



Empowering Under-represented Learners in VET: Strategic Frameworks for Addressing Barriers, Fostering Belonging and Ensuring Post-Completion Success

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Victorian Skills Authority Fellowship, 2024

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01

Acknowledgements

The Awarding Bodies

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Sponsor - the Victorian Skills Authority

The Victorian Skills Authority works in partnership with the International Specialised Skills Institute by funding the VET International Practitioner Fellowships. The Fellowship program focuses on developing opportunities within the VET sector to assist in building an Education State in Victoria that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. In addition, the program is funded to support the priorities of Skills First, including developing capacity and capability, innovative training practices and increasing teacher quality within the VET sector as well as building industry capability and developing Victoria's current and future workforce.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI) and the Victorian Skill Authority (VSA) for their sponsorship of activities and support during the planning and execution of my fellowship.

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I am excited to share my findings and make an impact for learners, especially those who may think post compulsory schooling is not for them.



Figure 1. Fellow at ISSI Fellowship presentation event

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Executive Summary of Fellowship

Successful progression by learners from under-represented groups in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is of significant concern for VET providers. This is evident through the inclusion of recommendations within key stakeholder plans such as the Victorian Skills Plan (2022), the Macklin review (2021) and the Firth review of Senior Secondary Certificates (2020), as well as the introduction and continued expansion of initiatives like Free-TAFE.

The ability of educational providers to respond to the specific and changing needs of learners is critical to appropriately address the current and predicted trends of learners entering the VET sector with low prior educational attainment levels and increased complex needs impacting their ability to engage in traditional VET training.

Under-represented students have a 7.25% lower rate of completion in VET study than those who do not identify from an under-represented cohort and groups such as Indigenous and remote learners are 10% less likely to complete their chosen course of study (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2023). Low completion and success rates of learners from under-represented cohorts demonstrates that the VET sector and TAFE providers need to innovate in how we attract, retain and successfully progress learners in their study and onto further education and employment.

Who are under-represented learners?

For the purposes of the fellowship, evaluation of research and initiatives implemented post travel, under-represented learners are defined as individuals who belong to cohorts that have historically been excluded or marginalised within educational systems experiencing complex needs. These cohorts may include, but are not limited to, early school leavers including students seeking exemption from secondary school, people in poverty, racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation students engaging in VET, parent learners or with caring responsibilities, learners in or experience of out of home care.

Under-represented learners face an intersectionality of barriers to access, retention and success in education, necessitating targeted support and inclusive delivery design to ensure equitable opportunities for learning and achievement.

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a concept originally developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, the unique impact of intersectionality is becoming evident within the education context as learners face complex and multiple barriers.

Intersectionality is

**“a way of thinking about identity
and its relationship to power.”**

**(“Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit -
UN Women”)**

Kimberlé Crenshaw, 2015



Figure 2. Intersectionality wheel

Figure 1 the Intersectionality wheel demonstrates how the unique aspects of an individual's identity such as age, education level or disability can result in discrimination underpinned by systems and structures within our society that results in further exclusion and marginalisation.

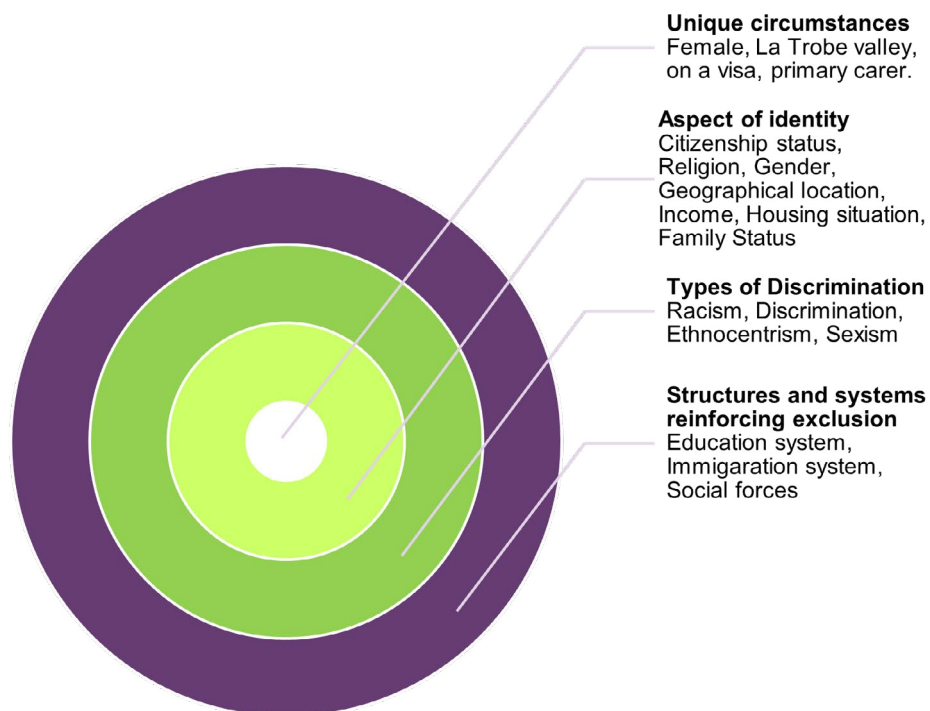
To bring the concept of intersectionality to life, a participant in non-accredited training was asked how their unique circumstances impact on their ability to engage in education and training. This participant described the concept of intersectionality for them as

“The people and their processes that keep putting barriers in front of me so I can’t change my situation for myself and my family.

It’s not being able to meet the costs of studying and the financial stress this causes within my family. I then can’t attend the course as it’s held at times my younger children are home, there are cultural expectations in my family that I am the primary carer and if I put them [children] in care that’s more cost and stress to my family.

I tried to study but I felt I didn’t belong, the cost and stress it put on me and my family was too much.”

Applying the unique circumstances in the example to the Intersectionality wheel visually represents intersectionality for this individual as outlined below.



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Fellowship Learnings

To inform fellowship learnings the following research activities were undertaken.

Conference attendance

Attendance at the NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education Conference and preconference workshops. Preconference workshops were facilitated by the Community Colleges Institute focusing specifically on the Community College sector. The NASPA conference theme for 2024 was Disrupt, Innovate and Transform: Community Colleges and the Future of Higher Education.

Final NASPA findings:

- The impact on learner engagement and progression a sense of belonging can have.
- Parent students as an under-represented cohort.
- The need for further disaggregated data to inform decision making for learners from under-represented cohorts.
- Being intentional with support provisions including across the academic year or course lifespan for learners.
- The positive impact of mentoring programs on learner success, academic progression and the education provider and wider community.
- The positive impact on learner progression of post completion programs and workshops.



Figure 3. NASPA conference Seattle March 2024



Figure 4. Fellow volunteering at NASPA conference

Provider visits

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
Northwest vista College	Lisa Black, Manager Student Advocacy Centre and team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty Informed practice. Service responses designed through the multi layered impact of poverty. Basic needs addressed via food bank on campus, clothes store, emergency needs. Sensory space – anxiety reducing tools, space students can access to decompress. Music on entry, music in bathrooms, to ground students. Intake assessment biopsychosocial model of assessment of need. Expanding further for referral to mental health services. Collaborative mental health and basic need service provision.
	Dr Russell Frohardt, Dean Academic Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of higher education. Discussed differences in our educational contexts 2 year > 4 year and pathways. Highlighted contextualised Literacy and Numeracy programs within Victorian VET sector.
St Phillips College	Associate Director Varryron Young, Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of belonging. Weekly events to build consistency. Student have access to volunteering opportunities to gain credit towards course – experiential credit. 4 major events per year. Build activities through area into the student life cycle. Have welcoming activities, not orientation type weeks, where staff will welcome students, show them to classrooms, offer cocoa and make them feel welcome. Engagement from connected high school to St Phillips.

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
Palo Alto College	<p>Carmen Velasquez-Avila, Director Student Advocacy</p> <p>Leticia Inocencio, Senior Coordinator Student Success</p> <p>Melissa Mejia, Counselling Service</p> <p>Kiana Pina, LeadHERs Program</p> <p>Isabel Cavazos, Ray Ellison Family Centre</p> <p>Marilyn Hernandez, Administrative Services Specialist</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing basic needs of students through Student Advocacy Centre programs, on-campus community partners and scholarships. • Student engagement in programs those in need of assistance and those volunteering. • In house counselling services and wellness, expanded services through collaboration with external networks. • LeadHERs program. • Communities in Schools program.
Bow Valley Community College	<p>Rebecca Comer, Equity and Diversity Inclusion Strategist</p> <p>Darany Touch, Equity Diversity Inclusion Advisor</p> <p>Nyo Malek, Administrative Assistant</p> <p>Janalee Morris, Manager Learner Equity Diversity & Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support network for parent students (online). • Benefits of student mentoring and post completion support. • Volunteer opportunities – co curricular record volunteering on campus. • Mindfulness moments workshops mindfulness as the mental health strategy. • Plain English policies • Move to an Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) focus from international students. • Curriculum design. • Accommodations for protected attributes under our respective legislation. • Being intentional. • Data informed practice.

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
	Keestin O'Dell, Iniikokaan Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports for students and engagement barriers not dissimilar to Victorian VET sector. • Elder involvement through on campus activities. • High Pressure / Low pressure engagement activities where student must be fully involved, actions asked of them or lower more passive activities for engagement such as information giving, static displays. • Indigenous student alliance – mission statement and students lead activities. • Strategic planning <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reducing barriers including pre study program. 2. Sense of community. 3. Provide cultural opportunities. 4. Skill development outside of the classroom – leadership for example. • Supports for recovery and addiction. • Indigenous design consultant who facilitates workshops and develops Indigenous course content. • Culture through drum song, specific graduation ceremony.
University of Calgary	Brenda McDermott, Senior Manager Student Accessibility Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar support structures for students with a disability. • Discussed documentation requirements, student trends, concept of academic ableism.
	Fouzia Usman, Academic Director of Equity and Inclusion, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop series for staff topics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disability accessibility. 2. Anti racism. 3. Intersectionality. • Inclusive cluster employment strategy each area 3 hires from defined equity groups. • Discussed the concept of Black Flourishing. • Teaching awards include EDI award.

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
	Jaclyn Carter, Educational Development Consultant, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal templates for program review, redesign, new programs and ceasing a program. • Curriculum review every 5 to 7 years. Program area develop a working group with Taylor Institute support. • Build guiding questions, review data in relation to engagement, retention and outcomes for students, assessment strategies and teaching and learning to inform review. • Course reviews are made public.
	Dr Sarah Eaton, Director Office of Equity, Inclusion and Diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for Equity Pathways. • Under-represented student in conduct processes, factors increasing representation such policies and educational provider structures. • Initiatives include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First in family admissions processes. 2. Attend on campus prior to commencing. 3. Application fee waived.
	Norma Jeremich'ca Gresl' and Gerald Ratt, Office of Indigenous Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous strategy development process and implementation. • Four components: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ways of Knowing (teaching, learning and research). 2. Ways of Doing (policies, procedures and practices). 3. Ways of Connecting (relationships, partnerships, connections to land and place). 4. Ways of Being (campus identity, inclusivity, learnership and engagement).

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)	John Partington, Director Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New role driving EDI at SAIT, implementing a culture.
	Jess Nicol, James Beres and Julie Mooney, SAIT Centre for Academic Development and Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decolonising and indigenisation of teaching and learning materials. Work with Faculty staff to develop teaching resources, quality assurance and EDI in classroom.
	Audrey Quitayen, Student Engagement Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Peer mentoring. Student Leadership. English Conversation Partners program. Strong link to positive impact of creating a sense of belonging and post completion success examples.
	Gina Marandola, Julie Egers, Emma Rodgers Student Development and Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselling services, health promotion activities, information for students. SAIT implement health promotion initiatives focusing on student health and wellbeing and the impact on study and learning.
	Steve Kootenay-Jobin, Natoysopoyiis Resource Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through the Natoysopoyiis provide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Career and academic support. Financial aid and housing support. Culture on campus including Elders in residence. Events and networks for students. Orientation programs specifically for students engaged in wider qualifications. Specific graduation ceremony to celebrate student success and culture.

Institute	Meeting with	Key concepts
Vancouver Community College (VCC)	Tanny Marks, Arbiter of Student Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arbiter role is to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Working directly with students regarding rights and aid in academic issues / complaints. Impartial contact to unpack issues. Systemic work for VCC, policies and procedures review for fairness, advice to areas including policy committee.
	Beth Beeching, Program Head Accessible Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Career orientated programs to provide access to meaningful employment for students with a disability. Example hospitality tailored program with built in practical opportunities and work-based learning.
	Nigel Scott, Associate Director Student Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General discussion regarding disability practices in post compulsory school and legislative context.
Additional meeting British Columbia Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills	<p>Joanna White, Assistant Deputy Minister for Workforce Development and Skills Training</p> <p>Chelsea Chalifour, Executive Director, Labour Market Policy and Research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty reduction strategy – social development aim is to end poverty through employment. Future Skills Grant an example with strong uptake. The impact of student success on economic recovery. Demonstrated the impact strong Governmental support can have on post-compulsory schooling environment. Future of education stacking micro credential model, focused training on employer need. Similarities exist between sectors including transitioning industries across our regions. Further research post meeting included Future Skills Grant program Labour Inclusion Powell River project CanAssist – University of Victoria Innovation hub

This report synthesises research from fellowship activities into three key findings.

1. Addressing basic need of learners to assist in engagement with education and training.
2. Creating a sense of belonging for learners to connect to education.
3. Post completion success for employment and/or further education.

The report outlines the impact of key findings on the engagement and success of learners from under-represented cohorts and based on fellowship and wider research, outlines considerations for the VET sector including pilot programs, proposed frameworks and initiatives implemented post fellowship travel.

Impact opportunities

Innovating the VET sectors response to changing learner needs opens the opportunity of post compulsory schooling education and training for our communities. Polidano and Ryan (2016), reported the benefits of engagement and re-engagement in VET study can remain for an individual for up to five years. Education and training while improving educational and labour market outcomes has profound social benefits through improved wellbeing and health, reduced criminal behaviour and increased community participation (Deloitte Access Economics report, 2021).

Findings can influence approaches to supporting learners leading to decreasing withdrawals, increasing learner retention and satisfaction rates and effectively supporting Government Initiatives such as Free TAFE.

Strategies developed based on fellowship research have the impact opportunity to:

- Inform TAFE sector strategic planning and funding provided to Institutes to support the engagement of learners from under-represented cohorts.
- Evolve supports and collaborative responses to learner needs.
- Inform innovative practices, frameworks and models to address the changing needs of learners engaging in post compulsory schooling environments.

Considerations

The following considerations for VET providers and the sector are based on an evaluation of research and fellowship learnings.

- Disaggregate enrolled student data by characteristics that identify under-represented learner characteristics.
- Expand methods to capture student data to understand basic need via student surveys.

Example questions:

In the past two weeks have you experienced food insecurity?

In the past month has your study been impacted by work responsibilities, caring responsibilities or cultural obligations?

- Pre-training interviews that explore with prospective learners past educational experiences, established support networks and identify for individuals study readiness and strategies for success prior to commencement of courses.
- Co-design programs delivered in community settings and TAFE campuses.
- Guidance materials for educators to respond to behaviour exhibited due to unmet need in a supportive approach to maintain engagement with education.
- Peer mentoring and Leadership programs for students.
- Opportunities for learners to engage in peer-to-peer teaching moments including formal and informal skills.
- Ensure potential VET learners see themselves represented in student cohorts and staff.
- Decolonisation and Indigenisation of curriculum including classroom examples, assessments and learning activities that honour Indigenous ways of learning and teaching.
- Strengthening opportunities through Skills and Jobs Centre and inhouse TAFE services to offer workshops regarding skills for post completion success.
- Funding collaborative initiatives with relevant stakeholders such as employment services and relevant Government departments.
- Provide funded opportunities for mentoring in work practices.
- Develop bridging programs to aid learners to develop academic skills before starting their qualification including expanding the opportunities through funded Adult and Community Further Education (ACFE) pre-accredited programs offered by Learn Local providers in the State of Victoria.

04

Fellowship Background

Fellow biography

Fellow Shae McGregor has had a 20 plus year career in the TAFE and Higher Education sector. First coming into the VET sector in 2001 as a Disability Liaison Officer at Box Hill Institute of TAFE. From this beginning working directly with students Shae commenced a career and developed a passion for creating inclusive education opportunities. Seven years working at Monash University prior to a tree change in 2011, gave an opportunity to expand the focus and experience from students with a disability to broader equity cohorts and take on leadership roles.

Briefly leaving the VET sector in 2014 solidified that working within an education provider and facilitating access to education for learners from under-represented cohorts was a must for a career. Returning in 2016 as a trainer within the Certificate I Work Education at TAFE Gippsland and then wanting to do more to provide educational opportunities for under-represented learners across Gippsland, Shae took on leadership roles including Head of Department Transition and Learning Support and Manager of Student Support Services. Her current role in Course Transitions and Pathways provides the opportunity to develop pathways for under-represented learners and work with teaching teams to design qualifications that address learner needs. Never wanting to be far from equity, inclusion and diversity, Shae is involved in opportunities to collaborate and lead work with local community-based organisations to engage

individuals in education. This extensive experience working in direct service provision roles to leading teaching and support services led to Shae pursuing a Fellowship to continue to learn and develop best practice approaches to developing inclusive educational environments.

Fellowship aim

The aim of the fellowship was to research innovative approaches for learners from under-represented cohorts within the VET sector, with the focus to create targeted education design and delivery that supports the inclusion, increased participation and success of learners.

To ensure the environment and ability to implement best practices from research it was important to the Fellow that comparable international educational contexts to the Victorian VET sector were the subject of the research. Following consideration and review, the Community College sector within America and Canada was chosen. In addition to identifying a similar educational context, Colleges in San Antonio within the state of Texas, America and Calgary and Vancouver in Canada were identified as providers who were implementing innovative programs, delivery methods and structures to successfully support learners from under-represented cohorts different to that in the current Victorian VET sector.

Attendance at the NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education conference provided an additional opportunity to attend

workshops and connect with institutions from across America. Conference attendance was scheduled prior to College visits and gave the opportunity to gain a broad understanding of the current issues, trends and developments in support structures and innovations within the post compulsory schooling sector across America.

Following conversation during pre-travel online meetings with providers, a review of the relevant Government policies was conducted for the planned visit locations. During this review initiatives of the British Columbia Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills were found and an opportunity to speak with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Workforce Development and Skills Training was added to research activities.

Fellowship methodology

The Fellowship consisted of website reviews to locate relevant programs of interest, pre travel online meetings with key contacts to establish relationships and understand implemented programs. When attending Institutions one on one and team meetings were conducted, campus tours and the opportunity to be part of on campus activities, classes and present current and proposed practices. At all times the Fellow made their way to campus by public transport and allowed time to spend in shared spaces on campuses, this gave further opportunity for informal conversations with students as to their experiences at the College. The travel component of the fellowship was conducted over 4 weeks.



Figure 5. Southern Alberta Institute of Technology



Figure 6. Northwest Vista campus Alamo Colleges District



Figure 7. St Phillips campus Alamo Colleges District



Figure 8. Vancouver Community College

05

Fellowship Learnings and Findings

Fellowship activities have resulted in three key findings.

1. Addressing basic needs
2. Creating a sense of belonging
3. Post completion success

Finding 1 Addressing basic needs

A repeated concept in presentations at the NASPA conference and visits to Community Colleges was the priority of Community Colleges to address the basic needs of learners.

When defining basic needs the most notable representation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see figure 2). According to Maslow there are five categories of need. For us to be able to engage in the activities of life we must have our basic needs met. Unmet need can lead to physiological and health problems as well as feelings of anger, disappointment, hopelessness, loneliness and embarrassment which can all impact our behaviours, attitudes and ability to engage in activities required for daily living including education and training.

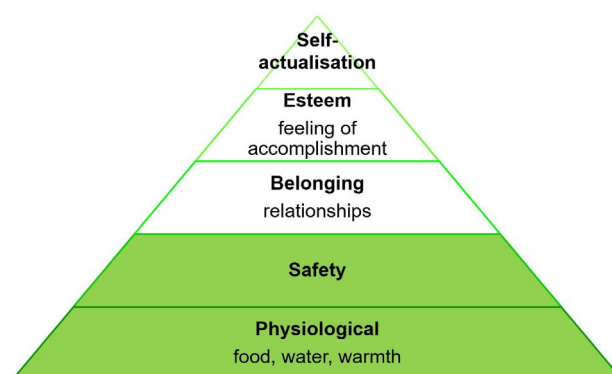


Figure 9. Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

“Everything comes after food, shelter and clothing even College”

Lisa Black

Director Student Advocacy and Resource
Centre Northwest Vista College

Addressing basic needs was observed during fellowship activities through.

Activities

- Grab and go food pantries and food banks on campus. Data provided by Palo Alto College advises minimal spend for these programs. For Grab and Go lunches 4,469 visits to the program were recorded for a 12-month period the total cost for the program over this time was \$9,065.66 (USD) equating to \$2 (USD) per lunch. The Fellow notes food costs between countries and exchange rates need to be considered in this estimation of cost for this program.
- Access to personal hygiene products on campus including family needs.
- Clothing stores with options for students and family.
- Collaborations with local services for housing assistance and cost of living.

Practices / Policies

- Grants and scholarships. Including external grants to be used at any Government funded Educational Institution from the British Columbia Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation who have a poverty reduction strategy to end poverty through employment.
- Creation of a sense of safety through sensory spaces on campus and music in shared spaces including bathrooms. Northwest vista Advocacy centre demonstrated sensory practices which students reported greatly assisted them to respond to their needs for grounding and decompressing while on campus.



Figure 10. Example of Addressing Basic Need Northwest Vista College

Program to highlight

All Community College providers through their Advocacy centres, Student Development and Counselling services addressed basic need through access to financial assistance, food, clothing, essential items and counselling services.

A program to highlight is the health promotion focus through the Student Development and Counselling (SDC) at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). With a dedicated role of Student Wellness Promotion Specialist. The SDC offers campus wide wellness activities and workshops, classroom-based wellness workshops customised to learner groups such as managing stress, communication, sleep and resilience in the workplace or while on practicum. In addition to traditional workshops and activities the SDC has several online tools available via QR codes linking students to online self-help tools, Spotify playlists for motivational music, dedicated SAIT YouTube channel containing mindfulness videos

and practices. To further support the wellness work of the SDC, SAIT has a network of SAIT students employed through the Student Outreach and Wellness Leaders program.

Considerations

Within the Victorian VET Sector before we can address basic need, we must understand the needs of our students. This can be achieved through.

- Disaggregate enrolled student data by characteristics that identify under-represented learner characteristics.
- Expand methods to capture student data to understand basic need via student surveys.

Example questions:

In the past two weeks have you experienced food insecurity?

In the past month has your study been impacted by work responsibilities, caring responsibilities or cultural obligations?

- Pre-training interviews that explore with prospective learners past educational experiences, established support networks and identify for individuals study readiness and strategies for success prior to commencement of courses.
- Co-design programs delivered in community settings and TAFE campuses.
- Guidance materials for educators to respond to behaviour exhibited due to unmet need in a supportive approach to maintain engagement with education.

Finding 2 Creating a sense of belonging

A sense of belonging refers to the extent a person feels included, accepted, valued and supported. Our sense of belonging is often interwoven with our social identity. We are more likely to do better in environments where we feel connected, have relationships and feel seen, valued and heard.

Creating a sense of belonging relates to Maslow's hierarchy of needs regarding the psychological needs of belonging and esteem.

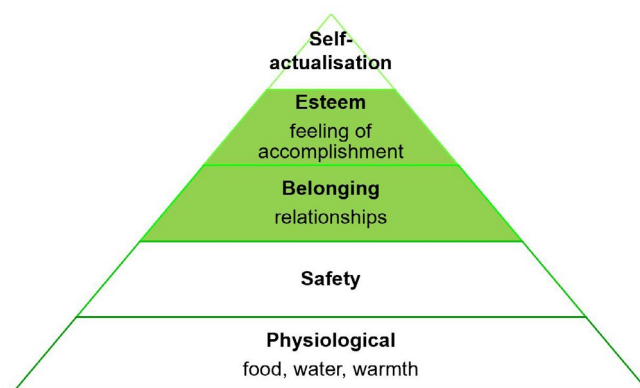


Figure 11. Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

Creating a sense of belonging was observed during fellowship activities through.

Activities

- Pre-study programs for prospective learners to build a sense of confidence in learning.
- Breakfast clubs to create connections for learners.
- Formal peer to peer learning opportunities.
- Leadership and mentoring programs for students.
- Volunteering opportunities within Student Advocacy Centre services.
- Opportunities for learners to engage in activities on campus to teach skills or information sharing with other learners to create an opportunity for connection on campus and to practice skills in public speaking.

- Culture on campus including First Nations culture with ceremony, smudging and college honour song.
- Opportunities for students to share their own culture through lunchtime sessions and presentations.
- Flexibility in student groups including an online group for students who are parents with restricted availability to attend on campus events during traditional hours.
- English conversation partner programs.
- The development of specific training modules for teaching staff including content of the principles of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and training modules regarding cultures, faith and the impact of intersectionality on education.
- Elders in residence.

Practices / Policies

- Decolonisation and Indigenisation of curriculum.
- Learning design practices that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and learning in classroom design.
- Inclusion within curriculum and program design, equity, diversity and inclusion information and principles.
- Promise of entry for selected courses at a foundation level from local and Community College connected High Schools.

These activities, practices and policies result in a higher rate of completion for students who engage in leadership programs. The ability to scale up support services through mobilisation of a student workforce engaged with their education provider. Institutions demonstrated co-design and program delivery based on lived experience through the evolution of participants who are now employed staff members facilitating and designing activities.

Program to highlight

LeadHERs is a leadership and mentoring program for female students at Palo Alto College in the Alamo Colleges District. Participants of the LeadHERs program participate in curricular and co-curricular activities and are paired with a Palo Alto staff member for mentoring during the program.

Activities and workshops participants engage in cover a broad range of topics including information sharing activities such as workshops exploring topics of domestic violence and self-defence, career development, wellness, scholarships and money management, self-care. The program consists of social activities such as program lunches, mindfulness activities and graduation events.

Students engage in the program for a full academic year and the staff mentor commitment is approximately 4 – 6 hours per month. The mentor commitment includes attending meetings, engaging in program activities and meeting individually with the mentee.

Completion rate data for students who engage in LeadHERs program is higher than student that do not. Demonstrating the program has a direct impact on successful academic achievement.

Considerations

- Peer mentoring and Leadership programs for students.
- Opportunities for learners to engage in peer-to-peer teaching moments including formal and informal skills.
- Ensure potential VET learners see themselves represented in student cohorts and staff.
- Decolonisation and Indigenisation of curriculum including classroom examples, assessments and building in opportunities to include activities that honour Indigenous ways of learning and teaching.



Figure 12. Fellow with staff from the Palo Alto S.H.A.R.E. Center



Figure 13. University of Calgary indigenous design from the Office of Indigenous Engagement

Finding 3 Post completion success

The top reason learners come to TAFE is to get a job.

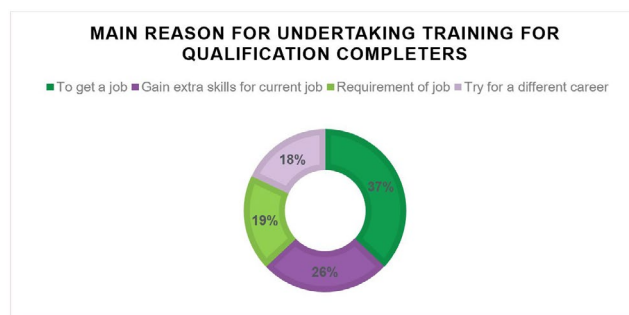


Figure 14. NCVER Student Outcomes Survey 2023

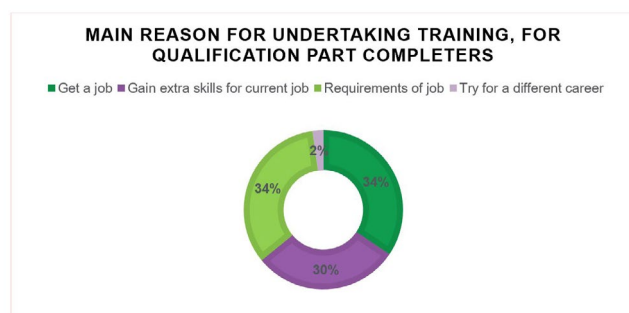


Figure 15. NCVER Student Outcomes Survey 2023 Main Reason for undertaking training, for part qualification completers.

For learners from under-represented cohorts, gaining employment post completion can be impacted by their individual circumstances.

From research with international providers, it is identified that learners from under-represented cohorts are less likely to.

- Access experiential learning opportunities as they are not aware of options available and if they are aware of programs the opportunity to engage can be impacted due to additional responsibilities such as caring, the need for paid employment and cultural obligations.
- Have the social capital to navigate career spaces successfully.
- Be in jobs that are future proof.

- Have role models actively engaged in education and employment from whom they can learn from and seek advice.
- Have existing connections to assist with finding work placement or act as referees.
- Have skills and experiences that they can add to a resume. Under-represented learners are more likely to have extended time periods of inactivity in education and training due to leaving school early, leading to gaps in work or learning history which can be viewed negatively by potential employers.

Institutions supporting post completion success was observed during fellowship activities through.

Activities

- Use of co-curricular record to acknowledge volunteer roles and the skills that can be transferred to employment through engagement in activities.
- Trade fair days with employers.
- Formal peer to peer learning experiences students could reference as skills and experience.
- Post completion workshops containing information for participants regarding taxation requirements, unwritten rules of workplaces, how to build an online presence to increase employment opportunities, skills to build independence and resilience, negotiating workplace needs and responding to workplace discrimination or harassment.
- Paid and unpaid opportunities for learners to engage in employment through internships and work-integrated learning activities embedded in qualifications, leading to skill development, experience and employment for learners.

Program to highlight

A program of note building skills and experiences for employment is the LEADS: Student Leadership program at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. The SAIT LEADS program provides hands on work-experience and the opportunity to engage in activities while completing study. SAIT has volunteer and paid roles for students.

LEADS students work from three to five hours per week in roles and engage in additional professional development workshops to further build skills. Students who engage in LEADS add the skills acquired to their co-curricular record. A co-curricular record can be used by students to demonstrate to potential employers, work history and employability skills in communication, leadership and collaboration giving learners experience that they can use during employment applications and interviews.

Considerations

- Strengthening opportunities through Skills and Jobs Centre and inhouse TAFE services to offer workshops regarding skills for post completion success.
- Funding collaborative initiatives with relevant stakeholders such as employment services and relevant Government departments.
- Provide funded opportunities for mentoring in work practices.
- Develop bridging programs to aid learners to develop academic skills before starting their qualification including expanding the opportunities through funded Adult and Community Further Education (ACFE) pre-accredited programs offered by Learn Local providers in the State of Victoria.



Figure 16. Fellow with Audrey Quitayen Office of Student Engagement SAIT



Figure 17. University of Calgary campus



Figure 18. Bow Valley College North Campus

06

Considerations and Next Steps

Informed by fellowship activities, TAFE Gippsland has commenced implementation of pilot programs and frameworks in second semester 2024.

These include.

- Co-designing qualifications with learners from under-represented cohorts, community members, influencers and services.
- Pilot within the CPC20220 Certificate II Construction Pathways (July 2024 intake) of a collaborative and robust pre-training interview for learners, embedded supports and design.
- Wrap around support model to address student misconduct and respond to student behaviour exhibited due to unmet need or trauma.
- Concept of expert trainers and targeted trauma informed professional development for teaching and non-teaching stakeholders timetabled to qualifications identified as attracting or designed to engage learners from under-represented cohorts.

Co-designing qualifications

Co-designing education programs with under-represented learners has been increasingly recognised as a beneficial approach for learners and educational institutions. Research conducted within the fellowship activities and further supported by research from Cook-Sather, A. (2014) Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2011). Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2010). Demonstrates co-design can.

- Ensure that curriculum and learning activities are relevant to the learners' cultural, social and individual contexts, increasing engagement and motivation. Fostering a learner-centred approach, where the needs, interests, and aspirations of under-represented learners are at the forefront of program development.
- Better address specific skill gaps and promote the development of both academic and non-academic skills to assist the learner to be successful in study and post completion.
- Empower learners, giving a sense of ownership and responsibility over their education, leading to increased commitment and persistence.
- Ensure the incorporation of diverse cultural perspectives, making the educational content more inclusive and culturally relevant.
- Lead to innovative responses and solutions that may not be present in traditional top-down design of qualifications.

- Foster stronger relationships and communication with learners building trust and respect.
- Increase retention rates and positive reputation amongst the community for being inclusive and responsive to the current and evolving needs of learners.

Co-design of educational qualifications for under-represented learners involves collaborative efforts between educators or teaching teams, learners, community members, influencers of prospective learners and other stakeholders to develop qualification design, materials, assessment practices and embedded supports that are inclusive, culturally responsive and tailored to the needs and strengths of learners from marginalised groups. This approach aims to empower learners by ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are integral to the educational design process.

Through a collaboration with Our Place located within two primary schools in the La Trobe Valley region of Gippsland, TAFE Gippsland is working with the school community to develop opportunities for co-designed qualifications, pathway programs and activities to attract and engage community members from under-represented cohorts to education and training.

Pilot within the CPC20220 Certificate II Construction Pathways (July 2024 intake) collaborative and robust pre-training interview for learners, embedded supports and design.

Inclusive educational delivery design has been implemented in a trial program within the CPC20220, changes to delivery include increased practical components to engage learners, changes to timetabling of staff and program to respond to feedback from learners, embedded supports for literacy and numeracy, embedded responses to address unmet need including food insecurity, strategies to monitor attendance and participation including incentives for maintaining attendance and activities to assist post-completion success into employment or further education prior to completion of the qualification.

TAFE Gippsland has identified the CPC20220 qualification as a targeted cohort for additional design as a previous intake of the qualification experienced low completion rates and attracted a high number of learners experiencing intersectional disadvantage.

Objectives of the pilot were to.

- Enhance student preparedness and success.
- Identify individual student needs and tailor support services accordingly.
- Collaborate with relevant TAFE Gippsland Support Services and external service providers to inform academic and personal needs of learners prior to commencement.
- Increase the number of learners completing the certificate.

The pilot program has four elements

1. Interview
2. Program delivery and embedded supports
3. Attendance monitoring
4. Post completion success.

1. Interview

An individual meeting time with the learner and relevant support person is conducted to understand from the prospective learner their educational experiences, connected network and to orientate them to the TAFE Gippsland campus. The table below outlines areas for discussion, some of the example questions used and what we are hoping to understand from the information provided to aid learner success.

Area for discussion	Example questions	Wanting to understand
Prior educational experience	<p><i>"Can you please tell us about schooling"</i></p> <p><i>"What did you like about school?" "What didn't you like?"</i></p> <p><i>"What would be the last year of school that you truly engaged in?"</i></p>	Past schooling, areas of difficulty, true final year of schooling the student engaged.
Supports while engaged in previous schooling	<i>"Did you have any extra supports while at school? "Can you tell me what they were?"</i>	Gives an opportunity to inform learner of embedded supports available to all in the classroom and explain the delivery mode of the course.
For those exiting from Secondary School understanding of reason for exit	<i>"Can you explain to me the reasons you're leaving school early?"</i>	Opens discussion to understand disengagement reasons (COVID, bullying, past impacts).
Study readiness (routine, travel, equipment or clothing needed)	<p><i>"What's your daily routine like at the moment?"</i></p> <p><i>"Are there things you can put in place now to be successful in your study with us?"</i></p>	Study readiness to attend class each day and for full day identified with actions including support person to commence prior to start date.
Disability or health conditions / supports	<p><i>"Have you been diagnosed with a disability, mental health or medical condition?"</i></p> <p><i>"Do you have a current treating professional?"</i></p> <p><i>"Are you on any medication that impacts you, your sleep, in the morning"</i></p>	Additional questions to explore reasonable accommodations based on information provided.
Connected support services and strategies for successful study	<p><i>"Who will you speak to if things at TAFE aren't going well?"</i></p> <p><i>"Who can TAFE speak with if we need to about your study?"</i></p> <p><i>"Are you connected with any supports who may be able to help you identify some things you can put in place to be successful?"</i></p>	These individuals are then identified for learner and TAFE Gippsland to contact. In the event the learner requires assistance with external issues trainers can refer them back to this identified support. Alternatively, if behaviour needs to be addressed TAFE Gippsland can reach out to include the identified network.
Sense of belonging	<i>"If I could tell your trainers and staff anything about you, what would you like that to be?"</i>	Information or a piece of information our staff can then use to connect with the learner.

To inform teaching and non-teaching roles working with learners within the pilot program cohort, individual profiles have been developed in collaboration with the learner and relevant support networks. A team meeting was held prior to the commencement of the course with relevant teaching staff, Program Manager, pilot lead, Trades Coordinator, referring Pathways Advisor and Student Service Learning and Wellbeing supports. During this meeting time learner profiles and program delivery was discussed. An example of the student profiles created to inform teaching and non-teaching staff can be found in appendix 1.

2. Program delivery and embedded supports

To aid learner engagement the sequence of units and timetabling of classes has been amended. The teaching team has reviewed the objectives of the pathways program and identified the need to increase hands on learning opportunities.

To welcome the learner group and create a sense of belonging, a welcome breakfast was provided for all learners, teaching and support staff.

The cohort is further supported by embedded specialised literacy and numeracy content via the Skills First Literacy and Numeracy Support (LNSupport) package and learning assistance from TAFE Gippsland Student Services. Food insecurity was identified as an issue for learners as a result embedded access to food is available to the group.

3. Attendance monitoring

Weekly attendance is monitored and where learners have not attended without prior notice follow up communication has been initiated. To encourage consistent attendance, incentives to maintain an 80% attendance have been introduced for the learner group these include TAFE Gippsland café vouchers.

4. Post completion success

To aid post completion success, incorporated into the design of the qualification is a session with the Trades Coordinator, Skills and Jobs representative and Pathways advisor two weeks prior to completion of the course. Learners will have the opportunity to

discuss and be supported in their next steps whether that be employment and/or further study. For students who have an exemption from Secondary School to attend the qualification, a plan will be developed with appropriate supports to assist the learner to reengage with the mainstream schooling environment or further TAFE Gippsland study including Senior Secondary school programs if relevant.

Pilot success

At time of publication the pilot group has 5 weeks left of the qualification until complete, retention rate for the program is 100% and 10 of the 11 participants have maintained well over 80% attendance. The cohort includes learners from under-represented cohorts including Koorie learners (27%), those in out of home care arrangements (45%), learners with an exemption from secondary school (54%).

This pilot is part of a broader strategy to attract and engage learners experiencing intersectional disadvantage. Other elements of the strategy include developing trainer capability in trauma informed practices, the concept of timetabling an expert trainer and an expansion of targeted cohorts in 2025 to include other teaching areas.

Wrap around support model to address student misconduct and respond to student behaviour exhibited due to unmet needs or trauma.

Learners from under-represented cohorts are more likely to be part of disciplinary processes in education compared to their peers. This was evident during Fellowship research discussions with those in Student Ombuds roles within Institutions and Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton from the University of Calgary as well as published research by Porowski, O'Conner and Passa (2014).

This disparity can be attributed to various factors, including systemic biases, cultural misunderstandings and the impact of unmet need and trauma on behaviour.

Factors identified through Fellowship research that contribute to disciplinary disparities include.

Systemic Bias and Discrimination

- Educational institutions often have implicit biases that affect how disciplinary policies are applied.
- Stereotyping and prejudices can lead to disproportionate targeting of learners from under-represented cohorts.

Cultural Misunderstandings

- Teaching and non-teaching staff may misinterpret behaviour of learners from different cultural backgrounds, leading to unnecessary disciplinary actions.

Unmet Basic Needs

- Learners experiencing poverty, housing instability, or food insecurity may exhibit behaviours that are misunderstood as disciplinary issues. Addressing basic needs can help reduce stress and improve learner behaviour.

Impact of Trauma

- Learners from under-represented cohorts may have experienced trauma, including violence, abuse and neglect. As well as traumatic experiences with education, school environments, other institutions or Government departments which can influence their behaviour in educational settings. Trauma-informed approaches to discipline can help in understanding and addressing the causes of behaviour rather than punishing it.

By recognising and responding to the unique complex needs faced by learners from under-represented cohorts, educational institutions can create more equitable and supportive environments that reduce the need for disciplinary actions and promote positive learner outcomes.

TAFE Gippsland is implementing a process to address learner misconduct and respond to learner behaviour due to unmet need and/or trauma by creating a collaborative approach to learner behaviour that addresses the needs of students

concurrently with their enrolment. The framework leverages established networks of the learner or specialised services to develop strategies to support the learner to remain in education. This approach is based on a model traditionally used in the health and community services sector known as a care team approach, also known as a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary team approach, involving various and relevant stakeholders to work collaboratively to provide comprehensive care to patients or clients. Using this model in the education and training sector aims to address the multifaceted needs of learners by leveraging the expertise and services available to assist learners to be successful in education whether that is academic needs or external barriers.

The proposed model identifies for teaching and non-teaching staff, learner behaviours to be addressed as misconduct and outlines appropriate responses to behaviour that may be due to unmet need or trauma see appendix 2 TAFE Gippsland addressing behaviour model.

Expert trainers and professional development for teaching and non-teaching staff.

The role of trainers in the learner experience is critical. As a result, TAFE Gippsland is implementing a process whereby cohorts that are identified as attracting or specifically designed for learners from under-represented cohorts must be facilitated by an expert trainer. The concept of expert trainer is backed by the research of John Hattie (2009) Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement (2009).

This concept was further explored during fellowship research when reviewing and meeting with trainers involved in specialised programs for students from under-represented cohorts including ready to work qualifications and industry specific courses at Vancouver Community College. Key findings included the success in engagement of learners where trainers had strong industry experience, could integrate into their theory work real world examples, treated learners with respect and employed the principles of adult learning by Malcolm Knowles (1973), designed qualifications with experiential

learning and work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities including internships.

Characteristics of an expert trainer

Sound understanding of content

Expert trainers possess a deep understanding of their subject content. Allowing them to explain concepts to learners clearly and in multiple ways, answer questions and provide examples and learning experiences to enhance opportunities for learners to develop skills. Having a sound understanding of teaching content allows a trainer to be flexible in their approach based on the learner needs.

Ability to respond to classroom situations

Expert trainers can respond to classroom behaviour, pre-empt possible concerns and have a plan in place if inappropriate behaviour does occur or to circumvent inappropriate behaviour before it escalates.

Creating a positive learning environment

Expert trainers foster a supportive and positive environment for learning to take place, where learners can feel safe to take risks, ask questions, identify when they do not know something and can express their ideas.

To implement this process, Education Delivery areas within TAFE Gippsland will nominate trainers within the Training and Assessment Strategy (TAS) for qualifications designed for under-represented learners. Trainers identified within these programs will be timetabled based on their expert trainer experience it is acknowledged that not all teaching areas will have immediate access to expert trainers as a result the ability to timetable those trainers who demonstrate willingness or ability to develop skills will be included. To build capacity of those involved in qualifications for learners from under-represented cohorts, professional development regarding trauma informed teaching practices and classroom management will be provided. In addition to training a Community of Practice established, providing an opportunity to come together and collectively learn, share knowledge and improve practices.

07

Impacts of Fellowship

Personally

Being awarded a VSA sponsored ISSI fellowship has had strong personal impacts. Renewing my energy to continually improve the educational outcomes for learners especially learners from under-represented cohorts. I have reengaged with VET sector colleagues and providers across Australia to learn and share my experience from working in the VET and Higher Education sector. The chance to connect, learn and share with international colleagues and experience the campuses was a wonderful opportunity to be involved in activities and campus life firsthand. While undertaking the final 2 weeks of Fellowship visits my family joined me allowing them to share in this experience.

Professionally

Professionally the fellowship has provided the opportunity to explore, learn, share and test initiatives to attract and engage learners from under-represented cohorts. This has resulted in an informed and strategic response to my day-to-day work. Post travel has been a busy and exciting time as I have presented key findings to a range of stakeholders and implemented pilot programs, frameworks and developed strategies to implement findings.

Organisationally

TAFE Gippsland has immediately implemented actions post fellowship and will continue to develop additional strategies and responses in the future.

Fellowship findings have informed the development of a Strategy to attract and engage learners experiencing intersectional disadvantage with milestone reporting for the coming 18 months (July 2024 - December 2025).

To aid the implementation of this strategy a new role of a Specialist Advisor has been established to provide advice and support to educational delivery area to implement co-designed qualifications, community-based pathway programs as well as implementing the processes outlined in the pilot program.

TAFE Gippsland is positioning itself to be a leader in innovative practices for learners from under-represented cohorts including establishing and/or strengthening partnerships with external service providers and Government departments.

The timing of fellowship activities and distilling of findings has informed initiatives for 2025 delivery including professional development programs for teaching and support staff, timetabling of teaching staff deemed appropriate for under-represented cohorts and design of qualifications.

Broader VET Sector

The fellowship aims to increased engagement and progression of students from under-represented cohorts, taking the key findings and initiatives implemented post travel the opportunity to collaborate with other TAFEs and relevant stakeholders is of interest. In addition to the VET sector, it is identified that relevant specialised services and other Government departments can benefit from and be instrumental in the success of the proposed considerations and next steps. The opportunity to further disseminate and work with the TAFE network is welcomed. Applying the findings from research and outcomes of the pilot programs will further develop the opportunities of VET providers to successfully engage and progress a growing learner cohort who are experiencing complex needs within the educational environment.



Figure 19. St Phillips College Alamo College District Creating a Sense of Belonging

08

Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

Dissemination of findings to date have included presentations to

- TAFE Gippsland all staff conference
- TAFE Directors Australia Convention TAFE at the Heart
- VSA-ISSI Fellows Forum
- Adult Community and Further Education Gippsland Regional Council
- Adult Community and Further Education Learn Local Skills and Collaboration Network
- Gippsland Headspace Consortium
- Our Place Site Partnership Group
- Inner Gippsland Department of Education Leadership
- Education and Training Committee (TAFE Gippsland Board)

The Fellow has plans to further publish and disseminate research findings including outcomes from pilot programs and activities that are implemented based on research findings.



Figure 20. Fellow presenting at TDA Convention May 2024

09

Conclusion

The successful progression of learners from under-represented cohorts is a crucial priority for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Educational providers must respond adeptly to the complex and evolving needs of learners, especially given the increasing instances of low prior educational attainment and complex barriers that impact engagement in traditional VET training.

The fellowship research identified three key areas essential for supporting under-represented learners: addressing basic needs, creating a sense of belonging, and ensuring post-completion success. These findings offer valuable insights into developing frameworks and initiatives that can significantly improve the educational experiences and outcomes for learners such as positive learning experiences, completion, engagement in further education and employment.

In conclusion, the VET sector must commit to innovative, inclusive strategies that provide equitable opportunities for all learners. By doing so, we can enhance the completion rates and success of under-represented learners, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment.



Figure 21. Student Advocacy logo Northwest Vista College Alamo Colleges District

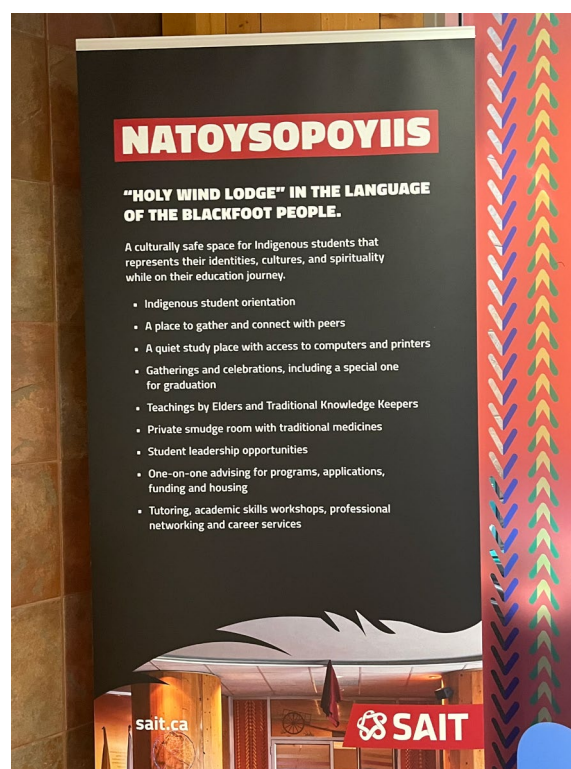


Figure 22. Welcome banner outside SAIT Nattoysopoyiis

10

References

Figures

Figure 1 taken from the adcet.edu.au website adapted from *Everyone Belongs: A Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality* by the Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women. (“Inclusive Language - ADCET”)

Figure 2 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Adapted from Maslow, A.H. (1943). “A Theory of Human Motivation”. In *Psychological Review*, 50 (4), 430-437.

Figure 3 Derived from NCVER 2023, VET student outcomes 2023, NCVER, Adelaide.

Figure 4 Derived from NCVER 2023, VET student outcomes 2023, NCVER, Adelaide.

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11

Appendices

Appendix 1 Student Profile

Student Pre-training Interview

Student name

Prior Educational Experience

Last full year of secondary school year 10.

Disliked teaching staff, attendance was low.

Discussed with x expectation of respect and requirement to follow trainer instructions.

Learns best practical work.

May not seek assistance if struggling with content will need check in support from staff.

16 will require exemption from school has commenced process.

Health information

No diagnosed conditions or health related information / impacts.

Engaged support networks

x not linked with other support services, father x is first point of contact.

Study preparedness

Father will arrange transport for x to attend campus.

Will work on routine to be up and ready for day aware of 8am start time and full day expectations.

Pathway from course

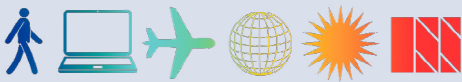
Indicated interest in Carpentry post course.

Key information

- Likes to be called (nickname).
- Very quiet will take time to warm up.
- Loss his mother when he was young (6) has impacted him ongoing.

Appendix 2 TAFE Gippsland addressing behaviour model

	Low Level Behaviour	Medium Level Behaviour	High Level Behaviour	Extreme Level Behaviour
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruption to class Absence Late submissions Mobile phone use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argumentative with others Not following instructions or completing work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dangerous/reckless behaviour Potential to cause harm to others and property Verbal abuse or threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence Extensive damage to property
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour addressed verbally by teacher Documented If behaviour continues escalate to Program Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting time set with student Student advised of behaviour of concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour reported Meeting set with student Identified support networks to be engaged to inform and assist appropriate response . Student advised of behaviour with opportunity to respond and support in process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour reported Meeting set with student Identified support networks to be engaged to inform and assist appropriate response. Student advised of alleged behaviour with opportunity to respond and support in process Student removed while investigation occurs
Interventions	Interventions concurrent with enrolment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral to students services (if identified) Progression Plan and identification of behaviour to be discontinued Review meeting 	Interventions concurrent with enrolment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour contract Referral to student services Study skill workshop skill gap training Referral to external services (if identified) Review meeting 	Interventions concurrent with enrolment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension from class or practical activity Referral to external services Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EAP, Student Services, teaching team to assist return to class 	Suspended Enrolment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral to appropriate external services demonstrated behaviour change required (Counselling, mentoring, aggressive behaviour) Enrolment in alternative course Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EAP, WHS, support to return to campus



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