

Towards Increasing Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Experiences of Work Through Employment Services Focused Mentoring: An Urban Case Study

Philippa Hawke

Abstract

Mentoring is under the spotlight as a strategy to address the high rates of unemployment and low rates of job retention in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. One federal government funded strategy has injected \$6.1 million dollars into Job Services Australia (JSA, now jobactive) pilot mentoring programs around the country over the past three years. These pilots have had varying rates of success, with the Department of Employment defining a positive outcome as 26 weeks job retention.

One such pilot, targeting young people less than 26 years of age, was conducted between 2012 and 2015 in the Inala area of Queensland. This is an urban locale generally known to be suffering significantly high levels of disadvantage, particularly associated with low levels of education, inadequate housing, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and imprisonment (Vinson, Rawsthorne, Beavis, & Ericson, 2015). A series of evaluative studies were conducted by the JSA provider, BoysTown, over the course of the three year pilot. These studies found the mentoring model used on this site, whilst not reaching Department of Employment three year indicators of success, nevertheless achieved a number of important outcomes within the three year timeframe. These included expanded bridging forms of social capital in the local Aboriginal community, achieved through overall increased engagement in the labour market by their young people. This paper describes the phases involved in assisting program clients to achieve increased rates of job seeking, placement and long-term retention, and maps the spectrum of mentoring activities required at each stage.

The paper highlights the breadth of skillsets concealed within the title of "Indigenous Mentor" under this complex employment services based funding model, and argues that policy goals of increased job retention will be best achieved through the employment of more than one of these highly skilled Indigenous mentors in employment placement service offices.

This paper extends existing explorations into the range of barriers to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's long-term employment prospects. It focuses particular attention on the impact of extended kinship obligations on work attendance and the unique role that Aboriginal mentors are in a position to play in bridging communication breakdowns between employer and employee. It also challenges government policy settings which determine employment "success" should be measured in terms of six months job retention in a labour market environment of short-term and casual work.

Introduction

The following paper is an account of an attempt to increase the rate of long-term employment amongst young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Inala, an urban location in Brisbane Queensland. The program, "Access to Mentoring Support for Indigenous Job Seekers", was funded by the Federal Department of Employment through the offices of Job Services Australia (JSA) between 2012 and 2015, and was designed to build an evidence base for the potential effectiveness of mentoring support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers.

Mentoring is a form of relationship building between two people - one generally more knowledgeable, experienced or senior to the other. It has a strong evidence base for increasing resilience and empowerment and has a connection to improved health outcomes (Bainbridge, Tsey, McCalman, & Towle, 2014), as well as being associated with developing good management-employee relations and improved job performance (Burgess & Dyer, 2009).

Evidence points to mentoring being a means of social capital raising that is aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning and teaching styles (Bainbridge et al., 2014; Ware, 2013). Given the culturally specific components available when a mentor is of the same race or cultural background, mentoring has been viewed as a useful tool for assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to negotiate access to mainstream agencies and institutions (R. Ortiz-Walters in Passmore, Peterson, & Freire, 2013).

Other studies have described the nature and outcomes of mentoring programs for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in justice settings

(Stacy, 2004; Ware, 2013) and educational settings (Harwood, McMahon, O'Shea, Bodkin-Andrews, & Priestly, 2015) and more broadly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in vocational (Helme, 2010) and employment settings (Burgess & Dyer, 2009; Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, 2010). However little has been written of how mentoring support delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders based in employment service provider offices can assist highly disadvantaged young people to specifically engage with the labour market and achieve long-term employment.

This paper describes the results of a series of three annual evaluations conducted by BoysTown. It follows the shifting dimensions of the program funding objectives over the period, and a change in mentor personnel during Year 2. It describes the impact of these shifts on local community expectations; the level of job readiness of those offered mentoring, and the nature of mentoring activities. The paper also offers insights into the obstacles encountered in reaching 26 weeks employment from the perspectives of both the job seekers and those involved in supporting them, and describes when and how mentoring was able to intervene to change the course of labour market experiences.

The paper discusses several key policy implications arising from this localised study, highlighting the broader nature of cultural tensions between labour supply and demand which need to be addressed before larger numbers of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can achieve long-term employment. The paper emphasises that each step taken towards mainstream economic integration by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires trade-offs which

are costly to their culture and existing forms of bonded social capital. At the same time, mainstream employers are also expected to make accommodations for employees' cultural and family obligations that are generally poorly understood or valued by the employers.

This discussion underlines the complex skillsets required by employment services based mentors to build understanding and mutual goals between the two groups. However the results of this three year study suggest that with a multifaceted model encompassing community engagement, intensive case management, counselling, job-brokering and employer cultural education, an impact can be made on the current low levels of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment.

BoysTown Inala JSA Indigenous Mentoring Program (IMP)

Background to the program

The focus of Government policy towards improving the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has narrowed considerably over the past 15 years to one of increased integration within the mainstream economy (FaHCSIA, 2011). Although there remains strong adherence by many in policy research circles to the principles of self-determination (see for example Dr Julie Lahn in Klein, 2014), in practice government efforts are increasingly directed towards an agenda of economic reconciliation which demands adherence to mainstream expectations of employee behaviours, with co-existing measures of policy success in terms of increased rates of "sustainable employment" (Dockery & Milsom, 2007).

The Access to Mentoring Support for Indigenous Job Seekers Program which became known as the Indigenous Mentoring Program (referred to from here as the IMP) operated out of existing JSA offices. The program targeted mentoring assistance both before and after job placement to job seekers allocated to Streams 3 and 4 who experience the highest levels of non-vocational barriers including homelessness, mental ill-health, criminal histories, drug and alcohol addictions and family and domestic violence. Although the funding outlined expectations for the mentor to work with employers, the business sector was not a party to the Pilot funding agreement and there was no requirement for them to participate.

BoysTown, a national charity with a significant presence in the employment placement sector and a mission-led focus on disadvantaged young people, opted to incorporate this mentoring strategy into their JSA office in the South East Queensland suburb of Inala.

Inala is situated 18 kilometres to the south west of Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland. Inala-Richlands is recognised as an SA2 (small statistical area) with significant levels of hardship as defined by conventional mainstream measures. It is ranked by the ABS as 30th most disadvantaged area within Australia, 8th within Queensland, and second within the Greater Brisbane region with a SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) score of only 756 (ABS,2011-a).

Since colonisation the Jagara People, the first inhabitants of the Inala/Richlands area, have accommodated squatters, settlers, migrants and refugees from all over the world, and have welcomed dispossessed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from other

Australian homelands. Although this has led to the area becoming extremely ethnically diverse (Kaeys, 2006), Inala continues to be known as a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with 6.2% of the population identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander compared to 2.6% nationally (ABS, 2011-b).

Sustainable employment goals are particularly difficult to achieve in this area with disproportionately low levels of labour force participation and high levels of unemployment and short-term, unstable, low-skilled and low paid jobs (ABS, 2011-b). These economic indicators have been observed by local employment service providers to be particularly visible amongst the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, resulting in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having few employed role models to help them prepare for interactions with the business community. In addition, social factors known to affect job-seeking activities and remain engaged with jobs, including low educational attainment (Helme, 2010), criminal behaviours, homelessness and mental health issues (Gray, Hunter, & Lohar, 2011) contribute to lowered work capacity in the youth of the Inala Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The Inala IMP

The Inala IMP was divided into two separate voluntary programs both carried out by a single mentor - "Pre-Employment" for those seeking work and "Post-Employment" for those who were in paid employment or undertaking full-time study. Movement back and forth between these two programs was common and became known as "churning" as clients who had been placed into employment lost or left their

jobs prior to 26 weeks and moved back to pre-employment phase.

Two consecutive mentors carried out this role over the three year period. The first, a local Aboriginal man well-known in the Inala community and with a background in youth work, was employed over a period of 21 months. Following his transfer to another program during Year 2, a female Aboriginal woman with experience in employment services consultancy but without local connections, was employed.

Although the office was based inside the central shopping area where many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people congregate, there were few formal ties between the community and the JSA office at the start of the program, and rates of "No-shows" for appointments with Employment Consultants was high.

Over the course of the three years, 90% of the 102 clients that mentors worked with in pre-employment programs were between 15 and 25 years of age. Fifty three percent were male and 47% female. Of the 59 clients enrolled in the post-employment program, (47 placed into employment through the JSA IMP and 6 enrolled following other forms of employment placement), 87% were between 15 and 25 years of age. Fifty eight percent of these were male and 42% female.

Many of the early clients faced a range of barriers to employment above and beyond those experienced by older people in their community. They were more likely to be homeless or couch surfing (40% of clients in the pre-employment program were homeless or in unstable accommodation) and experiencing mental health problems, including suicidal behaviours. Ten percent had spent periods in either juvenile or adult detention, also reducing

their ability to engage successfully with work (Borland & Hunter, 2000). Many were referred by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or self-referred after hearing about the program, as the mentor, although based within an employment services team, came to be seen as someone who could help young people address these critical psycho-social issues.

Inala IMP mentoring model

Despite archetypal definitions of mentoring as a one on one relationship, the program's funding guidelines suggested mentors were expected to carry much broader responsibilities embracing consultation and negotiation with a range of stakeholders. These roles included liaison with Elders and the greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, job brokerage with employers and trainers and something more akin to case management practices than traditional mentoring definitions would suggest: assessing client's individual needs, developing strengths-based goals and "Plans For Success" in consultation with clients and their employment consultants, negotiating access to a range of other agencies involved in each client's life and developing "wrap-around care plans" more commonly seen in mental health services (Winters & Metz, 2009). This was a more comprehensive and at times far more intensive characterisation of case management compared to the model generally known in the employment sector (Dockery & Milsom, 2007), leading to occasional service tensions around mentoring activity prioritisation and appropriate time allocations to each stakeholder group. Service Agreement changes instigated by the Department of Employment over the course of the three years of the pilot significantly affected this model and the two mentors gave quite different

assessments of time distribution between clients, family members, community, external agencies and employers. Increasing proportions of time were spent with clients and reducing proportions with other stakeholders as the program focus shifted over the years towards job-ready clients referred by JSA Employment Consultants and away from community and self-referred clients with significant employment barriers.

Pilot evaluation processes and findings

At the time of the IMP commencement no Department of Employment outcome targets were set, and each tender respondent was only required to nominate an expected level of annual activity outputs. This led to acceptance into the program of a significant number of clients who were not considered "job-ready" by the JSA. By the beginning of the second funded year, new performance indicators were introduced by the Department, setting targets for caseload proportions of clients who were expected to achieve not only job placement but also 26 week job retention outcomes. This change caused a substantial modification in Year 2 to the manner in which the program operated and the level of engagement conducted with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Several stakeholder groups in the final evaluation phase referred to the reduction in time spent building community/employment service bridges as disappointing. One final survey respondent from the Inala Elders could not recall having spoken to anyone from the Inala JSA for several years, while another Aboriginal staff member of a local mental health service noted the relationship between the community and the Inala BoysTown JSA, built up during

2012, had dissolved by 2015 and needed rebuilding.

Although the IMP eventually ran for three years, original pilot funding was for one year only, with each subsequent year's funding determined by the previous year's program results. This led to three separate and distinct foci for each year's evaluation. The following is a description of the three studies' methods and findings. Full details of methodologies and data analyses are available in the three discrete evaluation reports published on the BoysTown website (BoysTown Strategy and Research, 2013; Hawke, 2014; Hawke, 2015).

Year One

The first year's evaluation was formative in design, eliciting perceptions of mentoring activity effectiveness through semi-structured questionnaires and interviews with 39 stakeholders, including clients, family members, mentors, JSA staff, other external agency staff and employers. The study also assessed the level of labour market engagement among clients at year's end.

Year 1 mentoring model

A 2012 Australian Government review of all Job Services Australia programs found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers were less likely to attend both initial and further scheduled appointments than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to being more likely to experience practical barriers to attendance, including lack of access to transport and telephones (Tom Karmel, Misko, Blomberg, Bednarz, & Atkinson, 2014). Although the national report suggested disproportionately high levels of "No Shows" could be attributed to higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander JSA clients living in

remote areas, evidence from the Year 1 Inala study suggested that those same pragmatic impediments affected young urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, not only in relation to compliance with JSA meeting attendances, but also job search activities and getting or maintaining a work placement.

The first year's IMP study found that addressing these practical issues was crucial to successful mentoring engagement. The mentor connected with clients through providing concrete assistance with the essentials of transport and mobile phone communications. Phone credit, driving lessons and drivers' licenses were arranged and paid for, with the mentor negotiating with the Inala JSA office for Employment Pathway funds to pay for mechanical repairs and tyre replacements for clients having difficulties attending interviews and job sites. Time was also spent supporting clients through psycho-social crises: attending clients' court cases, arranging and accompanying clients to mental health service appointments and hospital admissions, and advocating for housing support services.

It's important to remember the average client age and developmental stage when considering the role of the mentor during the first year of the Inala IMP. Information gathered from the community and family members during this study described a dearth of responsible and effective male role models in this community. Research tells us that when young people have supportive relationships with adults (parents, family, teachers, neighbours, etc) their ability to develop resilience, meaning in life and deal with life's challenges is enhanced (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992). These relationships act as a protective

factor when young people grow up in high-stress family or community environments and can be understood as a form of "social capital".

The mentor was clearly identified by stakeholders in this first year of the pilot as playing a significant role in compensating for the lack of stable adult relationships in the Inala young people's lives.

"I think mentoring - taken under someone's wing - is really important for our young people, especially when the young person takes it seriously"

Inala Elder

"It makes a big difference that the mentor is Aboriginal- not many Aboriginal men around here talk to the kids, but (the mentor) does, so he's a good role model. He even talks to the street kids and they talk well of him because of that"

Family member

Another key activity of the mentor during the first year was spending significant time and energy connecting to the Inala Elders and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, clients' families and other support agencies including legal and mental health services. This was a strategy designed to build bridges between families of an extremely disengaged young cohort, commonly used social service agencies and the employment placement service. Building respectful cultural connections with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and providing intensive psycho-social supports to clients with serious mental health issues proved to be a very successful strategy at increasing trust in BoysTown Employment Services.

"I have lost several people in the past two months and he has been the one I have talked to about how I feel. Better talking to him than to a counsellor"

Male client- 25years

"(Employment service based mentoring) has given Indigenous people opportunities to find their way out of unemployment. I can think of half a dozen kids who can now see light at the end of the tunnel because of being linked into employment services with support from us and (mentor's name). I've been here for 12 years and there has been a tremendous improvement in the well-being of the most at-risk kids in Brisbane this past year. We had a suicide here the other week that affected the Indigenous kids big time and having (mentor's name) and the other BoysTown (JSA) staff help organise the funeral and offer ongoing support with the fall-out for the other kids was crucial - the risk of copy-cat suicides is high and (mentor's name) is actively monitoring and intervening to get those not managing into Mental Health services which they otherwise would not have accessed. (Mentor's name) is paving the way cause they trust him"

Local Aboriginal mental health service

However it was evident that this deep community connection also created an attendant hope and expectation in the community that the mentor would be able to provide ongoing support to all clients, whether "job-ready" or not.

"He is very understanding of our needs. He knows Inala - it's good to have someone who knows the community as well as he does, helping our kids to get jobs"

Family member

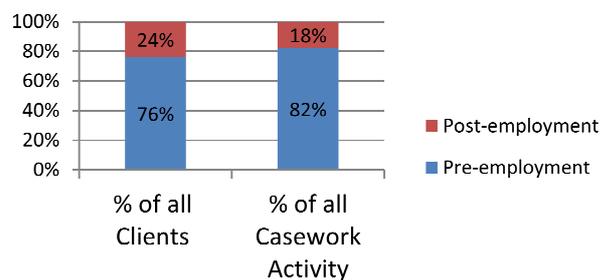
"The liaison between the Indigenous community and a job service is important for our people to get jobs"

Inala Elder

Consequently the mentor's energy and resources were not always able to be focused on those clients who may have been more work-ready or in employment during that period.

Levels of casework activity with employed clients, including mentor contact with employers, were disproportionately low compared to that offered to job seekers (18% of total casework events targeted employed clients despite comprising 24% of total caseload). It was clear the mentor was prioritising the needs of the more vulnerable members of his caseload.

Figure 1: Year 1 Pre vs. Post-employment activity comparison



"The role asks me to focus on job-ready clients. This is an issue because it's the clients with the barriers that take up all my time, and you don't want to ignore their needs - well you can't - there has been a number of suicides over the past few months affecting my clients...one who killed himself, and others who have talked about wanting to as a result of the suicides of family members and friends. I have to support them through these times and it means less time for those who don't have so many barriers".

Year 1 mentor

Year 1 evaluation findings

Only 20% of the 60 enrolments in the pre-employment program were able to be placed into jobs over the course of the first year ($n=12$), with another two clients receiving post-placement mentoring support after finding work through other means. Several young people were placed into jobs more than

once, but only one of these 14 enrolments was able to achieve a 26 week outcome. However the Year 1 evaluation found indications that employment placement agency based mentoring could be an effective strategy to improve the pathways to networks required for effective job-seeking in a group with the level of disadvantage seen in Inala's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

Qualitative data demonstrated critical foundational shifts were being made in attitudes towards engaging with the employment market in many of the clients by the end of the first year.

"He rings me up to yarn about jobs that I might be interested in. He helps to keep me interested" Female client- 23 years

"It's very hard for all Aboriginal people to go to the JSA offices and an Aboriginal mentor there helps to build respect in these offices for our people"
Family member

"Seeing (mentor's name) gives the young people something to look forward to"
Family member

Feedback from BoysTown Inala employment consultants referred to decreased "No-Shows" for appointments, higher levels of job seeking motivation and increased client awareness of job service pathways.

"I have found by having this service available there has been an increase in engagement with our Indigenous caseload. I have also noticed that clients linked with other providers are requesting to come here to specifically access this additional assistance"

Employment consultant

"We have been able to engage/ re-engage Indigenous clients at higher

rates and are able to case conference about Indigenous clients"

Employment consultant

"Some clients who were regular No-Shows are now regularly attending"

Employment consultant

"The program has helped engage Indigenous clients into our office"

Employment consultant

Satisfaction with the Aboriginal mentor and the BoysTown JSA office overall was high by the end of Year 1, but it was clear that sustainable employment outcomes would require a strategy of stepped goals over several years and these early achievements were just a beginning to what needed to be a long-term strategy. The first year's mentor referred to the multi-dimensional nature of his clients' barriers embedded over multiple generations, and illustrated the complex service responses required in the following way:

'Even when an Aboriginal person is working with an Aboriginal client the change takes time. We may not see outcomes in periods of months, or even one to two years. There may need to be periods of two to three years given to a single client who is experiencing the community impact of dispossession and trauma" *Year 1 mentor*

Studies have depicted the strong bonding capital found in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reciprocal trust relationships as providing them with the necessary resources to sustain themselves during periods of resource scarcity; however these same extended kinship networks have also been described as negatively affecting a community's levels of other forms of social capital - "bridging" and "linking", thereby decreasing access to networks

which can act to offer information about, and referral connections to mainstream job openings, and consequently decreasing employment rates (Van Es & Dockery, 2003; Lahn, 2012).

There was evidence in the Year 1 Inala IMP study to show that individual psycho-social issues, as well as lack of access to those particular forms of social capital known to increase employment (Tom Karmel et al., 2014), had fundamentally affected the Inala Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's ability to facilitate employment for their young people. These two issues were seen by the community as key areas where the IMP was able to intervene - acting as a bridge between the young person and the JSA office, and increasing both individual and community capacity.

"(Mentor's name) will be able to introduce me to people I would not otherwise meet that may be able to help me with a job" *Male client- 21 years*

"Young fellas look up to him. When they see him he's not doing all the wrong things like crime stuff. They look at him as a role model (and) can see he's got a good job, so they think hey- I want to be like that" *Male client - 19 years*

"(Mentor's name) is identified as a key person we can go to for connections in the Indigenous community. He has a great reputation and is very well-known and well-connected"

Youth Justice agency

On an individual level the study found qualitative evidence to demonstrate the program impacted on clients' state of mind barriers to work including:

- Improved self-confidence
- Increased motivation to look for work
- Decreased levels of suicidal thinking

- Decreased susceptibility to peer pressure not to work
- Improved overall well-being

"I'm more motivated to keep looking for work and have more self-confidence because he (mentor) accepts me as I am"
Male client-27 years

"I've really improved. Rate the change for me as nine out of 10. I'm starting to look for work and coming to appointments is good. I look forward to coming in to BoysTown now"

Female client-21 years

"I feel more positive thinking way- When other people say to me – 'nah you can't do it', he'll (the mentor) say 'Well, if you want to do it- don't let other people bring you down'"
Male client-25 years

"Before I was really slack and thought like-'Ohh do I have to do this?', but now everything's coming into place and I feel good and more motivated."

Female client-20 years

Surveyed clients also provided descriptions of practical and work related outcomes including:

- Increased knowledge about how to access indigenous specific training and employment opportunities
- Increased engagement with the JSA system
- Increased comfort with approaching potential employers
- Increased support networks
- Increased enrolments in training courses
- Increased levels of stable accommodation

- Increased engagement with driver learning programs

"He took me cold calling- opens up new opportunities that I wouldn't get otherwise if I was just looking for myself sitting here (in BoysTown JSA) at the computers"
Male client- 17 years

"Gives me better guidance for looking in the right places for work- like adult traineeships, like what's available/how to get the traineeships. He goes through it all one step at a time- how to apply/ builds my confidence"

Female client-39 years

"He helped me with getting a driver's license and now a Forklift license. (Mentor's name) has been the one driving it all and encouraging me. He's organised the dates for booking the test and paid for the test"

Male client- 20 years

"Gives me ideas about jobs that I'm really wanting to do rather than only what I'm able to do or on paper able to do. I don't want to do the sort of jobs I've been doing in the past. (Mentor's name) "gets" that I won't stay in a job where I'm not comfortable"

Female client- 31 years

Year Two

With the new outcome-focused benchmark set by the Department of Employment in mind (50% of employed clients to achieve 26 weeks job retention), the Inala BoysTown JSA Manager made a decision at the beginning of the second year to re-evaluate the mentor's caseload and only accept new clients into the IMP who were assessed by the Inala JSA as "work-ready", while hoping to capitalise on the intense support offered to Year 1

clients who were now far more engaged in the job seeking process.

A corresponding decreased focus on working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was observed during the Year 2 study as concerns were held about the lack of job-readiness of their referred young people and the consequential high levels of support they required. Clearly there was a need for more extensive support for vulnerable young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing a raft of disadvantages in Inala, but it was no longer seen as a role for the IMP to meet those needs.

By the end of Year 2 there were 45 additional enrolments into pre-employment phase, totalling 105 over the two years (79 unique job-seekers), and 31 more into post-employment, totalling 45 job placements over two years. These 45 job placements were from 35 unique clients churning between employment and unemployment. By year's end 16% of the 45 post-placement enrolments had reached 26 weeks while 42% had cycled back into pre-employment phase, sometimes several times ($n=19$). Almost one third of all employed clients found themselves unemployed again prior to 26 weeks because the jobs they were placed in were short-term, lasting between two and six weeks on average. Another quarter dropped out of work, were asked to leave by their employer, moved regions or were imprisoned. The remainder were still in employment but had yet to reach 26 weeks at year's end.

Year 2 evaluation methods

The results of the Year 1 evaluation suggested the need for a stepped approach to increased job sustainability - acknowledging the need for these young people to address long-term non-

vocational issues and get used to the expectations of daily work. Given this finding, the goal for Year 2's evaluation was to identify whether there had been changes in a range of "employment-influencing" psycho-social aspects of client functioning during their time with the IMP. Over the course of the seven month evaluation, a mixed method survey was conducted 35 times at three timepoints (69% of overall respondents in pre-employment and 31% in post-employment phases) using an evaluation sample of 24 IMP clients. Measures were taken with groups of clients at similar points of program enrolment ie: baseline at 1-3 months enrolment, mid-point at between 4 and 12 months and final measure with those enrolled longer than 12 months.

Research suggests that measuring changes in aspects of human lives over time can indicate the success or otherwise of services provision and lead to predictions for such life domains as future sustainability of employment (Caballero, Walker, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2011). The survey tools used in this evaluation measured a mixture of social, emotional wellbeing and communication items. Scaled responses were recorded for a series of 21 statements relating to 5 constructs:

- Self Esteem,
- Social Networks,
- Decision-Making and Planning,
- Substance Use and
- Future Outlook

These items were adapted from widely known and validated psychometric survey tools including Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults, the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS), Outcome Questionnaire (OQ45), the

Aspirations Index, the Interpersonal Agency and Personal Agency Scales and the Work Readiness Scale.

Year 2 evaluation findings

Positive self-reports for each item were surprisingly high at baseline and may have been the result of previous support received from other BoysTown programs or a case of social desirability bias operating during the interview process. Regardless of the reason, this high baseline led to difficulty demonstrating quantitative evidence of substantive change over the period of the study. The study was too small to demonstrate statistically significant changes across the whole year's cohort, but generally positive change was evident within the sample population in many indicators including self-worth, confidence in talking to new people and self-pride. There was also strong qualitative feedback to support the hypothesis that change was occurring for many respondents in most psycho-social aspects.

Social and Emotional Well-being

Small increases in the mean were seen in most items relating to Self-Esteem and Communication Confidence the longer a client was receiving mentoring support.

"Things have been changing for me already. Since (mentor's name) has taken me to get anti-depressant tablets and counselling I've been feeling a bit better. I would agree now I'm a person of worth. I would have used to Disagree Strongly, but now I'm just getting happier"
Male client-19 years

"(Mentor's name) has taught me how to speak up, how to communicate properly. Normally I just hand my resume in, but he's taught me to speak about it when I hand it in and say things like "I'm keen

to work- I've done this and this in the past"
Male client- 24 years

"Since I've been with (mentor's name) I'm more ready to hand out resumes, and talk to them - I never used to do that before. And now I have more confidence on the phone"
Male client - 19 years

Social Networks

Improvements to mean scores on items relating to increased social connections and feeling supported varied according to the source of support. This survey conducted repeat measures on feeling connected to BoysTown JSA office and feeling supported by family. Of note, feeling connected to the BoysTown Inala JSA office increased on average the longer a young person was with the IMP, indicating long-term mentoring support was successful at increasing emotional engagement with employment pathways.

"Travelling to the office is hard and expensive but you have to do it. But at least at Inala I always come away with some new knowledge about where the jobs and traineeships are or some new job hunting skills. I never feel my time has been wasted"
Male client- 20 years

"Jobs come in your head when you walk through the door. They know your name and yell it out- it's all good- really friendly"
Male client- 19 years

"It's a safe place- everyone knows me and says 'How're you going (client's name)?' If I need to tell anyone something that's happened, I can tell them cause they know what's going on for me"
Male client- 19 years

"It feels like a home cause everyone know everyone"
Male client -19 years

However, in line with research suggesting that labour force engagement creates difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with strong cultural and family obligations (Gray et al., 2011), there was a decrease in the mean score of young people reporting being able to depend on their family for support the longer they were looking for or working in a job.

"Family business can make it hard to keep a job" Female client- 24 years

"I'm mostly just relieved about (getting mentoring help with) my family responsibilities" Female client – 24 years

Decision-making and Planning

Decision-making and planning demonstrated some progress, with small improvements on average in problem solving, achieving goals by knowing when to ask others for help and budgeting skills.

"I make better decisions now because I've got someone to talk stuff through with" Male client- 24 years

"I've been asking (for help to achieve my goals) a lot lately" Male client- 19 years

"(Mentor's name) helped me with budgeting and then kept ringing me to check up how I was going with it" Female client- 22 years

Substance Misuse

There was a small increase in the mean score for respondents reporting issues with drugs and alcohol the longer they were in the IMP and may be explained by increased comfort with the interviewer over time as well as the impact of intensive mentoring support leading to increased willingness to

acknowledge and seek help for addiction issues.

"A couple of times I've told him I was thinking of going back to South Australia where I had bad drinking problems and he's encouraged me not to go"

Male client- 24 years

"I was an alcoholic and (mentor's name) told me I had to quit for two months and then he'd help me get a job. So I did that and that's when I got the job. Now I only drink socially"

Female client- 19 years

Future Outlook

Measures on future outlook were intended to establish the level of hope for, and confidence in, the future felt by IMP clients. There were mixed responses by clients to items under this domain, with respondents reporting on average:

- strong and increasing levels of a) value attached to and b) confidence in attaining a good job, and
- strong and unchanging levels of a) openness to new learnings and b) excited anticipation of starting work,

"I'm not as scared to apply for jobs that I don't necessarily have the skills for as I used to be...I'm more willing to be "out there" for new ideas of jobs"

Female client- 31 years

"I didn't want to do this traineeship; I thought it would be boring. (Mentor's name) pushed me to want it, but then I loved it there, I have to say. I asked them if I could stay!"

Female client – 19 years

"I never wanted to work when I was depressed, I didn't feel like doing anything- just wanted to stay home. I'm happier now - I just got a new job too! I can't wait!" Male client- 21 years

The results of this study demonstrated that surveyed clients who had previously experienced serious barriers to employment were now feeling new confidence in their ability to join the labour market as a result of receiving mentoring support, with deeper engagement in the job-seeking process the longer the mentoring relationship. However long-term job retention rates remained low and suggested a need for further exploration of the barriers continuing to be experienced, particularly in relation to the impact of short-term job placements on clients, and their ability to manage the competing pressures of cultural, family and work obligations.

Year Three

By the end of Year 2 a new female mentor had commenced at the Inala Employment Services office following the transfer of the previous mentor to another BoysTown program.

During Year 3 under the new mentor, the previous year's shift in mentoring focus became more pronounced. This move was away from deep community engagement and intensive casework with young people who were not job ready and toward a greater emphasis on employment service models of case management and job brokerage.

Mentoring activity concentrated on finding and servicing clients with as few non-vocational barriers as possible, yet still classified as Streams 3 and 4. Inter-agency liaison only occurred with external agencies that were specifically supporting shared clients. The size of this shift can be garnered from mentor reports in Year 1 estimating that 30% of time was spent with other agencies compared to reports of 10% in Year 3. Feedback from

Aboriginal staff in other agencies was that this was a loss for the Inala community as the Aboriginal mentor was no longer seen as a drawcard for young people into the employment service office.

"There was a relationship between the community and the JSA. Now the community will have to start all over again if there is ever more funding"

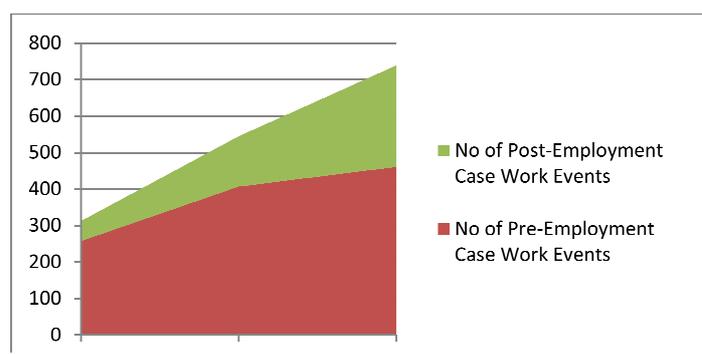
Aboriginal staff member- health service

The new mentor described this withdrawal from deep collaboration with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services as being driven by funding priorities, and reported that in her view, time spent in regular meetings with other Aboriginal agencies raising awareness of JSA based Aboriginal mentoring services, would bring "a higher level of buy-in from clients, who then view BoysTown as having the approval of their leaders".

Mentor Year 3

However, while community engagement activities waned during Year 3, efforts were intensified to achieve higher rates of 26 week positive outcomes. Direct client related activity increased by 36%, with support to clients in jobs increasing at a far greater proportional rate than that offered to jobseekers (44% one year increase from Year 2 levels vs. 13% one year increase from Year 2 levels respectively).

Figure 2: Three year case work activity comparison



By the time the three years of federal funding support for the Inala IMP ceased in June 2015, there had been 147 enrolments in the pre-employment program, with 102 unique clients receiving job-seeking related mentoring support. Of these, 46% (47 unique clients) had been placed into employment at least once. Twelve of these clients had cycled in and out of work between two and four times. Six additional clients had been referred to the post-placement mentoring program by their Employment Consultant after they commenced work through other pathways, bringing the three year total number of unique IMP clients who received mentoring support following job placement to 53.

This level of employment placement was a noteworthy milestone for the Inala community given the majority (58%) of IMP clients had been classified by Centrelink as Streams 3 and 4 with the attendant log of extreme job-barriers. Yet only 30% were able to achieve 26 weeks in work ($n=16$ with 56% of these from Streams 3 and 4), 20% below the 50% "success" target set by the Department of Employment. This was in spite of a 405% total increase across the three years in the amount of intensive case work offered to employed clients.

Year 3 evaluation objectives

With this failure to achieve funded benchmarks in mind, the Year 3 evaluation set out to examine the following in more detail:

- The reasons why clients and those supporting them believed wider engagement with the labour market was not translating into longer-term employment
- The areas in which a mentor had been able to intervene and affect young Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people's labour market experiences

- The impact young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people perceived a series of short-term work placements to be having on their confidence and/or motivation to remain in the labour force.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to examine the opinions of a number of stakeholders in the Inala community on the issues impacting on IMP client job retention. Five separate stakeholder groups were interviewed using a combination of semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires.

The key target client groups for interview were both current and past clients of the Inala IMP who had experienced at least one employment placement and may or may not have reached 26 week outcomes. Given the difficulty of reaching young people who no longer had contact with the Inala JSA office, the majority of the 14 client survey respondents were those still receiving a service, either from the Aboriginal IMP mentor or their JSA employment consultant.

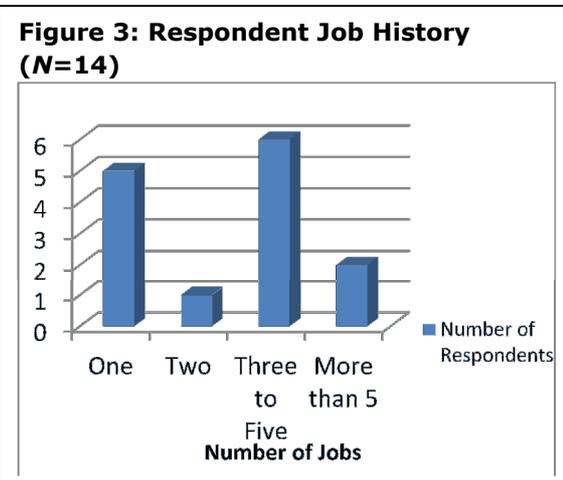
Eight other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, including Elders, members of client's families and five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services staff from justice, mental health and social security settings, were interviewed to add context and further insights into why the Inala IMP had not been able to achieve higher levels of job retention. Five employers were also asked for both quantitative and qualitative information on the impact of mentoring on their human resource management.

The Inala mentor was interviewed and client case notes created by her and other relevant staff were reviewed. This methodological triangulation was particularly illuminating given the divergence of messages that young people gave about themselves at interview compared to the perspectives of those working with them.

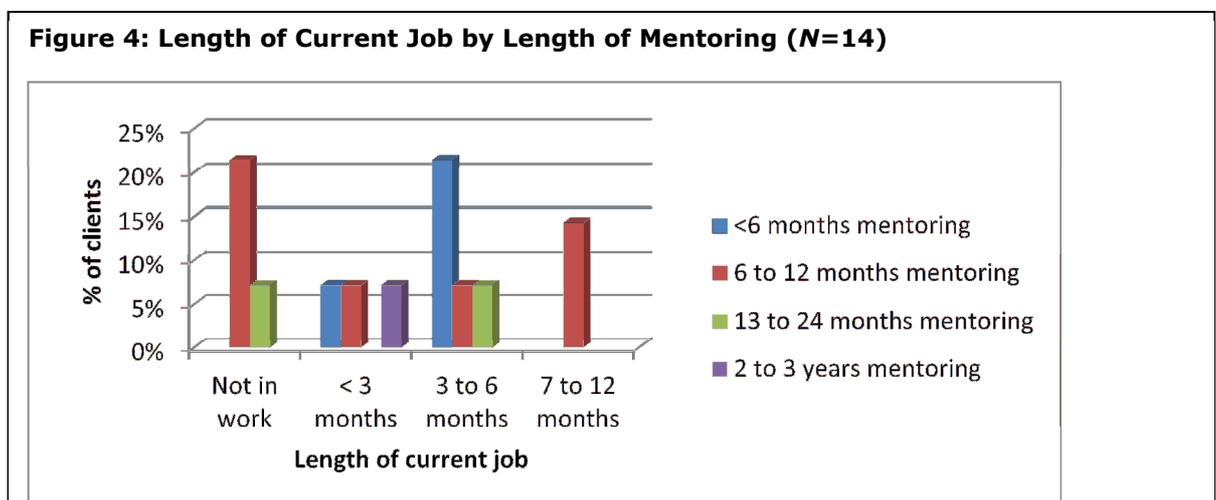
Surveyed clients were asked to nominate from a supplied list of options all the relevant issues that had made it hard for them to keep a job once they had been placed. This list was generated from issues raised in BoysTown IMP Years 1 and 2 studies and in consultations with the mentor. Clients were also asked a series of qualitative questions relating to employment retention barriers and the ways in which mentors had been able to assist with these barriers.

The client sample was reflective of the total IMP post-employment client population with equal numbers of male and female respondents with an overall average age of 20 years (range of 18-24 years). Sixty four percent of the 14 clients interviewed had at least one vocational qualification, almost half of these at Certificate 3 level. Ten were working at the time of interview while four were not. The majority (36%) of those working had been in their current position for between three and six months.

A majority (57%) had held more than three jobs and almost three quarters (71%) had received mentoring for less than 12 months.

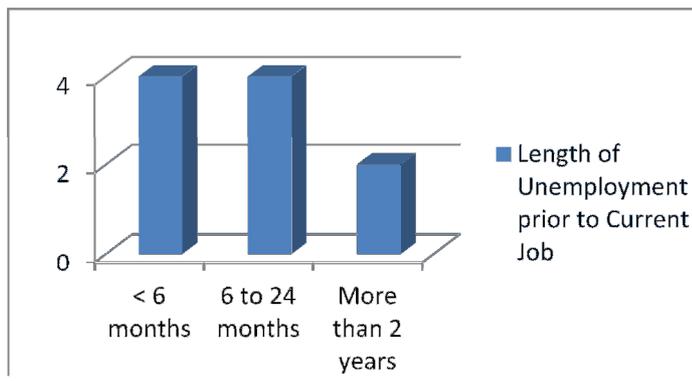


Three respondents who had received more than 13 months of mentoring were either not currently in work or had been working for up to six months at the time of interview (See figure 4).



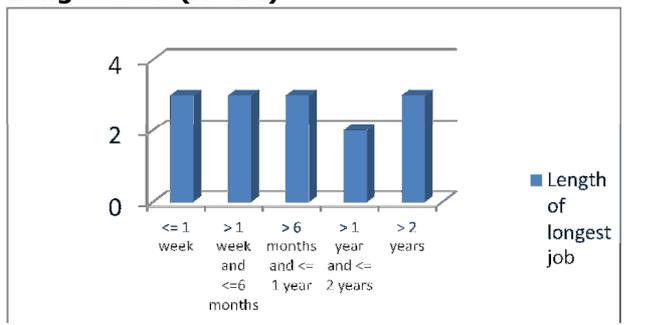
Of the 10 young people working at the time of the survey, two had been unemployed for at least three years prior to their current position (See Figure 5)

Figure 5: Number of Respondents by Length of Unemployment prior to Current Job (N=10)



Fifty eight percent of the sample had at some point experienced employment placements lasting longer than six months, including their current job. The majority of these positions were casual or part-time, and included traineeships where there was no guarantee of continuing employment beyond the end of the traineeship. The range of job duration was from one day to 5 years, with the longer jobs all casual (See Figure 6).

Figure 6 : Number of Respondents by Length of Longest Job (N=14)



Year 3 Findings

Impact of mentor’s shared culture on job retention confidence

The majority of clients (76%) who were working at the time of the final study were feeling very confident that their jobs would continue. A very high rate of satisfaction (90%) was expressed about the manner in which mentoring support had been offered during employment placements and job retention was seen to be related to having received culturally specific and intensive support.

"To have an Aboriginal mentor was what got me to open up about all my problems. I couldn't open up with other people. I didn't tell my (employment consultant) all the things that were happening. I wouldn't have stayed out here without (mentor's name)"

Female client-19 years

"I was ashamed that I was unemployed for so long- I always used to work. But (mentor's name) understands the impact of family loss on me and so I wasn't ashamed around him"

Female client – 31 years

"Aboriginal mentors understand us more than (employment consultants)"

Female client- 19 years

This finding supports results from the Year 1 Inala IMP study that found 71% of surveyed clients ($n=10$) believed their mentor’s shared aboriginality had a positive impact on their labour market experiences. It also supports other research into minority group mentoring programs describing the trust and interpersonal comfort realised through matching for culture and ethnicity, as necessary for delivering successful psycho-social support and for role-

modelling goal achievement (Rowena Ortiz-Walters in Passmore et al., 2013).

"Being Indigenous he knows our ways and our issues. He understands the stuff we have to go through that makes it hard for us to work"

Female client- 23 years

"The only way to get (Aboriginal people) into the workforce is through culturally safe pathways. (When they are) in interviews with non-Indigenous people they go silent- fade away, and won't say the things they need. With an Indigenous mentor as a third person they get the support that is essential to get them along that pathway from A to Z, by finding ways to get clients to meet their job seeker obligations and do the activities it takes to get a job"

Aboriginal staff – social security

The Year 1 IMP mentor's perspective on the crucial nature of shared culture was equally explicit:

"The barriers for Aboriginal young people can only be understood at an emotional level, where change happens, by another Aboriginal person. Rapport must be built before a client will listen to a mentor or service provider who tells them to get up early, to be on time, to phone the boss when sick. But a non-Aboriginal person cannot build this rapport, so the next stage of employability skills learning does not happen"

Year 1 mentor

This Inala study also corroborates Ortiz-Walters' findings that length of mentoring, as well as frequency of meetings, plays an important role in extracting the most benefit from a culturally matched mentoring strategy. Inala clients were more likely to nominate their mentor's Aboriginality as a key influence in their positive employment experiences the longer they participated in the program.

Issues affecting job retention

This final study was able to confirm the key fundamental issues impacting on job retention rates previously highlighted by stakeholders in Years 1 and 2, including short-term job placements, inadequate transport, family and cultural obligations affecting job attendance, and difficulty planning and negotiating absences with mainstream employers. Those spaces where an Aboriginal mentor could intervene and affect outcomes were also identified.

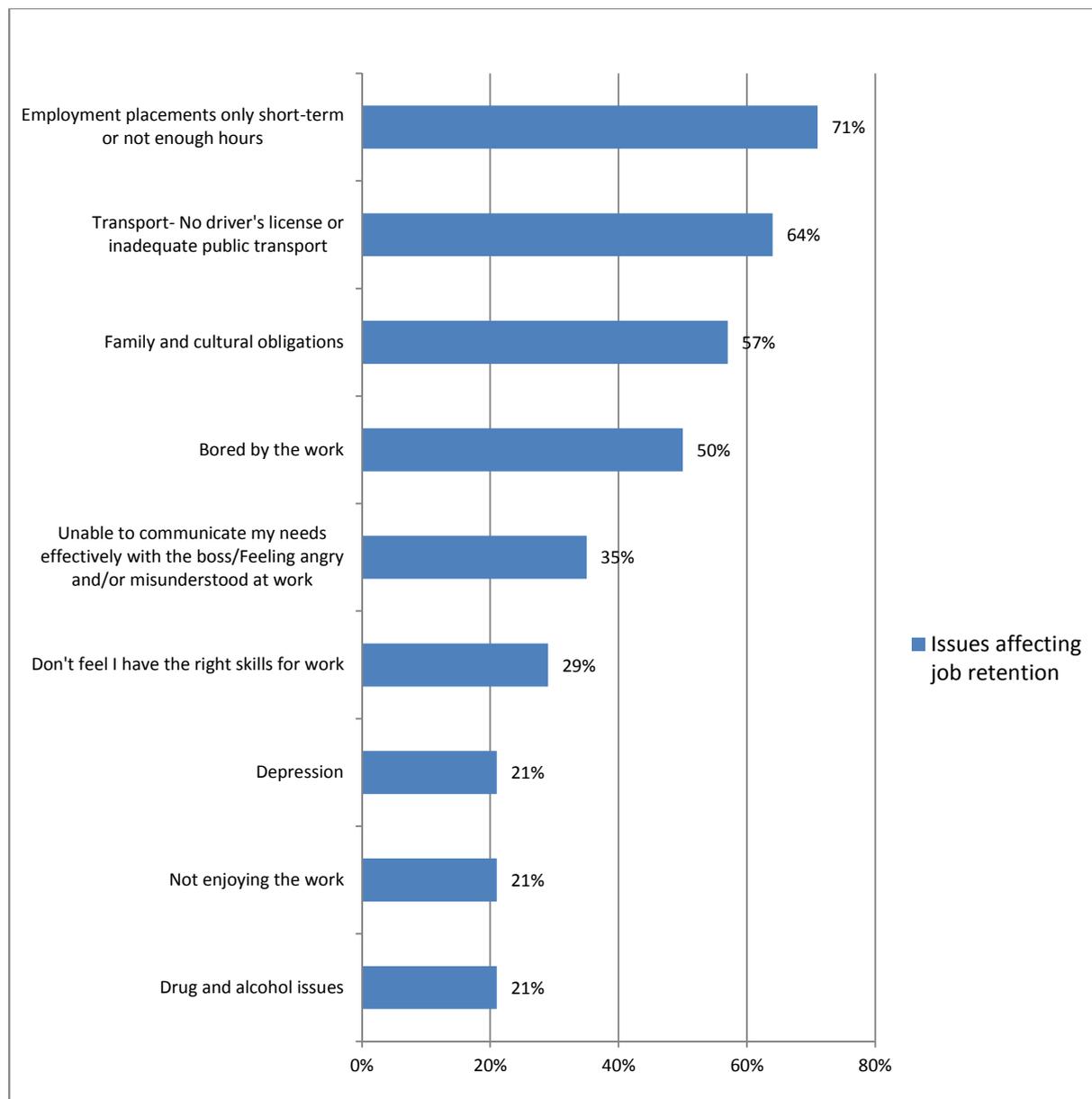
Qualitative data was thematically analysed from open question responses by Aboriginal staff employed in local and public service agencies and providing support to Inala IMP clients. The most common issue believed to be impacting on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's inability to retain jobs was found to be family and cultural obligations (almost half of all responses).

Other reasons included:

- a lack of employer awareness of these responsibilities
- poor communication skills, including a reluctance or inability to communicate family and cultural needs to their employers
- psycho-social issues including low self-confidence and self-destructive behaviours
- lack of transport
- lack of adequate education and training, including literacy and numeracy skills
- boredom with entry level jobs

When asked to specifically nominate from a pre-determined list of options, clients selected very similar issues to those proposed by service providers in their support networks. Figure 7 ranks the rate at which each option was selected by young people.

Figure 7: Issues Affecting Job Retention



**These proportions are related to specific answers to a survey item. Survey results triangulated with qualitative analysis of case notes suggests that some clients minimised or chose not to acknowledge issues which mentors identified as risk factors in their jobs ending (eg: transport, drugs/ alcohol and inability to communicate effectively with their employer appeared to be under-reported as issues impacting on job retention by clients).*

Short term and casual placements

Job experiences were reported by 71% of clients to be either short-term (less than six months) or casual, with not enough hours to withdraw from social security benefits. Although the Year Two Inala IMP program evaluation report had recommended an increased focus on sourcing permanent roles offering living

wages, it was clear during the Year 3 study that this was not easily achievable.

The Mentor stated that close to half of her placements had been with employers who were actively seeking to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers into employment. These employers included social enterprises

and Indigenous specific traineeships, where positions did not necessarily translate into open market permanent jobs.

"The job was only one day a week"

Female client- 23 years

"The jobs are often casual"

Female client – 19 years

"I finished the traineeship- there was no more work"

Female client – 23 years

The mentor's response to questions relating to the degree of difficulty in sourcing appropriate employment for her young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients was that it was no more difficult than for any other long-term unemployed young clients. With her years of experience as a JSA employment consultant, this answer can be interpreted to be alluding to the structural determinants of high levels of Australian youth unemployment, including poor literacy and numeracy, low Year 12 completion rates, the changing nature of industry and employment conditions generally and an increasing shift towards short-term and casual positions (May, Campbell, & Burgess, 2005).

The mentor, however, described her belief that all placements had value, noting that short-term and casual jobs played an important role in building a young person's credibility as a potential long-term employee and that they:

- increased the content and value of a resume,
- expanded the level of skills and knowledge relating to the particular employment area,
- increased employability skills such as learning the importance of getting

out of bed on time, budgeting for transport costs and communication skills with employers, and

- gave potential employers a contact for references.

Yet large scale research shows a less optimistic outlook for young people in short-term work. Data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAYS) would suggest the job cycling phenomenon is not unusual for young people with the level of disadvantage experienced by Inala IMP clients, finding evidence to suggest an association between young people under 20 years of age and/ or those with no or minimal post-school qualifications and "churning" through low-skilled jobs and unemployment (T Karmel, Lu, and Oliver, 2013). A 2013 comparative report prepared for the European Monitoring Centre on Change found longitudinal studies in several countries showed less than 30% of people on temporary contracts translate to permanent employment within one to two years (Matsaganis, Rabemiafara, & Ward, 2014) while other European research found that short-term or temporary jobs tend not to lead to permanent jobs for young people, but instead reinforce cycling patterns of being "in-and-out-of-work" (Maguire et al., 2013).

Despite this research, and although clients reported short-term placements as the most frequent reason for not staying in jobs, this aspect was not perceived by them as a necessarily negative phenomenon. Client survey respondents were specifically asked whether they believed short term and casual work experiences had a positive/negative or neutral impact on them. Sixty percent felt that all work was positive as it was "all good experience" while the remaining 40% were neutral,

claiming a number of short-term positions had no effect on them. No respondents perceived multiple short-term jobs or casual work as contributing to a loss of confidence or motivation to stay in the labour force.

"I'm happy to do casual for the money at this stage. It depends on what you want to do. I know my personal interest will take me a few more years to reach my goals"
Female client- 20 years

Given the nature of work today many young people may have no option but to accept short-term positions and this sanguine response by Inala clients to uncertain work conditions may be fortunate. It is crucial in this analysis to acknowledge the fast changing nature of the current commercial environment and the high adaptability of young people to fast-paced change (Burnstein, 2013). Unstable employment is on the increase for young people in particular, with casual work rates at 50% for them in 2013, and their part-time work outstripping full time work, with rates of 45% compared to 42% respectively in 2014 (AIHW, 2015). It may be that repeated exposure to a range of roles will contribute to the resilience required to survive the future employment landscape.

On another note, it is worth remembering that if young people do not perceive short-term or casual jobs as detrimental there may be a higher likelihood they will take these positions if offered. This may even occur despite a mentor's advice that they should wait for longer-term positions. It may also indicate that they would be more ready to leave an ongoing position if the situation was judged by them to not be optimal. Both of these scenarios challenge current government policy settings determining that employment "success" occurs only after 26 weeks.

Transport

The issue of transport rose repeatedly over the course of the three years of this study as a defining feature of unsuccessful job hunting and job retention. It is not a barrier unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, however it is an issue that the young clients of the Inala IMP consistently rated over the course of the three studies as one of the hardest things for them to manage, with 64% of 2015 survey respondents reporting difficulties staying in employment as a result of transport disruptions. Surveyed agency staff also reiterated the important relationship between transport and job retention, mentioning loss of drivers' licenses and distance from the workplace as key factors in placement breakdowns.

While public transport is available and appropriate for some clients with office-based positions, many others were placed into jobs long distances from their homes or that required quick and flexible mobility such as construction or trade related work.

"The job took two hours on three buses to get there"

Male client- 20 years

"There aren't enough buses"

Female client- 18 years

"Timetables can get confusing"

Female client - 19 years

"I couldn't get to the jobs"

Male client - 23 years

"Public transport is either not available when I needed them (between midnight and 6am) or not available at all in some areas"

Male client - 20 years

Like most people, young Inala IMP clients were keen to develop independent travel means, however they struggled to:

- Afford driving lessons,
- Gain access to vehicles for compulsory driving hours,
- Develop the confidence to take the licensing test, and
- Afford the purchase, insurance and maintenance of a vehicle.

"I have a license but no car"

Female client – 18 years

"I have a car but can't afford to insure it"

Female client 20 years

The Inala mentors were able to intervene in relation to financial support for transport related items including Go-cards, driving lessons and vehicle insurance and repairs, but this was only available via JSA funds while the client remained in the pre-employment phase of the IMP. Once job placement occurred, financial support had to be negotiated through other means.

The practice of the Qld State Penalty Enforcement Registry (SPER) of suspending drivers' licenses for non-payment of fines was also raised by several clients as a further obstacle to maintaining employment.

"My license was suspended cause of SPERS fines"

Male client- 18 years

"There was a course in automotive detailing that I was doing, but I lost my license, so I could no longer drive the cars"

Female client- 20 years

A review of case notes revealed direct advocacy by the mentor for difficult

issues such as SPERS fine repayment negotiations did occur. However this evaluation also disclosed evidence that even when mentors actively offered assistance to clients with these issues, this help was sometimes refused. Reasons for refusal of help were not clear, but may have been related to gender differences, shame and avoidance style behaviours.

Other clients placed into remote community roles, including mining and hospitality, faced the issue of expensive airfares, particularly each time they attended a funeral. One client recollected the mentor fervently advocating for the financial support of the JSA at times in order for her to not lose her job.

"BoysTown paid for my airfare, but only because (my mentor) talked them into it"

Female client – 19 years

Family and Cultural Obligations

Fifty seven percent of surveyed clients in this study nominated pressure from competing family/ cultural and work obligations as one of the reasons why their jobs had ended.

"I volunteered at the RSPCA for six months but had to stop cause of family issues"

Male client- 20 years

Aboriginal staff at Inala community and public sector agencies described the pressures felt by local urban clients to meet conflicting demands:

"Those from regional areas with full cultural values move to the town. The extended kinship system still has significant ceremonial expectations here. Even (for those) with semi-cultural values, family obligations means time off

work. People are not supposed to work for weeks for some ceremonies"

Aboriginal staff member- health agency

"Kinship means your cousin's kids are your kids. You can't send your mother to a nursing home so you have to stay home to care for her"

Aboriginal staff member- health agency

"Circumstances often change in families after people get work so the client may now need to support other family members"

Aboriginal staff member- justice agency

The strong care economy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities means there are disproportionate rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertaking unpaid carer responsibilities from a young age compared to non-Aboriginal people (Yap & Biddle, 2012) . The Inala IMP study found caring responsibilities have a profound impact on young IMP clients' ability to seek and sustain work, with family related "emotional overload" a substantial risk factor for leaving jobs:

"It wasn't easy to keep my job because of family responsibilities. My mother just died this year and I'm raising my siblings and their children"

Female client- 24 years

"I lost a few family members and had to get home and when I got home it made me not want to go back out (to the job). I've lost five family members in the last couple of years"

Female client- 19 years

This study demonstrated that support with family obligations was a key entry point for deep mentoring relationship building, and required the mentor to have substantial skills in mediation and negotiation. One external agency staff member noted the perceptiveness

required for the mentoring role in the following way:

"It is a difficult task to identify the members of a family who are ready for work and sensitively support them to "go for it" when the rest of the family is trying to talk them out of it. (Mentor's name) is able to work with the whole family to meet their needs so that they trust (the JSA) and support their family member to work"

Aboriginal staff member- community agency

Despite some research which speaks to the tensions and potential conflict between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural family obligations and participation in mainstream employment (for example Lahn, 2013), there is nevertheless an emerging alternative story of family and community support for labour force engagement. This Inala study found that a culturally appropriate mentor was able to successfully role model the possibilities of mainstream employment. One client described the positive way her family responded to her receiving intensive wrap-around-care style mentoring support to remain in work, despite the challenges of being placed in a remote job:

"Family members tell me not to give up. They tell me they're proud of me"

Female client – 19 years

Another father commented:

"My son realises he has to work now"

Family member

The mentors frequently demonstrated their commitment to both the clients' and community's well-being through practical family support. This time-consuming assistance highlighted the mentors' willingness to operationalise values that saw job retention as the major goal in all circumstances. It also demonstrated methods to negotiate

alternate ways of meeting extended family support needs.

"Mostly (mentor's name) supports me with taking care of my family. Like if one of my siblings has a job interview and I can't get her there, he'll take her. He gives me full-on support with me and work and with really difficult family situations"
Female client- 24 years

"When I was in Brisbane, my mum was going through DV (domestic violence) and I didn't want to come back (to remote work). My mentor really encouraged me to come back (to work)"

Female client – 19 years

Employer/ worker communications

Little research has been carried out specifically examining the impacts of family and cultural obligations on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's job retention, and in particular, the difficulty some young employees experience trying to communicate the impact of these responsibilities on their work attendance to their employers. However, studies evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander "on-site" employment support strategies, including mentoring, have noted this issue and have offered commentary suggesting a range of communication experiences along a spectrum from "easy to explain our obligations" to "impossible to explain our obligations" (see for example Briggs, 2006; Brereton & Parmenter, 2008 and Mills et al., 2014).

"Meeting the complex obligations and demands of an extended family and fulfilling employer expectations can be a difficult balancing act for some, particularly those working in FIFO operations who may be absent from home for extended periods. Anecdotal evidence suggests that

a compounding factor is that Indigenous employees are often reluctant to discuss personal problems with their supervisors"
(Brereton & Parmenter, 2008)

The above studies report some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff felt able to negotiate the meeting of their needs, but this was generally in overtly flexible employment settings with proactive Indigenous support strategies such as the public service, mining and health settings (Briggs, 2006). One Inala IMP client who had worked in an Aboriginal specific workplace for one week reported feeling secure in those circumstances to negotiate for her cultural needs to be met:

"This (absences) would only be for things like funerals and I would feel confident asking for that"

Female client – 20 years

For those working in less flexible and culturally aware settings, a high degree of self-confidence and significant communication skills can be required to navigate mainstream attendance requirements, and the Inala IMP study showed some young clients were either sacked or dropped out of employment once the level of internal discord and competing pressures became too high.

Current labour market conditions and mainstream commercial drivers do not generally lend themselves to either an understanding of, nor a commitment to bridging the gap between an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's cultural needs and an employer's expectations of paid work attendance (J.Lahn in E. Klein, 2014). Specifically, one Aboriginal service provider stated:

"Everyone in large family networks is classed as close- most employers don't

allow for that in their employment conditions”.

Aboriginal staff member- justice agency

Even in short term jobs, the extended kinship systems of reciprocity, demand sharing, and the care economy, can place pressures on young people that are difficult for mainstream employers to comprehend or accommodate in competitive markets under existing commercial productivity and efficiency principles (Van Es & Dockery, 2003) (Lahn, 2012).

“The client worked really well when she was here, but she was away a lot. Other workers questioned why she got so much lee-way. It really needs a lot of understanding on the employer’s part about Indigenous workers and their issues”

Mainstream employer- casual job offering

“There is a lack of understanding about sorry business by employers”

Aboriginal community agency staff

“There is a great lack of awareness and sensitivity in employers. The lack of a treaty between our people leads to a lack of importance placed by employers on these (cultural obligation) issues”

Aboriginal health services staff

When asked about the main benefits of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees having a mentor, employers frequently framed their responses in terms of the mentor’s role being to intervene in frequent and/or unexplained absences.

“She chased up stuff like (my) employee not turning up. (That) was helpful”

Employer

“They found me staff and chased the staff for me if they took days off without negotiating that first”

Employer

“It has worked. We have had some issues. It’s been good when we had issues like not turning up or not communicating properly. Cause these issues were always resolved by the client after we let the (IMP office) know”

Employer

Such responses point to the main issue being one of poor communication between employee and employer about planned and unplanned absences rather than the absences per se. Both IMP mentors intimated the difficulties of raising with mainstream private employers the benefits of encouraging their young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to feel safe discussing attendance and family obligations with them. However both described such dialogue as a critical success factor.

“(It’s important to) understand that the emotional effects of historical and intergenerational trauma is played out in behaviours like not turning up for interviews or not calling if not coming in. It’s critical that non-Aboriginal people take these emotional needs into account to explain why these behaviours occur”

Year 1 IMP mentor

“I would advocate close contact with the employer during the recruitment process so that they understand the role of an Indigenous mentor is to support them, as well as the client. I would suggest that the employer needs to be open to listening to the mentor on common hiccups that happen when long term unemployed (Aboriginal) job seekers are placed into employment”

Year 2 IMP mentor

While only 35% of Inala IMP client survey respondents nominated difficulty communicating with the boss and feeling angry and misunderstood at work as reasons for job breakdown, additional data gathered from their qualitative

comments, their case notes, and other stakeholder interviews, suggested jobs ended for reasons relating to poor communication at much higher levels than this. This analysis indicated clients frequently did not feel able to advocate for themselves, and employers similarly did not understand why employees were not showing up for work.

"Even when there's something wrong (young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) can find it hard to ask for help. It's seen as a failure by them, of either themselves or of their leaders. They fear their employers will (also) see it as failure to ask for help too often, so they say nothing and things just escalate"

Aboriginal social security agency staff

Clearly there are serious challenges for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to not only accommodate the needs of both family and employer, but also to communicate the difficulty of their position to both parties. Rather than feeling able to discuss cultural obligations and unexplained absences with employers, this study found clients tended to frame their anxiety about workplace expectations in terms of managers not being "likeable", being "difficult to deal with" or "not being paid properly" (the latter in relation to a disagreement about payment following absences). Some young clients reported telling their mentor that they had informed their employer of intentions to be absent, but employers had fired them anyway. Other stakeholders perceived these claims to not be wholly accurate with one Aboriginal public service officer commenting:

"I think there is a mismatch between clients saying they always call and the truth. I think the younger generation in the cities don't have the same respect

for their elders and don't have the same traditional needs for time off for traditional ceremonies. Unexplained absences is often just laziness"

Aboriginal staff member- public sector

One family member reinforced this perception, commenting that "I don't really know why he left his job - maybe my son doesn't like getting up in the morning". However she also added that her son lacked confidence and "doesn't communicate well", highlighting the difficulty in assessing the source of this issue.

Depression, often undiagnosed, is a common experience for Inala IMP job seekers, to the extent that one in five respondents nominated having felt so depressed that they could not get out of bed as a reason for jobs ending. The three Inala IMP studies overall found evidence suggesting a lack of self-confidence, mental ill-health and reduced well-being influenced sub-optimal interactions with employers.

However, regardless of the reasons behind these failures to communicate, there were strong indicators that the mentoring strategy was pivotal in increasing and improving dialogue between parties about extended kinship responsibilities. There was evidence from all stakeholders and from client case notes to demonstrate that the mentors devoted many hours responding to this issue at an individual client level.

"He has also talked to my employer and spoke with them when I had a family crisis and didn't go to work"

Female client - 24 years

"(Mentor's name) has taught me how to speak up, how to communicate properly"

Male Client - 24 years

"If I don't want to ring (an employment place) - too shame- he (mentor's name)'ll do it for me" Male Client- 25 years

"(Mentor's name) taught my sons not to be ashamed if they can't get to work, but to contact people and let them know. They make the effort to ring now"
Family member

However, while employers noted the proactive nature of the mentor's behaviour as being key to placement success, with 100% in Year 3 reporting the mentoring program as either Effective or Very Effective at meeting their needs as an employer, they nevertheless gave little indication of feeling a shared responsibility for encouraging their employees to communicate their needs directly to them.

"The mentor was around quite a lot to see the employee- not me. Prompting my employee- getting her into gear/get motivated. I didn't need to call to discuss absences- the mentor rang me"

Employer

"We have an employee with serious issues and the mentor speaks with her on a weekly basis. The client still has the issues, but they are being managed"

Employer

"A mentor lessens the impact of (employees') issues (on the employer). When something happens for an employee, it might just be small, but the potential is there for the client to go off the rails to the point of losing their job. If the mentor intervenes it can short-circuit the problem. (Mentoring) minimises the impact of the problem on the employee's ability to do their job"

Employer

"(When there were) issues with attendance or communication (close liaison with the employer) made it easier for the mentor to call the client and reiterate a message about expected behaviour, rather than just coming from us. That helps to get the message through"
Employer

Aboriginal staff from other Inala support services were unanimous in their survey responses that employment services based mentors played a critical role in promoting communication between employers and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:

"Mentors can improve cultural awareness in employers and other JSA staff. They can directly negotiate with employers when a client needs time off to attend to cultural responsibilities- educating them about the responsibilities involved in being Aboriginal. The Mentor can help explain these kinds of things. Mentors can also encourage clients to speak up for themselves by using role-plays to practice."

Aboriginal staff member- community agency

Bored by the work

Half of client respondents nominated "feeling bored by the work" as a trigger for a job ending. Qualitative feedback indicated they wanted their jobs to be interesting and to stimulate their minds. Although this is not an issue unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, there may be a correlation between the rate of entry-level jobs many find themselves in because of poor literacy and numeracy skills (AIHW, 2015), and a lack of motivation to stay in these jobs if they are not perceived to be going anywhere.

Research by the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining noted the impact of this issue on job retention in 2007.

"Indigenous employees are aware of the limitations of working in semi-skilled operational roles and some study participants commented that the work was 'boring' and they wanted further challenges. Others felt they were overlooked for promotion. These observations are supported by the work of Barker and Brereton (2005), who found that eight per cent of survey respondents cited 'boredom with the job' as the reason for leaving employment" (Tiplady & Barclay, 2007).

Inala IMP clients were surprisingly open with feedback relating to the demotivating nature of unskilled work.

"It was warehousing- it didn't interest me so I left" Female client- 20 years

Aboriginal staff from other agencies were also very specific about this factor's role in low job retention.

"Being stuck in the same job with no progression can make people bored so they want to leave. Entry level jobs are great for starting but they need to see a path to something else"
Aboriginal social services agency

The Year 3 mentor gave feedback that she found unmotivated clients with few non-vocational barriers were often more likely to leave a job than clients who may have had many non-vocational problems, but were highly motivated to work.

"It all comes down to motivation and attitude. I have placed clients into work who would be termed non-job-ready due to numerous non-vocational barriers but who were desperate to work and (I've) found that they have stayed in work as well as dealing with their non-vocational stuff"
Year 3 mentor

The Year 3 mentor also highlighted the inter-play of factors impacting on job retention in pointing out that extended kinship obligations not only signify an employed person has family obligations that may create stress for them, but an upside also exists, where if work ends for any reason, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are themselves able to draw upon the community's resources to survive. The mentor framed this "safety net" as another reason why some clients were less motivated to remain in jobs that were not experienced as stimulating or fulfilling and referred to the need for a whole of community response to this issue.

"(We need to) change the culture of families to be more supportive of clients going into employment. Getting the entire family and community more involved in the processes around job searching, job readiness and maintaining employment. Higher levels of Indigenous employment is going to require a change in mindset at a community level"
Year 3 Mentor

Policy implications

Despite the localised nature of the Inala IMP pilot evaluations, several key messages emerged from the analysis that may be useful for broader policy consideration.

Addressing cultural tensions between demand and supply

Any strategy aimed at creating a synergistic labour marketplace between an Aboriginal community with the level of disadvantage experienced in Inala and the mainstream commercial employment sector, must find a way to generate not only demand, but also supply, plus a mutually acceptable pathway between the two.

Bridge building needs to occur not only between a community and an employment placement service, but also between employers and their employees' families. To ensure demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young workers continues, this study showed indications of the need for mentors to play a larger role in cultural education with employers.

Servicing labour demand

There was evidence in this study that mainstream employers had very little understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural obligations. Because of this paucity of information, it would seem that raising their awareness of the potential need for frequent and unplanned absences would be crucial to building job retention and sustainable demand. Federal Government Indigenous employment related funding agreements and guidelines have been asking mentors to carry out "cultural awareness raising" with employers and existing employees for many years (see for example: DEEWR, 2008) yet this task continues to challenge mentors and would appear to be an area that is far more complex than the documentation of contract deliverables would suggest.

These models require employment service mentors to not only be skilful case managers, but to also be confident and diplomatic cultural trainers and informed job brokers; to source employers willing to make the effort to take on young people who may need sensitive encouragement to discuss their extended kinship responsibilities and attendant absences. Many employers would not see this predicament as their responsibility. Despite national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies such as Generation One producing "handbooks" for educating employers and

encouraging them to build relationships with a worker's family and instigate discussions with employees about the potential impact of family obligations (Generation One, Reconciliation Australia, & Social Ventures Australia, 2013), shifting the predominantly commercial orientation of the mainstream business sector to willingly offer reduced hours for the same pay would seem fraught with difficulty.

For many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who find the dilemmas of work/family balance overwhelming, employment in an Aboriginal enterprise or a company that is an active partner to a Reconciliation Plan may be a preferred option. Yet in 2013 there were only 300 organisations, including public services, that had Reconciliation Plans (Generation One et al., 2013). With many Indigenous specific traineeships failing to convert to long-term employment, and an unknown number of Indigenous enterprise employers available (Morley, 2014), it is likely to be a long road to a sufficiency of culturally aware businesses to accommodate all young urban people's job preferences. The Year 3 mentor also challenged this choice on the grounds that too much flexibility in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise employment conditions set young people up to not be able to operate efficiently within more restrictive business environments. It would therefore seem important for existing and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises to ensure they are sensitively preparing their staff to meet mainstream commercial expectations.

Creating supply

Although unemployment has a financial opportunity cost to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is not an impairment to a member's full cultural

and community participation (Hunter, 2000).

This view was illustrated by the Year 3 mentor's description of extended kinship reciprocity safety networks as providing a means for her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to come and go from paid jobs and even survive welfare payment breaches in ways that would be rarely available to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This cautionary tale would suggest that government strategies using a carrot and stick approach to unemployment "benefit" payments as applied across the wider Australian community, may lose influence when used to increase the supply of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mainstream employment participants.

The history of "economic reconciliation" as promoted by government policy is relatively short, and the number of role models for long-term full-time employment within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, while growing, are still few. This lack of inter-generationally deep "employability" skills, experience and values cannot be underestimated, nor can the impact of asking families to forgo binding cultural expectations around demand caring and sharing be ignored, if working family members are expected to prioritise work commitments over family obligations.

Local communities who do choose to focus on growing rates of long-term mainstream employment for their young people may be called upon to make fundamental changes to the manner in which extended family networks operate to sustain themselves, and to the demands they place upon their young people to provide personal, psychological and monetary resources to other family members during both job-seeking and employment phases. Such moves by

communities towards making economic, social and cultural accommodations may require the employment system to offer valuable non-monetary adjustments in return, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are compensated in ways that are assessed by them as having equivalent worth.

This study demonstrated that Aboriginal mentors based in employment services can be seen by a community to be offering valuable services when they are able to provide intensive case management support. This model of care not only links the community's job-ready young people to an employment network, but also delivers timely, holistic, comprehensive and above-all, culturally safe support, to their most vulnerable non-job-ready young members through direct interventions in their psycho-social crises.

This study found descriptive evidence that intensive wrap-around care and counselling style support, as well as deep relationship building with co-case managing agencies in mental health, housing, justice, and other related domains, contributed to improved psycho-social outcomes in surveyed clients in the early years of the pilot. These forms of outcomes were noted to have been linked to improved sustainable employment in other research, yet few employment services have been funded to provide culturally appropriate case co-ordination across such a diversity of settings. Nonetheless, this Inala IMP study was able to demonstrate that by placing highly skilled Aboriginal mentors within an employment service delivering just such a model of continuity of care, the focus was able to be kept on paid work as the overall long-term goal, even when other psycho-social barriers were present.

The limitations of solo mentoring

Despite these successes, the Inala pilot demonstrated a fundamental design flaw in the Department of Employment funding strategy. Hard-won community trust in the Inala BoysTown JSA was eroded by funding an economic reconciliation strategy which initially encouraged deep engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and nominated Streams 3 and 4 clients - the most disadvantaged of all cohorts - as the target client group, but then failed to fund enough mentors to truly respond adequately to the resulting influx of young people with serious and complex needs.

As noted, early engagement strategies by the Inala IMP mentor were extremely effective at increasing the community's willingness to encourage their young people to "give work a go", and were shown to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to participate in ongoing job seeking processes than before the IMP began.

However the resulting need to then deliver intensive case management and wrap-around care to many of the resulting caseload diverted mentoring resources away from those who were ready for job placement, as well as away from employers needing cultural education and training. When the program pivoted away from community engagement to avoid further referrals of non-job ready clients, this study showed community interest quickly disappeared.

This would suggest an expansion of funding facilitating the employment of more than one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentor in each employment service office might allow programs to more effectively deliver on the long-term objective of sustainable employment through offering the community a service they could deem

valuable: intensive case management support given to the most vulnerable of their young people.

This is not to suggest that the mentors' roles should be split between pre and post-employment phases. The breadth of skillsets described in this paper - whilst not easy to recruit for in a single person - nevertheless allows each mentor to leverage the power of long-term trust relationships with each group of stakeholders over time. A strong belief was held by the Year 3 Mentor that it was essential the same person offer support across both pre and post stages. It was felt that critical relationship building occurs in the pre-employment phase, leading to trust and a willingness on the part of clients to disclose issues potentially leading to job placement breakdown. It was felt that these issues would not be identified in a timely way if clients were faced with starting a new mentoring relationship once in employment. The primacy of this principle of continuity of care would suggest that additional mentors would allow for smaller caseloads, each with a combination of both job-ready and non-job-ready clients, thus freeing up more time for ongoing engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and cultural education strategies with employers.

Additionally, an increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors in a single employment service office would assist in ameliorating the isolation and pressure felt by solo mentors operating within mainstream employment offices who may find themselves facing the same pressures of juggling work/family balance as their clients.

What mentoring cannot change

Finally, note must be made of the reality that there is little a mentoring strategy

can do to overcome the structural determinants of high youth unemployment in the current labour market. Casual work leading to under-employment and short-term contracts are hallmarks of the 21st century job scene, and employment policy makers should be challenged to revisit the current paradigm which posits that success in an employment program can only be measured in terms of six months of ongoing employment.

Note should also be made that financial assistance and driving license support attached to mentoring programs was shown to be effective at addressing some of the transport problems faced by job seekers and workers, however this support was limited to their time in the mentoring program. Larger issues relating to expensive and poorly located public transport and state driver license suspension systems for non-payment of fines are beyond the remit of any employment strategy.

Conclusion

While the Inala IMP failed to reach the benchmarks of success as outlined by the Department of Employment, the program nevertheless demonstrated that a culturally appropriate mentoring strategy could be developed that would increase young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour market engagement in the short-term, with strong indications of increased job retention in the longer term. This strategy would need to be supported by an expansion in the number of highly skilled mentors in a single location, and have a corresponding increase in focus on educating employers about the impact of cultural obligations on work attendance. The Inala study demonstrated that with staged processes, including engaging the local community and other service providers

in wrap-around care for their most vulnerable job seekers, and supporting families to redirect their reliance on working members, young people from a highly disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander urban community could be brought to connect strongly with an employment placement office, to endure the anxiety of long periods of job seeking, to demonstrate their strengths at interview, to be selected for jobs and to keep them for up to six months and longer. The study also suggested that short-term and casual work is not perceived by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as having a negative impact on them, and its over-representation in today's labour conditions should challenge current policy definitions of employment program success.

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About the Author: Philippa Hawke is a Senior Researcher in the national not-for-profit organisation, BoysTown, and conducted all three evaluative studies on the BoysTown Inala Indigenous Mentoring Pilot program between 2012 and 2015.

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