

# Collaborative Evaluation & Research Group

Supporting Innovative Research and Evaluation



**'I AM DEADLY'  
PROJECT EVALUATION  
DECEMBER 2022**

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FEDERATION UNIVERSITY  
COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION &  
RESEARCH GROUP

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

**'I AM DEADLY'**  
Project Evaluation  
December 2022

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group (CERG) Federation University Gippsland, acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners and custodians of the land, sea and nations and pay our respect to elders, past, present and emerging. The CERG further acknowledges our commitment to working respectfully to honour their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this country.

The CERG would like to thank Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) for funding this evaluation, their support and contribution to it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group (CERG) Federation University Gippsland is an innovative initiative that aims to build evaluation capacity and expertise within Gippsland. As a local provider the CERG understands the value of listening to the community and has the ability to deliver timely and sustainable evaluations that are tailored to the needs of a wide variety of organisations.

Associate Professor Joanne Porter is the Director of the CERG. Joanne has led a number of successful research projects and evaluations in conjunction with local industry partners. She has guided the development of the CERG since its formation in 2018.

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- Amy Cowan
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*Associate Professor  
Joanne Porter*

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The 'I Am Deadly' project was designed by Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) in the Latrobe Valley. The experience of Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN indicated that there was a reluctance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects at school. This limited their employment opportunities post-secondary school as they had little or no understanding or experience of vocational pathways. This also restricted their ability to successfully gain an apprenticeship or traineeship. The project aimed to address this by providing Koorie<sup>1</sup> students with an understanding of what a trade career would involve. The project also aimed to provide the necessary work readiness skills that would support a successful transition to employment, a traineeship or apprenticeship.

### 1.2 KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Of the 20 places available in the I Am Deadly program, 15 students enrolled with 8 students completing the entire program. Of the seven students who withdrew from the program, four found employment or an apprenticeship. The majority of the students lived in Morwell and Traralgon, with Kurnai College and Traralgon College referring most of the students to the program. There were five facilitators and a group of volunteers.

It was identified from the workbook analysis, focus group interviews and interviews with program facilitators and mentors that a strong focus on cultural connection and safety was vital to the success of the program. Ensuring that program facilitators and mentors had a deep understanding of the history and distinctions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture was acknowledged as vital for program sustainability. These findings were supported by the literature review, with strong cultural identity, connection to culture within learning environments and providing culturally safe environments for learning enabling student success (Ackehurst et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2015; O'Shea et al., 2016; Shay & Heck, 2015). Developing a culturally safe space for the students to learn encouraged their connection to culture, whilst highlighting that cultural nuances such as Men's and Women's Business may impact the students' confidence in communicating with others. Program facilitators highlighted the importance of having the program designed, implemented and evaluated with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;

*"My biggest thing is the mentors need to be Koorie. I'd like the Facilitator to be Koorie too, but if they can't be, the mentors must be because there must be that shared experience."*

In future iterations of the program, if students were able to see themselves and their culture reflected in the workbook content, including in art, language and expression, a greater connection to the written content may be achieved (Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2018; Gwynne et al., 2020). It was identified that students valued the discussion that followed from the workbook exercises, which is supported by the literature in yarning and communications circles being the desired mode of learning (Eady & Keen, 2021). When students can see their lives and culture reflected in course content, it may foster a sense of purpose, belonging and personal responsibility in the learning process. Facilitators also highlighted the lack of Welcome to Country;

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<sup>1</sup> Koorie is a generic term used by contemporary Aboriginal people and communities of Victoria and Southern New South Wales to identify and differentiate themselves from Aboriginal groups from other parts of Australia. Koorie Heritage Trust: <https://korieheritagetrust.com.au/about-us/>

*“I think we should do a proper Welcome to Country. If you want my personal opinion, we should do a smoking ceremony at the start before we do it.”*

Data collected from the student workbook indicates that over the 8-week ‘I Am Deadly’ component of the program, student confidence and competence improved significantly (33% in week 1 and 62% in week 8). Students expressed feeling more positive and supported when applying for a job (37.5% in week 1 and 50% in week 8), and significantly more positive about taking part in a job interview (12.5% in week 1 and 50% in week 8). By finding their voice, students were able to engage more readily with their classmates and industry professionals at the Inspiring Young People Lunch. Students built skills in participating in discussion:

*“I talk more. I used to just sit here and ignore everyone and now I’m like I will talk to everyone.”*

Mentors and facilitators agreed, stating that the changes they saw in the students personal and professional confidence was encouraging:

*“Their work skills have definitely improved, but their confidence in themselves to be able to do that has improved.”*

Mentors and facilitators saw as positive students who at the start of the program were shy and reserved become enthusiastic about the days spent in the group. They could see the benefit on the inter- and intra-professional skills of the students, who were making new connections with peers and industry professionals.

Throughout the program, findings from the workbook suggested that students felt more positive, however slightly more overwhelmed with the prospect of applying to TAFE (37% positive and 0% overwhelmed in week 1 and 50% positive and 25% overwhelmed in week 8). Additionally, students felt marginally less positive about pursuing their dream job 76% positive and 25% supported in week 1 and 62.5% positive and 12.5% supported in week 8). This may be attributed to learning more about what the job entailed, entrance requirements for the job and expectations for their future careers. This was confirmed by program facilitators, praising the opportunity that the Trade Taster offered:

*“I do think the trades helped because it was something that they've never done before. And it's really fun to engage in. I think that was great because it also gives them an idea of what they are good at and what they are not so great at.”*

Students acknowledged that the skills they were learning within the program helped with in their future career aspirations. They noticed the teachings had impacted their behaviour and workplace professionalism:

*“Like I am more organised now. I actually get up an hour earlier than I need to, to get here. I like getting up at 7, get dressed straight away, leave home and catch a bus and get ready for this place.”*

The program was seen as a great success for the students, staff and key stakeholders involved in the program. Feedback from the Inspiring Young People Lunch demonstrated that industry professionals wanted to see more students involved, and greater time allocated to the event to network, build connections and learn more about the students. Words such as ‘Students’, ‘stories,’ and ‘hearing’ were highlighted in what participants enjoyed most, supporting literature findings that yarning and storytelling was a desired mode of learning and communication for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents (Eady & Keen, 2021). Mentors and program staff voiced their excitement and passion for

being involved in a potentially life changing program, expressing that their own personal growth was enormous. When reflecting on whether the program delivered on its intent of preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents for the workforce, they agreed that it had:

*“So are they work ready? Yes, they now know what to say, they know now how to sell themselves in a positive form, which is good and being able to sell yourself in a positive form is something they would have never experienced before.”*

### 1.3 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations are made based on the evaluation of ‘I Am Deadly’.

1. The I Am Deadly program continues to be delivered and promoted across the region
  - a. The program continues to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students learning work ready skills and increasing career aspirations.
2. Future programs consider the importance and connection with culture, especially the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in designing, facilitating and evaluating the program.
  - a. A Welcome to Country with place-based ceremonies be included to strengthen the cultural connection to the land on which the program was run.
  - b. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators and mentors be included to foster a sense of belonging and cultural safety for students.
  - c. Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the project evaluation including during collection, analysis and dissemination of the results.
3. Facilitators, staff and mentor’s complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training where needed;
  - a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators, staff and mentors be included in the delivery of the training, as facilitators or advisors
4. The student workbook be improved for future delivery to include more culturally appropriate content, including artwork, images and relatable material.
  - a. Workbook images need to reflect the students, being age, gender and culturally appropriate in the human figures displayed.
  - b. Consider encouraging students of past programs to design art and images based on their experiences within the program and the benefits they want to share.
  - c. Language used in the workbook should be culturally relevant and relatable for students which will foster a sense of belonging and shared understanding.

# I AM DEADLY



*"All I got to say is that it is awesome like if I had a chance to do it next year I definitely would."*

Trade Taster

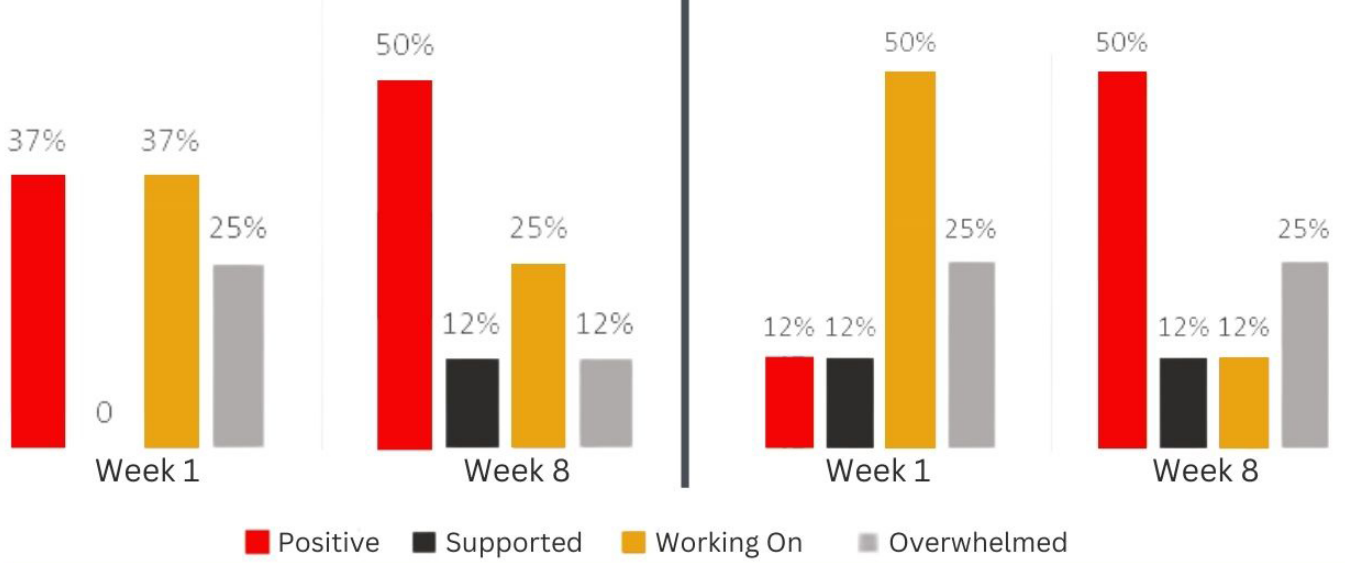
'I Am Ready'

Work Placement

*"How to get ready for work, how to work as a team better, how to trust people. Pretty much, make better friends, just all the good stuff..."*

Taking part in a job interview

Applying for a job



*"We are getting extra help and getting job ready and the others are not going to know how ... so hopefully practically we are already ahead"*



Inspiring Young People Lunch

## 2 'I AM DEADLY' PROGRAM

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The 'I Am Deadly' project was designed by Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) in the Latrobe Valley. The experience of Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN indicated that there was a reluctance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects at school. This limited their employment opportunities post-secondary school as they had little or no understanding or experience of vocational pathways. This also restricted their ability to successfully gain an apprenticeship or traineeship. The project aimed to address this by providing Koorie students with an understanding of what a trade career would involve. The project also aimed to provide the necessary work readiness skills that would support a successful transition to employment, a traineeship or apprenticeship.

### 2.2 POLICY CONTEXT

A report by the Commission for Children and Young People, *Our youth, our way: an inquiry into the over representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system*<sup>2</sup> found that Aboriginal and young people have lower rates of school attendance, are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school and have lower levels of educational attainment than non-Aboriginal students. The report also found that Aboriginal students experienced unacceptable rates of racialised bullying which contributes to their disengagement from education. The 'I Am Deadly' program aimed to encourage Koorie students to stay in school to increase their employment options and therefore reduce their chance of entering the youth justice system.

The 'I Am Deadly' program was funded from the Latrobe Valley Community Infrastructure and Investment Fund, Latrobe Community Connections Grants Program. The grants were provided to community groups across Latrobe and Baw Baw local government areas (LGAs) to increase community engagement and participation in education, training, sport, recreation or other community activities.

### 2.3 PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project was to enable young Koorie students in Latrobe City LGA to obtain knowledge, skills and opportunities for lasting outcomes in employment, further education and training.

#### Program Objectives

- To motivate and empower participants to continue to engage with education and employment with a work readiness focus
- To develop in participants the confidence to pursue opportunities
- To deliver real and lasting employment preparation for participants
- To expand the knowledge and understanding of trade pathways
- To provide a platform for stakeholders to work collaboratively in providing a holistic work readiness program that connects participants to employers and provides real exposure to the workplace
- To build a series of 'case studies of success' that will enhance the aspirations of young Koorie people.

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<sup>2</sup> Commission for Children and Young People, *Our youth, our way: inquiry into the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system*, Commission for Children and Young People, Melbourne, 2021. <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/our-youth-our-way/> Accessed 16.09.2022.

## 2.4 PROJECT DELIVERY

The project consisted of three components over three school terms.

### **Trade Taster**

The trade taster included visits to a number of industries to see trades at work and to meet with tradespeople and hear about their jobs. It also included an opportunity 'try a trade' through an eight-week taster at TAFE or other registered training organisations (RTO's). Trades included automotive, electrical, carpentry, plumbing, hospitality and hairdressing. The component was completed with an 'Inspiring Lunch' with key industry leaders, which was an opportunity to connect and socialise with industry professionals.

### **'I Am Deadly'**

The 'I Am Deadly' component is based on the 'I Am Ready' program that was developed and run successfully to young people with a disability<sup>3</sup>. 'I Am Deadly' provided the students with the skills to help them transition from school to further education, traineeship, apprenticeship or employment. The component involved participants attending workshops aimed at developing employability skills and included team building, communication, industry visits, mock interviews, dressing for success, healthy minds, resume writing and career mapping.

### **Work Placement**

Industry placements gave the students the opportunity to experience working in the area of their choice. Following the Work Placement component, a number of workplace visits and a celebratory lunch was arranged for the students.

## 2.5 PARTNERSHIPS

To deliver the project Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN partnered with several local organisations including TAFE Gippsland who delivered the trade tasters, Latrobe Youth Space in Morwell where the program was run and industry partners, for example, AGL and Alinta who provided industry visits.

## 2.6 SELECTION, ATTENDANCE AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The program was aimed at Koorie high school students in Year 10 (15 – 16 years of age) from seven secondary schools across Latrobe City LGA. Students were identified through individual schools' staff who currently work collaboratively with Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN.

Of the 20 places that were available, 15 students enrolled in the program with 53% (n=8) of participants completing the entire program. Of the seven students who withdrew from the program, four found employment or an apprenticeship. The majority of the students lived in Morwell and Traralgon, with Kurnai College and Traralgon College referring most of the students to the program. There were five facilitators and a group of volunteers.

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<sup>3</sup> Collaborative Evaluation Unit 'I Am Ready' Partnership Evaluation, 2020: <https://federation.edu.au/research/research-centres/ceug/completed-projects/i-am-ready-partnership>

## I AM DEADLY PROGRAM STUDENT ATTENDANCE

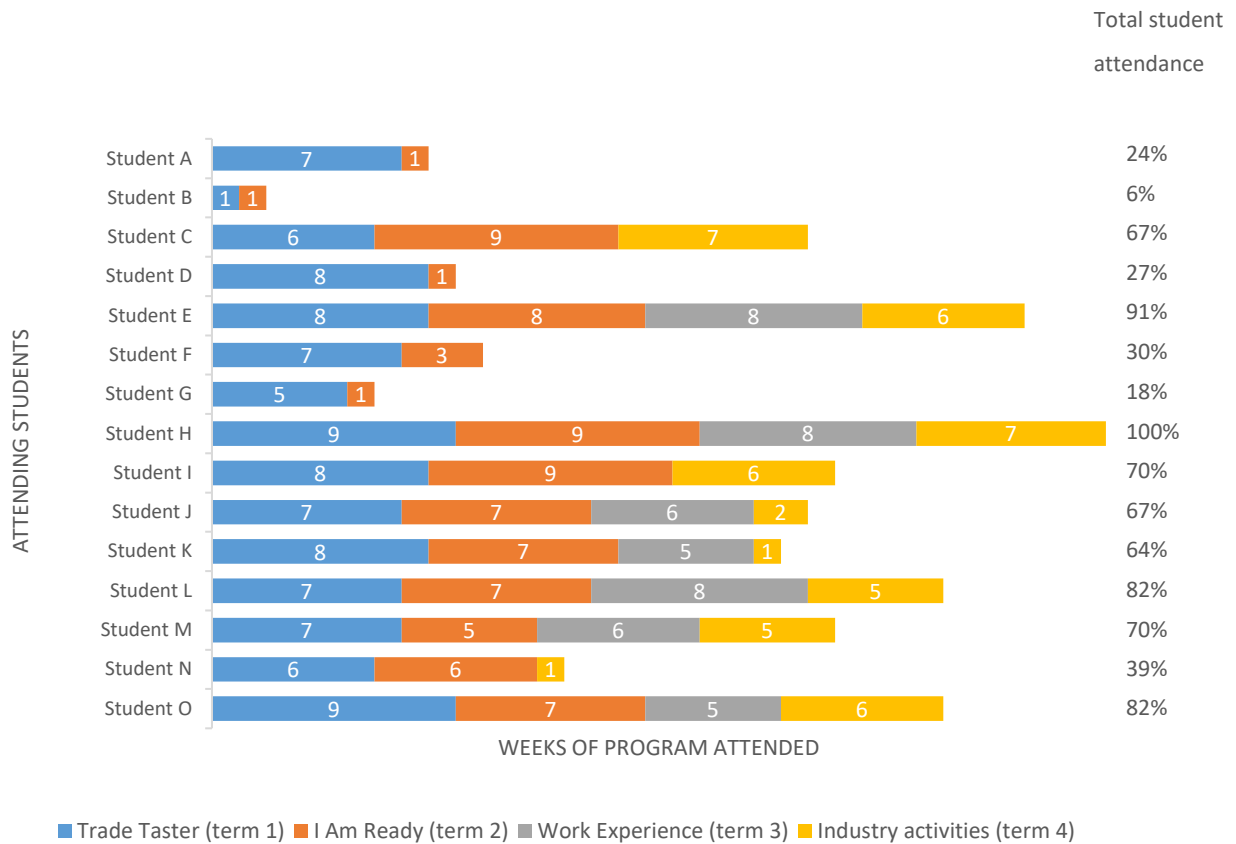


Figure1: I am Deadly Program Student Attendance

The highest program attendance for a student was 100%, attending all 33 weeks. Conversely, the lowest attendance recorded was two weeks (6%). Average student attendance was 20 weeks, over 57% of the total program. Student reasons for disengaging with the program were varied. Several students found apprenticeships and work opportunities, while others had health, family and social pressures throughout the 33 weeks. The greatest engagement occurred in the first nine weeks of the program, during the Trade Taster component. This was followed by engagement in term two for the “I Am Ready” component. Both term one and two saw engagement of all 15 students for at least one week of the program activities.

In term three, the work experience component of the program, attendance was the lowest with seven of the 15 students completing at least one week (47%). Students attended workplaces such as Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), The Australian Gas Light Company (AGL), Baptistcare, Heritage Manor, Aussie Broadband, Latrobe City Council (LCC), Delfab engineering and the local hairdresser. Attendance steadily increased again in term four during the industry activities, with at least 67% of the students completing at least one week (n=10). Of the 10 students that attended the term four work experience activities component if the I Am Deadly program, time was spent with DELWP (n=9), Technical school (visit 1) (n=7), Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault (GCASA)/Australian Community Support/Youth Space (n=6), Federation University (n=7), Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLAWAC)/Koori Unit TAFE Gippsland (n=7) and a second technical school visit (n=3). Several students attended more than one work experience opportunity, increasing their knowledge in various career avenues.

### 3 THE EVALUATION OF 'I AM DEADLY'

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#### 3.1 AIM OF THE EVALUATION

CERG was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the 'I Am Deadly' project on young Koorie students' readiness to seek future employment.

#### 3.2 EVALUATION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The evaluation of the 'I Am Deadly' project addressed the following research questions:

- What was the impact of the 'I Am Deadly' program on the confidence and competence levels of year 10 Koorie students in seeking employment?
- What was the impact of the work experience aspect of the program on the student's attitudes towards employment?
- What were the perceived benefits and challenges to employment for Koorie students?

#### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION / TOOLS USED

The evaluation of the project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach which provided information about process, outcomes and impact. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected via focus groups with facilitators, mentors and participants, and student workbooks.

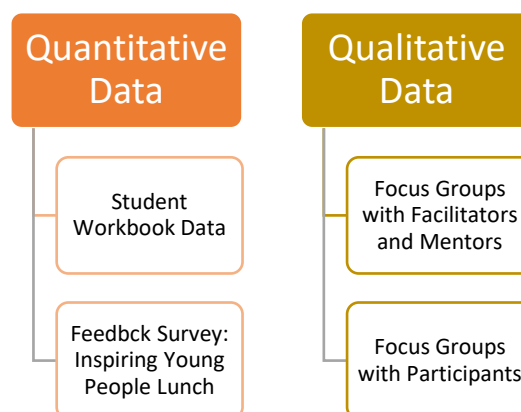


Figure 2: Data Collected

See Section 9 for Evaluation Methodology

## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

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### 4.1 PARTICIPANT WORKBOOKS

Student workbook data was collected after the 'I Am Deadly' component of the project in term 2 of 2022, which included an 8-week face to face structured program and a 2-week employment placement. The workbooks were a key learning tool that contained weekly exercises, activities and self-assessment exercises. A total of 15 workbooks were collected, of which seven (n=7) were removed due to incomplete data due participants withdrawing from the program. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis.

The following exercises from the workbook were analysed:

Section	Data / Activity		
4.1.1	How are you feeling? Activity	Week 1 and Week 8	
4.1.2	Self-Assessment of Employability Skills	Communication	Week 2
		Teamwork	Week 2
		Problem Solving	Week 3
		Initiative and Enterprise	Week 3
		Planning and Organising	Week 2
		Self-Management	Week 4
		Learning	Week 4
		Technology	Week 4
4.1.3	Transferable Skills Checklist Activity	Week 4	

Table 1: Workbook Data and Activities Analysed.

The results of the workbook data are presented in valid percentages (removing missing data) and number of participants / frequency (n=X). Students were assigned an identification number so their data could be de-identified.

#### HOW ARE YOU FEELING? ACTIVITY

Participants were asked to rate how they were feeling about applying for and searching for work before and after the 'I Am Deadly' component of the program. Their responses at the beginning of the term were compared to their responses at the conclusion, showing either increased or decreased confidence in entering the workforce. Participants were asked to colour in the figure in the picture (below) that best represented how they were feeling using a series of five prompts.

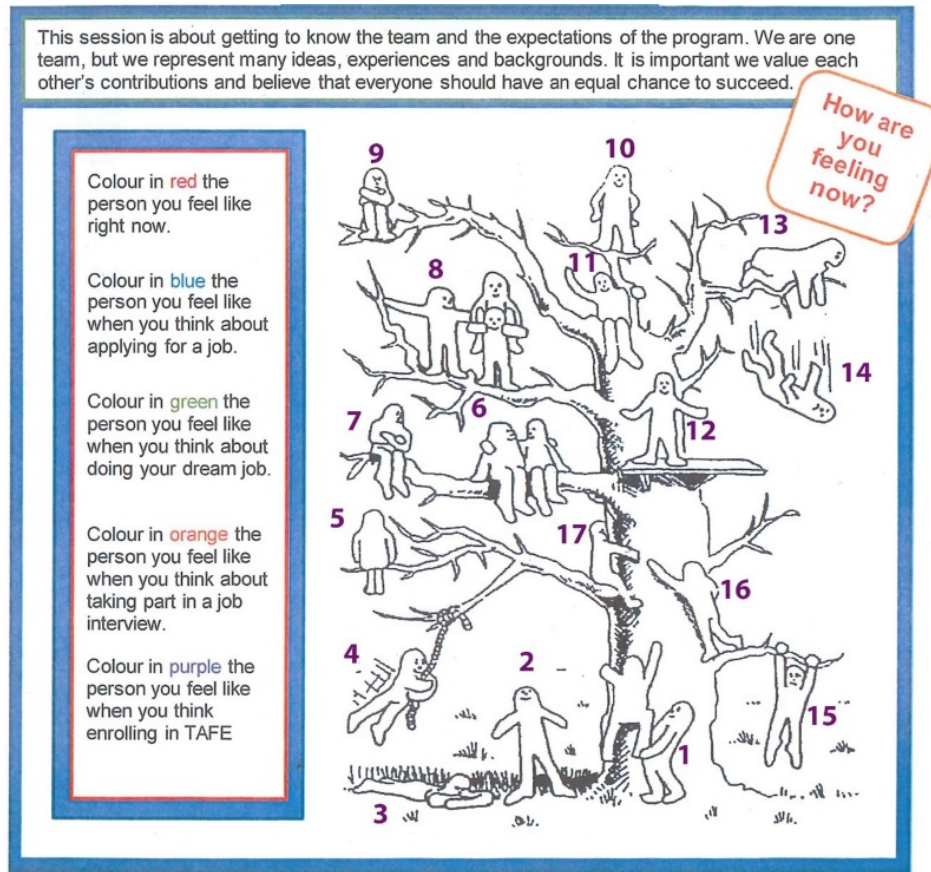


Figure 3: How Are You Feeling: Tree Activity

Participant responses were evaluated based on activity subcategories which were established during the 'I Am Ready' evaluation<sup>4</sup>. Each figure in the activity was allocated a number which corresponded to a feeling as outlined in the table below. These responses were collated at week 1 and week 8 to show the difference in participants feeling towards the five prompts.

Category	Figure Number
1 = Positive	2, 4, 10, 11, 12
2 = Supported	1, 6, 8
3 = Working On	13, 15, 16, 17
4 = Overwhelmed	3, 5, 7, 9, 14

Table 2: Activity subcategories

**Red: How are you feeling right now?**

In answer to the prompt "how are you feeling right now?", participants in week 1 were spread evenly between feeling positive, overwhelmed or working on it (33%, n=3). By week 8, most participants were

<sup>4</sup> "I Am Ready" Partnership Evaluation: Collaborative Evaluation Unit, Federation University: [https://researchonline.federation.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/vital:15369?query=Baw+Baw+llen&sort=ss\\_dateNormalized+desc%2Csort\\_ss\\_title+asc&queryType=vitalDismax](https://researchonline.federation.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/vital:15369?query=Baw+Baw+llen&sort=ss_dateNormalized+desc%2Csort_ss_title+asc&queryType=vitalDismax)

feeling positive (62%, n=5), compared to only 25% (n=2) that were still working on it and 12% (n=1) that were feeling overwhelmed.

This shows a significant increase in the confidence and positivity of participants from week 1 to week 8 of the program (33% in week 1 and 62% in week 8). No participants selected feeling supported, however this may be due to being able to select only one figure, and other options were more significant to them.

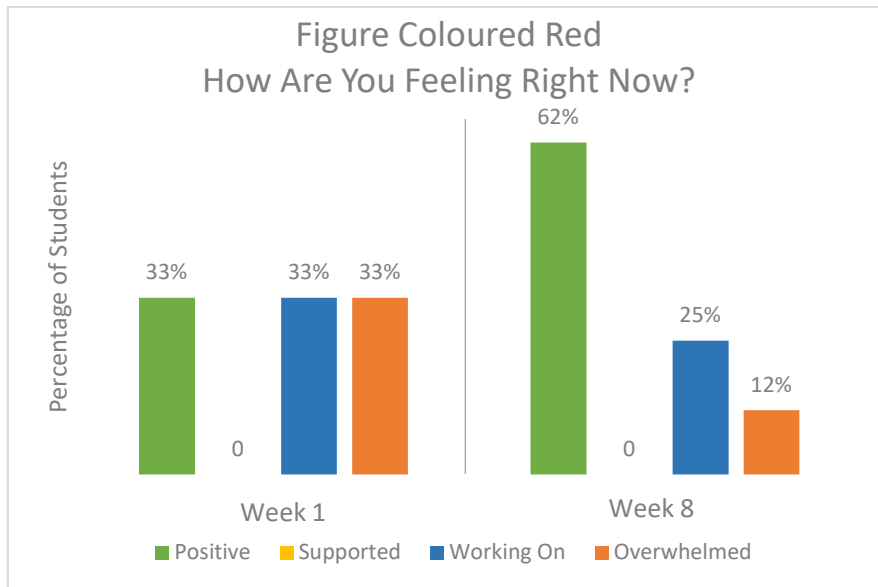


Figure 4: Red: How Are You Feeling Right Now?

**Blue: Applying for a job**

When thinking about applying for a job, participants became more positive towards the end of the program (37.5% in week 1 and 50% in week 8). Encouragingly by week 8, participants feeling overwhelmed decreased (12%, n=1) and participants feeling supported increased (12%, n=1).

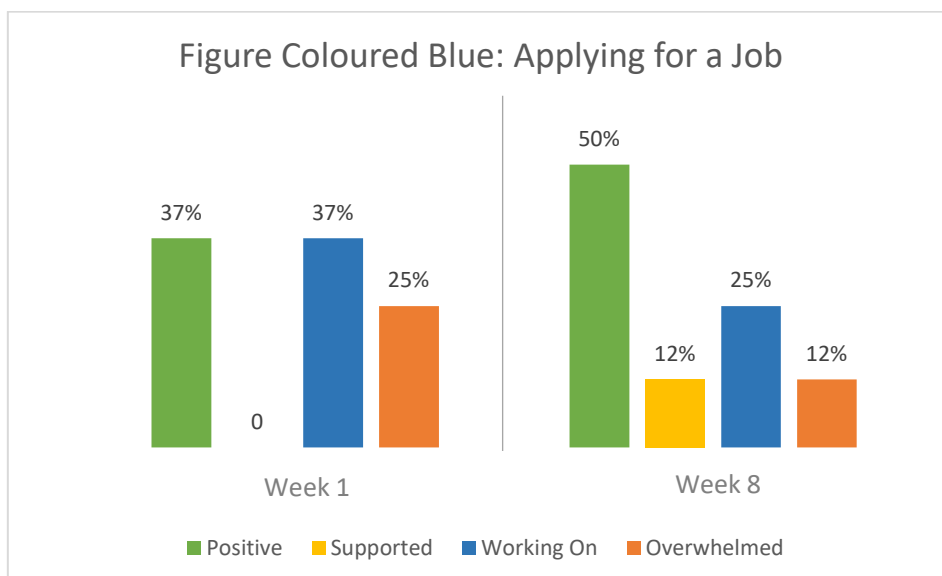


Figure 5: Blue: Applying for a Job

### Green: Doing your dream job

Participants were asked to indicate how they felt about getting their dream job. The number of participants feeling positive (75%, n=6) or supported (25%, n=2) when thinking about getting their dream job in week 1 decreased by week 8, with 62.5% (n=5) feeling positive and 12.5% (n=1) now feeling supported.

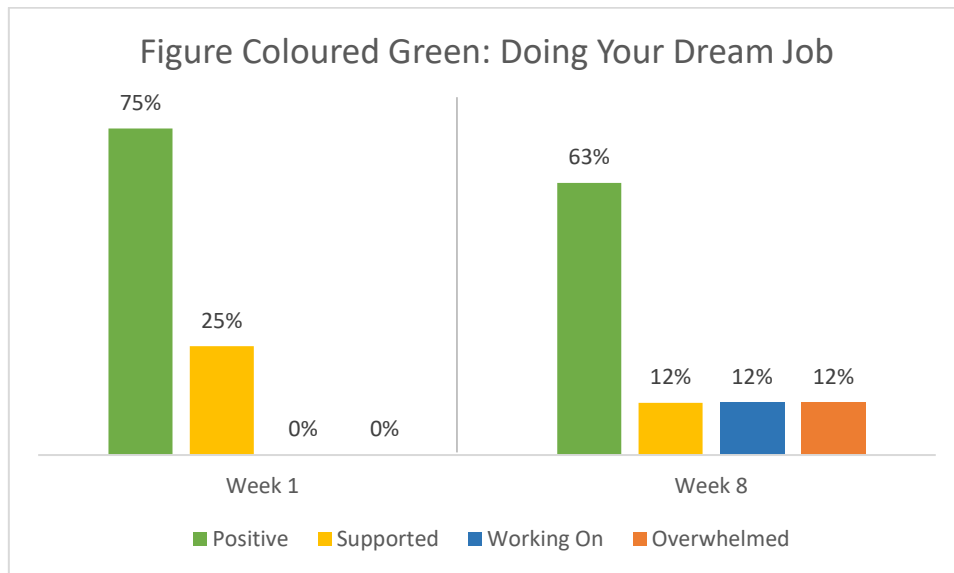


Figure 6: Green: Doing Your Dream Job

The change in thinking is not able to be evaluated due to a lack of further information however participants changed their mind about their dream job or were faced with the realities of applying for that job. Table 3 below shows participants career dreams and aspirations at the beginning of the program.

Career Dreams and Aspirations after leaving School
Apprentice
Beautician
Car restoration
Carpentry
Chef
Community worker
Construction worker
Game designer
Homicide detective
IT developer
Painting apprentice
Robotics Engineer
Tattoo artist

Table 3: Career Dreams and Aspirations after leaving School

Some of the aspirations and career goals highlighted by students require specific career pathways and further advanced study to achieve. The 'I Am Deadly' program highlighted the pathways required to gain these jobs and may have changed the way student's felt about getting their dream job.

### Orange: Taking part in a job interview

Overall participants were more positive when thinking about a job interview in week 8 (50%, n=4) compared to week 1 (12.5%, n=1). This shows a positive shift in participant attitudes towards participating in a job interview. By the end of week 8, 25% (n=2) of participants still felt overwhelmed about taking part in a job interview and 12.5% (n=1) still felt like they needed support.

Interestingly, the number of participants who felt like they were still working on their confidence about taking part in a job interview in week 1 (50%, n=4) decreased by week 8, with only 12.5% (n=1) still feeling like they needed to work on their skills.

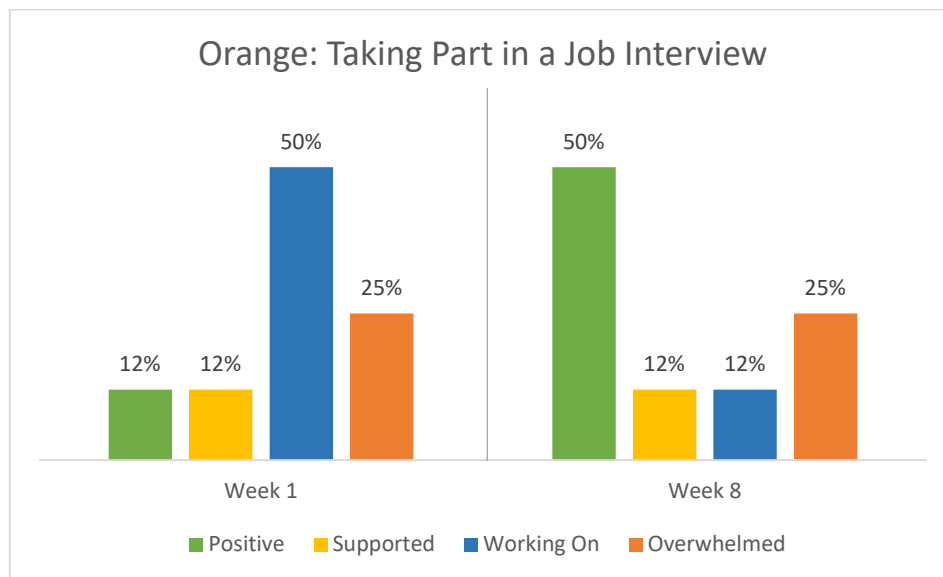


Figure 7: Orange: Taking Part in a Job Interview

### Purple: Enrolling in TAFE

When asked to show how participants felt about enrolling in TAFE, there was a positive trend from week 1 to week 8 (37.5% n=3 in week 1 and 50% n=4 in week 8). Participants were more evenly spread in week 1 between feeling positive (37.5%, n=3), supported (37.5%, n=3) or working on it (25%, n=2) when thinking about enrolling in TAFE than they were in week 8.

By week 8 the number of participants feeling overwhelmed about enrolling in TAFE increased from 0 to 25% (n=2). As there was no opportunity for participants to elaborate on why they might feel this way about TAFE, this finding could not be expanded upon further in the evaluation.

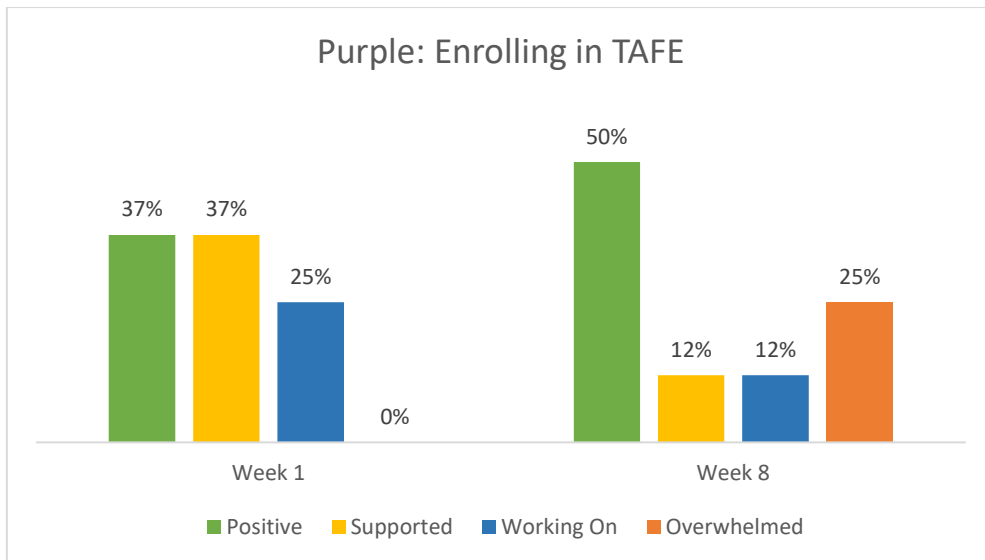


Figure 8: Purple: Enrolling in TAFE



Participants Kyra and Jade

## SELF-ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

### COMMUNICATION SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants reflected on their communication skills. Participants felt comfortable with their listening skills and their ability to follow instructions and understand what people need. Most participants felt they could only sometimes get their point across without conflict (83%, n=5) and 85% of participants (n=5) did not give presentations in class. Participants were more divided on their written communication skills, with 67% (n=4) of participants writing lists often or sometimes (33%, n=2). This is compared to writing longer letters or emails, which some participants didn't do at all. The majority of participants (83%, n= 5) often used the phone at home or at work to get or pass on information.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I am a good listener and understand what people need	0	50% (n=3)	50% (n=3)
I can follow instructions	0	50% (n=3)	50% (n=3)
People come to me for information and support	0	83% (n=5)	17% (n=1)
I listen and discuss issues with family, friends and workmates	50% (n=3)	33% (n=2)	17% (n=1)
I can speak clearly and get my point across without conflict	17% (n=1)	83% (n=5)	0
I use the phone regularly at work or home to get and pass on information	0	17% (n=1)	83% (n=5)
I give instructions to people	17% (n=1)	50% (n=3)	33% (n=2)
I give presentations in class	83% (n=5)	0	17% (n=1)
I can write letters	33% (n=2)	33% (n=2)	33% (n=2)
I can write lists	0	33% (n=2)	67% (n=4)
I can write emails	50% (n=3)	17% (n=1)	33% (n=2)

Table 4: Communication Self-Assessment

### TEAMWORK SELF-ASSESSMENT

When reflecting on working in a team, participants indicated that they had worked as part of a team in a job or community group sometimes (60%, n=3) or that they didn't do this at all. Only one participant had often worked as part of a team in a community group. Most participants (60%, n=3) had worked as part of a team in sports, and 80% of participants (n=4) had worked as part of a team for a school or learning project.

Values	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I have worked as part of a team in a job	40% (n=2)	60% (n=3)	0
I have worked as part of a team with a community group	20% (n=1)	60% (n=3)	20% (n=1)
I have worked as part of a team with a sporting team	20% (n=1)	20% (n=1)	60% (n=3)
I have worked as part of a school or learning projects team	0	20% (n=1)	80% (n=4)

Table 5: Teamwork Self-Assessment

### PROBLEM SOLVING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants showed strong problem-solving skills, with all participants using these skills sometimes or often. 78% (n=7) of participants would know who to ask if they had a problem and 67% (n=6) sometimes worked with others as part of a team to solve problems. 56% of participants (n=5) were able to identify when there is a problem and 44% of participants (n=4) were able to identify problems often and use problem-solving skills to get good results.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I can identify when there is a problem and use different ways to get good results	0	56% (n=5)	44% (n=4)
I have worked effectively with others in a team to solve problems	0	67% (n=6)	33% (n=3)
I would know who to ask if I had a problem	0	22% (n=2)	78% (n=7)

Table 6: Problem Solving Self-Assessment

### INITIATIVE & ENTERPRISE ACTIVITY

When completing the initiative and enterprise activity, participant responses were spread consistently throughout the middle of the scale. Notably, 70% (n=7) of participants indicated that they rarely handled new situations with ease, however most respondents (55%, n=5) did not feel hopeless or negative when faced with difficult situations. Most participants (67%, n=6) were able to sometimes achieve the goals they set for themselves and 57% (n=4) were sometimes able to relate to people working hard to accomplish their goals. Most participants received positive feedback on their work and achievements often (37%, n=3) or some of the time (37%, n=3).

Statement	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
I do what is expected of me, rather than what I believe to be 'right'	25% (n=2)	25% (n=2)	50% (n=4)	0	0
I handle new situations with relative comfort and ease	0	70% (n=7)	30% (n=3)	0	0
I feel positive and energised about life	0	40% (n=4)	20% (n=2)	20% (n=2)	20% (n=2)
If something looks difficult, I avoid doing it	0	30% (n=3)	30% (n=3)	20% (n=2)	20% (n=2)
I keep trying, even after others have given up	20% (n=2)	0	40% (n=4)	20% (n=2)	20% (n=2)
If I work hard to solve a problem, I'll find the answer	20% (n=2)	10% (n=1)	30% (n=3)	40% (n=4)	0
I achieve the goals I set for myself	22 % (n=2)	0	67% (n=6)	11% (n=1)	0
When I face difficulty, I feel hopeless and negative	22% (n=2)	33% (n=3)	22% (n=2)	22% (n=2)	0
I relate to people who work very hard, and still doing accomplish their goals	29% (n=2)	14% (n=1)	57% (n=4)	0	0
People give me positive feedback on my work and achievements	25% (n=2)	0	37% (n=3)	37% (n=3)	0

Table 7: Initiative and Enterprise Activity

#### INITIATIVE & ENTERPRISE SELF-ASSESSMENT

When thinking about how participants used their initiative and enterprising skills in the past, 66% (n=4) of participants would often be able to show initiative and create work for themselves if needed. Interestingly 83% (n=5) of participants had once made something to sell in the past, showing that most participants had strong or developing enterprising skills.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
If I was working at a cafe and there were no customers, I would be able to show initiative and create work for myself	17% (n=1)	17% (n=1)	66% (n=4)
I have used enterprising skills in the past and made something to sell to make pocket money	17% (n=1)	83% (n=5)	0

Table 8: Initiative and Enterprise Self-Assessment 2

## PLANNING & ORGANISING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants showed strong planning and organisational skills overall, with most participants arriving to school on time (75%, n=6), organising their day by planning ahead (63%, n=5), and sometimes keeping a diary (63%, n=5) to track their tasks. Only 25% (n=2) of participants did not keep a diary or to-do list, but they were able to organise their time in other ways.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I am punctual and get to school on time	0	25% (2)	75% (6)
I organise my time so I can fit in all the things I need to do, I plan ahead	0	37% (3)	63% (5)
I organise my time so I can fit in all the things I need to do, I keep a diary or a to do list	25% (2)	63% (5)	12% (1)
I organise my time so I can fit in all the things I need to do, I prioritise tasks in order of importance	0	50% (4)	50% (4)

Table 9: Planning and Organising Self-Assessment

## SELF-MANAGEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

When reflecting on their self-management, most participants indicated that they are often able to plan to achieve a goal (63%, n=5) and that they were aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and what they need to improve (75%, n=6). Most participants responded that they were sometimes able to manage their emotions when angry or upset (75%, n=6).

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
In the past I have had a goal, made a plan and followed it through to achieve something. Example: got your L's and/or P's to drive a car or completed a course	0	37% (n=3)	63% (n=5)
I know my own strengths and weaknesses and what I need to improve	0	25% (n=2)	75% (n=6)
I am able to manage my emotions, example: when I get angry or upset	0	75% (n=6)	25% (n=2)

Table 10: Self-Management Self-Assessment

## LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants responded that they were able to take responsibility for their own learning by asking if they need help (63%, n=5) and researching new skills online (50%, n=4). Most participants indicated they would sometimes take responsibility for their own learning by completing all their homework (75%, n=6) with 25% (n=2) doing this often.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I take responsibility for my own learning, I ask for help if I do not understand something	0	37% (n=3)	63% (n=5)
I take responsibility for my own learning by completing all my homework	0	75% (n=6)	25% (n=2)
If I want to learn something new I might research the skill online	0	50% (n=4)	50% (n=4)

Table 11: Learning Self-Assessment

### TECHNOLOGY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Participants were confident with their use of technology, often using it to find information (67%, n=4), write documents or play games (83%, n=5), send a text message (100%, n=6) and make a phone call (100%, n=6). Participants were not as confident using technology to create a photocopy, with 17% (n=1) of participants not doing this at all and 50% (n=3) of participants only doing this sometimes.

Statement	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
I use technology to send and receive emails, write documents or play games	0	33% (n=2)	67% (n=4)
I use technology to find information on the internet	0	17% (n=1)	83% (n=5)
I use technology to send a text message	0	0	100% (6)
I use technology to make a phone call	0	0	100% (6)
I use technology to create a photocopy	17% (n=1)	50% (n=3)	33% (n=2)

Table 12: Technology Self-Assessment

### TRANSFERABLE SKILLS CHECKLIST ACTIVITY

Participants were asked to identify transferable skills that could be used between home, work and school. Work and school were seen to have the most transferable skills between each environment, with participants responding similarly for each responsibility. Making your own travel arrangements was seen as transferable between home, work and school equally. In contrast, coming back from your breaks on time each day was not seen as transferable to home tasks (0%, n=0) and wearing appropriate clothing or a uniform was also not seen as an important home task (20%, n=3). Participants indicated that getting along with people was more important for work and school environments (60%, n=9) compared to the home (40%, n=6).

Responsibility	Home	School	Work
Make Your Own Travel Arrangements	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)	53% (n=8)
Arrive on Time Each Day	33% (n=5)	60% (n=9)	53% (n=8)
Bring Your Phone Fully Charged	27% (n=4)	53% (n=8)	60% (n=9)
Wear appropriate clothing or uniform	20% (n=3)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Bring your own food, or money to buy food	33% (n=5)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Call if you are running late or not able to make it	47% (n=7)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Pay attention to safety instructions at all times	33% (n=5)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Let your supervisor know if you have finished your tasks	40% (n=6)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Come back from your breaks on time each day	0	53% (n=8)	60% (n=9)
Try to finish your tasks each day	53% (n=8)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Clean up your area at the end of the day	53% (n=8)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Get along with the people around you	40% (n=6)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Ask for help if you do not understand the rules or responsibilities	47% (n=7)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Report anything you think might be a risk to yourself or others	53% (n=8)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)
Be aware of the emergency evacuation procedures	47% (n=7)	60% (n=9)	60% (n=9)

Table 13: Transferable Skills Activity

## 4.2 INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE LUNCH

The Inspiring Young People Lunch was an event which facilitated the sharing of stories between young people and experienced industry professionals. 'I Am Deadly' participants attended the lunch at the Italian Australian Club in Morwell and heard from Aboriginal guest speakers, Troy Jennings, Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the West Gippsland Healthcare Group and Jedda Costa, a reporter with ABC Radio, about their career journeys and experiences. Students also had the opportunity to connect and socialise with industry professionals during the lunch.

Feedback forms were completed as part of the Inspiring Young People Lunch, with word clouds created to highlight common themes and suggestions from this feedback. Responses were collected from 'I Am Deadly' students as well as industry professionals who attended the event. The word clouds below focus on two of the feedback questions: "Which part of the Inspiring Young People Lunch did you enjoy most?" and "Which part could be improved?"



Inspiring Young People Lunch: Speakers Jedda Costa and Troy Jennings





## 4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSES

### INTRODUCTION

Two thematic analyses were conducted to collect qualitative data from those involved in the project. Firstly, a focus group with eight students was analysed, then four individual interviews with facilitators and mentors was conducted and analysed. The focus group and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke's<sup>5</sup> 6-step thematic analysis technique. Five themes emerged from each data set, and quotes from participants have been provided to support them. All quotes have been de-identified to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

#### 4.3.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUP



Figure 11: Focus group analysis themes

#### **Found their voice**

There was excitement around the table as the students were all keen to talk about their experiences in the 'I Am Deadly' program. Many talked about differences that people around them had seen in them, such as teachers, other students and in particular their families. One student explained that family members had noticed how much better they were applying themselves at school and in the program. "...they have realised that I'm more hard working than I was." They went on to talk about how they had learnt how to learn and had also seen that learning could be fun. The students in the focus group all agreed that the 'I Am Deadly' program was more fun to attend than regular school, with many going expressing their desire to attend this program instead of school.

*"Even the fact of it being fun, just do it because it's fun."*

Some students noted that having the full day at the 'I Am Deadly' program was an interruption to their class schedule which meant catching up on the work they had missed at school. The 'I Am Deadly' program did, however, inspire the students to consider why they studied and to think about further opportunities to study such as TAFE courses, short courses and university.

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<sup>5</sup> Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887.

*"...learnt how to study more and now I want to go to night school."*

The 'I Am Deadly' program, which included mentoring from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, inspired the students, encouraging them to think about their future and to raise their aspirations. The mentors showed their different paths, highlighting the twists and turns of their careers and provided examples of how they found their voices and successfully enrolled in courses and obtained employment. The 'I Am Deadly' program helped them to develop the confidence to engage with others and encouraged them to participate in discussions.

*"I talk more. I used to just sit here and ignore everyone and now I'm like I will talk to everyone."*

The confidence to speak, ask questions and to actively engage in the learning was a different experience from being in school, where many students expressed that they often felt unheard and invisible, that many of the teachers ignored them in class.

*"Our teachers don't take notice of anyone really. Your aides do but the teachers don't."*

Students expressed feeling more organised and more capable of completing tasks. Getting to the venue to attend the 'I Am Deadly' program was at times difficult for many students, some had long commutes and others needed to be picked up in order to attend. Students, however, explained how they enjoyed coming to the program so much that they were more organised and motivated to being punctual on program days in comparison to attending school.

*"Like I am more organised now. I actually get up an hour earlier than I need to, to get here. I like getting up at 7, get dressed straight away, leave home and catch a bus and get ready for this place."*

Another benefit to finding their voice was the understanding that engaging with people can lead to employment opportunities and more positive experiences at school.

*"Yeh, I will be able to get my job done. I have improved I know that. I can see like when I don't want to talk and all that and now I can, I know I can speak freely and often."*

The ability to communicate confidently has led to students gaining meaningful friendships and to build trusting relationships.

*"How to get ready for work, how to work as a team better, how to trust people. Pretty much, make better friends, just all the good stuff..."*

### **More fun than school**

The students attended the 'I Am Deadly' program one day per week leaving their regular class schedule. This resulted in many students missing activities, tests and events that were on that day. Many were not concerned because they felt they were learning job readiness skills which put them ahead of other students.

*"...we were supposed to be doing a maths test and any other special events, like out of school uniform (will be) on a Thursday which doesn't really matter to me because I am getting ahead of most other children, in this program."*

They found the learning style was more engaging and the activities were fun to do.

*“School you generally just sit down and do this work for an hour, go to the next class. This [the ‘I Am Deadly’ Program] is engaging for everyone and everyone gets it.”*

The students found that there was difference in the way people who were part of the program treated them than those they engaged with at school, they were considerate and respected them. The students agreed that they felt that they were constantly in trouble at school, whereas in they felt included and had a sense of belonging at the while on the program.

*“School, you just get yelled at and no one gets you. Yeah no one gets ya.”*

*“You don’t have people who are total arses here. And you have people who have been in the same situation as you and their nice and kind....”*

There is an expectation that students arrange and undertake a work placement as part the school curriculum. The participants, however, often found difficulty in arranging it without guidance. They were excited when they found a placement through the program and felt supported in their preparation for it.

*“I found myself a work placement job. Yeah, finally got one. Our school is depressing, they couldn’t find one but finally got one here so now they don’t pressure me anymore.”*

### **A place to chill**

The ‘I Am Deadly’ program was run at Latrobe Youth Space in Morwell which is a newly established centre providing a variety of programs, support groups and general counselling services. Of particular significance to the ‘I Am Deadly’ students was the food provided by staff during the program. Meals were arranged, with students taking it in turns to assist in the communal kitchen to prepare food for the group.

*“Yeah, when you arrive you can have breakfast if you didn’t have a chance to get breakfast.”*

It was particularly important for students who had not eaten before arriving to program days and or who did not have access to nutritional food choices. The preparation of food also created opportunities for staff to talk with students, often more easily than during the scheduled sessions.

*“Like during breaks you can grab something to eat, chill on the couches with the others and like just chat and as well with consoles you can play a game”*

There was a sense of belonging and feeling comfortable in the space with extra curricula activities that students could engage with, such as play station games and games tables. The video games provided students with the chance to interact with participants from the program and other young people who attended Youth Space. Students noted feeling “welcome” a “sense of warmth” and that it was “comfy”.

*“Since the ‘I Am Deadly’ program I have met so many new people because I have stayed. Like I never knew this place until like I started this...and I have stayed every day after. Like every time we have this I always stay and meet my friends here.”*

### **Supportive staff**

There were a number of staff related to the program who each played a role in its delivery. The students commented on how each staff member made a contribution to the success of the learning experience. Of particular note was the program lead, who was seen as the “Boss” the one who

“organises us”. Her kindness in travelling to pick up the students was mentioned as being important to their ability to attend the program. She was also referred to as “like a mother to us, she keeps us in check”.

*“Pretty much without her [Program lead] we would not be able to get to the places, we wouldn’t know times, we would pretty much be late every day.”*

The program facilitator taught the ‘I Am Ready’ job readiness components of the program identified when the students needed to have a break and used a variety of teaching techniques to ensure that the different learning styles of the students was taken into consideration.

*“She understood that if we couldn’t read or write she was like supporting and still helping us.”*

*“She was kind, she understands, she knew when we need a break”*

Volunteers with lived experience were able to help the students to view the world using a different lens which helped them to understand the context of learning better. Having Aboriginal people with lived experience of learning and working helped students to see their own potential.

*“They also gave really good opinions and made us look at things from a different angle.”*

The volunteers supported the students with empathy and patience, and an understanding of connection to their culture.

*“Like they understand that we are energetic, and we are edgy and we wanted to be doing active stuff, we didn’t want to sit down and they also like understood problems .... they understood I have dyslexia and some of us have some form of depression .... and they understood us and worked best to support us.”*

### **Good program**

The students commented on the various aspects of the program from the workbook to interview training and the program activities. They enjoyed the different elements of the program including the flexibility around the written sections.

*“The best part with the book was we barely wrote; we mostly chatted about it and had a good chat. That was like the best part. And we were helping each other out around.”*

The workbook activities created opportunities for discussion which helped students with low literacy levels to stay engaged with the learning.

*“The best part about doing the work in the book was that we had good conversations.”*

The workbook activities provided practical sessions giving students job readiness skills. These were useful in the mock interviews and in preparation for work experience. The students identified that they felt that they were being given a wonderful opportunity to learn job ready skills which were not offered to students in the same year at their respective schools.

*“We are getting extra help and getting job ready, and the others are not going to know how they are going to get ready, so hopefully practically we are already ahead.”*

*“We might have a better chance of being employed over say, [the] average year ten [student]”.*

This gave them an advantage when seeking employment. Many students spoke excitedly about the part time employment they had secured. There was a great sense of pride as they spoke about their jobs.

When asked if they thought the 'I Am Deadly' program should be continued and or offered to other students they said that there were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at their school who missed out this year and who would benefit from learning the job ready skills.

*"...there are actually some aboriginal kids at [my school] that actually did miss out. I actually feel it would be very beneficial for them if they were aware and could do it next year and further years to come."*

Interestingly, students involved said that if they had another chance, they would attend the program again. This may have been due to their stated enjoyment of the different learning environment and teaching styles, the flexible venue and the sense of belonging that occurred from participating in the 'I Am Deadly' program.

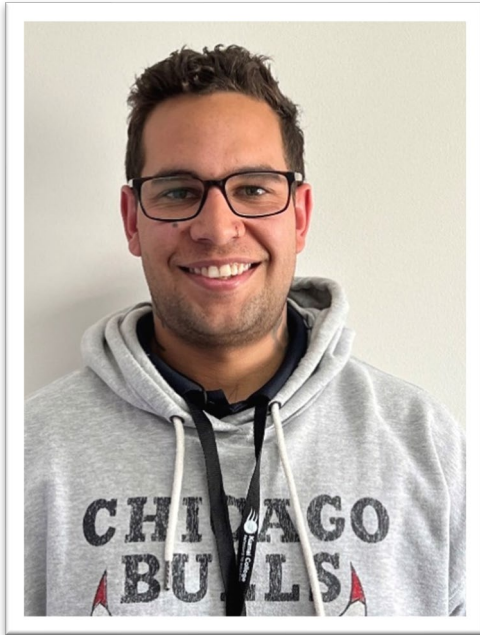
*"All I got to say is that it is awesome. Like if I had a chance to do it next year I definitely would."*



Participants taking part in  
Cooking and Woodwork

## CASE STUDY

### TRE – I AM DEADLY MENTOR



Tre, a 26-year-old GunaiKurnai man, has been able to use his life experiences to mentor the participants of the 2022 I Am Deadly program. After becoming disengaged with school, Tre had a variety of jobs including construction, painting and decorating but always felt a desire to work with young people. Tre went on to complete a Certificate IV in Community Services at TAFE Gippsland which led to a placement opportunity with the I Am Deadly program. He believed having Aboriginal mentors within the program provided students with a culturally safe connection as they navigated the school year. The learning was mutually beneficial, with Tre stating that he learnt a lot from the I Am Deadly students in being confident to speak to various people of different genders in a culturally safe way.

Post the I Am Deadly program, an opportunity to become a Koori Support Mentor within a high school was offered

to Tre who said, “...even though that’s my title, **I help out all students that need it**”. Within the role, Tre provides educational, cultural and social support to students and their families, which he describes as “relate, advise and empathise”. The role includes supporting and encouraging early intervention with young people who may be struggling, ensuring they know that people care about them and their future, “...**it’s all about them, and what they do and where they’re going**” Tre says. Tre believes that his story is relatable, bridging that unspoken gap when picking up on students’ behaviour when they may be struggling.

In future, Tre would like to continue in his education, and is considering a Diploma of Community Services, cultural courses and social work education to expand his knowledge in the field. Tre says that he has always loved to learn new things and expand his knowledge in different fields such as psychology, knowing that he wants to stay in a role that supports and helps people. By having strong cultural mentors within the I Am Deadly program was vital to its success, providing a solid foundation for the program students as they navigate their lives.

**“I try to tell the kids in this program, the worlds your oyster right now”**

Tre stated, encouraging young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to dream big and reach for the stars.

#### 4.3.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FACILITATORS AND MENTORS

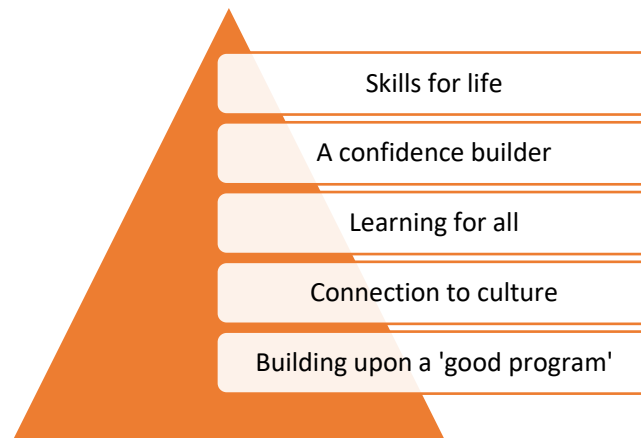


Figure 12: Interview analysis themes

##### **Skills for Life**

The aim of the 'I Am Deadly' project was to enable young Koorie students in Latrobe City LGA to obtain knowledge, skills and opportunities for lasting outcomes in employment, further education and training. The importance of the program for students was noted by both facilitators and mentors. This was highlighted as they reflected on why it was essential that young people are taught skills to prepare them for the long-term future in the workforce:

*“One of the students that was here last week or the week before had a job, and he was labouring... And he's like I don't need to be here I already have a job and \*\*\* said, “well these are skills to keep the job” and that I thought wow that is so spot on.”*

Providing students with the opportunity to experience different career pathways and help them understand what skills they could bring to a workplace was essential to helping students build the confidence to succeed. Interviewees reflected on this, noting that some students initially did not understand why they needed to work:

*“Some have realistic goals; they just want a job to be able to buy a car to be able to be independent. Some don't really understand why they have to work.”*

Facilitators and mentors agreed that the program contributed to students increased confidence and skills development. The Trade Tester component held in term one of the program, was particularly useful, as it gave students the opportunity to learn new skills and experience career pathways through VET that they may not have considered:

*“The TAFE experience was amazing... it was really good to see kids who have never had an opportunity to do VET go do VET... and to see them excel in a program and realize skills that they probably didn't realize they had.”*

The completion of mock interviews was crucial to the program allowing students to experience an interview scenario and to develop skills in a real-world environment. As part of the process, students were encouraged to buy clothing which would be suitable for an interview.

*“The mock interviews were really important last week... going to buy the clothes was an experience some of these kids hadn't had of being able to choose the clothes... and going and purchasing those clothes and looking a certain way.”*

According to interviewees, students gained confidence as social engagement outside of friendship groups increased. They noted that students were initially “not 100% committed and being a little isolated in friendship groups to now hanging out with each other outside of school.” The more often the students attended, the more confident and willing to socialise they became.

Of those that left the program it was identified by the facilitator that most had gained employment or started a trade apprenticeship which was a successful outcome:

*“I think there's only been two or three that have stopped coming, but they are working though... which is great because there was one kid there that didn't want to learn culture or work at all, and at the moment he's actually working two days a week. So that was a big win”*

The program was making a difference, with all facilitators and mentors reflecting on the success of ‘I Am Deadly’ in creating lasting effects that would stay with students throughout their lives. Of note, they reflected on the ability of the program to get students work ready:

*“So are they work ready? Yes, they now know what to say, they know now how to sell themselves in a positive form, which is good and being able to sell yourself in a positive form is something they would have never experienced before.”*

Their participation in the program had improved their work readiness in the timeframe and enhanced their ability to recognise the skills that they could bring to a workplace. As well as preparing students for employment and teaching them new skills, the facilitators and mentors noted that facilitating and being part of the program was a rewarding experience:

*“Heaps of kids... probably have had someone just walk in and walk out, do their job and leave... It's good to see them grow... it's rewarding, it's more than money.*

To see the students flourishing and gaining confidence in new ways reiterated the importance of ‘I Am Deadly’ for nurturing self-confidence and the ability for students to be independent in the future.

### **A Confidence Builder**

Key to the success of ‘I Am Deadly’ was a focus on building self-confidence in students. Facilitators and mentors reflected on the changes they saw in the students;

*“They are such clever kids, very intelligent and I'm just seeing how far they've come in the short period that I've been here. It's only been like 8 weeks...so the change is enormous.”*

The mentors discussed their interactions with students and how they changed over time. Students that were reserved at the beginning of the program became confident enough to socialise and ask for help when needed. Students also gained confidence in talking to others, particularly in a social setting; *“he will talk to you, no hassles. If you didn't hear him, he will repeat it and we'll talk in front of other people.”*

Building students aspirations towards finding a career path that was right for them was a key part of the program;

*“Some of them at the beginning were a bit unsure. Some of them knew from week one what they wanted to do... and some of them you could see became a lot more passionate about*

*their future... some had no idea what they wanted to do even at the end of Week 8, but they knew that they wanted to work."*

The Trade Taster component of the program allowed students to try new skills and be able to recognise and build on their strengths;

*"I do think the trades helped because it was something that they've never done before. And it's really fun to engage in. I think that was great because it also gives them an idea of what they are good at and what they are not so great at."*

The engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors was essential to helping the students feel comfortable and safe during the program, which consequently assisted in the building of their confidence:

*"When he's with [the mentor], he comes out of his shell and he says things and he does things and he's super, super funny. But [the mentor] gives him the confidence to be that, where if he was just in a room, he wouldn't have that confidence."*

The importance of building self-confidence in relation to work readiness cannot be underrated as noted by the facilitators and mentors;

*"Their work skills have definitely improved, but their confidence in themselves to be able to do that has improved."*

### **Learning for All**

Regardless of cultural heritage, age or identified gender, students in the program connected with the content and thrived in the learning environment. Facilitators and mentors regarded the learning as two-way, developing new skills in communication and connection with others:

*"I just love the engagement, I love just hearing things from their perspective too, just because you're older than them doesn't mean anything. We are learning too. I love to hear their perception of how they see the world."*

Mentors experienced benefits of increased self-confidence throughout their roles, gaining the ability to lead and guide, which are transferrable skills. Interviewees realised they were professional and personal role-models to the students, and were mindful of how they conducted themselves:

*"I don't sit on my phone, I don't do anything because I want them to see that time is valuable. We have given up time to be here, everyone has, and so you're just trying to role model that."*

Seeing the changes in the students' capacity and confidence was motivating for facilitators and mentors. Being able to walk alongside the students as they learnt skills to move out into the workforce was a key factor to the program's success:

*"You're seeing the changes only because they are able to walk the steps, and they have someone beside them to do it. That's the only way they could do it. You could never just expect these kids to go out and just go to an interview without those tools, because it is not spoken."*

Learning beyond vocational skills was realised with the relationship built amongst students and program mentors, where a shared cultural heritage supported learning about work, life, and the future:

*"I think it was super important that [the mentors] were there, vital that they had their Indigenous heritage to share with the students and, you know, just having them as the role models in the class."*

## Connection to Culture

The facilitators and mentors highlighted the importance of connecting the students to their culture and heritage through the 'I Am Deadly' program. Having strong ties to Koorie culture within the staff employed in the program and within the workbooks and activities undertaken by students was vital to the success, relatability and cultural safety of the program:

*"My biggest thing is the mentors need to be Koorie. I'd like the Facilitator to be Koorie too, but if they can't be, the mentors must be because there must be that shared experience."*

A shared perspective and the importance of understanding culture was key to the facilitators and mentors connecting with students in a responsive way. Mentors who shared cultural heritage expressed ease in building relationships with the students, with shared understanding reducing barriers in communication. Participants highlighted the differences within gender, regarding this as an important element of the program:

*"The girls worked with the girls, boys with boys. I don't know if it had something to do with men's business, women's business type thing or just sort of that feeling more comfortable until we got to know them."*

Participants mentioned that the mix of genders gave students the capacity to build networks outside of their norms, providing benefit when preparing students for employment in the future.

Deciding on a venue for the program was discussed, with the need for it to be relevant for the student's needs. On reflection, facilitators and mentors mentioned that in future a Welcome to Country should be included at the beginning of the program:

*"I think we should do a proper Welcome to Country. If you want my personal opinion, we should do a smoking ceremony at the start before we do it."*

Program location restrictions regarding time and resources hindered the potential capacity for further connection to country for students. Participants saw the benefit of running the program at a gathering place, with established cultural ties and community, however opted for neutral ground for the first iteration of the program. Participants that did not have ties to the Aboriginal community recognised that building greater connection with the local community would benefit the program in the future.

Regardless of culture, facilitators and mentors recognised that barriers to accessing the program and implementing skills learnt may be similar to other high-school students:

*"The challenges that these guys may face, which might be the family issues, money, food, clothing, all that kind of stuff are the same kinds of issues that I would find with other schools that I've worked with."*

In being aware of the perceived and released cultural barriers within the "I Am Deadly" program, the staff provided important recommendations for future facilitation. Including more culturally appropriate art and images within the workbooks would have strengthened the connection to culture and identity and should be considered in the future.

## Building Upon a "Good Program"

Building upon the success of 'I Am Deadly', facilitators and mentors reflected on changes which could be made to improve the delivery of the program in the future.

The 'I Am Deadly' workbook is an important element of the program which teaches students work skills through a series of activities over a set number of weeks, "The book work is reality. It's what they're coming into, they are at that age where that is their next step."

Although the workbook reflects the skills students need to learn to be prepared for work, it was suggested that it needs adjustment in the future to ensure it is relatable and accessible for students. It was noted that the workbook could be improved for future delivery of the program by including more cultural elements in the design and content of the book. These elements could include different images used in the workbook, as well as different activities:

*"I think we could add a little bit more cultural stuff to it, and I think we could remove some of the whiteness of it."*

Although it was not originally factored into the delivery of the program, including and providing food proved to be crucial in the engagement of students, encouraging them to come to each session and giving them space to be social in a comfortable setting.

*"Food needs to be built in... because we're feeding kids breakfast and we are feeding kids lunch... In fact, we should be doing that, it should be part of the program because we get the socialisation out of it too."*

As well as socialisation, food and the act of making and eating as a group facilitated increased engagement and the bringing together of students and staff:

*"It obviously brings them together and I found it quite interesting because with my background and my culture food is really important, and it brings family together"*

*"That's how they are going to engage and when we are here cooking food they are down helping... We sit there and that's how they talk to me. We converse through just cooking"*

As well as food, transport was also a crucial part of the program which was not initially factored into the delivery. Facilitators and mentors reflected on the ability for some students to get to the venue and noted that it would be good to be able to provide transport options in the future, so students didn't miss out:

*"The majority of them try to come in every week as much as they can. And some have to catch public transport which sometimes makes them miss a session so that's a bit unfortunate."*

*"It would be nice to pick up the kids that have to catch the public transport. I think that would help a lot, but I guess it also shows that also goes to show that like you know gives them that little bit of independence and how much they actually want to be here, so it's not exactly a bad thing."*

Although providing transport was noted as a good addition to the program, it was also suggested that the transport could be slowly reduced over time to assist in building the independence of students. In relation to getting students work ready, the gradual increase in their requirement to be more and more independent was seen as something that would be a positive addition:

*"You need a bus in the morning whether you pick them up from a designated location or you pick them up from their home, you need a bus... Then when you're doing the 'I Am Ready' part, you need to slowly withdraw that bus, so by the last two or three weeks, they're getting there without you... so they're learning to get there, and to get to that job."*

## 4.4 TRADE TASTER AND WORK EXPERIENCE COMPONENTS

### 4.4.1 TRADE TASTER

A total of 15 students participated in the Trade Taster with 13 completions. Two students left after gaining full time employment.

Course	Number of Students
Hospitality	4
Childcare	3
Hairdressing	3
Beauty	3
Horticulture	6
Health	3
Engineering	8
Furniture Making	8
Bricklaying	7

Table 14: Trade Taster Courses

### 4.4.2 WORK EXPERIENCE

The work placements that were offered to students in Term 3, gave them a real opportunity to experience how a workplace operates, potential employment and the confidence to know what they would like to do in the future.

A total of 7 students completed work experience. Workplaces included Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), AGL, Baptcare Heritage Manor, Aussie Broadband, Latrobe City Council (LCC), Delfab Engineering and a local hairdresser. As a result of the placements some students have since found part time work in the field of their choice.

#### Employer Feedback

*Shaq has been wonderful. He has been sitting with our call centre staff and listening to calls and seeing how our systems work. He will be helping our office manager when she needs a hand (making care packages for sick staff/stocking vending machines).*

*When we are recruiting for level 1 roles, he will be able to sit in the interview with P&C to see how it works from P&C's side and what we look for in candidates.*

*On his first day he walked from Mid Valley to the office because of the bus he was on (which is about 4km). I told him that he can start a bit later and/or finish a bit earlier if it means he can catch a closer bus, so he doesn't have to walk as much.*

#### 4.2.3 I AM DEADLY WORK EXPERIENCE FACILITATOR EXPERIENCES

Feedback from participating organisations in the work experience component of the I Am Deadly program was extremely positive, stating they thoroughly enjoyed hosting the students. Students were given the chance to experience various industries, some attending group tour days, while others spent one day a week for five to eight weeks within a workplace. Students were given the opportunity to see what different organisations could offer them as they create their career goals.

Organisations described I Am Deadly as *“a fantastic program”*. They felt the students were energised, asking questions, *“seeing their confidence grow, seeing their engagement grow”*, and showing enthusiasm when involved in tours and activities provided. Organisations expressed that the opportunity for learning was mutual, with employees able to increase their cultural awareness and gain a greater understanding of I Am Deadly student perspectives:

*“I think it was quite a positive experience both from the students and from our workers.”*

Students were given the opportunity to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within their work experience provider organisation, gaining additional mentoring. This opportunity allowed organisations to demonstrate their dedication to ensuring a culturally safe workplace for all employees, and for them to identify gaps in where they could improve their inclusivity.

One organisation highlighted the collaboration that was fostered through the work placement opportunity:

*“It was a really active hands-on placement and [the I Am Deadly student] felt like he was a member of the team and he got involved in a lot of the work that we do.”*

Organisations shared discussions had with students about their futures, with goal setting and career pathway mapping outlined. They showed students how to apply for positions within their organisations, and what vocational skills and qualifications were required. The transformation in students, those who initially may not have stayed in school, showed in the excitement in potentially being the first in their family to finish high-school and go on to further study.

*“I think it was absolutely beneficial for [the I Am Deadly student] to come out and do placement, get that real variety of people and job roles and tasks under her belt to kind of give her that next step in what her path might look like.”*

During the mock interviews, organisations involved in this process believed this was a great way to prepare students for employment opportunities:

*“The students were extremely well prepared for the interviews.”*

They did however state that they felt responses were often too scripted, making it difficult to relate to the student and their personal experience, reducing authenticity at times. It was suggested that mock interviews could potentially take place later in the year after work placements when students had an opportunity to experience an industry. Furthermore, it was suggested that it may be beneficial for students to engage in additional transferrable skill development in the I Am Deadly program such as gaining a driver’s license, a requirement for many employers.

In future, organisations suggested tailoring student’s workplace preparation more closely to their chosen career to ensure they are adequately prepared. In addition, if the program were to grow, tailoring the students experience to their age and schooling level may provide a more focussed work

experience opportunity. Organisations also highlighted that ensuring good communication between participating organisations and I Am Deadly program facilitators was vital for a successful and smooth transition throughout work placements.

Overall, organisations were extremely positive about their involvement with the I Am Deadly program, with some sharing their intentions to remain involved if the program were to continue:

*“This was such a powerful and wonderful program to be involved in. It is linked to probably the most important work that my department is doing as part of its commitment to Treaty, so I just can't talk highly enough.”*

## 5. END OF YEAR LUNCH AND REFLECTIONS

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A lunch was held in November 2022 to celebrate the successes of the program throughout the year and congratulate the students on their participation. Student Jade Hiskins gave a keynote speech, thanking all those involved.

### JADE HISKINS

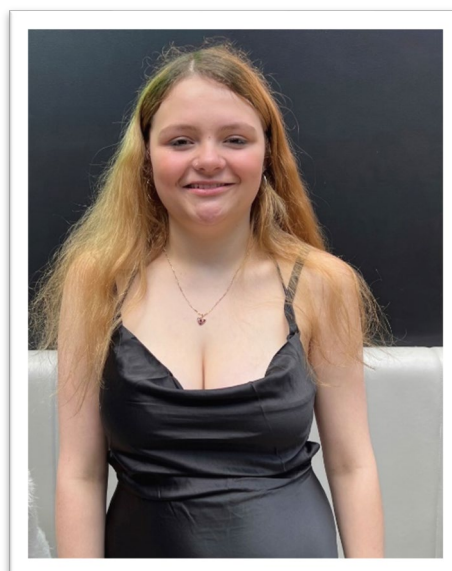
Wunman njinde everyone my name is Jade Hiskins. I am a proud Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Gunai Kurnai woman. I would like to discuss the I Am Deadly program all different young aboriginal brothers and sisters from different schools got to take part in this year.

At the start of the I Am Deadly program everyone was in their own corners and shy but as soon as we kept meeting every week, we all started getting comfortable with everyone. I am **beyond proud** seeing my peers try and achieve new achievements they probably never thought they would never try or do in their lifetime. I think speaking on behalf of my brothers and sisters we have all made new friends.

The I Am Deadly program is **an amazing program** for young brothers and sisters to take part in, it is **super cultural safe place** and definitely a safe place we can express how we are truly feeling and would definitely recommend the program to every young aboriginal kid coming up. Standing here in front of you all I can proudly call everyone in the I Am Deadly program this year my brothers and sisters.

I would like to thank Tre for your inspiring words of wisdom and taking your time out of your day to be with us in the program, I would also like to thank Belinda for taking her time out of her day to be with us too and be such a strong Deadly inspirational woman last but not least I would also like to give a huge thank you to Tamara for setting this program up and having it running we all definitely needed it we appreciate you for it even though you couldn't get most of us to come at the start of the year now we are calling you asking where you are.

Thank you to all the elders and soon to be elders and parents and teachers who have given up their time to come to this celebration today thank you for your time today from my peers and I, **Yarrabee**.



*Jade Hiskins*

*Images of the Lunch over page.*



I AM  
DEADLY



# WHAT I AM DEADLY MEANS TO ME

This program gave my child so much confidence to stand in front of anyone and talk. Gave her lots of work experiences that she can use in her future no matter what she decides to do. My child made many friends in this program, not only the students but the teachers/helpers/work experience, every person involved along the way have been amazing. Thank you for this opportunity

This meant to me a community supporting one another, to foster and grow a more engaged and informed community

Fabulous future program moving forward. We are DEADLY peeps!!

Exposing our awesome young people to a range of opportunities in a safe and supported way. Allowing young people to explore and shine

For the students, opportunity to learn leadership skills, most importantly build self-esteem. The changes I've seen in the students has been amazing

An opportunity for young people to find their inner power and realise their potential. Empower and believe

I Am Deadly meant to me a place where us mob could come together and feel safe and welcome. This program gave us a chance to show us what skills we didn't know we had. This program showed us what we could be

It is a program where you can meet new people, get out of your shell and it helps you with the future and it can help you for what you want to be when you're older. They do so much fun stuff, you can cook, bake and you can go on work placement through this program

A chance for students to connect with their culture, to raise their awareness of life opportunities and to increase their confidence

Making friends, finding your dream job, helps you get ready for the workplace

A program engaging family and confidence in yourself and with the community, industry and people in general. Program should be offered each year, followed with next stage program

To me, 'I Am Deadly' is a really great program that has created a way to bring a group of bright, talented and lovely young people who have so much to offer together with organisations. It has helped break down barriers and create opportunities

Figure 13: "What I Am Deadly Meant to Me"

## 5.1 STUDENT END OF YEAR REFLECTIONS

With the completion of the I Am Deadly program, students reflected on their experiences throughout the year. The overall feeling was a sense of accomplishment, joy and hope for the future for their own careers, as well as the future of the program. Students used words such as “amazing”, “engaged” and “fun” to describe their experience. Many said that they thought the I Am Deadly program should be a permanent fixture in the school year for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Students said that the skills they had learnt in the Trade Taster, I Am Ready and work experience components of the program provided them with employability skills that had already begun to translate to their lives outside of the program. Some had found part-time work that they were enjoying, stating “*I have the I Am Deadly program to thank for that*”. Students believed that the mock interviews and education undertaken in the I Am Ready component of the program prepared them for the workforce:

*“The employability skills that we were taught, I’ve been able to use them. My time management, making sure I have enough time to get ready, get to work, be prepared.”*

Although some found it difficult when preparing for interviews, they felt more relaxed and prepared for the job interview process. Some students voiced that the opportunity gave them the skills to find their voice and “*speak up*” in a number of settings:

*“I started feeling comfortable talking to new people.”*

Throughout the different components of the program, students had an opportunity to not only try different career paths and interests, but also make new friends. Coming together with their peers encouraged “*teamwork*”, “*we all became friends*” and “*we’re all one big family now*”. Students also gained confidence and felt supported in their connection with the program facilitators, with many praising the facilitator skills in bringing them together and guiding them on the I Am Deadly journey. Encouraging pride and confidence in the students gave them transferrable skills for the future:

*“They [the program facilitators] believed that I could do it. They told me that they knew I could do it and made me feel better. That’s when I started getting out of my shell and I started talking to everyone comfortably, I felt like I could do it then.”*

Having the opportunity to try out different career paths broadened the perspectives of the students. Many enjoyed the hands-on work, stating that their learning extended more than the physical product they were creating. They learnt that coming together for a common goal made the work easier and more enjoyable, also learning that when they encountered barriers, there were multiple ways these issues could be overcome. Students experienced the often physically challenging aspects of employment, such as long hours standing or lifting and manoeuvring stock and equipment. These experiences may have assisted in evolving and managing their expectations as they prepare for vocational opportunities.

When asked about their future after the I Am Deadly program, many students highlighted the value they now saw in staying in school. They were able to identify what was needed to achieve their career aspirations, whether that be enrolling TAFE, University or engaging in a trade:

*“I’ve been focusing on school a lot more now because I really want to be a childcare worker, so I can finish that and get into a TAFE for that, and I’ve been trying to look for a job in that.”*

Hopes for the future were high, with students thanking the I Am Deadly program for the skills, confidence and support it provided them as they develop their career goals:

*“There's a lot of opportunities out there for me.”*

The continuation of the program in future years was discussed, with 2022 students wanting their peers to have the opportunity to engage in the program if it was continued. With new personal and professional perspectives, the program provided a place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to explore their futures.

### **A Scoping Review of Work Pathway Programs for Indigenous Australian Adolescents**

Career education, vocational education and training (VET) and work readiness programs are crucial to the process of the transition from school in rural and remote communities. Schools however, are often unable to provide the appropriate resources to enable an effective, culturally appropriate transition from school to work, training or further education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents (Cuervo et al., 2015). The current model of VET often does not allow for cultural diversity, and access to technology and resources are a barrier (Cuervo et al., 2015).

This scoping review focused on programs for school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents that aimed to enable successful transition between school and work, training and further education. A scoping review was the preferred typology as the intent was to explore the breadth and depth of the literature and to identify knowledge gaps (Munn et al., 2018).

The aim of the review was to identify and map the literature pertaining to enabling pathways and barriers for future employment/training/education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents. The specific research objectives were: i. What are the characteristics of programs or enabling pathways that promote employment/educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents and ii. What are the enabling factors and barriers to implementing these programs? The search was restricted to a ten-year period (2012 to 2022) and six articles were included in the final study.

#### **Barriers and enablers**

The review highlighted the barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents face with work transition programs and pathways. Edwards-Vandenhoeck (2018) highlighted time as being one of the biggest barriers faced and this may be exacerbated by geographical issues identified by O'Shea et al. (2016), where participants in far reaching locations may have difficulty in attending. Additional barriers in addition to time and remote locations include housing issues, socio economic stability and cultural differences (Ackehurst et al., 2017). Such issues are often not too dissimilar for non-indigenous adolescent populations undertaking similar programs or initiatives however, an equitable approach is needed for Indigenous Australians.

Many enabling factors were identified, including a connection to culture, a strong cultural identity and a safe place to learn (Ackehurst et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2015; O'Shea et al., 2016; Shay & Heck, 2015). Together these enablers highlight the importance of cultural connections and how best to craft and shape work transition programs and pathways. Gwynne et al. (2020) further highlights these barriers by identifying how they may be operationalised into programs and pathways. Such barriers highlighted included the characteristics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the teachers and their understanding and awareness of cultural needs, the relationships and connections student have with other students or staff, the commitments of the institutional providers and the support the family and community can provide (Gwynne et al., 2020).

The use of yarning and/or yarning circles may also be a consideration to approaching such design and implementation (Eady & Keen, 2021). This approach allows the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents have their own voice and provides them the opportunity to have a direct contribution to the design and implementation of the program or pathways to best suit their needs (Eady & Keen, 2021). This is not too dissimilar to that proposed by Edwards-Vandenhoeck (2018) where centralizing

Indigenous design knowledge, perspectives and voices by fostering a two-way learning framework benefits the participants by building confidence and improve their educational outcomes. Additionally, understanding the reciprocal learning for both mentor and the participant with cultural and social awareness and respect of Indigenous knowledge, cultures and values positively impacts the program intervention and improves participants' aspirations for further training, education and/or employment (O'Shea et al., 2016). Together, these studies support the understanding of how best to approach transition programs and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents, particularly in a sustainable and long-term way. While as yet there is limited data regarding this facet of the design and implementation, further investigation may enable sustainability and success of such initiatives into the future.

#### Recommendations for future programs

- Future work enabling programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents must consider the importance and connection with culture, especially the inclusion of Indigenous voices in designing, facilitating and evaluating the program.
- Mentoring is key to the success of such programs; however, the issue of cultural safety must be considered for both mentor and student.
- Further research and/or evaluations are needed around the efficacy and sustainability of these programs.

#### Conclusion

This review aimed to investigate work enabling pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents. The take-home message from the small number of programs featured in this review is the importance of connection to culture and strengthening cultural identity. Programs should focus on building the aspirations of Indigenous adolescents and should promote an inclusive, culturally safe environment. The presence of Indigenous community voices in the designing, delivery and evaluation of the programs would help to facilitate this need. It is clear from the literature that continued long-term research and funding is required to explore the impact and sustainability of these programs. Disengagement from work and education is not a failure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, therefore it is imperative that all efforts are made to provide safe and equitable education, work and/or training enabling opportunities for our Indigenous children and young people.

The full Literature Review has been submitted for publication in a research journal. The Review will be included in this report when publication copyright and procedures allow.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The discussion will focus on the findings and the unintended outcomes from the program. The three research questions that guided the evaluation of the 'I Am Deadly' program will be explored, examining what impact this program has on the lives and work readiness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, program facilitators and mentors involved.

It was identified within the workbook, focus group interviews and interviews with program facilitators and mentors that a stronger focus on cultural connection and safety be achieved. Ensuring that program facilitators and mentors had a deep understanding of the history and distinctions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture was acknowledged as vital for program success. These findings were supported by the literature, with strong cultural identity, connection to culture within learning environments and providing culturally safe environments for learning enablers for student success (Ackehurst et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2015; O'Shea et al., 2016; Shay & Heck, 2015). By developing a culturally safe space for the students to learn encouraged their connection to culture, whilst also highlighting the cultural nuances such as Men's and Women's Business may impact the students' confidence in communicating with others. In future iterations of the program, if students were able to see themselves in the workbook content, including their art, language and expression, a greater connection to the written content may have been achieved (Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2018; Gwynne et al., 2020). It was identified that students valued the discussion that followed from the workbook content, which is supported by the literature in yarning and communications circles being the desired mode of learning (Eady & Keen, 2021). When students lives and culture is reflected within course content, it may foster a sense of purpose, belonging and personal responsibility in the learning process.

### Research Question 1:

#### **What was the impact of the 'I Am Deadly' program on the confidence and competence levels of year 10 Koorie students in seeking employment?**

Data collected from the student workbook suggested that over the 8-week program, student confidence and competence improved significantly (33% in week 1 and 62% in week 8). Students expressed feeling more positive and supported when applying for a job (37.5% in week 1 and 50% in week 8), and significantly more positive about taking part in a job interview (12.5% in week 1 and 50% in week 8).

Students confirmed these findings during focus group discussion, where they shared their feelings of fun and belonging when attending the program days. As a results, students expressed feeling inspired to pursue further study and strengthen their career aspirations:

*"...learnt how to study more and now I want to go to night school."*

By finding their voice, students were able to engage more readily with their classmates and industry professionals at the Inspiring Young People Lunch. Students built skills in participating in discussion:

*"I talk more. I used to just sit here and ignore everyone and now I'm like I will talk to everyone."*

The students could see the benefit of engaging in the program, potentially making them a more competitive candidate when looking for work:

*“We might have a better chance of being employed over say, [the] average year ten [student]”.*

Mentors and facilitators agreed, stating that the changes they saw in the students personal and professional confidence was encouraging. They saw as positive students who at the start of the program were shy and reserved become enthusiastic about the days spent in the group. They could see the benefit the program was having on the inter- and intra-professional skills of the students, who were making new connections with peers and industry professionals.

## **Research Question 2:**

### **What was the impact of the work experience aspect of the program on the student's attitudes towards employment?**

Findings from workbook data suggested that after the 8-week program, students felt more positive, however slightly more overwhelmed when thinking of applying to TAFE (37% positive and 0% overwhelmed in week 1 and 50% positive and 25% overwhelmed in week 8). Additionally, students felt marginally less positive about pursuing their dream job (76% positive and 25% supported in week 1 and 62.5% positive and 12.5% supported in week 8). This may have been attributed to learning more about what the job entailed, entrance requirements for the job and expectations for their future careers. It was identified that the workbook content did not have the capacity to expand on how and why the students' perceptions on future careers transformed over the program.

Students were able to see the skills they were learning within the program would help them in their future career aspirations. They noticed the teachings had impacted their behaviour and workplace professionalism:

*“Like I am more organised now. I actually get up an hour earlier than I need to, to get here. I like getting up at 7, get dressed straight away, leave home and catch a bus and get ready for this place.”*

By engaging in work experience as part of the program, the students made new connections that their schools may not have been able to offer. They voiced feeling supported by the program facilitators in this process, taking the pressure off with ongoing guidance:

*“I found myself a work placement job. Yeah, finally got one. Our school is depressing, they couldn't find one but finally got one here so now they don't pressure me anymore.”*

Withdrawal from the program was noted in the number of students that found employment or an apprenticeship during the 8-weeks (n=4). Although this meant that students were no longer engaged in the program and subsequent evaluation, the skills they had learnt were being put into practice in real world settings. This was encouraging for the program designers, seeing that knowledge translation was in effect. By encouraging the students to engage in a workforce trial, this may have impacted the students' expectations on the workforce both positively and negatively. By managing expectations, students may have been more readily able to make plans for their future, identifying the stepping stones and pitfalls that may be relevant on their journey.

### Research Question 3:

#### What were the perceived benefits and challenges to employment for Koorie students?

There were a number of perceived benefits in addition to challenges that were identified in the program when preparing the students for employment. Ensuring that the program is designed, implemented and evaluated with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples was identified as vital for program success. This inclusion allows for cultural safety to be woven throughout the program, giving students the necessary skills when communicating and working in a range of different environments, but also allowing them to see themselves in the program content fostering a greater sense of personal responsibility. This finding was supported by the literature, with suggestion of a two-way reciprocal learning framework that encouraged engagement of students and mentors (Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2018). Facilitators highlighted the lack of Welcome to Country traditions and made clear that future iterations of the program must include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples in mentor and facilitator roles:

*"I think we should do a proper Welcome to Country. If you want my personal opinion, we should do a smoking ceremony at the start before we do it."*

*"My biggest thing is the mentors need to be Koorie. I'd like the Facilitator to be Koorie too, but if they can't be, the mentors must be because there must be that shared experience."*

Encouraging pride in their culture may foster a sense of confidence within the students which is transferrable to workplaces. When students understand the nuances of their culture, they are able to identify where their values may differ amongst their colleagues. This was highlighted by facilitators of the program who saw distinctions in the behaviour of male and female students, and their confidence in speaking to one another:

*"The girls worked with the girls, boys with boys. I don't know if it had something to do with men's business, women's business type thing or just sort of that feeling more comfortable until we got to know them."*

A key finding of the evaluation supported by Edwards-Vandenhoeck (2018) and O'Shea et al. (2016) identified time and transport constraints as barrier to the students attending the program and work placements:

*"The majority of them try to come in every week as much as they can. And some have to catch public transport which sometimes makes them miss a session so that's a bit unfortunate."*

Additionally, socioeconomic factors to student participation within the program and the workforce were identified by facilitators. They did state however, that these factors are evident cross-culturally in the region:

*"The challenges that these guys may face, which might be the family issues, money, food, clothing, all that kind of stuff are the same kinds of issues that I would find with other schools that I've worked with."*

Providing food and sharing in its preparation encouraged communication, improved social skills ensured that students were well fed.

The program was seen as a great success for the students, staff and key stakeholders involved in the program. Feedback from the Inspiring Young People Lunch demonstrated that industry professionals wanted to see more students involved, and greater time allocated to the event to network, build connections and learn more about the students. Words such as 'Students', 'stories,' and 'hearing' were highlighted in what participants enjoyed most, supporting literature findings that yarning and story-telling was a desired mode of learning and communication for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents (Eady & Keen, 2021). Mentors and program staff voiced their excitement and passion for being involved in a potentially life changing program, expressing that their own personal growth was enormous. When reflecting on whether the program delivered on its intent of preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents for the workforce, they agreed that it had:

*“So are they work ready? Yes, they now know what to say, they know now how to sell themselves in a positive form, which is good and being able to sell yourself in a positive form is something they would have never experienced before.”*

## 7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations are made based on the evaluation of 'I Am Deadly'.

1. The I Am Deadly program continues to be delivered and promoted across the region
  - a. The program continues to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students learning work ready skills and increasing career aspirations.
2. Future programs consider the importance and connection with culture, especially the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in designing, facilitating and evaluating the program.
  - d. A Welcome to Country with place-based ceremonies be included to strengthen the cultural connection to the land on which the program was run.
  - e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators and mentors be included to foster a sense of belonging and cultural safety for students.
    - f. Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the project evaluation including during collection, analysis and dissemination of the results.
3. Facilitators, staff and mentor's complete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training where needed;
  - a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators, staff and mentors be included in the delivery of the training, as facilitators or advisors
4. The student workbook be improved for future delivery to include more culturally appropriate content, including artwork, images and relatable material.
  - d. Workbook images need to reflect the students, being age, gender and culturally appropriate in the human figures displayed.
  - e. Consider encouraging students of past programs to design art and images based on their experiences within the program and the benefits they want to share.
  - f. Language used in the workbook should be culturally relevant and relatable for students which will foster a sense of belonging and shared understanding.



## 8. LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

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There were limitations related to this evaluation that must be considered. These include:

1. The content and design limitations of the workbook limited the amount of detailed information that could be extracted and analysed for the project evaluation.
2. The smaller sample size of the student group may have affected the depth of the project evaluation, with the completion rate of the 'I Am Deadly' program being 53% (n=8). It was noted however, that several students withdrawing from the program was due to obtaining paid employment positions.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation is considered to present a credible assessment of the I Am Deadly program.



Enjoying lunch at Latrobe Youth Space

## 9. METHODOLOGY

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### 9.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The approach of the CERG to this evaluation was informed by a Participatory Evaluation and Co-Design Framework.

#### PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

A participatory evaluation framework puts people from the community and those delivering the programs, projects and services at the centre of the evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a distinctive approach based on the following principals:

- That evaluation should be a co-designed, collaborative partnership through 360° stakeholder input including project participants and project funders;
- That integral to evaluation is an evaluation capacity-building focus within and across projects;
- That evaluation is a cyclical and iterative process embedded in projects from project design to program assessment;
- That evaluation adopts a learning, improvement and strengths-based approach;
- That evaluation supports innovation, accepting that projects will learn and evolve'
- That evaluation contributes to the creation of a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking;
- That there is no one or preferred data collection method rather the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods will be tailored to the information needs of each project.

#### CO-DESIGN

Co-design is a process and approach that is about working with people to create 'interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives and will reflect their own values and goals'<sup>6</sup>. Co-design can be done in many ways but is about collaborative engagement that is bottom-up, creative, and enables a wide range of people to participate and importantly to steer decisions and outcomes. Co-design is not a consultation process but a partnership approach where 'end-users' actively define and shape strategies and outcomes. The role of the 'expert' is to facilitate this process.

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<sup>6</sup> VCOSS (2015). *Walk alongside: Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*. V. C. o. S. Service. Melbourne.

## 9.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach providing information about process, outcomes, impact and capacity building. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed as described below.

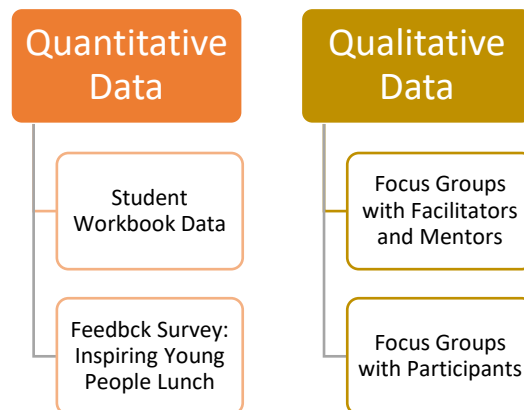


Figure 14: Data collected

### QUANTITATIVE DATA

Student workbook data was collected after the 'I Am Deadly' component of the project in term 2 of 2022, which included an 8-week face to face structured program and a 2-week employment placement. The workbooks were a key learning tool that contained weekly exercises, activities and self-assessment exercises. A total of 15 workbooks were collected, of which seven (n=7) were removed due to incomplete data due participants withdrawing from the program. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis.

### QUALITATIVE DATA

Two thematic analyses were conducted to collect qualitative data from those involved in the project. Firstly, a focus group with eight students was analysed, then four individual interviews with facilitators and mentors was conducted and analysed. The focus group and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed Braun and Clarke's six step process which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Figure 15 )<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887.

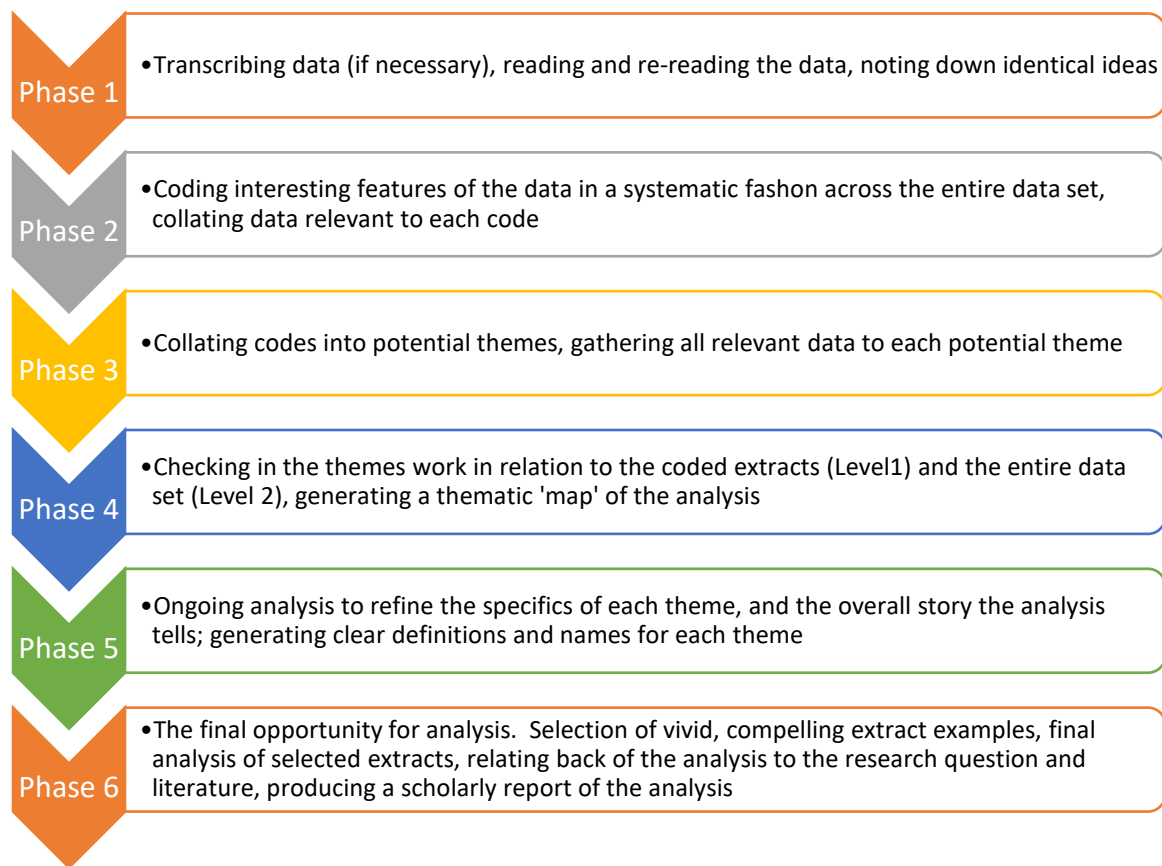


Figure 15: Six Step Thematic Analysis

As qualitative analysis is an inductive process, some interpretation of the data was required to create the thematic map. It was actively acknowledged that the researcher's interpretations would inform the results of this study, hence, any prior conceptions of the topic were reflexively bracketed to the best of the researcher's abilities<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>

## 10. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND PRACTICE

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Federation University aims to promote and support responsible research practices by providing resources and guidance to our researchers. We aim to maintain a strong research culture which incorporates:

- Honesty and integrity;
- Respect for human research participants, animals and the environment;
- Respect for the resources used to conduct research;
- Appropriate acknowledgement of contributors to research; and
- Responsible communication of research findings.

Human Research and Ethics application, Evaluation of the 'I Am Deadly' Project was approved by Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (A22-029) prior to data collection and analysis (Appendix 1). Consent to participate in the study and for participant's de-identified transcripts to be used for research and evaluative purposes was obtained via signed informed consent forms before commencing the interviews. Participant anonymity was maintained by removing any identifiable information from the evaluation.

## 11. ABBREVIATIONS

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AGL	Australian Gas Light Company
CERG	Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group
GCASA	Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault
GLAWAC	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
DEWLP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
LCC	Latrobe City Council
LGA	Local Government Area
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network

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## 14. APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Human Research and Ethics

<b>Principal Researcher:</b>	Associate Professor Joanne Porter	
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<b>Institution:</b>	<b>Institute of Health and Wellbeing</b>	
<b>Project Number:</b>	<b>A22-029</b>	
<b>Project Title:</b>	<b>Evaluation of the I Am Deadly Project.</b>	
<b>For the period:</b>	14/06/2022 to 10/06/2027 (standard 5-year project approval has been introduced)	

Quote the Project No: 2022-029 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Approval has been granted to undertake this project in accordance with the proposal submitted for the period listed above.

**Committee Comment:** Adding Aboriginal observers to the focus groups / interviews may promote cultural safety but also reduce participants' privacy.

Please note: It is the responsibility of the Principal Researcher to ensure the Ethics Office is contacted immediately regarding any proposed change or any serious or unexpected adverse effect on participants during the life of this project.

In Addition: Maintaining Ethics Approval is contingent upon adherence to all Standard Conditions of Approval as listed on the final page of this notification.

#### **COMPLIANCE REPORTING DATES TO HREC:**

Annual project reports:

**14 June 2023**

**14 June 2024**

**14 June 2025**

**14 June 2026**

Final project report:

**14 July 2027**

**A final report must be submitted within six months of the project completion, which may be prior to the date noted above. Submission of a final report will close off the project.**

The combined annual/final report template is available at:  
HREC Forms



Fiona Koop  
**Coordinator, Research Ethics**

## Appendix 2:

### Focus group questions

- Can you please tell me what was your role in the program was?
- Tell me about some of the experiences and observations you made during the program.
- What did you learn as a part of the "I Am Deadly program"?
- What did you enjoy most about the program? (Discuss strengths and weaknesses)
- Were there any changes in the students' attitudes throughout the program
- Where there any challenges faced by teachers / students / employers during the program?
- In your view did this program give its students a deeper understanding and appreciation of work readiness?
- Thinking about your experiences, what benefit, if any did this give to you?
- What would you like improved/what was a weakness of the program? Discuss
- Is there any other comments or thoughts anyone would like to share about their experience of the program?



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**Federation University Australia** acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where its campuses are located, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations Peoples.