

Evaluation of the Northern Futures Inc. *Career and Workforce Development Centre*

Cecilia Moretti, Sara Howard and John Spoehr
January 2014

Report prepared for Northern Futures Inc.

WISeR
Informing Decisions



EVALUATION OF THE NORTHERN FUTURES INC. CAREER AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

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WISeR also specialises in socio-economic impact assessment including the distributional impacts and human dimensions of change on different population groups and localities. Our research plays a key role in informing policy and strategy development at a national, local and international level.

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KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

- The CWDC provides one-to-one support services to job seekers in the Northern Adelaide region. Clients are generally 'walk-ins', which means they are self-referred and are often seeking an alternative to formal job search agencies. The CWDC has two shop fronts, one in Salisbury and the other in Elizabeth.
- CWDC coaching services are unique in the region in following an empowerment model, advocating a 'listening closely to the client' approach, and being freely available to any interested member of the public.
- The CWDC service has the flexibility to match client need. As a consequence of the self-referral model, the service cannot compel clients to attend appointments. Clients are free to engage, dis-engage and re-engage without prejudice. 20% of post-engagement survey respondents had signed up with the service on more than one occasion, demonstrating that there is enough perceived value in the service to bring clients back through the door.
- CWDC coaches aim to achieve positive employment outcomes for clients, but a clear priority is developing 'job readiness' capabilities to enable them to pursue employment opportunities in the short and longer term.
- Career coaching involves a multi-pronged focus on attitudinal development (building confidence and self-belief), developing career objectives and transition pathways (e.g. career assessment process and career development plans) and practical job seeking strategies (e.g. resume writing, job applications, interview skills).
- Pre-and post-engagement survey respondents were similar in all respects except for age. Post-engagement respondents were significantly older than their pre-engagement counterparts, suggesting that younger people are presenting to the service but are disengaging earlier and more frequently than older people.
- Just over half of pre-engagement respondents reported being unemployed while a quarter were employed (the rest were studying, volunteering or not actively seeking work). This suggests that while the main focus of the CWDC is on assisting people to transition into work, the service also plays a role in helping employed people to develop their career options.
- Pre-engagement (commencing) respondents reported strong levels of motivation, willingness to do training and confidence in their ability to hold down a job, leaving little room for improvement in these areas; however they expressed lower confidence in their functional job-seeking skills (e.g. knowing how to find a job, access training, and present well in a job interview). Respondents who had received CWDC services were somewhat more likely to express confidence in these areas, and significantly stronger in their resume and application skills.
- Around two thirds of post-engagement respondents agreed or strongly agreed that assistance was provided in a number of areas identified as important to participants, particularly advice about local career choices, direct links to training opportunities, specific strategies and skills to find work and help to build their self-belief and confidence. The most pronounced discrepancy between pre- and post-engagement respondents was in being provided direct links to job opportunities, where 95% flagged this as important, but only 53% felt well assisted in this area.
- Post-engagement respondents were no more likely than commencing respondents to have recently applied for jobs, but were slightly more likely to have participated in training, and considerably more likely to have engaged in volunteering.
- CWDC coaches expressed interest in developing and utilising professional partnerships and working more closely with industry in order to better link clients with existing and emerging job opportunities.



1 BACKGROUND

Northern Futures Inc. is a grantee for *Skills for All in Regions*, Northern Adelaide. Working with the DFEEST Regional Coordinator, Northern Futures appears well positioned to work with stakeholders across all tiers of Government, the community, not-for-profit sector, training organisations, the school and education sector (including training organisations and the tertiary sector) and most importantly, industry and employers.

The objective of *Skills for All in Regions* is to increase workforce participation and support *Skills for All* objectives by:

- Engaging and supporting people with labour force barriers into *Skills for All* pathways.
- Developing projects with industry, employers, government and the community to increase local participation in training and work.
- Increasing the participation of people who are unemployed, underemployed or are not in the labour force.
- Providing people not participating in the labour force with access to one-on-one advice on pathways to learning, training and work.
- Placing DFEEST Regional Coordinators in the 12 State Government Regions to provide strategic and operational advice and manage information between Networks and DFEEST.
- Working with jobless families to address all areas of a family's barriers to employment.
- Developing a collaborative approach that maximises resources, knowledge, information, ideas and partnerships to achieve shared workforce development objectives.

The Northern Futures **Career and Workforce Development Centre** is funded through *Skills for All in Regions* and assists people to make informed and planned choices about learning, training and work through a local and customised service.

Career Development Services play an important role in supporting people into training and employment pathways. Career and Employment Coaches provide one-on-one support and/or group sessions to guide participants through the career planning process and assist people to access opportunities which match their career goals.

The Career and Workforce Development Centre (CWDC) offers career planning for job seekers, school students, education facilities and local employers in the Northern Adelaide Metropolitan region. This covers the council areas of Tea Tree Gully, Salisbury, Playford and Port Adelaide's Enfield and Inner East region. The initiative is supported by all tiers of government and the *South Australia Works* in the Regions program, enabling a subsidised range of services to be provided by Career and Employment Coaches. Client services include the following¹:

- **Client Support** - Young people enrolled in school and thinking about leaving to gain full time employment, people facing redundancy, parents or caregivers returning to the workforce and those working casually looking for permanent employment can all receive support from our staff.
- **Career Planning** – Independent, personal and confidential career guidance for jobseekers needing assistance developing career plans, workshops addressing proven job search techniques.
- **Skills Training** - Support with applications to further study including SATAC – TAFE courses and University. Direct links to a range of free training

¹ Sourced from <http://northernfutures.org.au/career-and-workforce-development-centre/>

opportunities and in some instances assistance to help partially fund the training specifically needed to commence employment.

- **Recognition of Prior Learning** - Assistance to gather evidence to support recognition of prior learning.
- **Opportunities** – Promotion of events, training, and employment vacancies, displayed in an “Opportunities Window”. Access is provided to computers and internet connection to facilitate self-directed job search activities.

The CWDC also provides services with a broader remit than the needs of individual job-seekers, although these are outside the scope of the present evaluation. These include:

- **Workforce Development** - Local Businesses can list their vacancies and have these matched to potential employees on the Northern Futures database. An employer can interview people who have undertaken a career planning process and who understand the requirements of that industry.
- **School Support** - Workshops for parents and caregivers of students in secondary schools in the Northern Adelaide Region. Career and Employment Coaches can develop a career and personal development program to students’ needs. Career development sessions are also available for staff.

The present evaluation was commissioned by Northern Futures Inc., to assess the effectiveness of the CWDC service in responding to the needs of job seekers in the North. This is not restricted to achieving direct employment outcomes, but also takes in helping CWDC clients to realise their personal potential and to think about and plan pathways to employment.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 EVALUATION SAMPLE

The evaluation focus is on CWDC services provided to clients seeking one-to-one support from CWDC coaches, and excludes external workshop participants. The sample was not conducive to a straightforward pre- and post-survey as there is a high level of flexibility and variation in how clients are engaged and work with coaches. Clients are recruited on a continuous basis; some attend only once, others a few times, and some with greater frequency than others. Some clients disengage and then re-engage at a later date. Therefore, determining an end point for involvement with the Centre is not straightforward.

Given these conditions, and the relatively short timeframe set for undertaking the evaluation, a cohort study methodology was used. This involved designating a finite data collection period and conducting a baseline survey on all commencing participants and a progress survey with established participants who had been in the program for one month or longer. One month’s involvement was agreed as a reasonable timeframe in which the program should have made an impact on clients.

2.2 SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

An initial scoping interview was undertaken with a CWDC key informant to identify key characteristics of the CWDC service and to formulate a methodological approach. This was followed by a meeting between WISeR and the CWDC Coaches and their Manager to discuss the evaluation framework and survey tool, and the role of staff in implementing the survey. The pre- and post-engagement surveys were piloted among the CWDC coaches who provided feedback about the content and processes. Minor amendments were made to the survey prior to their administration to the CWDC clients. The surveys

were developed for both online and paper administration, to maximise convenience for respondents.

2.3 SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

CWDC coaches assumed responsibility for administering the surveys when clients presented at the office for appointments. The coaches were instructed to identify whether the attending client was a new or established client, and to have the relevant survey ready. A new client was defined as anyone **commencing a new contract with the CWDC on that date**, even if they have had previous contracts with the CWDC. An established client included all individuals who had been signed up with the service (on a current contract) **for one month or more**. This was based on the observation that many clients have 2-3 appointments/contacts with the service, maybe two in the first month and a follow up in the next month).

For clients attending the office for appointments, the coaches explained the purpose of the study and that participation was entirely voluntary. The coaches stressed that individual responses would be confidential, however that they would be on hand to help clients to access and navigate the survey if specifically requested (particularly if clients opted to do the online survey). Clients who agreed to participate were provided with an information sheet about the evaluation (provided by WISeR). Coaches encouraged respondents to fill out the online survey unless they specifically preferred to fill out a paper version. On completion, paper surveys were sealed in a provided envelope and returned unopened to WISeR. Online surveys were submitted through Survey Monkey.

Recognising that follow-up contact with established clients could be by telephone or email (not necessarily face-to-face appointments), coaches agreed to promote the post-engagement survey at the time of contact and request permission to email the link to clients to fill it out online if they agreed.

Two consent mechanisms were used. For people who agreed to do the online survey, an electronic consent function was included on the first page of the survey. For people who elected to respond using the paper survey, a paper consent form was attached to the survey. Signed paper consent forms were enclosed in the provided envelope together with the survey.

At the end of one month it was agreed that the number of completed surveys was lower than expected, especially in relation to post-engagement surveys. To address this shortfall, the CWDC management agreed to email the post-engagement survey link to eligible established clients of the service. Checks were put into place to ensure that there was no doubling up of responses from people who had already completed the survey (in either paper or online format). The deadline for survey closure was extended until early December.

2.4 FOCUS GROUP WITH CWDC COACHES

A focus group was conducted with CWDC Career Development Coaches onsite in Elizabeth. The purpose of this was to provide a framing context for the survey results, and to identify key information about program goals and implementation.

3 RESULTS

3.1 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

3.1.1 ABOUT THE CAREER AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The Career Workforce Development Centre (CWDC) has two shopfronts, one located at Salisbury and the other at Elizabeth. The Centre employs 16 people across the two sites, totalling 12.5 FTE. Around 1000 people were serviced in 2012, which were fewer than the year before in line with a funding reduction by DFEEST.

Clients are sourced from a number of avenues. One avenue is the DFEEST Skills Info Line referral process; these people must be seen within five days of referral and are usually brought together in a small group (around 4 or 5) for a briefing and induction. However, the majority of CWDC clients are self-referred – they may walk in off the street, or ring the Centre to make to make an appointment. CWDC coaches note that these clients often say that they do not have a productive, supported relationship with their JSA, and are looking for a more meaningful engagement. Self-referred clients typically see a career coach in a one to one setting, and generally see the same coach over time, although this may vary according to who is rostered on or off.

The CWDC coaches noted that self-referring clients are likely to have existing motivation to find work (hence the self-referral). People present with a range of needs; some require basic assistance with writing resumes and job applications, and practicing with mock interviews, while others need more intensive support in terms of identifying career prospects, and building self-confidence, resilience, communication and interaction skills. Notably, a number present with a good repertoire of work skills but lack the self-belief to put these into action. According to the coaches, these people need someone to tell them that ‘they can do this’, and to ask the right questions to prompt them to think about their interests, attributes and capabilities. This then sets people on a track toward employment related activities.

A key issue identified by CWDC coaches in relation to their clients finding work is a lack of job experience; even if people have completed formal qualifications, the lack of relevant on-the-job experience works against them. Migrants are observed to experience particular hardship finding work even when they have qualifications and experience, possibly due to discriminatory attitudes. Coaches often experience migrants with professional qualifications seeking to retrain in other areas (e.g. moving from engineering to aged care) due to lack of employment opportunities, or access to opportunities. The long-term unemployed often have mental health issues, of varying degrees. The most common issue is low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.

The CWDC works toward three main outcomes:

- **Initiating Pathways:** this generally involves directing clients to Adult Community Education (ACE), volunteering, and other ‘soft’ pre-employment development options.
- **Education and training:** encouraging clients (where appropriate) to re-engage with the education and training system, including Skills for All training opportunities.
- **Employment:** securing employment opportunities for clients. This is the primary focus of the Northern Futures Board, however in reality this is a less common outcome of the program, which has a greater focus on developing the personal job-readiness of participants (i.e. dealing with the essential basics of confidence, aspiration, resilience, and self-management skills).

3.1.2 SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CWDC

The CWDC provides one to one coaching services with clients (free of charge) and commissioned group workshops (fee for service). RTOs will often request the CWDC to provide a workshop for their learners covering a range of subjects such as self-marketing, networking, writing resumes and goal setting. Workshops can cater for different demographic groups, for example delivering a session on *Understanding Australian Workplace Culture* for migrant groups. The CWDC also delivers marketing and information sessions about the service to inform and recruit potential clients when their training is complete.

A major component of the work done by CWDC coaches is **attitudinal**, focusing on strengthening people's self-belief, and encouraging a positive, 'don't give up' attitude among clients. This follows an empowerment approach, whereby coaches are not there to find people jobs per se, but to empower them to find solutions to their own problems. A second component of the service is providing clients with **practical skills and resources** to assist in the job seeking process. The strategies used by coaches in providing one to one support to their clients include:

- **Explaining the types of assistance** provided by the CWDC, principally that it is not designed to find the person a job per se, but to equip the person with the skills, confidence and information to enable them to do the necessary legwork and make informed decisions about their own career path.
- For those who do not have a clear idea about what they want to do, the coaches will conduct a **career assessment process**. This can involve a Myer-Briggs personality inventory questionnaire, assessing people's backgrounds, personal attributes, interests, skills, confidence, capabilities etc. This process determines the strategies and speed with which the coach will progress the client. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- **Career development plans** are also used by coaches. These involve identifying short and longer term goals, although some coaches are less inclined to take the goal setting approach (as it can be viewed as too abstract) and prefer to set tasks for clients so that they have to take responsibility and be accountable to the coach for getting things done.
- Providing clients with **practical job search strategies**, e.g. teaching tips to prepare a resume, conduct a job search, interview techniques, and presentation strategies; directing them to employment websites and assisting them with filling out job and SATAC application forms. Clients are able to use computers on-site, with someone from the centre to sit with them and assist.
- **Staying in touch with fluctuating labour market conditions** in order to provide advice about realistic options and to link clients into arising opportunities. For example, this might involve tapping into the aged care workforce demand, although this needs to be realistically framed for clients (e.g. by using scenarios) so they understand what is required by the industry and whether it is the right fit for them. CWDC coaches observe that Northern Futures Inc. is well linked to employers in the region, and that the coaches are able to make use of these networks to identify and direct clients to employment opportunities.
- The '**listening closely to client**' approach taken by CWDC coaches is a key feature of the service. Coaches report that clients often come to them from other services feeling that their voices have not been heard, and that they have been 'treated like a number rather than a person'. CWDC coaches have the benefit of being able to spend more time with clients and taking a more personalised, empathetic approach to career planning.

3.1.3 DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE CWDC

There are key points of distinction between the roles of the CWDC and Job Services Australia (JSAs). Job seekers using the services of a JSA are classified into a Stream,

ranging from 1 to 4 according to assessed level of need. People in the higher streams receive more intensive levels of support from JSAs. The CWDC targets people in Streams 1 and 2 as they receive the least amount of services (if any) from JSAs even though they require support to successfully navigate the job market. The CWDC therefore generally sees people who are relatively 'job ready' but can't get adequate assistance elsewhere. Moreover, the service is available to any member of the public, unlike JSA's which work exclusively with Centrelink-referred people.

The CWDC coaching service is offered free of charge, although a fee for service is charged for workshops. The CWDC sees itself as performing a more comprehensive role for clients than JSAs, and as taking more time with clients, anything up to an hour and a half per appointment depending on client needs. It is a particular feature of the CWDC that participants may engage, disengage and re-engage with the program at various times, depending on their circumstances. A proportion will disengage and not come back, which is seen to reflect the nature of the cohort. Unlike JSAs, the CWDC cannot compel people to attend, as they are essentially self-referring.

It was noted that the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector works with people with very low levels of confidence, coping skills, and self-management skills. ACE workers are not necessarily experienced with a pathways approach to changing people's lives, which is where the CWDC fills a gap between ACE and the next level. The service focuses on building links, leading toward the 'soft' changes in people's lives that develop engagement, resilience, and the ability to contemplate education and employment (seen as the 'next step').

The CWDC sits within Northern Futures Inc., which is a community-based not for profit organisation designed to advance education, training and workforce development in the Northern Adelaide and Barossa region. CWDC coaches note that the Centre benefits greatly from working alongside the Northern Futures Partnership Brokers and Skills for Jobs in the Region program staff, all of whom collaborate, share information and resources, and 'look out for each other'. Other significant partnerships have been formed with RTOs, supported by the historically good rapport these are perceived to have with Northern Futures Inc. The CWDC considers that it fills an important gap for RTOs in addressing foundational skills and general job-readiness.

Partnerships of note include:

- RTOs such as Parawork Links, Training Prospects, Australian Workplace Training (AWT), Independent Institute of Food Processing, KMC Community Training
- JSA's (the workforce development manager attends JSA Buzz Meetings)
- Disability Employment Services (DES), e.g. Advanced Personnel Management (APM)
- Centrelink
- Adult Community Education (ACE) providers
- Community centres
- Tea Tree Gully City Council and Library
- Playford City Council

Partnerships are seen by the CWDC to strengthen relationships and networks between providers and services which in turn helps the service to meet its targets and make a positive change. These are reciprocal relationships, with providers referring clients to the CWDC, and the Centre referring clients to partner services where appropriate.

3.1.4 REFLECTIONS ON POTENTIAL SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

CWDC coaches noted that there was scope within the service to better market and promote the Centre to potential clients (particularly people who are job-ready and seeking employment). There is also potential to strengthen the coaches' role in identifying local employment opportunities and linking these more directly to clients.

Coaches also believe there is scope to work more closely with industry, particularly in the delivery of workshops for people who are employed but who require further foundational and career development guidance. One example where this could work well is educating migrant employees about Australian workplace culture, as a means of strengthening workplace productivity. The coaches considered that working in groups was an effective way to engage, motivate and build confidence in people, including those seeking employment and those in employment who want to develop their careers.

Word of mouth is considered the CWDC's best marketing tool as this is the source of many referrals to the Centre. This highlights the need to develop stronger and wider partnerships with providers, organisations and businesses in the region.

3.2 SURVEY FINDINGS

3.2.1 ANALYSIS

Sixty-five pre-engagement (60 in paper format and 5 from the online platform Survey Monkey) and 66 post-engagement (29 paper and 37 online) surveys were submitted from September to December 2013. Data from paper-based surveys were entered into Microsoft Excel 2010 and 10% of entries checked for manual entry errors. None were found and no further entries were checked. These data were then imported to the statistical software package SPSS (version 19). Data from the online surveys was imported into SPSS.

Cases were examined for missing data and those with substantial amounts of information missing were omitted². The remaining cases (n=111) were merged into a single SPSS file that contained both pre-engagement (n=63) and post-engagement responses (n=48). Analyses typically involved descriptive statistics and some parametric (e.g. independent t-tests) and non-parametric (e.g. chi-square for independence) tests, where appropriate.

Relevant to the design of the project, the pre-engagement participants were not the same individuals as those who completed the post-engagement survey. In order to warrant the comparison of results between these samples, their demographic characteristics should be similar. Consequently, chi-square tests for independence were conducted to see whether there were any differences in the characteristics of the pre- and post-engagement groups (e.g. was there a higher proportion of males in the post-engagement group than the pre-engagement group).

As such, overall demographic results are presented, unless there is a significant difference between pre and post-engagement respondents where they are then presented by group.

3.2.2 RESPONDENT BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

Most participants were born in Australia and speak English at home, with 27% born outside of Australia and 15.3% speaking a language other than English at home. Slightly more males responded (55.9%) than females (44.1%) and 14.4% of all respondents reported having a disability.

Age at survey completion ranged from 17 to 63 years with the overall average age being 37.2 years. Respondents of the post-engagement survey were significantly³ older (42.9 years) than their pre-engagement counterparts (32.8 years). However, the age range represented in each group was similar (17 to 62 years for pre-engagement and 17 to 63 for post-engagement).

² Note, the online survey method prohibits missing data and invalid responses therefore this is more an issue for the paper surveys. Complete demographic information was a criterion for analysis as well as more than half of the service-related questions.

³ Independent samples test: $t(109)=-4.28$, $p<.01$. The probability ("p") values or limits of what is considered statistically significant are conventionally set at " $p<.05$ " ('significant') or " $p<.01$ " ('highly significant'). The former means there is only a 5% chance of this result being a coincidence and the latter meaning only a 1% chance of the result being a coincidence.

EDUCATION

Approximately one third of respondents had completed Years 10, 11 and 12 respectively. A very small proportion of people had completed Year 9 or below (see Figure 1). Around half of the participants did not have any post-school education (52.3%). Of those who did, VET Certificate III or IV was the most common qualification (18.9%; see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1: HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOL EDUCATION COMPLETED

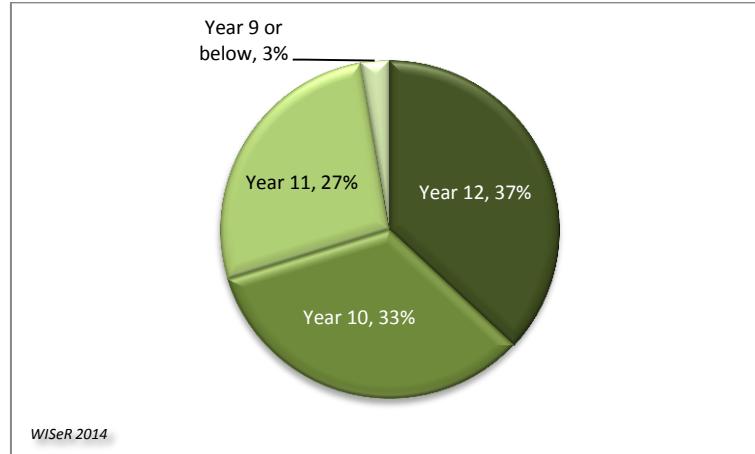
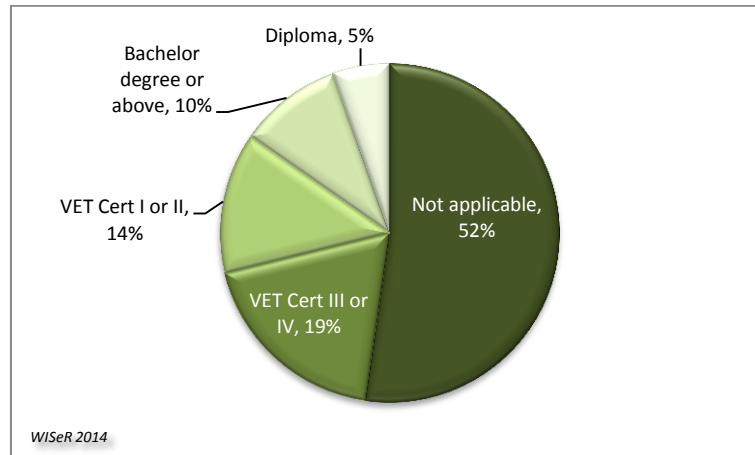


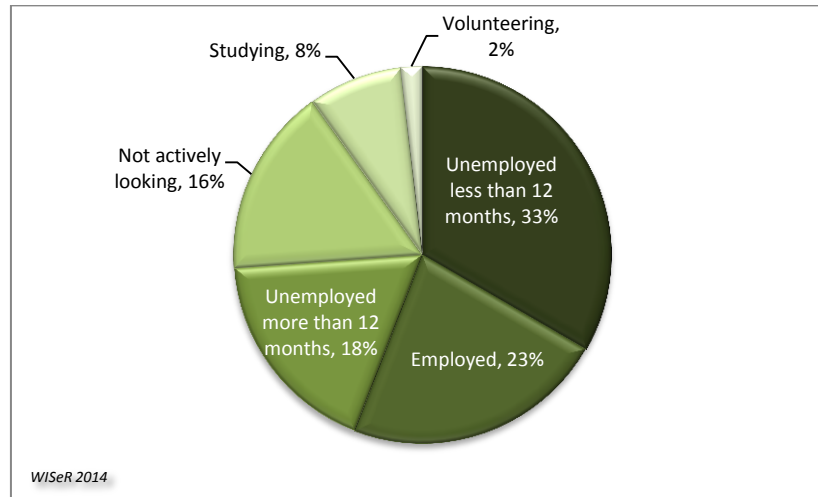
FIGURE 2: HIGHEST LEVEL OF POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION COMPLETED



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

As shown in Figure 3, prior to commencing the project approximately half of respondents were unemployed, 33% for less than 12 months and 18% for more than 12 months. Close to one quarter were employed and 16% reported not actively looking for work.

FIGURE 3: STATUS PRIOR TO ENTERING THE CWDC SERVICE



At least half of participants were registered with Centrelink (54.1%) and more than a third with a JSA (36.9%). Table 1 provides a more detailed summary; overall, 63 people were registered with one or both services (56.8%), 38 people were registered with both services (34.2%) and 48 were not registered with either (43.2%).

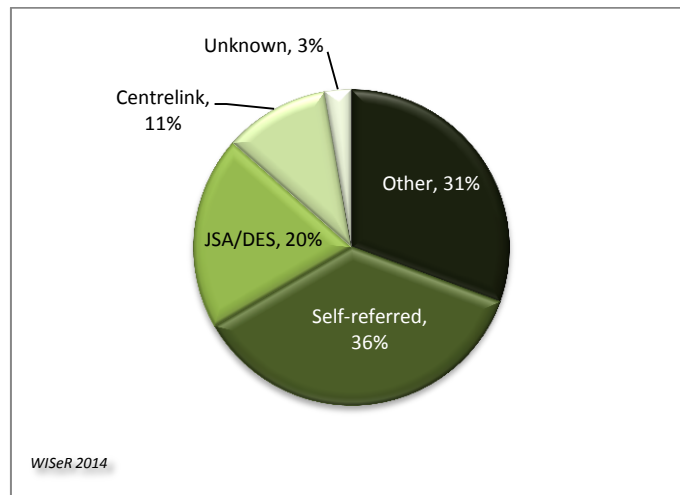
TABLE 1: REGISTRATION WITH EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Registered with	Pre-engagement respondents		Post-engagement respondents		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Centrelink and JSA	21	33.3	17	35.4	38	34.2
Centrelink only	15	23.8	7	14.6	22	19.8
JSA only	2	3.2	1	2.1	3	2.7
Neither	25	39.7	23	47.9	48	43.2
TOTAL	63	100.0	48	100.0	111	100.0

3.2.3 FEATURES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CAREER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

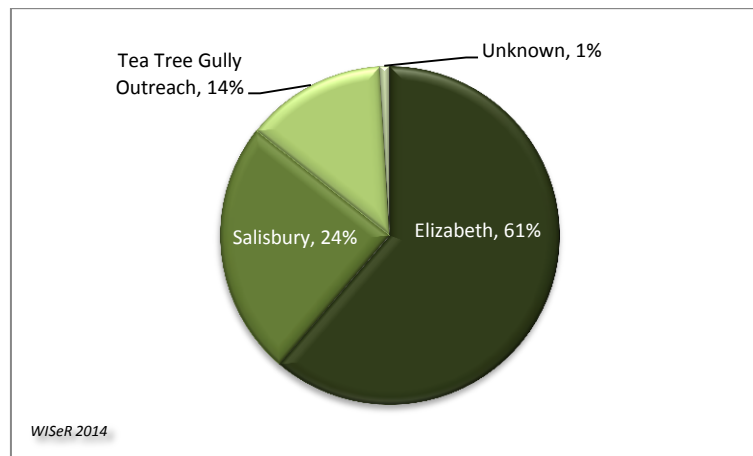
It was anticipated that participants in the survey would be self-referred but only one third explicitly reported in this way (36.0%) while 19.8% reported being referred by JSA/DES and 10.8% by Centrelink (see Figure 4). However, it should be noted that whilst 34 individuals (31%) reported 'other' sources of referral, most of these were in essence 'self-referral'; around half (n=15) indicated finding out about the Centre through other relevant programs, forums and workshops (e.g. Supporting Families Workshop, Job Prospects) and five were prompted by family members, friends or colleagues.

FIGURE 4: HOW RESPONDENTS WERE REFERRED TO THE CWDC



The majority of respondents were receiving most CWDC services from the Elizabeth branch (61.3%) and one quarter from the Salisbury branch (24.3%; see Figure 5). Least common was the Tea Tree Gully Outreach (13.5%) and no one reported from the Centrelink Outreach Pilot Program.

FIGURE 5: PRIMARY LOCATION WHERE RECEIVE SERVICES



As shown in Table 2, most of the pre-engagement respondents were signing up to the CWDC service for the first time, with only two having signed up once previously. Post-engagement respondents were significantly more likely to have signed up on more than one occasion (chi-square=9.78, df=2, p<.01), with five having signed up once previously and a further five having signed up more than two times previously.

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY OF SIGNING UP WITH THE CWDC

Number of times signed up with CWDC service	Pre-engagement respondents		Post-engagement respondents*		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First time	61	96.8	38	79.2	99	89.2
Second time	2	3.2	5	10.4	7	6.3
More than two times	0	0.0	5	10.4	5	4.5
TOTAL	63	100.0	48	100.0	111	100.0

*Note, post-engagement respondents were significantly more likely to have signed up on more than one occasion.

Of the 48 post-engagement respondents, 42% reported attending the CWDC service for 1-2 months, 25% for 3-6 months and 21% for more than six months (see Figure 6). Just over half had attended appointments 1-2 times, 40% 3-5 times and a minority of 6% had attended 6-10 times over the course of their current engagement (see Figure 7). While this presents a snapshot of the current survey sample, no conclusions can be drawn about the average length of time and number of consults received as post-engagement respondents are just as likely to be ongoing clients rather than having completed their time at the CWDC.

FIGURE 6: LENGTH OF TIME RECEIVING CWDC SERVICES

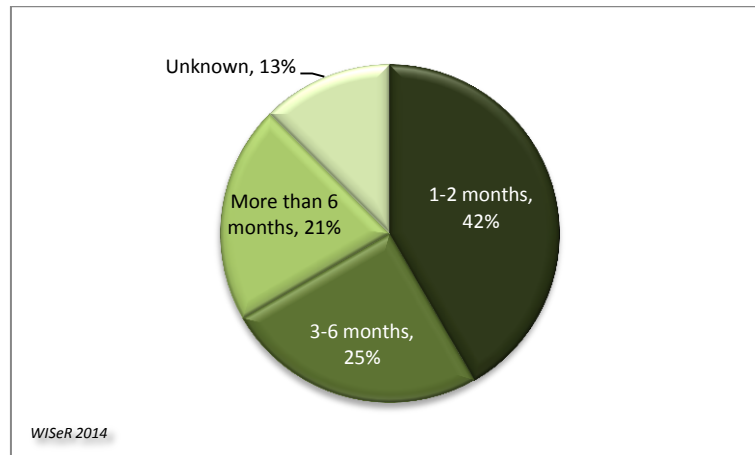
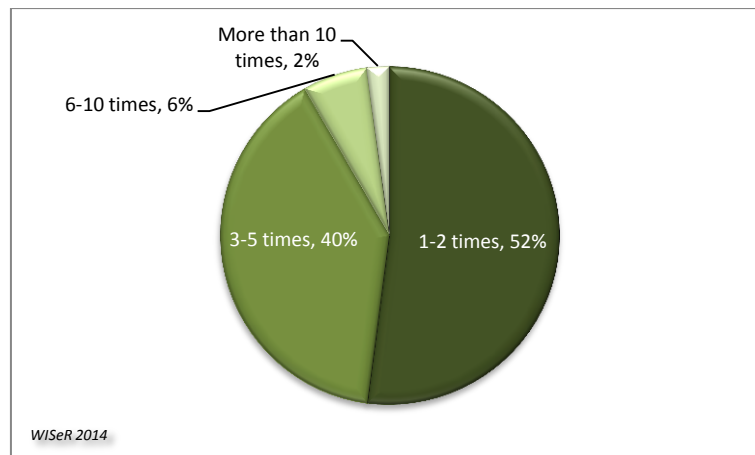


FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF TIMES ATTENDED CWDC FOR APPOINTMENTS



3.2.4 IMPACT OF SERVICE ON CWDC CLIENTS

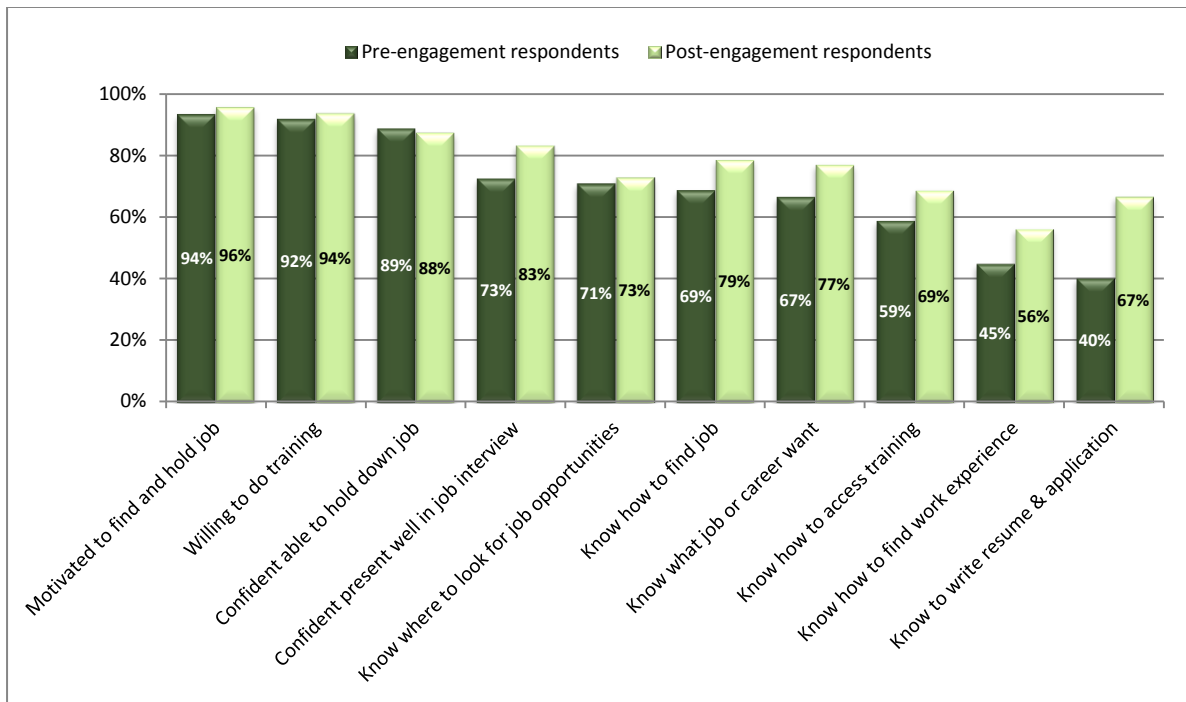
JOB READINESS

In comparing pre- and post-engagement responses, there was little difference in how respondents felt about being **motivated to find and hold a job, willing to do training and confident in being able to hold down a job**. These responses all hovered around the 90% mark pre- and post-receiving CWDC services, suggesting a ‘ceiling effect’ whereby there was little room for improvement based on receiving services (see Figure 8).

However, results signalled a greater tendency for post-engagement respondents to agree that they are **confident they can present well in an interview, know how to find a job, how to access training, and how to find work experience**, all of which differed by an order of around 10%. In particular, post-engagement respondents were much more likely

to **know how to write a resume and application** than pre-engagement respondents, with two-thirds agreeing with this statement post-engagement compared to 40.3% prior. This was the only difference to reach statistical significance; the average rating was significantly higher post-engagement (3.7) than pre-engagement (3.2; for more information see Appendix A). The area in which the least difference between pre- and post-engagement respondents was indicated (other than those indicated as reaching a ceiling effect) was in **knowing where to look for job opportunities**.

FIGURE 8: PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED WITH JOB READINESS STATEMENTS



3.2.5 EXPECTATIONS AND DELIVERY OF CWDC SERVICES

More than 80% of pre-engagement respondents rated all listed aspects of service as important or very important (see Figure 9). **Advice about local career choices** and **specific strategies and skills to find work** were considered the most important with 46% indicating these are *very important* and 52% and 48% reporting they are *important* respectively. **Support to believe in yourself** was rated the least important although 54.1% and 29.5% still reported this was important and very important, respectively.

At least half of the post-engagement respondents considered that their expectations around the helpfulness of services were met *quite a lot* or *a lot* (see Figure 10), while around a fifth were neutral in their opinion. Despite being a lower priority for individuals beforehand, more than one-third indicated that **support to believe in yourself** was achieved *a lot* (35%), followed by the **confidence to go out and find work** (29%).

Around two thirds of post-engagement respondents reported that advice about local career choices, direct links to training opportunities, and specific strategies and skills to find work had been achieved to a considerable extent (these were prioritised by 90% or more pre-engagement respondents; see Figure 11). Conversely, 23% (nearly one in four) reported that **direct links to job opportunities** were not provided at all when 95% had indicated this was an important aspect of the service (43% indicated this was very important).

FIGURE 9: IMPORTANCE OF WAYS IN WHICH THE CWDC SERVICE CAN HELP

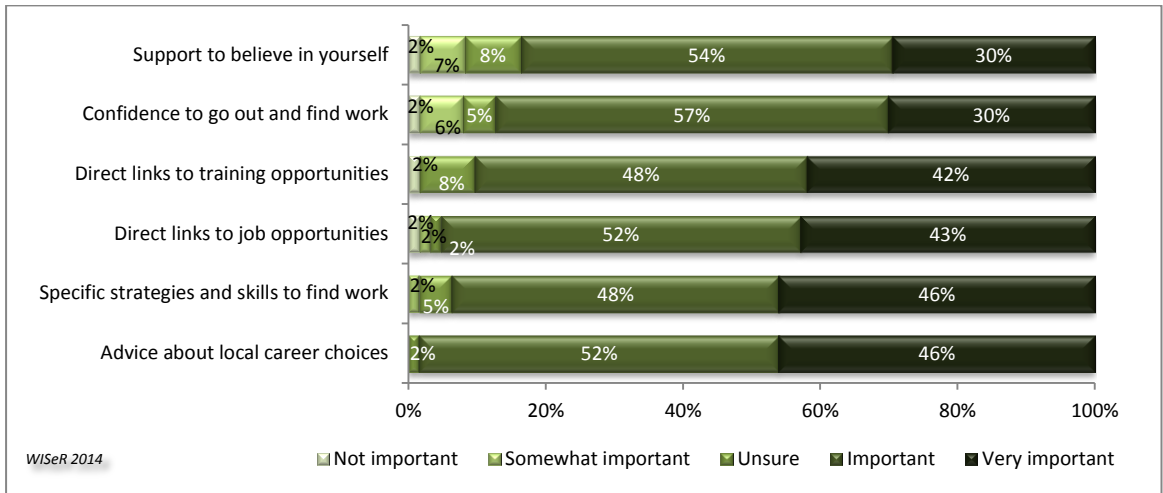


FIGURE 10: HOW MUCH THE CWDC SERVICE HELPED

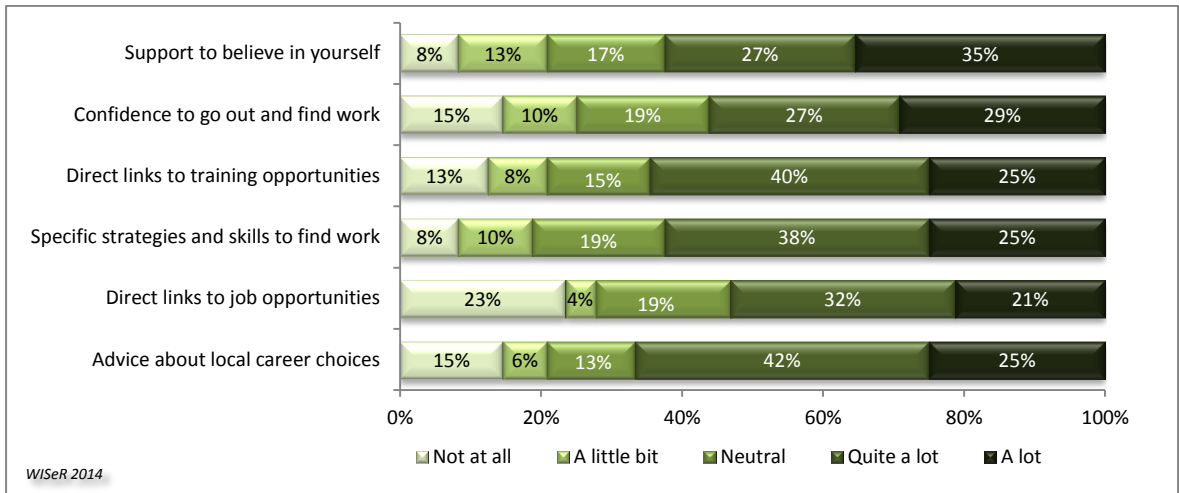
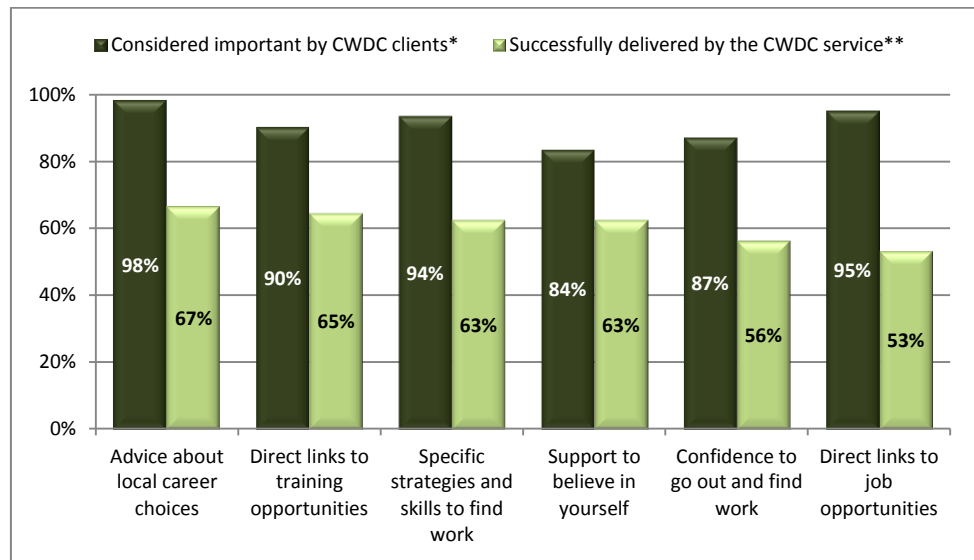


FIGURE 11: PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF CWDC SERVICE BY WHETHER THE SERVICE WAS DELIVERED

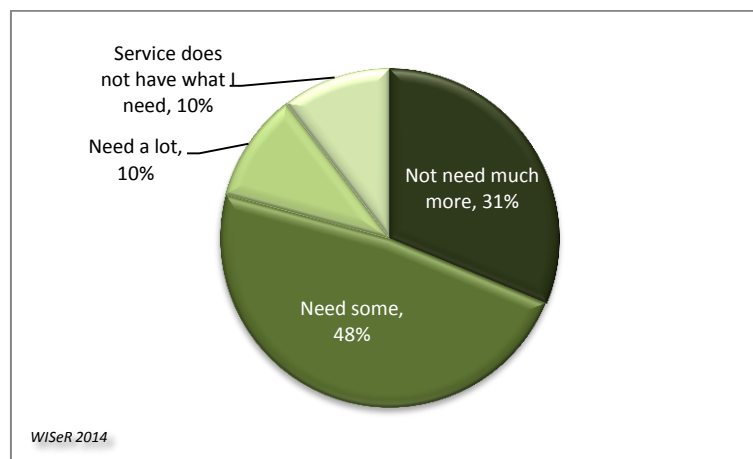


*Rated as *important* or *very important*

**Rated as *helped quite a lot* or *a lot* in this area by the CWDC service

In terms of continued support required from the centre, almost one-third reported they do not need much more support (31.3%), around half need *some* support (47.9%) and 10% **need a lot more** or have **not received what they needed** respectively (see Figure 12). There are no dominant demographic characteristics to distinguish the 10 people (20%) that need a lot more support/have not received what they needed except that the average age of these individuals is 45.2 years, which is higher than the average age of the post-engagement and pre-engagement groups generally; and that five had only been receiving CWDC services for 1-2 months.

FIGURE 12: EXTENT OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDED FROM THE CWDC

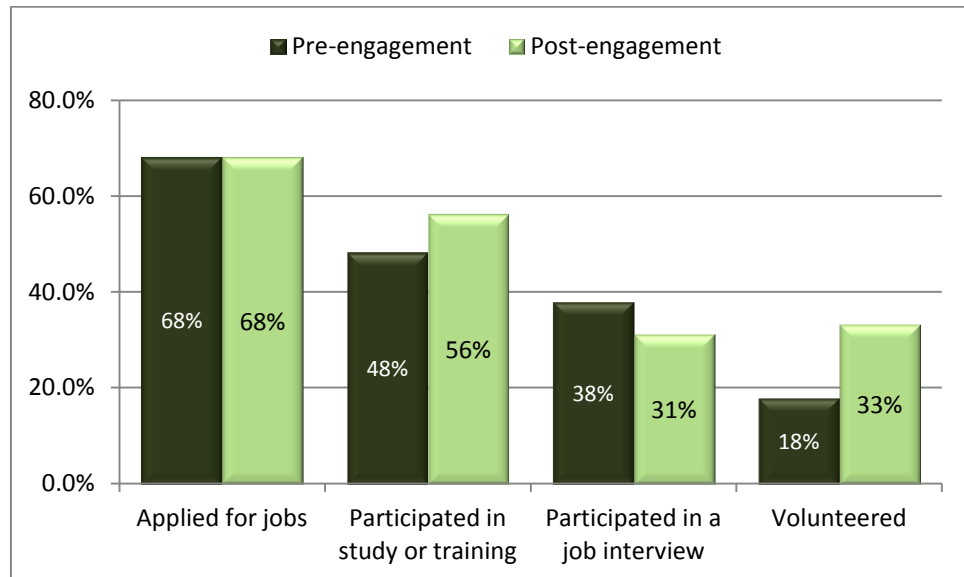


3.2.6 EMPLOYMENT-RELATED ACTIVITY

In the 6 months prior to attending the CWDC centre, just over two-thirds of pre-engagement respondents had **applied for some jobs** (68.3%), around half had participated in study or training (48.4%), approximately one third had **had a job interview** (38.1%) and nearly one in five had volunteered (18.0%; also see Figure 13).

Since being involved with CWDC services, a similar proportion of post-engagement respondents reported having applied for jobs (68.1%) and having had a job interview (31.3%). There was a slight increase in the proportion of individuals enrolled in **study or training**⁴ (56.3% post-engagement) and nearly a doubling of those **volunteering** (33.3% post engagement, see Figure 13). Additionally, two-thirds of post-engagement respondents indicated they had a **career development plan** (64.6%), close to one third had been **referred to other services** (29.2%) and 16.7% had **started a new job**⁵.

FIGURE 13: EMPLOYMENT-RELATED ACTIVITY, BY PRE- AND POST-ENGAGEMENT STATUS



4 DISCUSSION

The CWDC service presents itself as distinct from other job services in the North in adopting a one-to-one client focus based on an empowerment approach that encourages clients to develop their own solutions. According to the CWDC coaches, a key feature of the service is 'listening closely to the client' rather than treating them 'like a number rather than a person'. Clients receive a flexible, highly personalised service with a dual focus on attitudinal foundations and practical skills to underpin their employment prospects. The service encompasses a career assessment process that identifies clients' strengths and interests, involves clients in developing career development plans that account for their interests as well as local job conditions and opportunities, develops transition pathways via training, work experience and volunteering opportunities, and provides clients with practical job search strategies and support to implement these. The CWDC coaches note that while securing employment for people is a wonderful outcome, the key focus of the service is developing the personal job-readiness of participants, equipping them a set of skills and beliefs they can carry into the future.

The cohort study methodology used for the CWDC service evaluation compares a commencing group of clients (pre-engagement), and where they sit in terms of job readiness and expectations of the service, with an established client group (post-engagement) who have received services for one month or longer. A comparison of the demographic characteristics of both groups indicated no significant difference in the representation of these groups, with the exception of age. Post-engagement respondents were shown to be significantly older than their pre-engagement counterparts, whereby

⁴ Interestingly, half of those participating in study or training post-engagement had not previously completed any post-school education.

⁵ Please note these three items were not asked of individuals pre-engagement thus no comparisons can be made.

around half of pre-engagement respondents were aged below 30 years, compared with 17% of post-engagement respondents. This suggests that younger people are presenting to the CWDC, but are less likely than older people to persist with the service (i.e. disengage earlier and more frequently).

To gauge the proximity of post-engagement clients to completing their engagement with the CWDC, they were asked how much more support they felt they required. Around half needed some further support and a third not much more support, 10% felt the service did not have what they needed and 10% felt they still needed a lot more support. This indicates that most of the post-engagement respondents had received sufficient level of services to be able to comment on their usefulness.

The CWDC clientele profile presented by respondents indicated that approximately half had no post-school qualification, and only one quarter were currently employed. Around a half were unemployed, a small proportion were studying or volunteering, and 'not actively looking for work'. This suggests that the CWDC is mainly servicing its target population of people seeking to transition into employment, but is also assisting people currently in employment who are seeking to develop their career opportunities.

As expected, a large number of survey participants were self-referred to the CWDC. Around one third explicitly reported in this way and approximately another third indicated this implicitly. One in five respondents reported being referred to the Centre by JSA/DES and 11% by Centrelink.⁶

One of the key features of the CWDC service is its flexibility in accommodating clients and their needs. This allows people to engage, dis-engage and then re-engage at will. Survey results showed that pre-engagement respondents were almost exclusively signing up for the first time, whereas post-engagement respondents were more likely to have signed up with the service on multiple occasions. One in five post-engagement respondents had previously attended the service, which suggests that there is sufficient value placed on the services to motivate people to return as required.

The survey assessed pre- and post-engagement respondents' 'job readiness' according to a range of defined indicators. As anticipated, most CWDC clients exhibited strong motivation to find a job across both groups, which is a likely consequence of self-referral to the service. In addition to this, there was a preparedness to do training, and a positive, self-confident outlook about clients' ability to hold down a job once secured even before receiving support from the CWDC (and maintained into post-engagement responses).

While these attitudinal features rated highly across both groups, some differences were indicated in relation to functional job-seeking skills. Post-engagement respondents were generally 10% more likely to agree they could present well in an interview, and knew how to access training, find work experience and find a job. Post-engagement respondents were also 10% more likely to know what job or career they wanted. The most notable advance post-receiving services was in knowing how to write a resume and application, with two thirds of respondents agreeing with this statement compared with 40% of pre-engagement respondents. Conversely, there was little evident improvement in knowing where to look for job opportunities, which could signal a potential area of service development for the CWDC.

Apart from the statistically significant finding for resume and application writing, the differences detected between pre- and post-engagement were of a lesser order (i.e. did not reach statistical significance), which is possibly due to the relatively small sample size. However, the frequency patterns described signal an apparent benefit associated with receiving CWDC services.

⁶ It is worth noting that in considering this question, respondents may have failed to distinguish between receiving an official referral and a general suggestion or recommendation from these services to visit the CWDC.

The pre-and post-engagement survey design was intended to measure the importance attributed to various CWDC services offered, and the extent to which clients felt they were helped by these services. Results showed a healthy rate of around two thirds of clients acknowledging considerable assistance received in a number of valued areas, particularly advice about local career choices, direct links to training opportunities, and specific strategies and skills to find work. A similar proportion acknowledged the role of the service in helping them to build self-belief. Even though this was not flagged as among the most important services by pre-engagement respondents there was apparent recognition of the value of this focus post receiving services. This survey finding ties in with the observation by CWDC coaches that building self-belief is a key area of their service provision, noting that clients often had the necessary job-seeking skills but lacked the confidence to apply them.

The most pronounced discrepancy between pre- and post-engagement respondents was in being provided direct links to job opportunities, whereby 95% flagged this as important, but only 53% felt well assisted in this area. The CWDC coaches similarly flagged this as an area of their service they would like to develop further. The service has developed a range of partnerships, most significantly with the Northern Futures Partnership Brokers and Skills for Jobs in the Region program staff, with whom they are co-located. These partnerships provide considerable scope to keep coaches updated with local employment information and links to potential employers. The coaches also expressed an interest in working more closely with industry as part of their role, which would also support linking clients with existing and emerging job opportunities.

To gauge any differences in employment-related activities pre-and post-engagement, respondents indicated whether they had participated in various activities in the six months before and since commencing at the CWDC. The same proportion (around two thirds) reporting applying for jobs, slightly more participated in training, and considerably more engaged in volunteering post receiving CWDC services. Slightly fewer participated in job interviews post-engagement than pre-engagement. This may be due to people being motivated by unsuccessful job interviews to make contact with the CWDC to learn strategies and skills for potential (and perhaps better targeted) future interview opportunities.

5 CONCLUSION

The Northern Futures **Career and Workforce Development Centre** is funded through *Skills for All in Regions* and assists people in the Northern Adelaide Metropolitan area to make informed and planned choices about learning, training and work through a local and customised service. The survey results and consultation findings demonstrate the benefits of such individual, one-on-one support which has helped both short-term and long-term unemployed as well as employed individuals gain self-belief and confidence to go out and find work and hold down a job.

More specifically, the study found a greater tendency for post-engagement respondents to agree that they are confident they can present well in an interview, know how to find a job, how to access training, and how to find work experience. In particular, post-engagement respondents were much more likely to know how to write a resume and application than pre-engagement respondents, with two-thirds agreeing with this statement post-engagement compared to 40% prior. This was the only difference to reach statistical significance. The area in which the least difference between pre- and post-engagement respondents was indicated was in knowing where to look for job opportunities.

Another Centre objective (working with industry, employers, government and the community to increase local participation in training and work) has been demonstrated in

with 56% of post-engagement respondents participating in study or training since their involvement with the CWDC compared to 48% of pre-engagement respondents in the 6 months prior to receiving CWDC services. Importantly, a considerable number of those re-engaging with study or training post-engagement are 'less skilled' individuals who had not completed any post school qualifications.

Services and support provided by the Centre have also produced a near doubling of individuals volunteering. Not only is this of benefit to the skills and experience of the job seeker but an extremely valuable asset to organisations and the wider community. It also provides an opportunity to explore where people do volunteer work and build stronger partnerships with these and similar organisations.

Around two thirds of post-engagement respondents reported that advice about local career choices, direct links to training opportunities, and specific strategies and skills to find work had been achieved to a considerable extent. Conversely, 23% (nearly one in four) reported that direct links to job opportunities were not provided at all when 95% had indicated this was an important aspect of the service. Such a finding provides the CWDC with a clear opportunity to build on and improve this aspect, as recognised by existing coaches.

Participants in this study were largely motivated to find work (hence the self-referral) and actively seeking support to develop career pathways. The nature of support provided by the CWDC focuses on mutual commitment, empowerment and job readiness as a precursor to achieving positive employment outcomes. It is quite likely that a similar study in a JSA/DES setting might produce different results, owing to the different culture and focus of these environments. One drawback to the current study was the limited number of statistically significant results, which likely reflects the small sample size and also the positive ratings (ceiling effects) of both pre- and post-engagement participants. These limitations notwithstanding, there were sufficiently strong trends identified in the descriptive analyses to suggest that the CWDC is having a positive impact on participants seeking to further their career prospects in the Northern Adelaide region.

Appendix A. CHANGE IN JOB READINESS

FIGURE 14: EXTENT OF JOB READINESS PRE-ENGAGEMENT

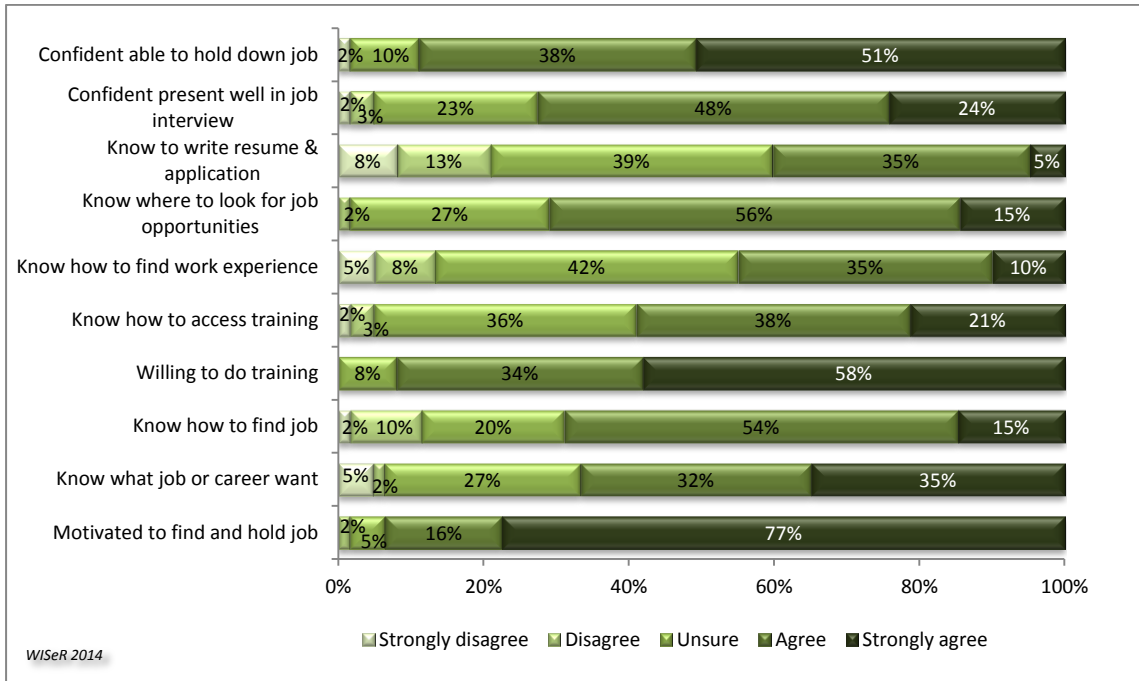


FIGURE 15: EXTENT OF JOB READINESS POST-ENGAGEMENT

