

Youth Mentoring Career Pathways program

EVALUATION 2018-2020

Report for publication



mmvllen

maribyrnong and moonee valley
local learning employment network



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1.0 Executive Summary

“From day one I learnt to try to take advantage every opportunity that comes my way, to give it a crack.”

Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network’s (MMVLLN’s) Youth Mentoring and Career Pathways (YMCP) initiative is providing real employment pathways for vulnerable young people from Melbourne’s West.

Over 70% of the young people taking part in this unique program move into employment whilst in or once they have completed their time in YMCP. These young people are drawn primarily (over 71%) from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in Western Melbourne, with the majority not in paid employment when they enter the program.

YMCP’s elegant service delivery model provides a combination of mentoring and on-the-job work experience supported by peer learning opportunities and structured monitoring. YMCP draws on national and international best practice transition to work strategies to provide a supportive experience that assists young people to gain the skills and experience necessary to navigate the challenges associated with transitioning into ongoing sustainable employment.

Through YMCP, MMVLLN is able to support each young person with a small stipend to cover the expenses associated with travelling to and from the work placement.

Participants develop **transferrable skills** that are suitable for many positions available in today’s job market, increasing their chances at gaining paid employment.

The three key stakeholder groups – Participants, Mentors and Host Employers – provide glowing reports of their experiences in YMCP. **Whilst job, study and career outcomes are paramount** to each stakeholder group, they also identify other important outcomes for Participants, such as:

- Developing the confidence to meet new people, learn new things and not lose heart;
- Being prepared to seek advice;
- Being able to use the experience they have gained in the workplace in their resumes;
- Feeling proud of what has been accomplished;
- Developing relationships with experienced people who can now be drawn on to be referees.

The Stakeholders believe that YMCP differs from other programs because it:

- Carefully matches the mentee and mentor to ensure that personalities and interests are well aligned;
- Provides an evidence-based training program for Mentors prior to them taking on the mentoring.
- Provides flexibility for the Mentors, Host Employers and Participants;
- Supports Host Employers to provide meaningful work for Participants;
- Demonstrates real care and commitment to all stakeholders.

YMCP has been able to continue to provide strong supports to its Participants in the COVID19 lockdown environment by moving quickly to a digital model. MMVLLN and the Host Employers

acknowledge that at this time many of the work placements are temporarily curtailed as supervising staff are working from home.

MMVLLEN, Mentors and Host Employers are concerned about the disruption a devastated economy is having, and will continue to have for some time, on the careers of young people.

High performing and well planned and executed transition to work initiatives, such as YMCP, will be critical to supporting vulnerable young people in the western suburbs of Melbourne to acquire real work experience and develop strong employability skills in a post COVID world.

MMVLLEN has the capability and delivery frameworks to scale its YMCP program to respond to the current crisis and reach significantly more young people, providing them with the skills, confidence, experience and support to navigate what will be an even more complex and difficult journey into work in the coming years. From the gloom of the current economic environment, however, YMCP Participants offer us sage advice:

“Just push yourself and do it, you will learn beyond your expectations.”

2.0 Introduction

2.1 About Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network

Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network Inc (MMVLEN) is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity. It is one of 31 LLENs that was established across Victoria in 2001 and its vision is “Young people are confident, capable and on their way to success in work and life.”¹

MMVLEN’s purpose is to “improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people with the priority being those experiencing disadvantage, discrimination, social isolation and from low socio-economic backgrounds in the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley region.”² MMVLEN fulfils its purpose by:

- Brokering and facilitating strategic partnerships and programs to support sustainable outcomes and address gaps in our community.
- Developing and facilitating collaborative approaches towards planned improvement and provision of education, training and employment.
- Engaging with appropriate stakeholders from education, training, business and industry, community and cultural organisations, government bodies and commissions, to achieve our vision across the community.”³

Specifically, MMVLEN implements the following initiatives to fulfil its purpose:

- Pathways to Employment Partnerships
- Structured Workplace Learning
- Youth Mentoring and Career Pathways (YMCP)
- World of Work
- Try a Trade
- Youth Friendly Employers
- Ontrack

Early in 2020 MMVLEN developed its Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023. Four Strategic Goals were identified with Goal 3 being “Stimulating Futures Thinking and Innovation in School to Work Transition”. MMVLEN identifies its YMCP initiative as an innovative place-based transition to work and learning initiative for young people in the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley local government areas.

1 <https://www.mmvllen.org.au/about-us/>

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*

2.2 YMCP Overview

MMVLLEN's YMCP provides mentoring and real on-the-job experience for vulnerable young people in the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley local government areas. Participants "develop **new transferrable skills** that are suitable for many positions available in today's job market, increasing their chances at gaining paid employment."⁴

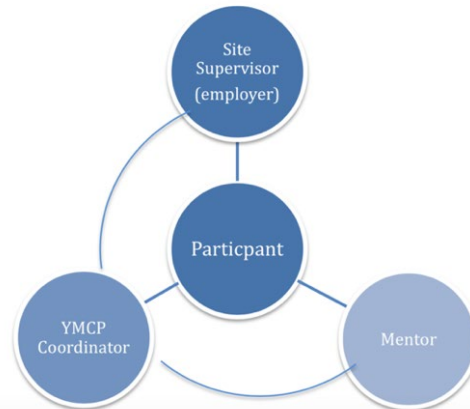
Work placements are generally for **one to two days per week, for 10 weeks.**

During the placement participants receive a small stipend to cover travel and lunch expenses (**\$20 per day**).

Participants are matched with a mentor from a professional background, to offer guidance and support for up to nine months. By combining mentoring with a work placement, YMCP is able to offer a supportive experience that assists the young person to gain the skills and experience to navigate the challenges associated with undertaking a work placement and transitioning into ongoing sustainable employment.

Youth Mentoring & Community Placement Program

Roles and Responsibilities



To participate in YMCP the young person needs to:

- Be between the ages of 16-24;
- Have some connection to the Moonee Valley or Maribyrnong area (Friends, family, previous school, sport clubs etc. in the area)
- Be currently unemployed;
- Be willing to commit to 1-2 days per week over 10 weeks



Employers interested in participating need to commit to:

- Having a young person in their workplace for one to two days per week for 10 weeks;
- Ensure a member of staff is able to supervise the young person while **providing a relevant workplace learning experience.**

Currently YMCP is being partially funded by Engage!, a Victorian Government initiative.

Engage! is part of the Victorian Government's vision that every young person should have the opportunities and support they need to reach their full potential, including those who face disadvantage.

A successful YMCP experience for the young participants requires the cooperation of the following:

⁴ <https://www.mmvllen.org.au/about-us/>

- Eligible Young People - Each young person is responsible for meeting all organizational requirements in terms of eligibility for the placement position, providing appropriate paperwork and meeting the organisational criteria;
- Youth Mentoring & Career Pathways Coordinator - The YMCP Coordinator is the official YMCP representative and is responsible for the oversight and implementation of the program;
- Host Employer Site Supervisor -The Host Employer Site Supervisor is the officially recognized professional at the approved host employer who is responsible for the on-site supervision and evaluation of the participant;
- Mentor - The mentor provides guidance and support to the participant to assist them in navigating challenges during placement and the transition into education and employment. Mentors undertake YMCP Mentor Training and are encouraged to attend regular debrief sessions.



Mentor Training is usually delivered as a whole day session on a weekend. Due to COVID 19 the training has been adapted to be delivered online through zoom as 3 separate modules which run for 2 hours each. These modules are:

- Introduction and understanding of youth issues
- Mentoring, boundaries & communication
- Identifying resources & Case-Studies

Mentors are provided with pre-reading, a Mentoring Handbook and Mentor Resource Pack.

In addition to mentoring and placement activities, participants are kept up to date with any youth programs, job opportunities and professional/personal development opportunities.

The outcomes reported from YMCP are reported as:

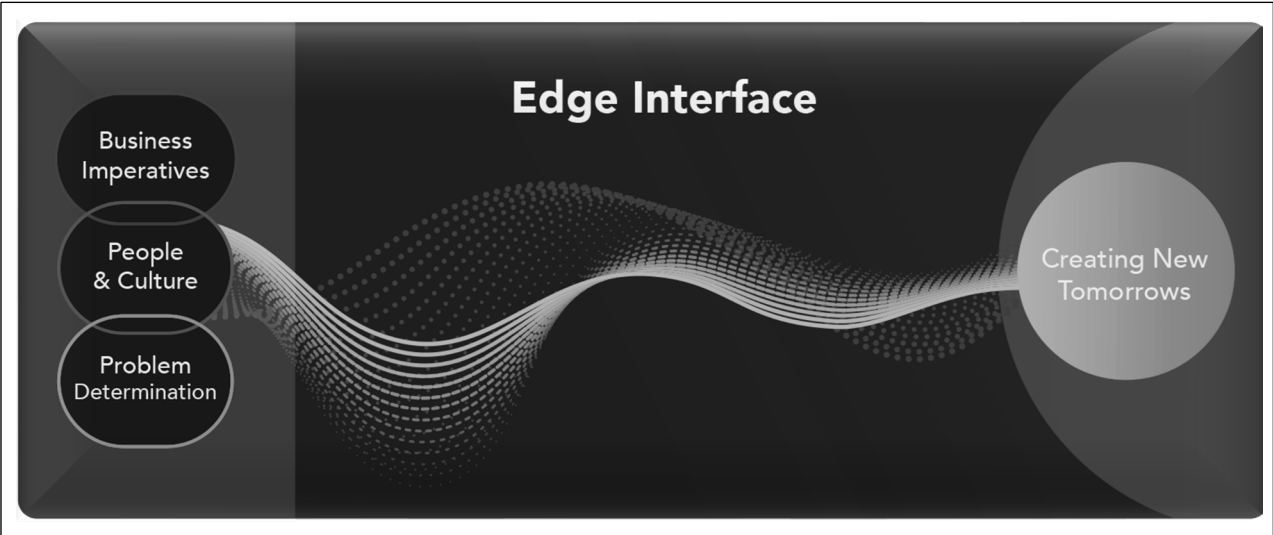
- Participating young people reporting that they feel more confident and more connected to their community;
- High satisfaction rates from all stakeholders;
- Word of mouth referrals;
- Re-occurring engagement from mentors and employers;
- Average over 70% employment outcomes for young people.

3.0 Evaluation Methodology

MGA customized its Edge Interface methodology to ensure that the evaluation of YMCP:

- Articulates with clarity the imperatives of MMVLLLEN and YMCP initiative;
- Focuses new thinking on determining and defining the problems YMCP is seeking to solve;
- Facilitates feedback from YMCP’s key stakeholders.

We believe that to *innovate* is to *make the best use of available resources in arriving at the optimal solution.*



MGA undertook a 4 Stage approach to conducting the evaluation of YMCP.

Stage	Key Tasks
Establishment & Communication	Confirm Methodology, Deliverables, Timeframes & Governance & Project Plan; Confirm Consultation & Communication Plan
Literature Review	Appropriate review of literature and data (quantitative and qualitative)
Consultations	Consultations with participants, mentors and the host employers. Confirm objectives, benefits, supports, mode of delivery and outcomes;
Findings & Reporting	Draft Report & Final Evaluation Report

4.0 Literature Review

The available literature confirms the importance of both mentoring and organised work placements in fostering the development of pathways into employment for young people, particularly vulnerable young people.

The majority of literature looks at the impact of one or other of the main strategies used by YMCP – being mentoring and work placement. Research looking at the combined impact of mentoring and work placement is less common, but we can draw conclusions from the literature that evaluates mentoring or work placements.

4.1 The Benefits of Mentoring for Young People

The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring, in its 2020 article *Are Youth Mentoring Programs Effective?*, argues that youth mentoring programs had stronger effects when deployed along with a greater number of recommended practices, such as mentor screening, training and supervision, as well as structured mentoring activities and monitoring of program implementation.⁵ In addition to mentoring and work placement, YMCP does provide opportunities for participant peer learning and strong monitoring of the program, both strategies specifically referenced by The Chronicle.

Dubois et al, in *Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth*, also argues that the effects of Youth Mentoring are enhanced significantly when greater numbers of both theory-based and empirically based “best practices” are utilized and when strong relationships are formed between mentors and youth.⁶ In *Mentoring Programs – How Effective Are They*, Dubois found that matching mentors and mentees according to their interests helps to produce greater benefits for young people, probably because this kind of matching helps young people and mentors connect and find activities that they enjoy doing together.⁷ One of the features of YMCP is its commitment to matching mentors and mentees on the basis of interests and personalities.

The location of YMCP in Melbourne’s West and its specific targeting of vulnerable young people who have either left school, or are actively planning to leave school, and are looking for work and careers is supported by Dubois et al, who highlight that youth from backgrounds of environmental risk and disadvantage appear most likely to benefit from participation in mentoring programs.⁸ In their research they found that mentoring programs appear to be most effective for youth who have some pre-existing difficulties or who are exposed to heightened levels of environmental risk,⁹ but they also found that “most programs probably can’t handle the demands of youth with really serious difficulties”.¹⁰

Other mentoring programs that target similar cohorts to YMCP support the importance of mentoring for vulnerable cohorts. CMY, their 2018/19 Annual Report, provided evidence that their Employment Empowers mentoring program “supported young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to build their work-readiness skills and find employment in Australia.”¹¹

Sawrikar et al, in researching the case for mentoring for young people settling in Australia from the Horn of Africa, found that, once their immediate needs are addressed, mentoring can provide the holistic support that these young people need because it can address emotional, socio-cultural

5 Are Youth Mentoring Programs Effective?, The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring, 2020

6 David L. DuBois, Bruce E Holloway, Jeffrey C Valentine, Harris Cooper, Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth, A Meta-Analytic Review

7 David L Dubois, Mentoring Programs – How Effective Are They? APS, Association for Psychological Science

8 David L. DuBois, Bruce E Holloway, Jeffrey C Valentine, Harris Cooper, Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth, A Meta-Analytic Review

9 ibid

10 ibid

11 <https://www.cmy.net.au/young-people-community/employment/envison-employment/>

and/or resource-related settlement issues. It can also provide a longer-term solution for the on-going process of acculturation for people from a CALD background in Australia.¹²

The length of contact between mentors and youth has been identified as a key indicator of the likely effectiveness of mentoring. Mentoring relationships which are sustained over a significant period of time are more likely to lead to beneficial outcomes and are likely to be increasingly effective with time.¹³ The formal length of the YMCP mentoring is 9 months and incorporates and extends beyond the time the participant is undertaking work placement. The YMCP data and the outcomes from the consultations, below, support the length of time involved in YMCP mentoring.

Hazeldene, in *Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to Engage Young Adults Furthest from the Labour Market*, argues that "unless the basic life needs of young people are being met, it is difficult for young people to focus on how they might go about developing their employability."¹⁴ His research highlights the need for mentoring to be progressed over months so that young people work "with their mentor to develop a person-centred employment plan to define the key actions they needed to be taking to develop their employability and address barriers to the labour market."¹⁵

4.2 The Benefits of Work Placement for Young People

There is strong evidence to suggest that work placements are extremely valuable to students, both in terms of their academic performance and their employability skills.¹⁶ Placements give students the opportunity to gain skills specific to their industry of choice as well as the employability skills required for real-life work. They also increase a young person's knowledge of an industry or sector, allowing them to make better informed decisions about future career choices.¹⁷

Hazeldene highlights the critical importance of work placements with his analysis revealing that "the strongest single predictor that a young person would secure employment was to have worked before."¹⁸

A clear beneficial output for young people from undertaking a placement is the ability to effectively evidence their experiences in their CV, providing documented contextual proof for their skills and abilities, coupled with a reference.¹⁹ Interaction with other professionals whilst on placement can also bring strong benefits in terms of networking. For example, engaging with professionals in their chosen career-field can provide a foundation of contacts on which to build and draw upon in a future career.²⁰

Supervised work placements are central transition experiences that enable social learning processes and trigger changes in a person's identity development as a professional, thereby increasing career resources and employability which in turn affect future career outcomes positively.²¹

¹² Pooja Sawrikar, Megan Griffiths & Kristy Muir, CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTORING: the case of Horn of African young people in Australia, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme

¹³ Marjory L Moodie, Jane Fisher, Are youth mentoring programs good value-for-money? An evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne Program

¹⁴ Hazeldene Richard, *Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to engage young adults furthest from the labour market*, 2019, <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/using-maslows-hierarchy-needs-engage-young-adults-furthest-labour-market>

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ David L Dubois, *Mentoring Programs – How Effective Are They?* APS, Association for Psychological Science

¹⁷ What are the benefits of a quality placement? National Centre for Universities and Business, <https://www.ncub.co.uk/placements-report/the-benefits-of-a-high-quality-placement.html>

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ ibid

²¹ Ilke Inceoglu, Eva Selenko, Almuth McDowall, Svenja Schlachter, (How) Do work placements work? Scrutinizing the quantitative evidence for a theory-driven future research agenda, Science Direct

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001879118301039>

4.3 Alignment of YMCP with Research Findings

The YMCP model demonstrates the characteristics highlighted in the literature as being key to providing successful transition to work pathways for vulnerable young people. The overwhelming majority of YMCP participants are from a Refugee/Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, with a large proportion of participants from the Australian-African community.²²

YMCP builds the skills and confidence of young people as they are able to gain new skills in a supportive and encouraging environment. Participants are provided with an insight into the work that is required in the field they are interested in. This allows them to build their confidence and knowledge in the workplace which will assist them in finding employment.²³

To ensure that the young people are supported during their work placement, YMCP connects them with a well-briefed supervisor in the workplace. This allows the young person to expand their networks and build connections that can be utilised as a reference for future job applications.²⁴

Underpinning the YMCP design is a strong evidence and experience base. The current model is a product of the years of experience in facilitating youth mentoring, work placements, skill development programs and individual support. YMCP program combines all of these elements to ensure marginalized young people have the greatest opportunity to succeed in accessing the local labour market. In 2019 72% of young people completing the YMCP program gained employment.²⁵

YMCP utilises a number of documents in outlining the program delivery framework, the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder/participant and how the program is delivered, including the YMCP Program Map. The Program Map²⁶ outlines YMCP and provides information on the Purpose, Vision, Participants, Mentors, Employers, Referral Agencies, Values, Critical Success Factors, Result Measures, Suppliers, Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes, Processes, Improvement Processes and Stakeholders.

22 MMVLLN Youth Mentoring Career Pathways Program – Summary Report

23 ibid

24 MMVLLN Youth Mentoring Career Pathways Program – Summary Report

25 ibid

26 YMCP Program Map 2018

5.0 Data Analysis

In the three years, from 2018 – 2020, YMCP has worked with 60 young people, providing youth mentoring and/or a work placement experiences.

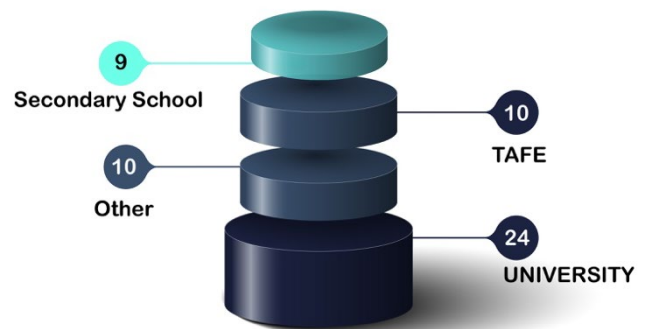
In 2018 the total number of participants was 23, in 2019 it was 22 and in 2020 the year to date number is 15. The bar graph below illustrates the impact of COVID19 in 2020 with a reduction in the number of Participants undertaking a work placement and an increase in those connecting with a Mentor only at this time of the year.

YMCP Activities 2018-2020



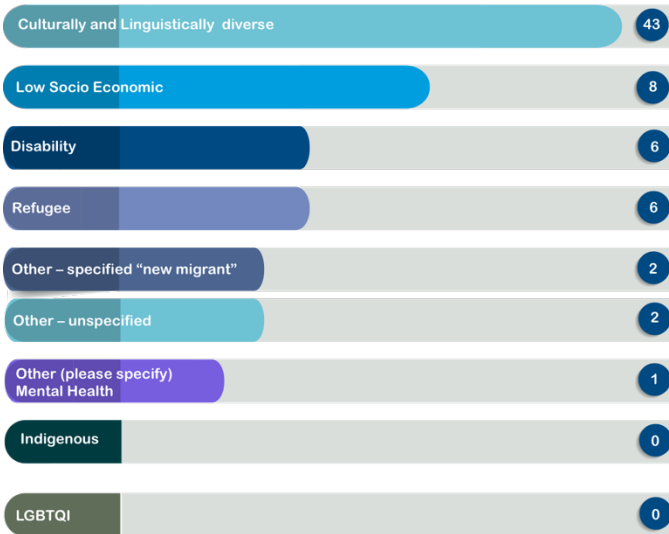
YMCP 2018-2020 Education Status Upon Entry

Out of the total of 60 young people participating in YMCP from 2018 – 2020 the majority (24) entered the program whilst they were undertaking university studies.



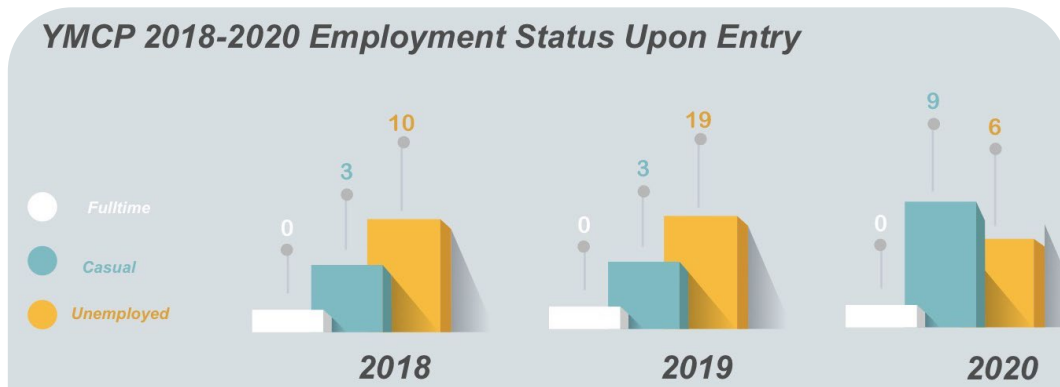
YMCP collects diversity data on each young person when they enter the program. The young person is asked if they identify as one of the following: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, low socio-economic household, disability, refugee, Indigenous, LGBTQI or other such as mental health. It should be noted that the diversity data is offered voluntarily by the participants, with young people only nominating one of the available options.

YMCP 2018-2020 Diversity



The data on the diversity of the participating young people supports YMCP's claim that it targets vulnerable young people from diverse backgrounds. Over 71% of the Participants come from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background.

The majority of participants over the past three years were unemployed when they commenced the program. In 2020 more young people held casual jobs at entry than were unemployed. It will be interesting to see the movement in demand from young people who are unemployed in a post COVID environment.



Data gathered by MMVLLLEN from young people undertaking YMCP from January to December 2019 shows that:

- 72% have gained employment since completing the program.
- 100% felt that, as a result of YMCP, they now have a good understanding about the Industry they would like to work in.
- 100% agreed that they felt better prepared for the job market, this included being provided with sufficient learning opportunities and feeling more confident in relation to finding work;
- 94% agreed that their YMCP participation has positively contributed to their overall health and wellbeing.

Young people who have completed their placement have many positive things to say about their experiences:

“The placement was an opportunity for me to learn and improve my skills in video editing, as my goal is to work as a video editor full-time, sometime in the near future.”

“I think the most valuable part of the placement with Trade Creative was the real-life hands-on experience, this made it both practical and enjoyable and it has given me a sense that this is certainly something I want to do as a career.”

“Be motivated and determined. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It's the best way to learn.”

“Personally, I absolutely love the Victoria Police for many reasons...the police members (mentors) that you work with, they were great in a sense of they teach you a lot about police work. Other reasons are the fact that I've learnt to be more confident with talking to people and dealing with a variety of cases.”

“The most useful part of the placement was learning more about administration and gaining first-hand experience in a work environment. My advice for future participants is to “use this as an opportunity to develop your skills, particularly time management, attention to detail and personal organisation.”

How YMCP has responded to COVID19

Whilst only halfway through the 2020 calendar year, and despite having to adjust the service in response to the restrictions related to COVID, YMCP has managed to attract and provide services for 75% of its target cohort. By the end of June 2020:

- 14 young people had been placed with and were actively undertaking mentoring (10 of these mentoring relationships commenced during COVID in an online environment);
- 9 young people are in the process of being matched up with a mentor or are on the waiting list, with an additional 1 expression of interest to be followed up;
- 6 work placements are “on hold” at the moment due to COVID and a further 8 employers have indicated interest once the restrictions related to COVID are lifted;
- In addition to the participants undertaking Mentoring, 17 young people are awaiting or are in the process of being matched into a work placement;
- Host and potential Host Employers include organisations providing transition to work services, health providers, library services, Community Centres and Neighbourhood Houses, Government Departments, an Interior Designer, Retro Girls, Victoria Police, Maker Space – Fab9 and The Westsider. A number of these Host Employers take multiple placements throughout the year;
- Other industries where placements are being sought include dental, arts and media including writing, psychology/youth work, science or laboratory work and museum or art gallery work;
- During COVID, 13 new mentors have been trained online.

6.0 Consultations

The key stakeholder groups for YMCP are:

- Participants
- Mentors
- Host Employers
- MMVLLEN

The consultation process included a number of Focus Groups conducted via zoom and one on one feedback from individual stakeholders using a set of established questions.

6.1 Consultations with Participants

Consultations with participants explored their overall experience with YMCP; why they were attracted to the program; whether the program met their needs; the extent to which it was tailored to their needs, strengths and interests; how YMCP differs from other local transition to work initiatives in Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley; what the best features of the program and where there are opportunities for improvement.

6.1.1 Why Undertake YMCP

The key reasons given by the young people for undertaking YMCP were to:

- **Gain experience in a workplace**, and, in particular, in a workplace that is linked in some way to what they thought their career aspirations were at the time. They pointed out that advertised jobs always ask for experience and they couldn't get the experience without having had a job or a job-like experience. Participants also reported how hard it is to get work upon completing University;
- **Help in formulating ideas about what they can do as a job or a career.** A number of the young people said that they left school without any idea of what they wanted to do in the way of paid work and/or a career.

6.1.2 The Participants' YMCP Experience

The mentoring component of the YMCP experience has been reported by the young people as overwhelmingly positive. Each young person reported that they felt very well matched with their mentor and were able to quickly develop high levels of trust in their mentor. They also reported that their relationship with their mentor continued beyond the 9 months specified in the program guidelines.

Two young people reported having experienced mentoring prior to joining YMCP and finding that it was less than satisfactory. In differentiating MMVLLEN's YMCP from other programs these participants identified six key points:

- The effort taken to match the mentee and mentor to ensure that the personalities and interests were well aligned;
- The training that the mentors had prior to taking on the mentoring. They reported that it was clear that the mentors knew what their role was and understood what was expected of them as a mentor.

- The flexibility of the mentoring - participant and mentor sets the time, mode (phone, video, email and in person) and frequency for catch up. Participants are confident to contact their mentor;
- The planning, organisation and follow through is really caring and genuine;
- The Project Coordinator reaches out to ensure open communication;
- Peer support through group dinners and catch up sessions.

“I love my mentor and I am still seeing her. She is the reason I have been successful in getting my job.”

Participants reported the mentoring relationship as being a unique relationship, one where they could talk about work, careers and their interests in a way that is different from any other relationship in their lives. Working with a mentor has enabled participants to build their confidence to ask questions, to learn and to make networks and connections.

The participants also reported that the work placement definitely met their needs at the time, i.e. to gain work experience that could go on their resume and to gain referees who could talk about their skills and attitude in a workplace environment.

All the participants agreed that the things they learned during the placement have been useful in their current jobs.

One reported that it helped her *“clarify the direction I wanted to go in for my future career.”* It provided the opportunity to take part in and facilitate a little bit of co-design and this helped with getting the current job.

A second reported that the placement *“gave me a lot more of a sense of direction and I’m finally studying a course I’m interested in – Diploma of Visual Arts at RMIT.”*

One of the areas where the placement particularly helped was in the development of self-confidence and communication skills. One young lady reported that before the placement she *“was afraid to meet new people and the placement helped me a lot because it helped me learn new things. It was hard to be part of a new culture in Australia and meet new people who didn’t speak my language, so this program it helped being around new people, to build my confidence to make friends and to speak to people from other cultures.”*

By working in the Braybrook Library one young person reported that the placement *“has helped me integrate into Australia because it helped me learn about the culture.”* She also learned about how to work in a library, how to work with children and how to communicate effectively in multiple languages to assist queries from the community.

In addition, participants reported that they learned how to work in a professional environment, to take control and responsibility and how to be accountable for the work that is done.

“The work placement gave me skills and experience. It was my first time being in the workplace and it gave me a head start from other graduates who were just finishing degrees. Industry experience puts you ahead of the class.”

One young person talked about how important his placement with Victoria Police was in giving him an understanding of all the jobs that are available. With vision issues he wouldn't be able to be a sworn member of the police force, but he found that there were lots of other opportunities and it strengthened his goal to get into police work. *As a result, he has had a job interview for a Property Manager position with Victoria Police and has a follow up interview scheduled.*

The combination of mentoring and work placement has worked very well for participants. They report being able to get help on updating their resumes, setting up job search profiles and applying for jobs at the same time as gaining real work experience and an understanding of what employers are looking for. Knowing that there is someone to draw on for support when applying for jobs is very important, as is being able to list relevant referees on the application.

In addition to receiving support through the mentoring and work placement, participants reported developing skills such as how to work in a team environment, communicating with people from diverse backgrounds, understanding their own motivation, participating in things like co-design, understanding the way work day is structured (showing up on time and when to take breaks) and organising tasks and jobs.

Participants also reported a direct relationship between their experience in YMCP and their success in moving into work study including for one moving into a Graduate Internship.

6.1.3 Tailoring to Participant Needs and Interests

Participants confirmed that both the mentoring arrangement and the work placement have been tailored to their needs and interests.

The process for tailoring includes the Project Coordinator listening to the participant's needs in the Initial Interview and taking their interests into consideration in seeking a mentor and Host Employer. From this point, the Project Coordinator is able to match the participant to a Mentor based on aligning their career and skill interests, hobbies and personalities. Work Placements are matched based on what the young person's career interest is and the skills and experience they hope to gain.

In addition, generally participants reported that the mentors and the host employers helped with further tailoring the experience to meet their needs. The Mentor Resource Pack contains a career quiz for Mentors to use with Participants if appropriate.

6.1.4 What the Participants Value Most

To the participants the most important aspect of YMCP is the trusted relationships they develop with the mentors and the people they work with during the work placement.

"It is nice to have someone in my corner and genuinely interested in supporting and can talk about professional stuff and relate to personal things but in a professional sense, like how to develop as a person and what is going on in the world, as well as how to be better in career."

Participants also valued:

- Learning not to take it personally if not successful in a job application;
- YMCP's welcoming environment and how the program is tailored to their needs;

- The wide range of Host Employer options to choose from;
- Meeting new people and getting advice and having questions answered;
- Really interesting work placements e.g. the library where it was amazing and interesting with books, children, entertainment and lots of programs; going out with the Police in the community, attending community meetings, answering phone calls in the watch house, admin training, and meeting community members at front desk.
- Aftermath, realising everything you've accomplished and looking at all the people you've met;
- Experience gained and meeting specialists in sustainability, and people who have had years and years of experience and now I'm on first name basis with them.



“Thank you. I really appreciate all the help you have given me. I definitely feel like I've grown as a person and I feel more confidence in myself and the direction that I'm going.”

6.1.5 Improvements to YMCP

The participants identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- Ensuring that the tasks within the work placement were sufficiently varied and that there is more to do;
- Would be good to meet the other mentees – a few more get-togethers and online groups;
- More programs like this to help youth, especially when you come to Australia, it helps with advice, help with resume and help with learning new things;
- Increase the marketing, it's pretty low key and a lot of it is word of mouth. It's a service that needs to be sold in job market;
- Greater involvement of local government and other organisations;
- Placement could be longer.

6.2 Consultations with Mentors

Consultations with mentors explored their overall experience with YMCP, why they were attracted to volunteering as a YMCP Mentor, what the key aspects of the mentoring role are, how well equipped they feel to undertake the role, the support and training they receive, resources available, what makes YMCP different from other initiatives, the best part of their YMCP experience and what can YMCP do to improve the program.

The primary attraction of the mentors to YMCP is the opportunity to work with, and make a difference to, young people as they seek to transition into work and/or create a career for themselves. The mentors described their role as:

- Providing guidance in finding long term career goals;
- Working to assist the mentee to find a job;
- Assisting with interview skills;
- Providing a friendly challenging perspective;
- Building the trust and confidence of young people and empowering them to take responsibility;



- Providing referrals to other services (via Co-ordinator) if necessary.

Mentors are given formal Mentor Training before being matched with the mentee. During the training the mentors are provided with resources to support the mentoring process, a monthly catch up and regular Mentor meetings.

Mentors discussed how important the training is on establishing clarity about the role and the boundaries that need to be in place for the mentor to successfully conduct the role.

“The training is fantastic. It provides a real understanding of the boundaries for mentors, the scope of the role, the do’s and don’ts, knowing your limitations, seeking help and sharing ideas and experiences that existing mentors have.”

The mentors also reflected on the importance of having regular catch ups with the Coordinator and being able to come together as mentors to share information and strategies. *“Reflection sessions are great, loaded with ideas from other mentors.”*

The mentors identified the key outcomes for the participants as being:

- Increased confidence and ability to take responsibility;
- Increased problem-solving ability;
- Participants moving into work;
- Participants moving into study;
- Participants coming back for support and advice when face with key decisions about their careers.

The challenges for the mentors included ensuring that they know what additional services are available when appropriate e.g. if they suspect that there may be mental health and wellbeing issues impacting the young person, knowing when to push the young person and when to give them space, coming to grips with the issues that young people face and making sure that they are familiar with the resources that are available through YMCP and other sources.

The mentors identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- Accessibility of resources and ability to share ideas;
- Adding a Frequently Asked Questions facility to the web site;
- Establishing a Community of Practice through zoom;
- Conducting a longitudinal study on what the mentees go on to;
- Connecting with the alumni to see where they are at and to talk to them about what worked, having them as guest speakers;
- Ensuring that the stories are celebrated.

Mentors identifies that a key strength of YMCP is its flexibility. Mentors are reaching mentees by phone, text, video calls and face to face (pre COVID). This flexibility has allowed them to provide the right advice at the right time.

“It is a very personalised service that is localised and grass roots, which means it is closer to the issues and closer to the solutions.”

6.3 Consultations with Host Employers

Consultations with Host Employers explored their overall experience with YMCP, why they were attracted to providing a work placement for a young person, what the key aspects of work experience at their organisation are, the skills/experience the young people gain, how well equipped their workplace was to take on young people, in particular vulnerable young people, the support and training received as a Host Employer, how YMCP is different from other initiatives that help young people in Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley transition into work, what the best part of the YMCP experience is and what would improve the experience for Host Employers.

The Host Employers taking part in these consultations included Victoria Police, Department of Education and Training, Braybrook Library (Maribyrnong City Council), The Level Crossing Removal Project, Westsider and Wingate Avenue Community Centre.

A number of the employers have provided multiple work placement opportunities. In supporting YMCP participants they talked about the importance of a workplace that has strong robust HR that includes good induction and onboarding. These strong systems and processes reassure managers that they will have support if necessary. Employers talked about taking their team on a journey to understand why it is important to take young people on for placements. Getting more “buy in” from managers about the importance of the program is very important. They reported on how supportive the workplaces are once the young people are on board.

COVID has impacted on work placements as it is trickier working remotely. Once restrictions eased work placements will recommence. Employers discussed the critical importance, post COVID, of ensuring that young people are provided with every opportunity to build a resume.

The key things that attract Host Employers to YMCP are:

- The length (ten shifts) and flexibility of the work placements;
- Young people being paid a small stipend to cover specific costs associated with undertaking the placement, such as transport and lunch;
- The outcomes that are achieved for young people – so many of them move into employment;
- The value to the organisation’s brand locally that comes from working with young people;
- The opportunities for the young person and the organisation – having the young person and their fresh perspective and input in the workplace is very valuable;
- The expertise of MMVLEN and the support given to the Host Employers;
- The corporate social responsibility and community obligation to support local young people to develop work readiness skills;
- The new skills that young people bring;
- Wanting to offer support and the chance for young people to learn *in a “real” work environment*.

“Having a young person in the workplace is a real advantage.”

Each of the Host Employers take a slightly different approach to planning and providing work tasks for the participant. These approaches range from:

- Preparing little projects that are meaningful and able to be contained. The participant can undertake the project from start to finish.
- Looking at interests and tailoring the work tasks to engage the participant’s interests. For example, one young person was interested in a career in Information Technology (IT), so they worked with the IT staff and built their own capability as well as helping out with assisting staff.

- Focussing on developing particular skills. For example, one workplace made up a “syllabus” covering the judicial process, communication, customer service, community engagement and investigation to ensure the participants gain a really good understanding of the workplace and potential career opportunities;
- Planning before the placement and asking the young person about skills they want to gain from the experience. The program focusses on confidence building and providing practical hands-on experience. Examples include customer service, reception skills and connecting with a broad range of community members.

The Host Employers identified outcomes for the young participants as well as for the businesses. These include:

- Development of work readiness skills for the participants, such as being on time, calling the workplace when they can't make it and dressing appropriately;
- Resume development where young people list the tasks and projects they have undertaken and the skills they have developed;
- One workplace is in the process of trying to align the YMCP experience with its graduate programs to determine if applicants who have undertaken the YMCP program with them can fast track through the recruitment process and go through to interview stage – a strong fast track scaffolding career path;
- YMCP prompting workers to develop a greater understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people and to appreciate the importance of providing them with work placement and transition to work support;
- Workplaces found that YMCP contributed to changes in culture, with an increase in healthy discussions about the importance of diversity in the workplace.



“Vulnerable young people need to gain experience and as an organisation who works with the community, we have a role to play in supporting this.”

The Host Employers suggested the following improvements for YMCP, including potential changes to the way they, as Host Employers, implement the program:

- Need to make sure the placement is planned across the 10 placement days to ensure that participants get the most from the work placement.
- Give the participants things to follow up on throughout the week to ensure there is a level of continuity from week to week.
- Could have greater flexibility in the length of the placement depending on the needs of the young person;
- Create opportunities to learn from other workplaces to see how they are approaching the work placement and share approaches;
- Post Work Placement support for participants;
- Closer relationship between the Host Employers and Mentors;
- Connect CEO MMVLLLEN with CEO or Managers of Host Employers to strengthen the connections and create a “whole organisation approach” in recognising the value of supporting young people in the community and to make sure that the entire workplace team is on board.

Host Employers agreed that it is important to match the needs of the young person with their role and that the YMCP Coordinator does this well. The level of support from the YMCP co-ordinator was identified by Host Employers as a standout feature of the initiative and differentiates it from other transition into work programs. Meetings with the Coordinator cover discussions about workplace

expectations, briefing on requirements and support when the participant first starts, being present for initial meetings and continued liaison with the young people.

Employers believe that paying the participant, having shorter well-planned placements that are designed as a job and the empowering nature of the program are also key features.

“The participants see the placement as a job, and they perform as if they are in a job. This is different than study or other placements.”

“As a Community Centre we think it’s a great opportunity to provide work experience for the young people in our community. There is a need to spend more time with the community to meet their needs and invest in them.”

“The YMCP program is better organised than other programs we have worked with. It matches the young person’s skills to the placement. The communication between the Project Coordinator and placement supervisor is great.”

7.0 Conclusion

YMCP provides a uniquely tailored approach to mentoring, work placement and career supports to ensure that the needs and interests of each participating young person are met. The highly localised nature of the initiative ensures that there is a strong understanding by the Program Coordinator, Mentors and Host Employers of the issues facing young people in Western Melbourne.

National and international literature confirms the approach taken by MMVLLEN in designing YMCP. The literature finds that the positive impact of mentoring is enhanced when it is combined with other transition to work interventions. It also confirms YMCP's conscious targeting of vulnerable young people from CALD backgrounds, finding that they make significant gains from targeted interventions such as mentoring and work placement. 71% of YMCP participants come from a CALD background, and over 70% of all participants transition into employment.

With its highly impressive outcome rate YMCP can play a key role in a post COVID environment, enabling young people to undertake real work experience and supporting them to develop capabilities that will assist them to move into work in a very difficult economy. In presenting YMCP as attractive in terms of value for money, MMVLLEN confirms that it has the capacity to:

- Extend its Reach – YMCP has the capacity and ambition to extend its reach to a significant number of vulnerable young people in Melbourne's West;
- Maintain and enhance its Quality – YMCP is founded on strong systems and processes that deliver a consistently high level of Participant, Mentor and Host Employer satisfaction;
- Deliver on Outcomes – YMCP has the demonstrated ability to deliver an evidence-based service model that supports young people in their transition into work and careers.

Given the numbers of vulnerable young people in Melbourne's West funding sources should be looking to resource proven effective programs that can reach more young people. With an elegant service delivery model, robust quality framework and a strong record of supporting young people into employment and/or study, YMCP certainly provides a strong value of money argument to funding bodies.

The advantage for YMCP in a competitive funding environment is its ability to achieve demonstrated outcomes for vulnerable young people by utilising a combination of mentoring and work placement underpinned by strong partnerships with local and regional businesses and organisations.

Moving forward, the evidence base would be enhanced by a longitudinal measure of the economic and social impact of YMCP for individual young people, as well as a study of the impact of YMCP on the way workplaces take on and work with young people.

100% of young people participating in YMCP agree that they are better prepared for the job market.

“The best thing is seeing a young person's confidence and sense of purpose grow before your eyes.”

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MMVLLLEN Youth Mentoring Career Pathways Program – Summary Report

YMCP Program Map 2018

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