) who are contacted directly, the program explained and they then put forward “difficult cases”. Advertising material was also put into the local shopping centre and community centres. Selection criteria include: Lives in 3214 area, long term unemployed, interested in studying logistics, hospitality or aged care (and able to pass a Police Check), some literacy and numeracy skills, “demonstrate a desire to succeed”, disengaged young but also mature people, public housing tenants, refugees or asylum seekers, people at risk or experiencing homelessness, Indigenous Australians and young people in or post Out of Home Care (Pathways November Report 2011). Later it was realised that other organisations dealt with specific racial and ethnic groups, with Diversitat primarily concerned with newly arrived migrants and refugees and Wauthaurong with Indigenous people in the region. There is some recognition of competition between agencies for clients and a policing of their
recruitment boundaries, a product in part of the privatisation of job placement services as well as of specialisation.

Potential participants are then interviewed by the Program Manager to see if they are “training ready”. Their selection is accompanied by an assessment of the level of support they will need. Success in part was seen by the Pathways staff to rest on the recruitment of the “right” candidates, those who met selection criteria and who were clear about the expectations placed upon them. This occurred via the development of a Checklist for potential applicants, information sessions held for JSAs and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and a further interview conducted by the Northern Futures staff to ensure suitability for the program and establish support needs. This screening process meant that not all recruits entered the training part of the program and exclusions at this stage suggest the need to recruit more into this part of the program to ensure targets are achieved.

**Brighter Future Workers**

“We have a policy that no one fails...we will never stop working with them”

The workers in this program were dedicated and enthusiastic. Most had come from other jobs into the program. Managing the program also generated jobs, in this case highly skilled ones. The workers came to their task with a mix of backgrounds and experiences. Half lived and/or had been to school in the Corio-Norlane area and at least two had degrees and professional working experience (in, for example nursing). Only one, however, had formal training in social work or workplace-based training. They had moved into this task primarily through personal connections with the Program Manager or Northern Futures manager. Some were mothers and this work could be fitted around domestic responsibilities, though all commented on how the demands of the job spilled well beyond the formal hours. In various ways they had all been exposed to the ideas of Ruby Payne, primarily through a Nairn Walker workshop - “Bridges out of Poverty” - which gave them a common conceptual framework in which to locate their work.

“We don't get stuck on the why's but deliver on the hows”.

The aim of all of the workers is to get students through the training and into some form of employment. They all contrast their approach to that adopted by other job service providers, in that the aim for their clients is not part time or casual work or the easy money that comes from quick placements, but real training and ongoing full time jobs that can break the poverty cycle. Unlike the other JSAs, the Brighter Future program sought out high risk clients, those that other agencies did not want and could not assist. Informed by the words of Ruby Payne and guided by her notion of hidden class rules, one major objective is to instil in the long term unemployed the (usually hidden) rules for work which middle class people easily command. The time and dedication devoted to this task is breathtaking and a
vital element in the overall success of the program. It is a truly labour intensive exercise. The main objective is a high retention rate and this leads to rigorous screening but also intensive support for the students to succeed. This is invariably given, during work hours and outside of these hours, for course and work-related reasons as well as personal reasons.

“If they drop out we bring them back in”.

The Brighter Future workers are actively involved in the recruitment process – via talks, pamphlets, a table at Corio Village and links with Job Services Australia agencies - carefully select potential trainees and actively seek employers for the program. When a new program begins, the initial set up tasks are enormous in that students, trainers and employers have to be recruited. Workers carefully monitor recruits for suitability and do indeed say “no” to some. For example one who had a police record cannot get a RSA Certificate and therefore there is no point in putting them into the Hospitality program: “I would be shattering her dreams to put her through”. So too with trainers who need to be “flexible” in their willingness to train in the area, offer teaching over two days (with one day for work placement) and who allow the Brighter Future workers to go into the class room when required, to deal with, for example bullying, non-attendance, illness and financial issues that impact on attendance and completion.

Employers are also recruited by the Building Brighter Future workers. Some have far better connections than others and are more successful than others. Thus for one worker “most locals are not supportive” but there are more distant employers in Hospitality who “can’t get staff” and therefore participate in the program. Some employers are formally aligned with Northern Futures or connected via their involvement with the Committee for Geelong. Others are well known to the workers via personal connections or skilled networking, a result of maturity as well as personality and family connections in a relatively small city.

The workers proceed to closely monitor progress and where there are cases of trainers being problematical “we pull people out who don’t fit”. Getting students to class is an ongoing problem and transport keeps looming as a major issue. The workers actively engage with the students as human beings, being able to tell a great deal about the personal circumstances of each and attempting to deal with that student as a whole person.

What is a challenge for some is keeping track of all of the students, the trainers and their work placements. With a number of courses running concurrently it was indeed hard to monitor numbers in each program, let alone detail each of them. An electronic and standardised record system is therefore critical. While good records existed for some courses, this was not always the case and different information was kept for different periods of time. Follow up also occurs with electronic contact for a year to see how students have fared. One claim is that 50% get work within 4-6 weeks and most are
employed by one year after completion, however there is little documentation to support this and there needs to be longer term monitoring of employment outcomes.

One analysis puts the success rate down to the small scale and intensity of the operation. “The small staff allows it to work. It gives freedom to make decisions and still have accountability”. Any replication of this program needs to recognise the need to keep the scale manageable and small. It is not a program that can be readily scaled up because of the personal relationships that are at its core – between the workers and the trainees and the workers and employers in particular, but also between the workers and the trainers.

For the workers their reward is in having trainees complete and successfully dealing with the challenges presented by the long term unemployed. As one noted:

“I feel like I am doing something positive that I enjoy and am passionate about”.

And another:

“I don’t have to be here. I want to be here”.

However there is a sense that the demands of the job sometimes overwhelm, especially the younger and less experienced Brighter Future workers. There is clearly informal support and mentoring given in a small office where all are located, but there is a risk of burnout and such support needs to be regularised and formalised.

Recommend:

Formal mentoring and training for those who are overseeing the program ie the Brighter Future workers themselves, to ensure common levels of information, systematic support and career planning to limit burnout and enhance performance.

A standardised electronic record system for monitoring students in each program – recruitment, attendance, work placements and any issues - as well as to document follow up contacts and employment for one year.

Higher levels of initial recruitment to allow screening to occur without compromising target course completion objectives.

Trainers

Emphasis is on applied and supported learning with tailored programs that develop work related and industry specific knowledges and skills to effect the transition into further training or employment (Pathways nd). Training involves a mix of on site training with local industry, classroom sessions held in the northern suburbs and independent supported study days with program mentors (Pathways nd). The program is delivered in partnership with the City of Greater Geelong, local industries, employment service providers, Gordon TAFE and local registered training providers (Pathways nd). The choice of trainers is not random in
that there is need for relatively intensive class-based sessions (two days per week over 21 or 26 weeks) and trainers have to have a value set that aligns with those of Northern Futures. So, for example, it was unacceptable that one trainer told off a trainee for wearing a hoodie in public. There was a slight issue of one trainer seeing those from the region as by definition being prone to failure but, in general, there attitudes were positive and supportive and the close connection between Brighter Future staff and the trainers ensured an alignment of objectives and values.

Students emerge with one of the following:

Certificate II in Logistics and Transport

Certificate II in Hospitality Front and/or Back of House

Certificate III in Aged Care/Home and Community Care

The students attend classes three days per week with one of these days on a work site, usually with a mentor. The best trainers were seen to emanate from the Gordon Institute which was recognised as a high quality and high status training provider. However, not all of the requisite courses could be delivered by this institution, as the Northern Futures team assessed that too much class time would be a problem with the clientele and negatively impact on completion. For the lower level courses, then, a different training agency was used so that students only needed to attend classes for 21 rather than 26 weeks.

Completing TAFE certificates involves a highly structured learning program with systematic small modules focused on work-related competencies. It was vital that this training was done on site ie in the northern suburbs as the transport problem meant that local training was vital to participation and completion. The Gordon Institute was happy to do this but local training providers were also used.

The two trainers interviewed were both highly experienced in their field and readily worked through the structured curriculum. They were both aware of the special challenges presented by this particular cohort of students – in that most had very poor levels of literacy, limited attention spans and a host of home-based and other problems that intruded into their attendance and participation. In one case, detailed records were kept of attendance and of personal issues and in both close connections were maintained with the Northern Futures staff so that, for example, absences were quickly followed up and other issues dealt with as soon as possible. While all of the students entered with problematic family backgrounds that limited their engagement, the vast majority did complete their courses (28/31 for Logistics, 18/27 for Hospitality and 12/13 for Aged Care) and most were job ready as a result. What was seen as vital in this was the on the job experience and in at least one case, further training in presenting for jobs.
What was readily recognised was that the courses did far more than deliver training and work experience. What was seen as equally important was the improvement in confidence, literacy, numeracy and general well being as a consequence of completing the program. As one trainer observed:

“All have confidence and nerve issues (but they are dealt with and the students) really blossomed... The group has supported each other, addressed home issues, even started a work-study group and had three sessions to help each other... they all matured as a result”.

Recommend:

A recognition that “training” is more than gaining job skills but it involves a whole of person transformation into being job ready and able.

An improvement to the TAFE programs would involve building in job presentation skills.

Trainees/Students

“Hey if I can get cert3 with love help and support any 1 can.”

By active selection, those who enter this program have a huge array of social problems. They are long term unemployed but also have mental health issues, chronic illnesses (such as diabetes), disability, criminal records (which limit their ability to work with alcohol and the elderly), low levels of formal education, single parents, survivors of sexual and domestic abuse, drug addictions and carers. All also come from the 3214 Corio-Norlane area, for many outside a stigma in itself. Most usually they enter the Brighter Future program via a referral from a Job Services Agency. But some also come through word of mouth, by seeing a pamphlet, talking to one of the workers in a local shopping centre or “just walk in” because they have heard about the program.

All of the trainees entered the courses because they felt “ready” to change their lives, though most were also sent on by a JSA. All of them enjoyed the experience, though it was also challenging in relation to literacy, homework and the discipline involved in attending classes which began at 9.30 in the morning three days per week. They all acknowledged the high levels of personal support they were given by the Brighter Future workers.

“there was lots of support, especially via (Brighter Future worker). She can kick my butt and that’s what I need. They have just all done a brilliant job”

At least one of the trainers also gave additional support and catch up classes if needed. There was also the comraderie and support given by the trainee groups to each other, with one story told of the entire class downing tools to help one person move house. Not only did they recognise the value of their formal qualification and the on the job training that it involved, but most also acknowledged the other benefits of the program: in relation to
improved personal confidence, social skills and work discipline. All appreciated the possibilities of personal and financial independence that a (better paying) job could deliver.

Not all of the students expected to enter jobs directly related to their training. One, for example who had completed the course in Aged Care/Home Care had secured a job in the tourism industry and will pursue a hospitality qualification in the future. Another having completed the hospitality course wanted to follow her dream into acting, though she was also committed to doing more hospitality-related short courses. All were happy to pursue the possibilities opened by their formal qualifications and new found confidence. As one trainee noted, after telling enthusiastically about her experience in the course and the work experiences that followed:

"Once I get the certificate they will employ me full time...with the reference i have (from the trainer). It will fit around my needs and I won’t need pills anymore! It is the best job and the best thing I’ve ever done. I’ve proved something to the ex. i wouldn’t be here without the Salvos and through the class, (Brighter Future worker) and the classmates”.

For those who have completed a course, contact was often maintained with the Brighter Future workers for advice and contacts with potential employers.

The main and most common issue was the problem of mobility, dealing with bus timetables that did not mesh with work hours, not having a driving licence or a car for more distant placements and job opportunities.

Recommend:

Mobility issues for this region be addressed, at the level of the City of Greater Geelong – via bus timetables and routes – and State government via support for learner drivers.

Employers

The sectors that were chosen for training and work placements were established by a skills gap analysis conducted by the City of Greater Geelong. The Economic Development Unit of the council established that there were skill shortages in: Aged Care, Hospitality and Transport and Logistics within the region. It was on this basis that these sectors were targeted, heightening the prospect of success in relation to meeting the needs of employers and on the job training and prospective employment of trainees.

Some employers were already engaged with the challenges of the northern region through their membership of Northern Futures and via the Committee for Geelong. Contact with the employers was usually directly by key workers in Northern Futures. In some cases they used existing links – via family businesses, husband’s work contacts, personal work histories or those on the board of Northern Futures – but in other cases, cold calls were made by Northern Futures staff. Having now established a reputation, employers also contact
Northern Futures for prospective employees. Many major employers were on the lists for each course, for site visits and work placements.

The three companies interviewed usually recruited via the web, through local newspapers, “word of mouth” or a preferred recruitment agency. There is clearly a range of valuable outcomes from the **Brighter Future** project for employers and they are not always ones that were anticipated.

The first and most obvious is gaining exposure and on the job experiences with potential employees. One came to the Rose St site – “into their comfort zone” - for half day mock job interviews, to give vital pointers on presentation, language, dress and how to interview to the trainees. Such experiences were often enhanced by extended work placements – up to 20 weeks in the case of one company – which meant a key additional element on trainee resumes. As one employer noted,

\[ \text{... these people had virtually nothing on their CVs, only likes and sports. Now at least they have some real work experience.} \]

An additional and unexpected benefit for the employers of the program was the boosting of staff morale as a result of contact with the trainees. Being in a position to show students around their workplaces and to describe and mentor them about their work meant that they had to articulate what their work and the company was. In the process employees of the companies gained a greater appreciation of it - “they got to show off here”. A sense of pride in the work and the company ensured. The employer therefore “got a hell of a lot out of it”, it was “a real buzz” as their full time staff mentored the trainees and gained a real sense of pride in their work. Their staff really enjoyed it and also “learned a lot about the real world” through interaction with the trainees. Most had been with their respective companies for many years and interacting with long term unemployed people gave a real insight into some of the challenges facing others.

The broader outcome for employers was related to their sense of corporate responsibility or, as one expressed it “we are good community boys” and “we like to help”. For all of the employers there was a strong sense that involvement in the program was part of “giving back”, of being responsible members of their geographical or worker’s communities. As one commented: “business needs to give” and involvement in this program was seen as more valuable than donating money to charities as it had very concrete and valuable outcomes.

And the positive outcomes were known; in that the futures of the better trainees – usually full time jobs with their company or with others - were recounted with pride. While most of the trainees did not end up with long term employment with these companies, a few did – 5 in the case of one company - and most went on to either further training or jobs elsewhere in the industry. Such information was known and recounted with pride by the employers.
There is no doubt that the trainees are vulnerable and challenged people and not all succeeded or wanted to be in their industries. So the employers had experiences of some who were not interested or who had such a range of issues that work experience could not address them all. Indeed one that had to be removed after a verbal altercation. One suggestion for dealing with such a challenge was to have more focus on company specific induction, to make it clear what the students will be encountering in a workplace, and to better screen trainees into the industries they were suited for. But also to acknowledge that perhaps these jobs were not for them and that is OK. But most do “grasp the chance”.

One issue that arose for the employers – and one noted by other respondents – was personal transport. With few financial resources, having a driving licence and owning a car was not always possible for trainees. As a result, getting to classes if they were not close to home, to placements that were early in the morning or outside of the bus timetable or route, and getting to work placements, if distant was a real and serious problem. While the Brighter Future staff assisted in organising car pools, having classes run in the area and connecting primarily with local employers and sometimes even taking students to venues, personal mobility was often an intractable problem. Its solution ranges from better public transport – within Geelong and between Geelong and Melbourne – and individual car ownership, both well outside the remit of a workplace training program. Having classes run in the region and utilising local employers are also key ways in which this challenge was met along with the expansion of existing programs to teach people to drive.

Evaluation and Recommendations:

Set against the criteria for evaluation and in the light of interview and documentary evidence the following emerged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims/Objectives and Measurement</th>
<th>Whether achieved</th>
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<tr>
<td>The successful completion of the training by participants, job placements achieved and retention of individuals within these jobs. The objective will be to achieve 35 general employment outcomes, 15 traineeships and 10 apprenticeships as a result of the program (NF Objective).</td>
<td>Successful training was attained by:</td>
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<td>12 in Aged Care</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18 in Hospitality and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>28 in Logistics</td>
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<td>Total of 58 graduates, most of whom will move into employment or further training. Indeed the employment rate was higher because of others who entered. Outcomes in relation to the targets for training and employment were as follows:</td>
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| Employment | Employment = 67 (Target of 35)  
Traineeships – 10 (target of 15)  
Apprenticeships = 5 (Target of 10)  
Real if short term jobs were also made available to the *Building a Brighter Future* workers (3) who ran the program. |
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<tr>
<td>Achieve better than the national standards for training and placing long term unemployed, which stands at around 45%</td>
<td>Achieves well above the national benchmark, averaging 83% from recruitment to completion of training and 71.5% for employment.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Recruitment: Take long term unemployed with a mix of disadvantages which renders them ineligible or poor performers in other training programs. Ensured by Recruitment Criteria and referrals from job agencies of “too hard” cases | Yes  
Recruitment occurred via referrals from agencies of hard cases as well as local recruitment via explicit criteria of long term unemployment and disadvantage. |
| Training: Train students within the northern suburbs. | This objective necessitated the modification of training courses and often their relocation into the region. Overall though this was achieved. |
| Training: Tailored courses for students to meet their needs and those of employers Assessed via interviews with employers and trainees | Training was highly structured by the TAFE competency frameworks but in general they delivered what employers wanted and expected. |
| Training: Work to ease if not remove barriers to participation in training. Good attendance and successful completion of courses a key indicator here.  
Retention rate of at least 75% | Barriers to participation were many and ranged from the personal (years of domestic violence or drug dependency) to the economic and logistical (organising regular transport to class). In general the skilled and dedicated mentoring by the staff negated these barriers ensuring relatively high participation and completion rates, averaging 83%. |
<p>| Place students with local employers – short term for training and longer term | Placement was relatively easy, with local and more distant employers available. However |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>as workers</th>
<th>longer term employment with these same employers was anything but automatic, dependent on their labour demands but also their usual job recruitment pathways.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build effective partnerships with key stakeholders, especially government industry, education and employment providers and the broader community. Measured by interview responses and ongoing participation in the program</td>
<td>All of the employers interviewed were enthusiastic about the program and the Northern Future workers who oversaw it. This is both a great strength but also vulnerability of the program in that it is highly dependent on close interpersonal relationships between key people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully engage and brief local employers on needs and responsibilities. Employer satisfaction with trainees and the program</td>
<td>Employers were all fully satisfied with job placement trainees with a very occasional exception which did not diminish enthusiasm for the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jobs for trainees

Number and proportion of trainees who achieve paid work – with the mentoring employer or with another employer – using skills and qualifications gained from the program.

Aim for 80% of program completion | Not all of the trainers gained full time employment with those who they secured work placements with, but some did. Others secured employment with other employers in the program.

Overall the program has a good reputation in the region and employers were approaching the key Northern Futures staff for potential staff when needed, a key indicator of its success. Good monitoring needed to establish ultimate success rates. 83% completed training and 71.5% secured employment. |
| Is the $355 000 cost of the program well spent? Is it value for money? | The successful training and likely employment of 67 intractable long term unemployed people. With funds primarily directed to the intense staffing required for the program (as well as for placement transport and student fees) a rate of $5 298 per graduate must be seen as extremely good value. |
Recommendations

**Pathways to a Brighter Future** built on a successful pilot program.

The program evaluated here had a clear identification of the problem, the area and the target group, dedicated and locally based staff, clear criteria and screening processes for recruitment, strong links with training providers, local employers who both needed labour and were willing to participate in their training and mentoring and a high success rate (measured by completion of training qualifications and work experiences that lead to ongoing employment). Overall the program met all of its objectives and can be regarded as highly successful and worthy of replication and acclaim in the region and beyond. Some areas of improvement have been identified and comprise the following recommendations:

**Recommendations: For Northern Futures:**

Overall the program is very dependent on high quality inter-personal relationships. Key Northern Futures staff are regarded as “inspirational” and “doing a great job”. This is its great strength but also a source of vulnerability in that, for example, a key Northern Futures staff person with substantial personal contacts could leave. It would be very difficult to replicate such relationships quickly and effectively. I therefore recommend:

**At least two Northern Futures staff are engaged with key employers to ensure some back up in contacts and expertise.**

**Formal mentoring and training for those who are overseeing the program ie the Building Better Futures workers themselves, to ensure common levels of information, systematic support and career planning to limit burnout and enhance performance.**

**A standardised electronic record system for monitoring students in each program – recruitment, attendance, work placements and any issues - as well as to document follow up contacts and employment.**

**At least two Northern Futures staff are engaged with key employers to ensure some back up in contacts and expertise.**

**Before any new program commences adequate time needs to be available to develop educational and employer links and staff capacity.**

**There are drop outs and it is clearly difficult to fill all of the training positions available. So there should be more active recruitment and a larger intake to achieve targets.**

**For the Training Providers:**

**An improvement to the TAFE programs would involve building in job presentation skills.**
Recommendations for G21:

Lobby and perhaps funding of an expansion in the Learner Drive support program, to enable more young and disadvantaged people to learn how to drive as one way of addressing the critical mobility problem.

Recommendations for other regions:

Any region or locality seeking to replicate this excellent program needs to have quality information on the local skill shortages and target their training and work placements to those sectors.

Whatever organisation oversees such a program has to have good relationships with major employers in the sectors of skill shortage, to establish sites for workplace visits and training as well as potential employment. This ensures that the program is self-sustaining, in meeting both the needs of employers and the long term unemployed.

The program can be presented as one that will potentially assist in filling skills gaps but also as one that can enhance the morale of existing employees through interaction with the trainees. It is also one aspect of corporate social responsibility in a region, helping the community and the image of the company.

It is best if local employers and trainees venues are connected to local trainees as mobility is often a key cost and issue for those coming out of long term unemployment.
References

ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing Canberra: AGPS.


Northern Futures nd Pathways to a brighter future Document outlining program. Unpublished.


Appendix 1 Interview Schedules

In formulating questions to ask of Northern Futures, employers, teachers and students Johnson kept in mind the objectives of the program, its philosophy, the approach of other organisations and the larger context of addressing disadvantage and unemployment.

In particular, the program aims to:

- Address long term unemployment
- Address generational disadvantage
- Create a different approach to service delivery, one which differs in its recruitment, training methods, support systems, placement tactics and success rates compared to other providers
- Fulfil the employment, skill and training needs of individual employers in the northern region of Geelong
- Allow training providers to meet the needs of students and employers in northern Geelong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective/Aim/ Target group</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success of the <em>Pathways to a Brighter Future</em> team – expectations</td>
<td><em>Brighter Future</em> project management team based at Northern Futures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of long term unemployed into the program</td>
<td>Long term unemployed (more than one year)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Assessing the experience of long term unemployed with employment service providers | Long term unemployed | Contact with employment service providers – which ones and frequency  
Nature of the contact (interviews, placements, training/courses)  
Outcome and assessment of each contact  
Areas for improvement |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Expectations of the long term unemployed with the Brighter Future program | Long term unemployed | How did they hear about this program?  
Why did they think it was for you?  
What do they expect to get out of it?  
How long do you think the program lasts?  
What industry and job do you want to be in? |
| Experiences of the Brighter Future program | Long term unemployed – trainees | What sort of training has been undertaken?  
What have you learnt?  
What is the time commitment and have they made all classes? Why/why not?  
What sort of contacts have they had with the Brighter Future team? Please detail those contacts (Why? What happened? Outcome)  
Have there been any problems that have remained unresolved? |
| Experiences of the Brighter Future program - employers | Employers | How did you make contact with the Northern Futures staff?  
What are your expectations of the Brighter Future program? Why are you involved?  
How many workers and in what part of your operation might you be looking to place them?  
What sort of on the job training and mentoring or induction did you provide?  
Were there good and also bad experiences?  
Do you recruit workers specifically from this area? Why? Why not?  
Areas for improvement in the program? |
<p>| Experiences of the Trainers/Educators | Trainers/Educators | How have you found the Brighter Future students in terms of attendance, willingness |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of the <em>Brighter Future</em> team</th>
<th><em>Brighter Future</em> team members</th>
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<tr>
<td>to learn and do the work?</td>
<td>How many students completed the course?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did they all graduate and were you happy with their levels of competence and attitudes to work?</td>
<td>Where there any problems that arose along the way and how were they handled?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you think they are job ready?</td>
<td>How many students are in employment now?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What sort of interaction do you have with the <em>Brighter Future</em> team?</td>
<td>Where, doing what and with what expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think they will get a job quickly/remain in the job they have? Why or why not?</td>
<td>How many students will be doing further training?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas for improvement in the program?</td>
<td>What has been the response to date of their employers?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is there anything you would do differently?</td>
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