



INCA CONSULTING

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# A BRIDGE TO WORK PROGRAM EVALUATION

**Final Report**

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Prepared for: Bridge Housing

20 December 2019  
P06001

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### About the program

*A Bridge to Work* (BTW) seeks to improve employment outcomes for community housing tenants in Sydney. The program is a partnership between a community housing provider, Bridge Housing, and an employment services provider, CoAct.

The program provides intensive case management support, including coaching and mentoring, developing realistic and achievable employment goals and action plans, supporting participants to become work ready (including building a quality resume and preparing for interviews), matching participants with suitable employers and positions, providing support and training, liaising with employment service providers. Support continues to be provided to participants in their new workplace for up to 26 weeks.

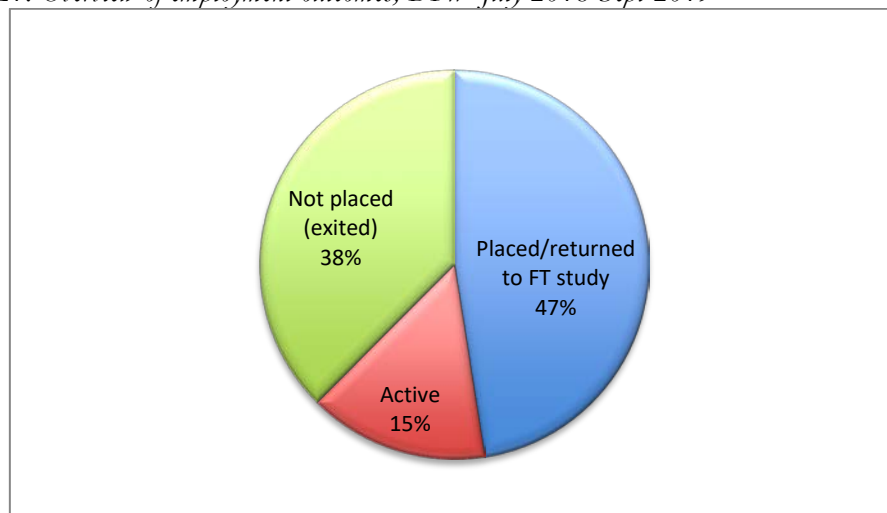
The program was established under a Strong and Resilient Communities grant from the Department of Social Services. The pilot phase began in July 2018 and finished at the end of September 2019 (15 months).

### Employment outcomes

By the end of the pilot, 80 people were engaged by the program. Of these:

- 39% were placed in employment
- 9% returned to full time study
- 10% were currently interviewing for jobs at the end of the pilot
- 37% exited the program without a placement
- 5% were still active in the program but had not gained employment.

*Figure E1: Overview of employment outcomes, BTW July 2018-Sept 2019*



Comparison with a control cohort<sup>1</sup> showed that:

- BTW achieved much better results in placing participants: nearly twice as many BTW participants were placed/returned to study.

<sup>1</sup> The control cohort was developed by CoAct from its Jobactive caseload excluding BTW in order to be able to compare outcomes of the two groups. The cohort was developed to as closely as possible match the demographics of the BTW cohort.



- BTW achieved significantly better results in terms of sustained employment.
- BTW was successful across demographic groups, but the sustained outcomes for women and people with a disability were particularly marked. Significantly better performance was also apparent for CALD groups, mature age and carer groups.
- On average, BTW participants were placed in less than half the time as participants in the control group (12 weeks compared with 26 weeks).

#### **Other outcomes**

- *Engagement with the labour market* – BTW participants attended between one and 23 interviews during the program. As might be expected, those who achieved a placement generally attended a greater number of interviews.
- *Enhancement of wellbeing and self-agency* – participants highly valued the program, improvement their confidence, self-agency, resilience, understanding of the job seeking process, and development of job seeking skills.

#### **Lessons learned**

A number of important lessons were learned from the pilot.

- An important feature of program design was to embed the ESC role within the housing provider. Housing managers are a key source of referrals and being seamlessly embedded at Bridge Housing has provided the ESC with a ‘foot in the door’ with people who otherwise may not engage with an employment service.
- It is important that the ESC role is filled by someone with the right mix of personal and professional attributes. The report identifies the key attributes and skills needed for this role.
- A number of lessons were learned about what works in terms of providing effective intensive case management, including ways of engaging with participants, recording data and reporting.
- There is a maximum caseload, beyond which quality and effectiveness appears to suffer. A maximum caseload of 20-25 at any one time allows intensive case management to be maintained. The initial KPI of 5 new referrals a month was set too high; a target of three per month would be more realistic..
- Significant improvements to data collection and management systems were made during the pilot, such as merging multiple data spreadsheets, developing a template for client notes, and automation of participant surveys.

#### **Suggested improvements**

The following improvements are proposed for the next phase of the program:

- Set a caseload cap at 25 participants at any one time.
- Reduce the monthly new referral target to three to ensure that existing clients can be supported adequately.
- As a consequence of the caseload and referral cap, establish a waitlist for the program.



- Further develop relationships with employers, with the aim of fostering employment partnerships which would give BTW participants a ‘foot in the door’ with partner employers.
- Examine funding sources (e.g. Bridge Housing’s Advance Scholarship Program, and others) for brokerage/discretionary funds to enable participants to purchase things that will assist them to get a job, e.g. one-off training/certificates, interview clothes.
- Conduct a post-implementation review of new aspects being introduced to the program e.g. post placement support by the PPS team, automation of participant surveys.
- Improve outcome measures and/or collection of data to better evaluate:
  - Sustained placements – a target could be set for 26 week outcomes
  - Working hours wanted/required – document the hours participants want or need consistently
  - Informal networks
  - Family/household engagement
  - Housing stability
- Align BTW outcome measurement intervals with CoAct and Jobactive measurement intervals, i.e four, 12 and 26 weeks (rather than four, 13 and 26 weeks).
- Follow up with participants 12-18 months after placement in order to gauge longer term outcomes, i.e. employment stability, housing security and income.

### **Conclusion**

On multiple measures, the BTW pilot can be considered a success. The program achieved the employment targets of 80 engagements, and came close to achieving the target of 40 placements (37 placements were achieved). But the remarkable achievements of the program have been its success in placing some traditionally hard-to-place candidates such as people with a disability, and in placing people in employment that is sustained over time. The evidence suggests that the intensive case management approach used by BTW is achieving better results than a mainstream employment service when it comes to placing people in jobs in a timely way, and keeping them there. The strength of BTW lies in not being a one-size-fits-all model: each participant is treated as an individual and service delivery is participant-led, needs-based and flexible. The model also recognises that getting a job doesn’t necessarily stop at the point of placement; that sometimes people’s trajectories are not straightforward, that things don’t always work out, and that they may need continued support to find another job or to keep the job they have.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of the program

*A Bridge to Work* (BTW) is a pilot program that seeks to improve employment outcomes for tenants of Bridge Housing. The program is a partnership between two organisations:

- *Bridge Housing*, a Tier 1 community housing organisation that provides housing to more than 3,500 low to moderate income households across the Sydney metropolitan area.
- *CoAct*, an employment services provider that has been delivering services for over 20 years.

The program provides ongoing intensive case management support, including:

- Working with participants to establish realistic and achievable employment goals
- Assisting participants to develop and implement an action plan to address their barriers to employment.
- Supporting participants to liaise with or connect to Centrelink, Job Active or Disability Employment Service Providers
- Providing support and training to develop a professional CV and interview skills
- Matching the participant with suitable employers in alignment with their employment goals
- Providing ongoing support including coaching and mentoring for participants in their new workplace for up to 26 weeks or above.

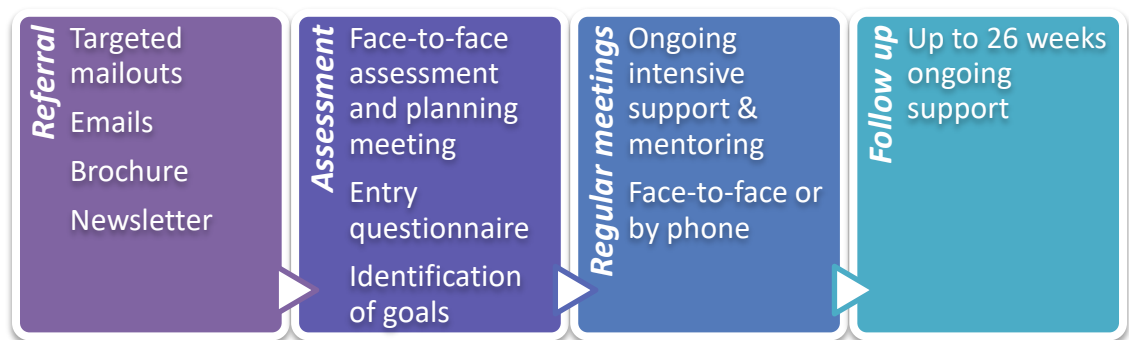
The program commenced in July 2018 and will continue until 2021.

### 1.2 How A Bridge to Work operates

BTW program employs an Employment Support Coordinator (ESC) who is a CoAct case manager situated at Bridge Housing. For the participants, the ESC is the face of the program and the person with whom they develop a relationship.

An overview of how the program operates is provided in Figure 1. The program provides support to participants in four stages.

*Figure 1: Program snapshot*



### **Referral**

BTW is a voluntary program to which participants self-refer, or they may be referred by a third party such as an employment service. Potential participants are informed about the program via a range of communication strategies, including direct mail to Bridge Housing residents, articles in the quarterly newsletter, a brochure which residents can pick up at the Bridge Housing office, the Bridge Housing website, and word of mouth.

Participants who are interested in participating can phone or email the ESC to register their interest and arrange an initial meeting and assessment.

### **Assessment**

At the first meeting with the ESC, the participant is informed about how the program operates, completes an entry questionnaire and works through an assessment with the ESC, identifying the person's employment and job seeking background, barriers to employment, support services and post-placement requirements, goals for the program, and any other relevant information (e.g. volunteering, work experience, education and training). The participant also completes CoAct's routine questionnaire completed by all clients upon commencement.

At this meeting the participant and ESC discuss the basis on which they will meet (regularity, location).

### **Regular meetings**

The participant and the ESC meet regularly, to discuss strategies for becoming work-ready, and review and update their resume. The ESC takes on a mentor role and tailors a strategy to each participant's needs. Activities may include revising the participant's resume, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of their job search strategies to date, identifying skill sets and industries where these skills may be suitable, applying for jobs, working on presentation and interview skills, and brainstorming difficulties or impediments to finding work. Meetings may be face-to-face at people's homes, in cafes or other public locations, or at Bridge Housing; or may be by phone if the participant prefers.

### Follow up

BTW continues the relationship with the participant for up to 26 weeks after they have found a job, with weekly or fortnightly check-ins by phone or face-to-face. The purpose of these sessions is to provide support as the participant adjusts to their new job and mentor them through the critical employment establishment phase.

A program logic was developed as part of the evaluation (Figure 3, over page) which shows how the program intends to achieve its outcomes.

## 1.3 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation sought to assess the program's processes and outcomes, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the program's design and implementation.

### Overview

Our general approach is summarised below.

*Figure 2: Overview of methodology*



### Review of documentation and data collection tools

Information about the program and implementation schedule were reviewed, as well as the data collection instrument and processes already developed by CoAct for the project.

### Evaluation framework and program logic

A program logic and evaluation framework was developed with input and feedback from Bridge Housing and CoAct.

### Program data

A range of demographic and program data for each participant, which is recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. The data were analysed the mid-point (March) and at the end of the pilot phase (September). The collected data included:

- Suburb of residence
- Age



- Gender
- CALD status
- Indigenous status
- Disability status
- Carer status
- Date caseload commenced
- Duration of unemployment prior to commencement
- Education level
- Whether resume has been updated
- Placement status upon commencement
- Placements made through the program
- Number of interviews attended
- Whether tracking to outcomes
- Achievement of outcomes at 4, 13 weeks & 26 weeks
- Hours working.

In addition, the ESC kept file notes for each participant (in MS Word format) which were updated after each session.

#### **Comparison cohort data**

A comparison (control group) cohort was developed by CoAct from the organisation's regular Jobactive client group. The cohort of 77 people was selected to mirror as closely as possible the current BTW cohort of 77 participants at the time of analysis (September 2019). This was achieved by mirroring the BTW demographic characteristics of gender, age, suburb of residence (Sydney), Indigenous and CALD status, disability, and education profile. Data analysis was then undertaken by CoAct, and further analysis was conducted by Inca Consulting.

#### **Program updates**

The ESC provided written fortnightly program updates throughout the pilot phase.

#### **Exit surveys**

It was intended that surveys would be conducted with participant at three points: entry, mid-way and exit. However these surveys were not routinely administered during the program, so in response CoAct sent a link to the exit survey via SMS to participants who had been placed but not completed 26 weeks as well as those who had exited the program (for any reason). In total, 20 exit surveys were completed.

#### **Participant interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted by phone with a selection of BTW participants. Candidates were identified by the ESC on the basis of some broad criteria that would provide a range of experiences and varying degrees of success in the program. Ten participants were interviewed in March 2019 and 12 participants were interviewed in September 2019 (including follow-up interviews with three participants from the March round). Therefore, interviews were conducted with 19 program participants for the pilot evaluation.

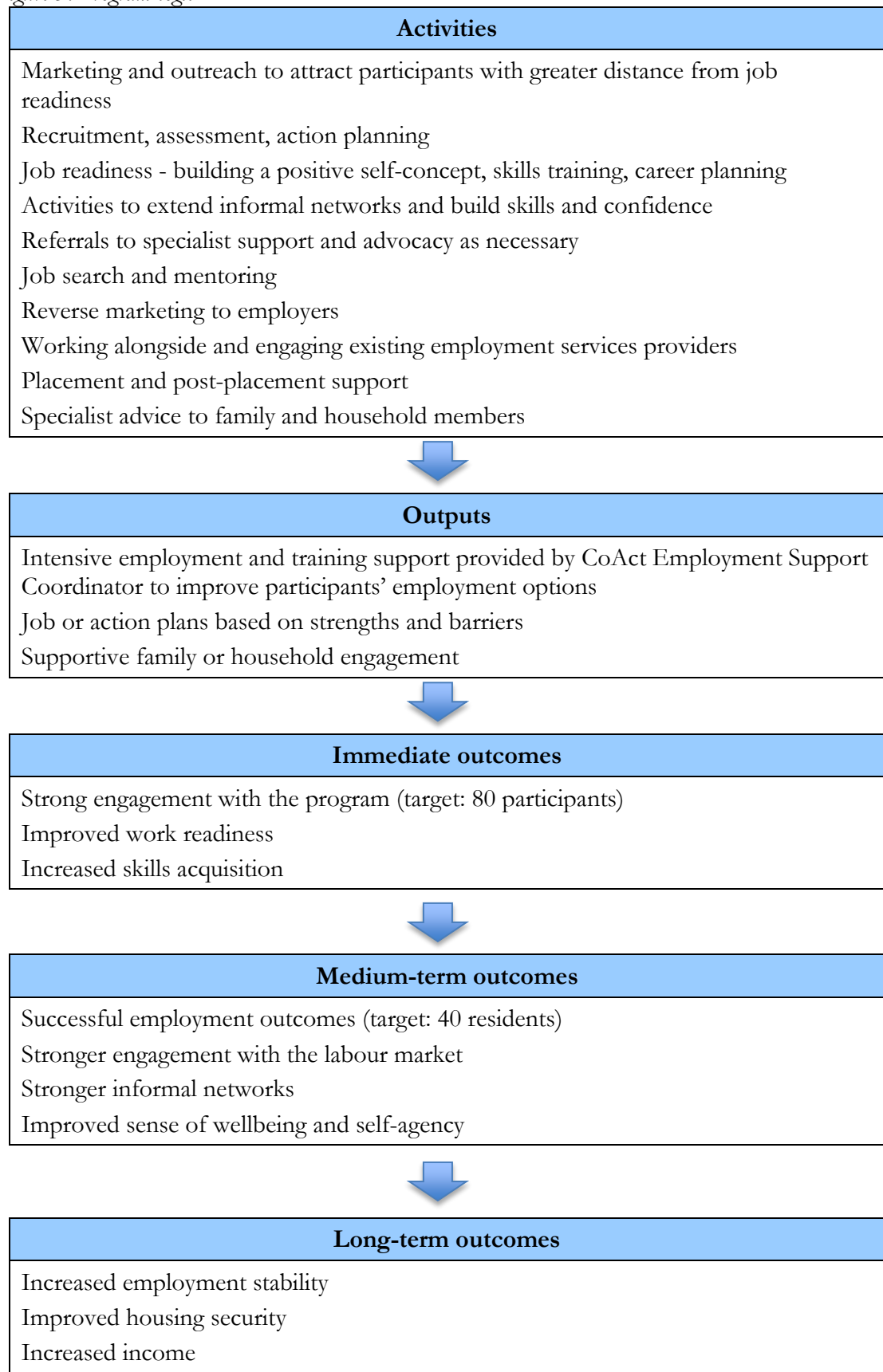
The following process was used to arrange the interviews. A list of potential candidates was drawn up by the ESC with some brief background information about each person. The list was reviewed and agreed by the evaluator. The ESC then contacted each participant to let them know that the evaluator would be in contact and to ensure that a consent form for interview had been completed. The evaluator contacted each participant to discuss their participation, to arrange an interview and to offer a \$40 gift card as an incentive for participation.

A discussion guide for the interviews was developed and approved by the Project Advisory Group.

#### **Stakeholder interviews**

Interviews and discussions were undertaken at the mid-point and at the end of the pilot period with several program stakeholders, including the ESC, Bridge Housing and CoAct.

Figure 3: Program logic



## **2. PILOT IMPLEMENTATION**

### **2.1 Program establishment**

The program was established using a Strong and Resilient Communities grant from the Department of Social Services amounting to \$478,672 + GST over three years. The grant agreement was signed in March 2018 and an Activity Work Plan was finalised in May 2018.

A full time Employment Support Coordinator was appointed in May 2018 and a service level agreement was signed between Bridge Housing and CoAct on 22 May.

The first program participant was assessed on 2 June 2018.

Inca Consulting was appointed as program evaluator in August 2018.

The program has been promoted via Bridge Housing's quarterly newsletter, by direct mail-out and via Bridge Housing's website. Housing managers have also referred tenants opportunistically after direct contact, such when they come in to pay rent.

The key program stakeholders report that program implementation has largely been as anticipated, with few teething problems encountered. As the program progressed, the ESC, in consultation with the Steering Group, set a target of 2-3 new participants per week, which was thought to be a reasonable workload balancing assessments and induction of new participants with caseload management of existing participants.

The ESC developed an approach to case management. First appointments always took place in a public place or at Bridge Housing to ensure safety, and the ESC then negotiated with the participant how they would like to proceed. Stakeholders all agreed that a key to the program being a success is the flexibility they try to provide, including giving participants options for face-to-face meetings in their home, at a café, library or other public place, or at Bridge Housing. Alternatively they could meet (as many do once they have a job) by phone if that works better for them.

### **2.2 Participation in the BTW pilot**

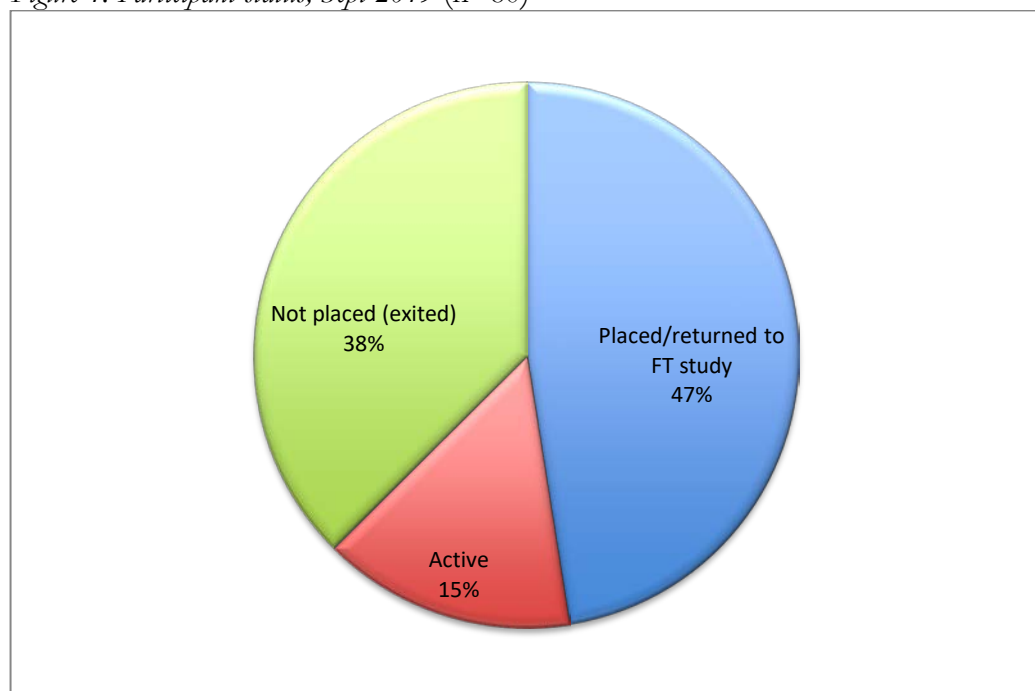
The pilot reached 116 participants in 16 months, out of which 80 were actively engaged.

*Table 1: Participant status, Sept 2019*

Status	Definition	Number
Declined to participate	After initial inquiry declined to sign up	35
Pending	New referral has not yet been processed	1
Exited No Placement	Discontinued in the program before placement has been made	31
Placed Active	Placed in employment or returned to full time study within 26 week post placement support	9
Placed Graduated	Placed into employment or returned to full time study and has completed 26 weeks of support	19
Placed Exited	Placed into employment but have left Bridge Housing or exited the program prior to 13 week outcome achieved	7
Active	Currently engaged in the program but not yet placed	14
<b>Total</b>		<b>116</b>

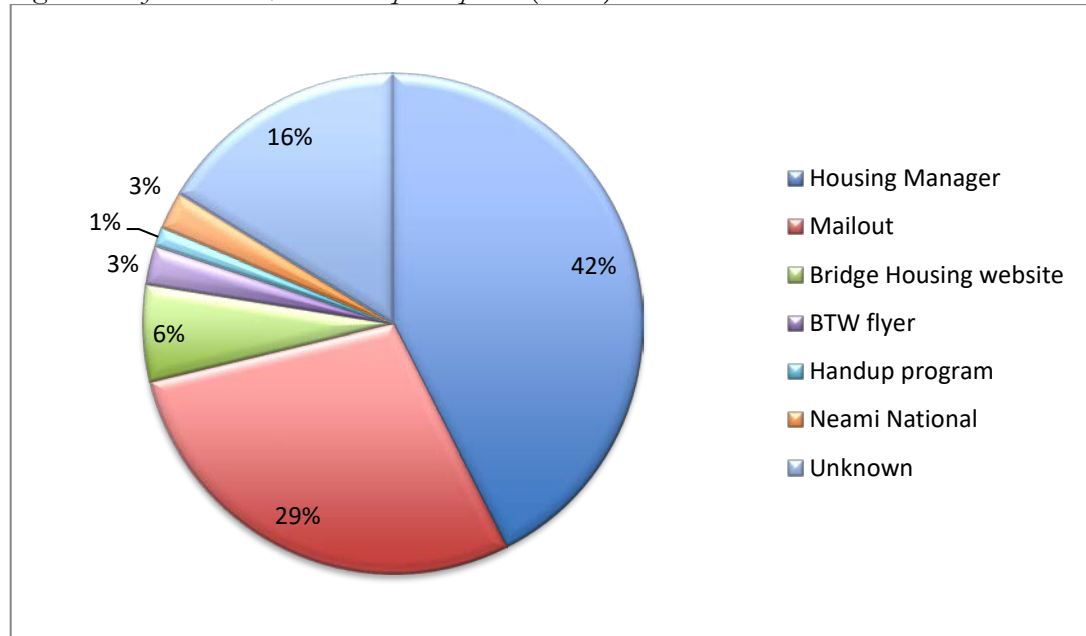
When those who declined to participate or who were pending were excluded, there was an engaged cohort of 80. Of these, 47% have been placed in employment or full time study; 38% have exited the program without being placed; and 15% were still active at the time of reporting.

*Figure 4: Participant status, Sept 2019 (n=80)*



The principal referral source was a participant's Housing Manager (42%), followed by Bridge Housing's periodical newsletter mailout (29%). On the other hand, the BTW flyer generated very few referrals (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Referral source, all BTW participants (n=80)



60% of participants in the pilot were female, and 40% male, which was broadly consistent with the Bridge Housing tenant profile (Table 2).

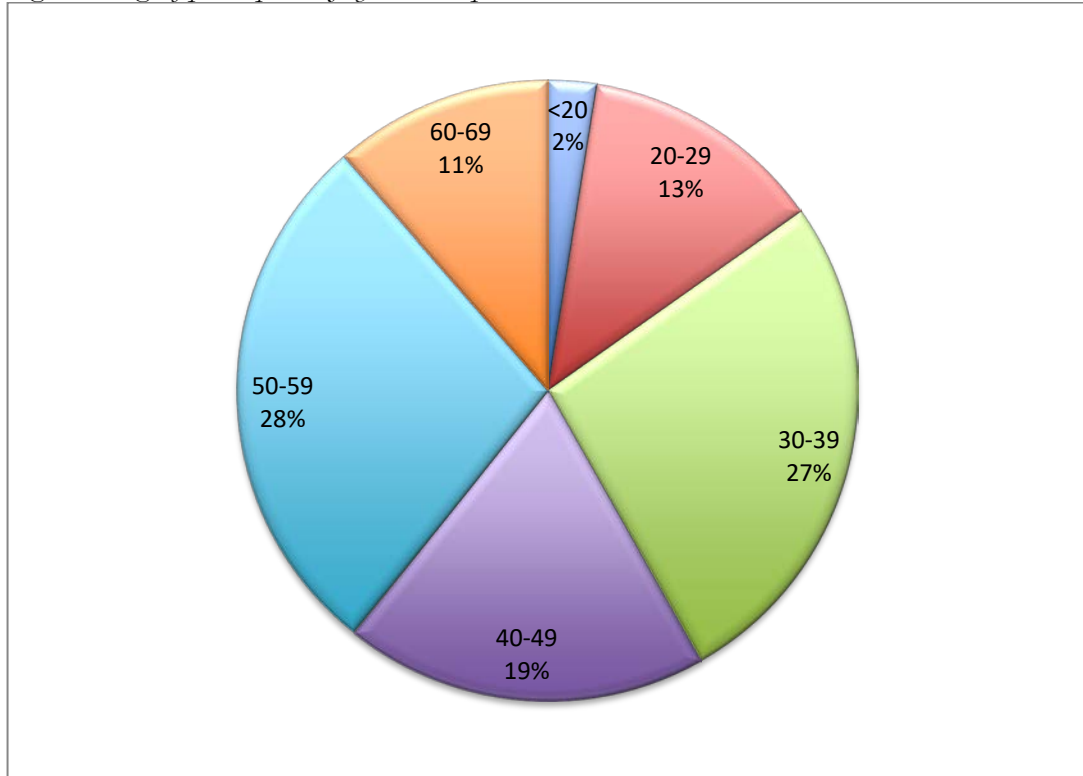
There has been significant participation in the program by people from CALD backgrounds (54% of all participants) and people with a disability (51%), rates that are considerably higher than in the broader tenant group. Participation by Indigenous people was low (4%) compared with the broader tenant demographic (8%). Just over one third (38%) were caring for children, while a small proportion (6%) were caring for one or more adults.

Table 2: Participant demographic data, July 2018-Sept 2019

Variable	Total	%	BH tenant profile
<b>Gender - Male</b>	32	40%	46%
<b>- Female</b>	48	60%	54%
<b>Indigenous</b>	3	4%	8%
<b>CALD</b>	43	54%	22%
<b>Disability</b>	41	51%	24%
<b>Carer for child/ren</b>	30	38%	-
<b>Carer for adult/s</b>	5	6%	-
<b>Total participants engaged</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>-</b>

The youngest participant was 19 years old and the oldest 65 years old. The median age was 46 years, and 58% of participants were over 40 years of age (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Age of participants, July 2018-Sept 2019



Participants lived in a range of suburbs across Sydney, from Waverley in the east to Bungarribee/Rooty Hill in the west (Figure 7). Around three quarters of participants lived in central/eastern Sydney or the Inner West.

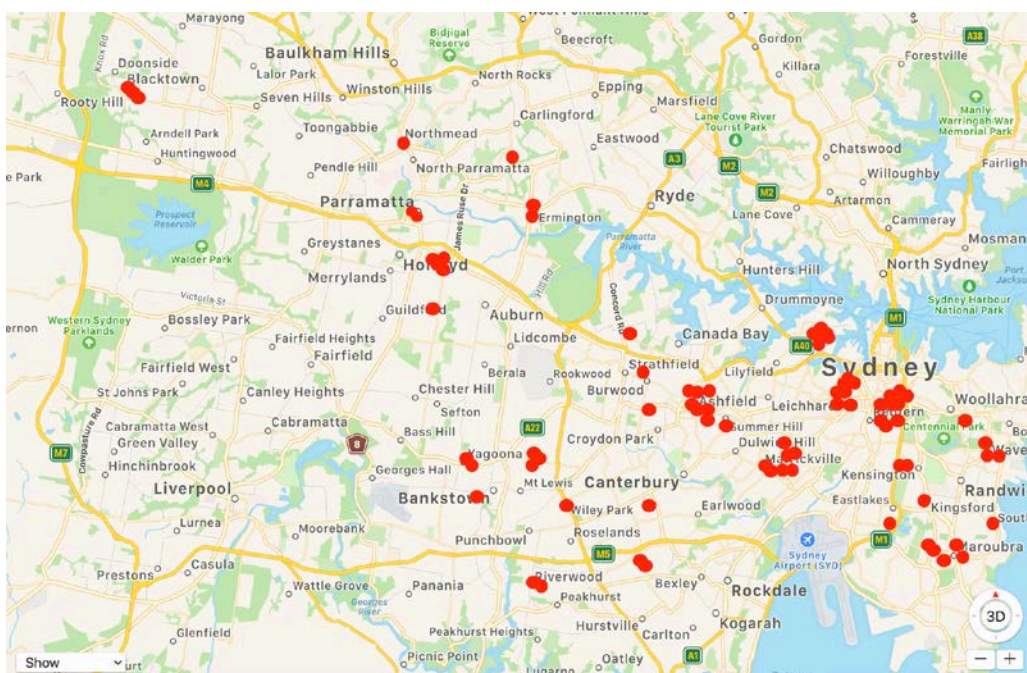
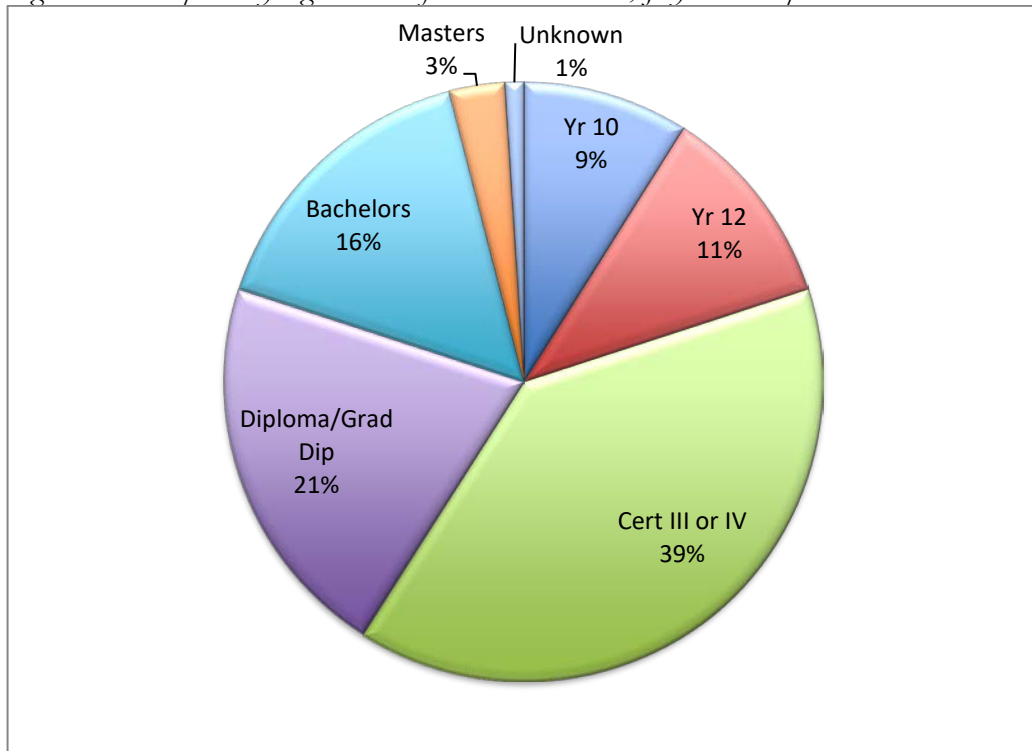




Figure 7: Residence of BTW program participants, July 2018-Sept 2019

One-fifth of participants had school/VET or school-only qualifications. About two-fifths had a Certificate III or IV were qualified at Diploma/Graduate Diploma level, and the about the same proportion had a Bachelor Degree. Only one person had a postgraduate qualification (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Participants by highest level of education achieved, July 2018-Sept 2019





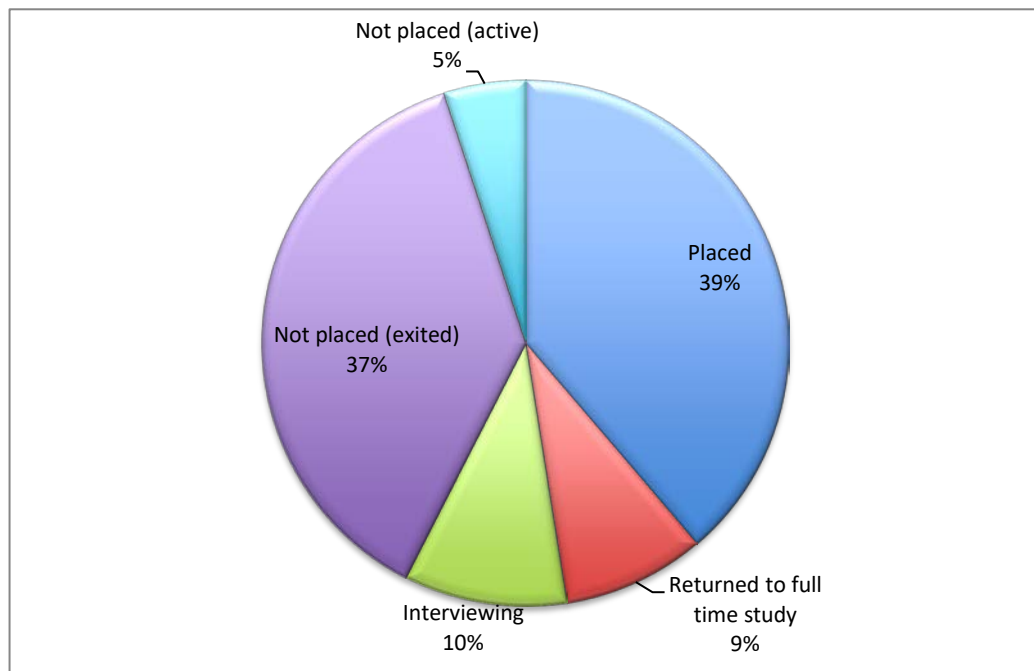
### 3. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

#### 3.1 Employment outcomes

Key employment outcomes from the pilot were as follows:

- 31 participants (39%) were placed in employment
- Seven participants (9%) returned to full time study
- Eight participants (10%) were currently interviewing for jobs
- 30 participants (37%) were exited from the program without placement; reasons include voluntary exit, disengagement from the program, exit from Bridge Housing, decision to remain in current job).
- A further four participants (5%) were active in the program (at 29 October) but not yet placed.

*Figure 7: Bridge to Work pilot, placement outcomes, July 2018-Sept 2019 (n=80)*

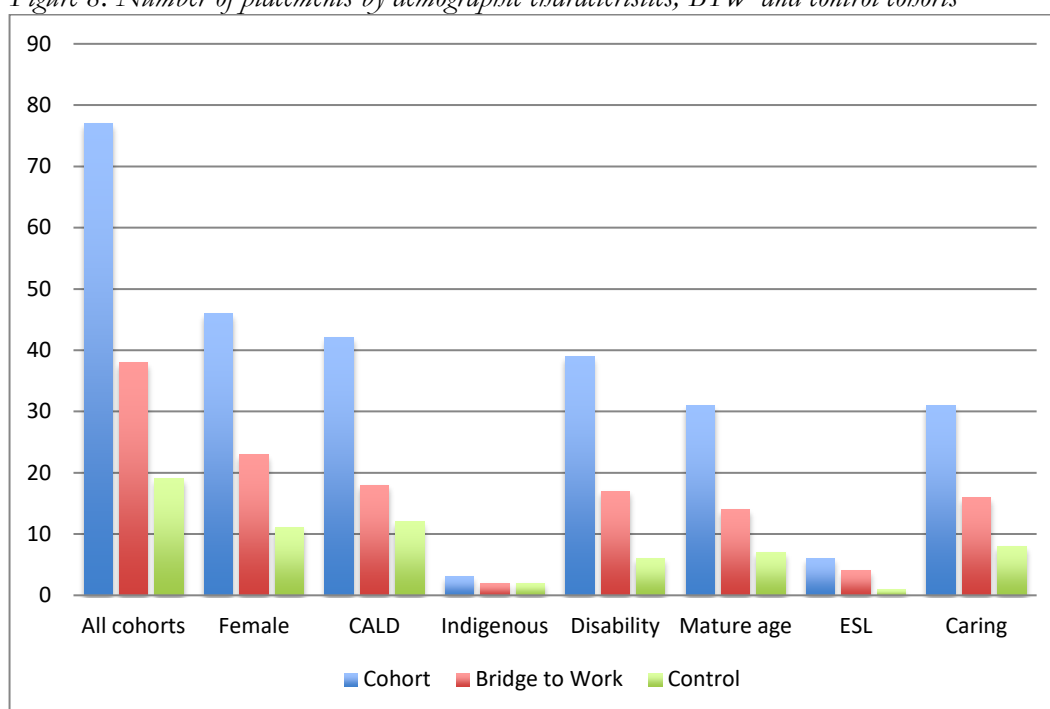


The placement status of all pilot participants at the end of the pilot period is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: BTW Participants by placement status & demographic variable, July 2018-Sept 2019

Variable	Placed	Interview -ing	Returned to study	Not placed (active)	Not placed (exited)	Total
All participants	31	8	7	4	30	80
Male	14	2	1	3	12	32
Female	17	6	6	1	17	47
Indigenous	2	0	0	0	1	3
CALD	13	5	5	1	19	43
Disability	11	5	5	3	17	41
Carer (children)	11	4	4	1	10	30
Carer (adults)	1	3	0	0	1	5

Figure 8: Number of placements by demographic characteristics, BTW and control cohorts



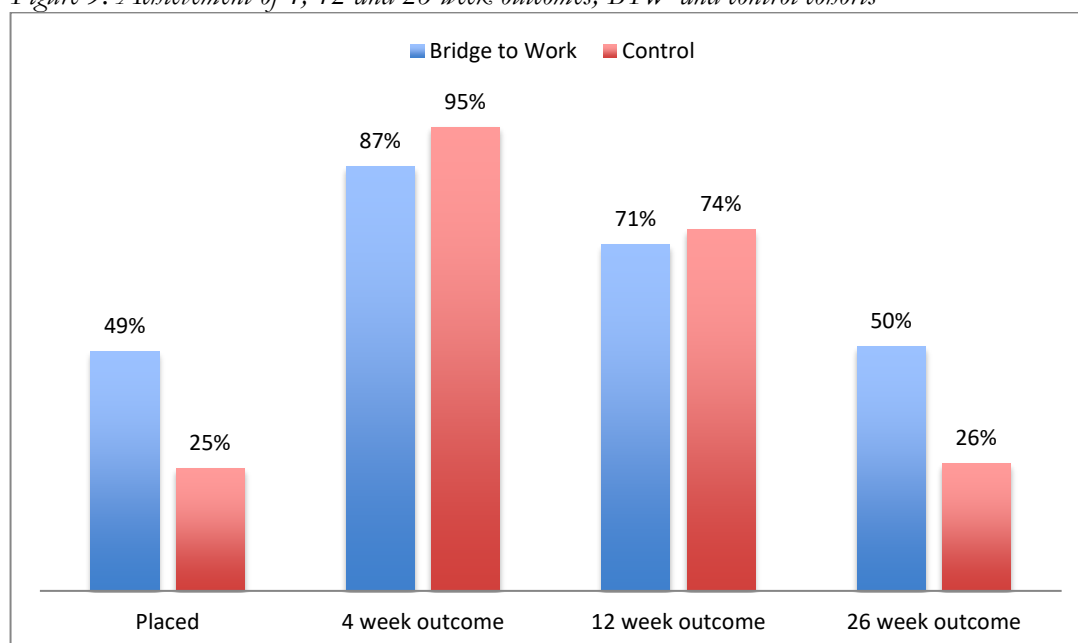
The cohort analysis of the BTW and control cohorts (see Tables A6 and A7 in Appendix A) reveals a number of significant outcomes. Figure 8 shows that relative to the control group:

- Nearly twice as many BTW participants were placed/returned to study.
- Across nearly all demographic characteristics, a higher number of BTW participants were placed in employment or returned to study. Results were significantly higher for people with a disability (283%), women (209%), mature

age participants (200%) and those in a caring role (200%). (Numbers were too low to draw conclusions for some population groups, e.g. Indigenous and ESL.)

BTW participants also tended to sustain their employment placement for longer. As Figure 9 shows, placed participants in both BTW and the control group had similar four and 12 week outcomes, but at the 26 week mark, BTW participants were about twice as likely to still be in their placement. These figures are also significantly better than *jobactive* results, where in 2018 67% achieved a four week outcome, 60% a 12 week outcome and 43% a 26 week outcome<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 9: Achievement of 4, 12 and 26 week outcomes, BTW and control cohorts



The outcome conversion rate shows the percentage of those placed in employment who were still in a placement four, 12 and 26 weeks after placement. Table 4 shows that the sustained placements under BTW were experienced across different demographic groups (NB Indigenous was excluded from the analysis due to very low numbers which meant comparison was not possible).

*"I had ten sessions with Gavin, once a week in the first couple of months, then once a fortnight. He would also search for related jobs and email them to me. Gavin was a real help. Computer skills are one of my downfalls and without his help I wouldn't have set up my profile on Seek. We also did some mock interviews which were good. I've applied for about 60 jobs and I've had 12 interviews. I'm still waiting to hear about two interviews."*

<sup>2</sup> Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business (2019) *Employment Services Outcomes Report January-December 2018* (figures rounded).

Table 4: Outcome conversion rates by demographic characteristics, BTW and control cohorts

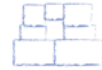
Characteristic	Bridge to Work				Control			
<i>Outcome milestone</i>	<i>No. placed</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>	<i>12 weeks</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>	<i>No. placed</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>	<i>12 weeks</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>
<b>Caseload (n=77)</b>	38	87%	71%	50%	19	95%	74%	26%
<b>Female (n=46)</b>	23	87%	78%	48%	11	100%	100%	27%
<b>CALD (n=42)</b>	18	83%	72%	44%	12	100%	92%	42%
<b>Disability (n=39)</b>	17	76%	53%	47%	6	33%	33%	17%
<b>Mature age (n=31)</b>	14	79%	71%	64%	7	86%	57%	43%
<b>Caring (n=31)</b>	16	94%	81%	38%	8	100%	100%	38%

In order to test for statistical significance, these rates were adjusted relative to the overall cohort (Table 5). Significance testing was conducted using a z-test for comparing the differences between two independent samples (see Table A5 in Appendix A). The tests found that for both the whole cohort for the subgroups of female participants and participants with a disability, significantly better outcomes were seen for BTW clients versus the control group at placement, 4 weeks, 12 weeks and 26 weeks. For CALD, mature age and carer subgroups, differences were not necessarily significant at 4 and 12 weeks, but were statistically significant at 26 weeks. These results quite convincingly demonstrate that, compared with the control group, BTW is firstly achieving better results in placing participants, and better results in terms of sustained employment.

Table 5: Outcome conversion rates by demographic characteristics, BTW and control cohorts (relative to overall cohort)

Characteristic	Bridge to Work			Control		
<i>Outcome milestone</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>	<i>12 weeks</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>	<i>4 weeks</i>	<i>12 weeks</i>	<i>26 weeks</i>
<b>Caseload (n=77)</b>	43%	35%	25%	23%	18%	6%
<b>Female (n=46)</b>	43%	39%	24%	24%	24%	7%
<b>CALD (n=42)</b>	36%	31%	19%	29%	5%	3%
<b>Disability (n=39)</b>	33%	23%	21%	5%	5%	3%
<b>Mature age (n=31)</b>	35%	32%	29%	19%	13%	10%
<b>Caring (n=31)</b>	48%	42%	19%	26%	26%	10%

Furthermore, BTW participants on average achieved a placement in less than half the time as participants in the control group (12 weeks compared with 26 weeks).



*“Gavin helped me restructure my CV and helped with my cover letter. He corrected things and improved things, like making things stand out, my experience and things like that. When I was applying for jobs as a teacher I was using the same kind of resume for teaching as I was using for customer care. Gavin showed me how to change things around and emphasise different things according to what kind of job I was applying for.”*

Of the 21 placed participants whose working hours were recorded, two were working 38-40 hours per week, 15 were working 20-30 hours per week and four were working less than 15 hours per week (Table 6). Participants' capacity to work hours are not stated, and the number of hours participants wanted to work was not consistently recorded, so it is difficult to know whether they were satisfied with the hours they were working or whether in fact they wanted more hours.

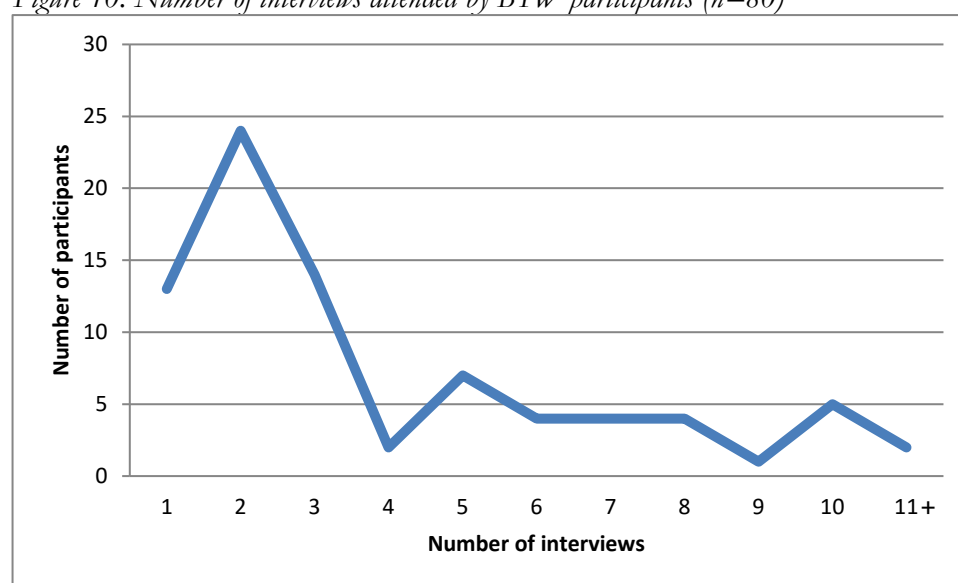
Table 6: Placed participants hours working, BTW, July 2018-Sept 2019

Hours working	Number of participants
40	1
38	1
30	10
25	1
20	4
15	2
8	2
Not stated	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

### 3.2 Engagement with the labour market

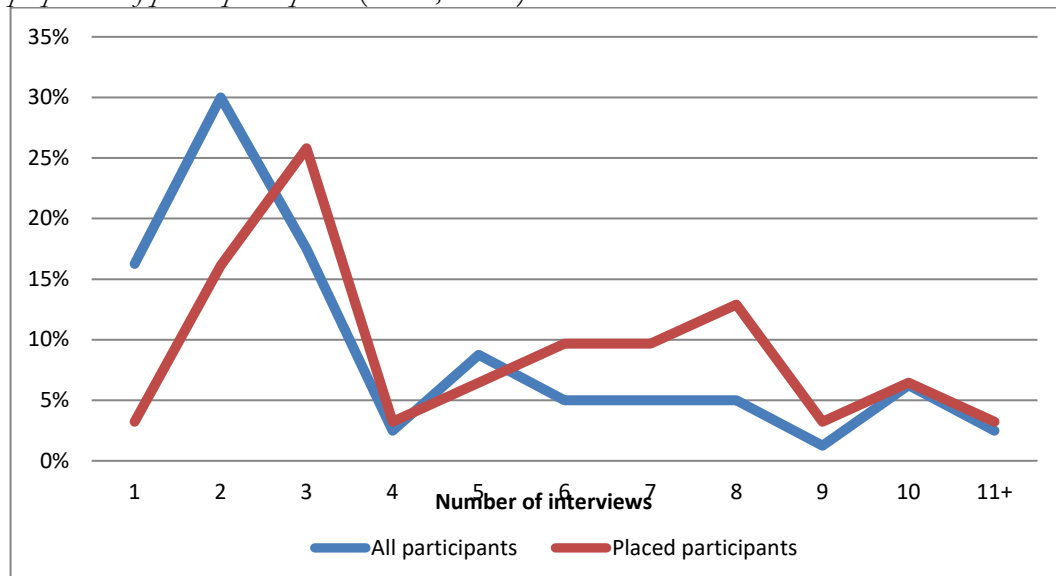
Participants in the program attended between one and 23 interviews. Nearly half (46%) of the participants attended 1-2 interviews (Figure 10). As might be expected, those who achieved a placement generally attended a greater number of interviews (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Number of interviews attended by BTW participants (n=80)



Interviews with participants revealed that some participants had applied for up to 80 jobs during their time in the program.

Figure 11: Number of interviews attended – proportion of all BTW participants compared with proportion of placed participants (n=80, n=31)



### 3.3 Sense of wellbeing and self-agency

Feedback from exit surveys and participant interviews revealed a high level of satisfaction with the program. One of the key personal outcomes of participating in the program has been increased confidence.

Exiting participants were asked how strongly they agreed/disagreed with the following statements:

- *The personalized support and more frequent contact of Gavin gave you confidence to reach your employment goals* – 19 out of 20 agreed/strongly agreed.
- *Gavin helped you feel more confident of the types of jobs you could apply for* – 20 out of 20 agreed/strongly agreed.
- *Gavin has helped me in a way that I felt that made me feel they really believed in me and wanted to help me* – 20 out of 20 agreed/strongly agreed.

The exit survey also showed that at the end of the program, responding participants generally had a strong sense of self-agency, as suggested by their responses to the following statements:

*“I gained a lot of confidence. Gavin helped me to believe in myself. We went through possible interview questions. I can answer these questions now. He said: “You have the skills and if I were the interviewer I’d give you the job.” That really gave me confidence. It was one on one and that was really helpful. I felt that he wanted to help. This job has really changed my life and I’m really thankful.”*

*“Very, very, very helpful. To me especially when he rang me just before I was going to an interview and I was scared. He encouraged me and gave me confidence. He told me some of the possible questions they could ask.”*



- *In general, I think I can obtain outcomes that are important to me* – 18 out of 19 agreed/strongly agreed.
- *I believe I can succeed at most endeavours which I set my mind to* – 18 out of 19 agreed/strongly agreed.
- *I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks* – 17 out of 19 agreed/strongly agreed.
- *Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well* – 15 out of 19 agreed/strongly agreed.

The survey also suggested that at the end of the program, responding participants were quite resilient, with 14 out of 19 saying they agreed/strongly agreed with the statement, *Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.*

In-depth interviews with participants revealed a high level of satisfaction with the program and supported these findings. Almost all those interviewed said their confidence had improved as a result of participating in the program, and for some this had been instrumental in them finding work.

Participants identified a number of ways in which BTW had helped them:

- Improved their understanding about how to apply for jobs and present themselves at interview
- Developed a professional and effective resume and cover letters
- Identified skills, and transferability of skills
- Registered them on jobsearch websites such as Seek
- Developed interview techniques through role play
- Kept participants motivated and helped them to believe in themselves.

The participants identified a number of features that sets BTW apart from other employment programs, in their experience:

- The fact that the ESC is willing to come to them, which is particularly appreciated by participants who have mobility difficulties or who do not drive.
- The ESC's willingness to spend the time and work with them on things like rewriting their resume, showing them how to apply for jobs online, practicing

*"Bridge to Work is not compulsory. It's face to face and very helpful. Centerlink just stick you on a computer and don't help you"*

*"Gavin gives me encouragement and talking about things. I lose hope. Most of the time I feel what's the point in applying when they don't answer. I had a few interviews and I had to cancel classes. It cost so much money, and I've been unsuccessful. He's been encouraging. He's really good at listening to me."*

*"He tries very hard and he's willing to come to you and help you out. He's been very helpful because I haven't got stable employment and he can come to my place between shifts."*

*"I gained a lot of confidence. Gavin helped me to believe in myself. We went through possible interview questions. I can answer these questions now. He said: 'You have the skills and if I were the interviewer I'd give you the job.' That really gave me confidence. It was one on one and that was really helpful. I felt that he wanted to help. This job has really changed my life and I'm really thankful to him"*





interview techniques, and talking through issues that might be limiting their job search or employability.

*"[My job search agency] won't help you with a resume, or a cover letter, and applying for jobs."*

*"[BTW] really very useful because I really didn't have any idea about how to prepare myself for an interview. I didn't know the terms and conditions in this country."*

*"In terms of my psychology, BTW has given me confidence. I was about to give up. Gavin encouraged me to keep looking and told me it was normal to face setbacks."*

- The program is viewed as being far more supportive and genuinely interested in helping participants, compared with Centrelink or other job search agencies:

*"I was with Centrelink but they weren't that helpful. They just wanted me to apply for any job and the relationship wasn't personal."*

- The personal nature of the program and the encouragement they received from the ESC:

*"He's keen to see us entering employment. He's bolstered my confidence by reassuring me that I was employable after I worked for someone who told me I wasn't employable."*

*"He understood the direction I wanted to go in and he researched roles that might fit me. It is good to have someone there to support me. It was a personal process."*

- The advocacy role of the ESC:

*"I got a contract with Lush Handmade Cosmetics and they trained me. Gavin met with them and talked to them about giving me a permanent position and they gave me an interview last week, and now I'm just waiting".*

- The rent freeze is also a drawcard for some:

*"I thought it would be good to have extra support. Also the six month rent freeze was very appealing because it would help me get on top of my finances".*

*"I learnt a lot about how to write and apply online. I wasn't having a lot of luck and I wasn't been asked in for an interview. Then through his help I got a three month contract job in a company making handmade cosmetics."*

*"There was a lot of understanding. I felt reassured and I was being helped. With other organisations, like Centrelink, it comes across as a punitive system. They want you to get out of there. You have to get a job doing anything even though you are not interested in it."*

*"They actually helped get me a job. Centrelink, they don't really care, or I've been ridiculed because they say I'm not trying hard enough".*

*"Bridge to Work is quite different. Centrelink says I have to apply for every job, not what I want to do. They don't help you with a cover letter or anything."*

**Case study: Linda**

Linda, 57, had been looking for work for two years after graduating with a Diploma of Counselling. During this time she had some casual work with a community organisation, but was looking for full time work as a counsellor or support worker.

She heard about BTW through Bridge Housing's quarterly newsletter. She felt her job search agency wasn't really helping her to get a job, so she was looking for an alternative. *"I was lacking a lot of self confidence and I needed to tailor my resume to fit various positions. I wanted someone to help with my CV and cover letter, as well as discussing the interview process."*

At her initial assessment, Gavin identified two key barriers: not having a drivers license or vehicle and lack of confidence. He identified that Linda would benefit from interview coaching and close mentoring during her job search.

*"We set out what positions I'd be looking for and I showed him my resume and he helped me highlight my skills and education experience. I then started looking for jobs. It made a difference in that I was encouraged to look into positions that I thought I wasn't qualified for. Normally I would have skipped over them. In the last eight weeks I've applied for 20 positions and easily half of those I would have skipped over."*

Linda had five face-to-face sessions, when they discussed strategies such as undertaking an administration skills course (and seeking financial support from MTC for this), revamped her resume, developed and refined cover letters, and practised interview techniques.

*"I've found the sessions to be good. They have definitely helped a lot with my self-confidence. I was reassured because I was able to discuss with someone about my anxiety about the interview process. We did mock interviews, like Gavin would say: 'What would you say if you were asked this, or that...'. It's a supportive program."*

*"I'm getting call backs and I'm being contacted for positions that I wouldn't have applied for before. I've had one interview, but I haven't heard back yet. I have another interview next week and I had another organisation interested in me but I wasn't a good fit. I didn't quite have the skills that they wanted."*

A few weeks after this interview, Linda was offered a permanent position with a disability support service, which she accepted and is now working full time. The ESC reports that she is doing very well in her role and has been given additional responsibilities as a Support Specialist.

Six months on, Linda is still in the same job and said she was still enjoying it. She didn't think she needed any more support, but she really appreciated the help that she had been given.

*"I would recommend BTW to anyone. I've got a job that I like! I feel settled in my job. And I've got a lot more confidence now too."*

**Case study: Karleen**

Karleen is 58 years old and lives in Glebe. She had not worked for four years, apart from one or two hours per week. She received a letter through the post informing her of the program.

*“Initially I thought I’d do it because I wanted to improve my resume and get my confidence back. I’m in my late 50s and I thought age is against you at my age. I didn’t have a lot of confidence.”*

*“I felt very confident after a few meetings with Gavin. It improved my wellbeing and I felt that I could get back into the workforce. I felt that there was something out there for me, despite my age.”*

During the program she met Gavin several times either at Bridge Housing or a local café. He called her regularly, especially in the first month.

She thought the program was ‘really good’ and ‘really helpful’ and was very important for mature-aged people who wanted to get back into the workforce. She found that it differed from other agencies in that it was much more personalised, more relaxed, and it focused on getting her a job she wanted. “I wanted to get back into long term employment, so we focused on that.”

She found the sessions very helpful in all regards, but especially when it came to building up her confidence.

*“It’s a wonderful program and it’s great that it’s part of housing. People will be more comfortable going to Bridge to Work because they’re already dealing with Bridge Housing. It’s not so daunting. They encourage you. They listen.”*

Karleen applied for two jobs whilst in the program, one with Bridge to Work, and one with Tribal Warrior. She was offered both. Since January 2019 she has worked 25 hours per week with the Aboriginal tourism and training company Tribal Warrior, and she also mentors youth at the organisation. She expects to work more hours as its education program expands.

Working with Tribal Warrior has given her even more confidence, and she has taken up art once again. She has created a large installation and story-telling program which has been installed for four weeks at the Australian Museum. It is aimed at educating children about recycling. It’s a paid commitment.

*“The program uplifted me. I now wake up every day knowing I’ve got something to do. I’m also overwhelmed that I managed to get an installation into the Australian Museum and I’ve decided to do a lot more installations using recycled materials and tell the story about how waste impacts on nature.”*

When we caught up with Karleen six months later, she was still working for Tribal Warrior and was using some of her own art work in its education program. She said that she was thriving in her role and loved her job.

Karleen has been in regular contact with Gavin by phone, and Gavin has also visited the organisation. Once, when she and several other staff members were having difficulties with a new boss, Gavin contacted her to give her some encouragement.

*“He gave me some really good advice and encouraged me to persevere, which was really helpful. He said he was always there to help me and I really appreciated that.”*

**Case study: Lance**

Lance, 32 had been looking for work for about 18 months when he registered with BTW in November 2018. He was registered with an employment agency and was looking for part time or permanent work in the retail or music industries, and holds VET qualifications in both these fields. He had some limitations that made finding work challenging, including lack of a driver's license, lack of confidence, health and presentation issues, and unavailability on certain days of the week.

Lance found out about BTW on the Bridge Housing website and was assessed in September 2018. *"I needed help, with everything, like my CV and applying for jobs".*

Lance met with Gavin more than 15 times during his time with BTW. Together they overhauled his resume, signed up to online job sites, developed a strategy of direct marketing to retail businesses, and preparation for and presentation skills at interviews.

*"Gavin's good. He's very helpful. We always get a lot done every appointment. He gives me interview tips. He helps with job searching. He helps me find jobs that comply with my skills and experience."*

Lance applied for many jobs and attended more than 20 interviews. There were times during the process where he has felt disheartened and frustrated about his lack of success, but also supported by Gavin to keep going. At the start of this year he underwent dental surgery to fix his teeth, which he felt could help to improve his confidence and presentation. Lance and Gavin also spent considerable time working on interview role plays to help improve his interview skills, in particular his ability to articulate his skills and strengths. Gavin has also met with Lance's employment consultant to discuss ways they could collaborate to help him.

In February 2019 he was successful in getting a job with a charity, but was let go after two days, reportedly because he hadn't met sales quotas. Although dismayed at this, Lance continued in BTW and applied for more jobs.

*"I've got more confidence. I think I will get a job, but before I didn't have any confidence that I would. I'm getting more done. Last year I had 20 interviews. The more you do the better you get."*

*"Just having someone there to support you. [My job search agency] doesn't do a lot to help me. Gavin covers a lot. It's more personal, one-on-one. That makes me feel more than just a number, like he really wants to help me get a job that I want."*

In August 2019 he got a job in telesales, which lasted about eight weeks. It was a full time position, although he had been told that the job (alongside similar roles for other people) would be terminated before the Christmas school holiday period. He had been told that he would be re-employed when the school year restarted.

*"I've spoken to Gavin at least twice since getting the job: what I've been doing and how it's been going. It's good to know I've got support if something goes wrong. I will keep in contact with Gavin. I'm staying in this job."*

Lance said he would definitely recommend BTW to others.

*"Having that something extra really helped. It gives you more motivation."*

### 3.4 Key learnings from the pilot

#### **Embedded nature of the program**

An important feature of program design was to embed the ESC role within the housing organisation. This proved to be very advantageous. A major source of referrals is housing managers and being seamlessly embedded at Bridge Housing has provided the ESC with a ‘foot in the door’ with people who otherwise may not engage with an employment service. The co-location was convenient to some who could meet with their housing manager or pay rent as well as meet with the BTW ESC.

#### **The ESC role**

Much was learned about the ESC role, which requires someone with a number of personal and professional attributes, including:

- Experience in working with vulnerable people and employment services
- Empathy and listening skills
- Life experience; experience of ups and downs in life e.g. unemployment
- Flexibility to be led by the participant’s needs
- An understanding of, and ability to work with, employer networks.

#### **Effective case management**

A number of lessons were learned about what works in terms of providing effective intensive case management, including effective ways of engaging with participants, recording data and reporting.

An important lesson was learned about effective caseload size, namely that there is a maximum caseload, beyond which quality and effectiveness appears to suffer.

It is worth noting that other intensive case management employment programs have caseload caps. For example, Neami National has set a per-case manager cap at 10 while Jobactive intensive case management is set at 35. The ESC, Bridge Housing and CoAct agreed that a maximum caseload of 20-25 at any one time allows the ESC to maintain intensive case management. They also agreed that the initial KPI of 5 new referrals per month was set too high and that a target of 2-3 new referrals per month would be more realistic.

It was also suggested by staff that creating a waitlist for the program could be advantageous, that a place on the program would start to be seen as something valuable by prospective participants.

Towards the end of the pilot phase, Bridge Housing and CoAct decided to shift post placement support to CoAct’s Post Placement Support (PPS) team. This was to relieve some pressure on the ESC and to enhance consistency of support. Under the

new arrangements, the first three post-placement phone calls are made by the ESC, and then the PPS team take over until 26 weeks post-placement. This aspect of the program has not yet been tested so its effectiveness cannot yet be determined.

#### **Employer partnerships**

During the pilot limited progress was made in developing employer partnerships (e.g. Tribal Warrior) who employed a BTW participant and expressed some interest in a partnership for future participants. This is an aspect of the program that could be further developed during the next phase of the program.

#### **Data collection and management**

Significant improvements to data collection and management systems were made during the pilot, including:

- Merging three separate data documents into one Excel spreadsheet that includes a program dashboard so that program status can be seen at a glance.
- Developing a template for the ESC to use for client notes, replacing a free-form Word format. The move was aimed at developing greater consistency in the notes and to ensure key observations were being included.
- Addition of a four week outcome measure, bringing BTW in line with CoAct and Jobactive measures.
- Automation of participant surveys, so that a link to the online surveys are sent by SMS to participants at key points (entry, mid-point, exit).

### **3.5 Suggested improvements**

The following improvements are proposed for the next phase of the program:

- Set a caseload cap at 25 participants.
- Reduce the monthly new referral target to three.
- As a consequence of the caseload and referral cap, establish and manage a waitlist for the program.
- Further develop relationships with employers, with the aim of fostering employment partnerships which would give BTW participants a ‘foot in the door’ with partner employers..
- Seek access to brokerage/discretionary funds to enable participants to purchase things that will assist them to get a job, e.g. one-off training/certificates, interview clothes.
- Conduct a post-implementation review of new aspects being introduced to the program e.g. post placement support by the PPS team, automation of participant surveys.
- Improve outcome measures and/or collection of data to better evaluate:



- Sustained placements – a target could be set for 26 week outcomes
- Working hours wanted/required – document the hours participants want or need consistently
- Informal networks
- Family/household engagement
- Housing stability
- Align BTW outcome measurement intervals with CoAct and Jobactive measurement intervals, i.e four, 12 and 26 weeks (rather than four, 13 and 26 weeks).
- Follow up with participants 12-18 months after placement in order to gauge longer term outcomes, i.e. employment stability, housing security and income.

### 3.6 Conclusion

On multiple measures, the BTW pilot has been a great success. The program achieved the employment targets of 80 engagements, and came close to achieving the target of 40 placements (37 placements were achieved). But the remarkable achievements of the program have been its success in placing some traditionally hard-to-place candidates such as people with a disability, and in placing people in employment that is sustained over time. The evidence suggests that the intensive case management approach used by BTW is achieving better results than a mainstream employment service when it comes to placing people in jobs in a timely way, and keeping them there

There are a number of key differences between BTW and a mainstream approach, the main one being the emphasis on the human side of job seeking by often vulnerable or disadvantaged people. The strength of BTW is in not being a one-size-fits-all model: each participant is treated as an individual and service delivery is participant-led, needs-based and flexible. The model also recognises that getting a job doesn't necessarily stop at the point of placement; that sometimes people's trajectories are not straightforward, that things don't always work out, and that they may need continued support to find another job or to keep the job they have.

As BTW moves into the next phase of implementation, some adjustments are advisable and have the potential to further strengthen the model.

## APPENDIX A – SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

*Table A1: Participants by highest level of education achieved, Jun 2018-Oct 2019*

Highest level of education	Number	%
Year 10	7	9%
Year 12	9	11%
Certificate III or IV	31	39%
Diploma/Graduate Diploma	17	21%
Bachelor Degree	13	16%
Masters Degree	2	3%
Unknown	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table A2: Placement status of participants as at 29 October 2019*

Status	Number	%
Placed	31	39%
Returned to full time study	7	9%
Interviewing	8	10%
Not placed (exited)	30	37%
Not placed (active)	4	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table A3: Number of interviews attended, BTW participants*

	All participants		Placed participants	
Number of interviews	Number of participants	%	Number of participants	%
1	13	16%	1	3%
2	24	30%	5	16%
3	14	18%	8	26%
4	2	3%	1	3%
5	7	9%	2	6%
6	4	5%	3	10%
7	4	5%	3	10%
8	4	5%	4	13%
9	1	1%	1	3%
10	5	6%	2	6%
14	1	1%	-	-
23	1	1%	1	3%
	80	100%	31	100%



*Table A4: Significance tests*

Subgroup	Week	z-score	Significance level	Statistically significant?
<b>Total cohort</b>	4	2.7	0.007	yes
	12	2.4	0.015	yes
	26	3.1	0.002	yes
<b>Disability</b>	4	3.4	0.001	yes
	12	2.4	0.018	yes
	26	2.5	0.011	yes
<b>Female</b>	4	2.1	0.037	yes
	12	1.57	0.117	no
	26	2.3	0.02	yes
<b>CALD</b>	4	0.69	0.492	no
	12	3.3	0.001	yes
	26	2.4	0.015	yes
<b>Mature</b>	4	1.4	0.149	no
	12	1.8	0.066	no
	26	1.9	0.052	no
<b>Caring</b>	4	1.8	0.065	no
	12	1.4	0.177	no
	26	1	0.31	

Table A15: Cohort analysis: Bridge to Work

	Total cohort	Placed/returned to study	Placed		Weeks to place	Returned to study		4 week outcome		12 week outcome		26 week outcome		
	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Caseload	77	38	49%	28	36%	12	10	13%	33	87%	27	71%	19	50%
Female	46	23	50%	16	35%	10	7	15%	20	87%	18	78%	11	48%
CALD	42	18	43%	12	29%	10	6	14%	15	83%	13	72%	8	44%
Indigenous	3	2	67%	2	67%	6	0	0%	2	100%	2	100%	2	100%
Disability	39	17	44%	10	26%	12	7	18%	13	76%	9	53%	8	47%
Mature age	31	14	45%	9	29%	10	5	16%	11	79%	10	71%	9	64%
ESL	6	4	67%	2	33%	3	2	33%	4	100%	3	75%	2	50%
Caring	31	16	52%	11	35%	11	5	16%	15	94%	13	81%	6	38%
Year 10	7	4	57%	3	43%	6	1	14%	3	75%	4	100%	4	100%

Table A16: Cohort analysis: Control group

	Total cohort	Placed		Weeks to place	4 week outcome		12 week outcome		26 week outcome	
		Number	%		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Caseload	77	19	25%	26	18	95%	14	74%	5	26%
Female	46	11	24%	35	11	100%	11	100%	3	27%
CALD	42	12	29%	22	12	100%	11	92%	5	42%
Indigenous	3	2	67%	5	2	100%	1	50%	0	0%
Disability	39	6	15%	9	2	33%	2	33%	1	17%
Mature age	31	7	23%	17	6	86%	4	57%	3	43%
ESL	6	1	17%	39	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Caring	31	8	26%	38	8	100%	8	100%	3	38%
Year 10	17	4	24%	29	2	50%	2	50%	1	25%

Table A7: Exit survey responses

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Gavin helped you to identify your goals and gave you a clear plan to reach your employment goals	13	5	1	0	0	19
The personalized support and more frequent contact of Gavin gave you confidence to reach your employment goals	16	3	1	0	0	20
Gavin helped you feel more confident of the types of jobs you could apply for	14	6	0	0	0	20
BTW/Gavin has helped me in a way that I felt that made me feel they really believed in me and wanted to help me	16	4	0	0	0	20
When thinking about the support you had received prior to Bridge to Work, do you feel the support provided by the Gavin gave you more confidence to reach your employment goals?	7	1	0	0	0	8
Gavin referred me to jobs I really wanted	8	8	3	0	0	19
Gavin has helped me to get useful training	9	4	6	0	0	19
I feel able to achieve most of the goals that I have set myself	8	10	0	1	0	19
When facing difficult tasks, I am certain I will accomplish them	7	9	1	0	0	19
In general, I think I can obtain outcomes that are important to me	8	10	1	0	0	19
I believe I can succeed at most endeavours which I set my mind to	7	11	0	1	0	19
I am able to successfully overcome many challenges	8	9	2	0	0	19
I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks	7	10	2	0	0	19
Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well	6	9	3	1	0	19
Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well	5	9	3	2	0	19