

Whittlesea Community Connections Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service

Mid-program Evaluation 2024



Emma Antonetti, General Manager Equity and Impact, Whittlesea Community Connections

Anas Qishta, Data and Evaluation Advisor, Whittlesea Community Connections

Dr. Souvik Lal Chakraborty, Evaluation Coordinator, Whittlesea Community Connections

2024

Contents:

Introduction	3
Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service (JVMS) Program Overview	4
JVMS at Whittlesea Community Connections	4
Services provided by WCC	5
Evaluation Context and Methodology	6
Client Feedback	7
Reflection from our mentors	8
Recommendations from our JVMS clients and WCC for improved service delivery	9

Acknowledgements:

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country and recognise the continuing connections to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Jobs Victoria for supporting Whittlesea Community Connections in delivering this program. We also deeply appreciate the employers who have partnered with us and Melbourne Polytechnic for their invaluable support. A special thanks to our dedicated mentors, whose commitment and efforts have been instrumental in making this program a success.

For more information about this program please reach out to Mr. Suraj Walson (Email: swalson@whittleseacc.org.au).

Introduction:

Existing research studies highlight that migrants in Australia face considerable barriers in securing employment upon arrival. Many experience challenges in obtaining jobs that match their qualifications and expertise, often encountering downward occupational mobility¹, where they take roles below their pre-migration skill level.²

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as of October 2024, Australia’s unemployment rate stood at 4.1%, with a participation rate of 67.2% and employment reaching 14,541,200 individuals. The employment to population ratio was 64.4%, and the underemployment rate remained steady at 6.3%³. In the 2023–2024 financial year, 1.2 million Australians aged 18–75 who were without paid employment expressed a desire to work. Of these, 1.1 million were available to start within four weeks, but only 41% (501,700) were actively seeking work⁴. In Victoria, the unemployment rate is slightly higher than the national average, at 4.5%.

Key barriers to securing employment included excessive competition for limited positions, inadequate training or qualifications among applicants, lack of experience, and a shortage of jobs offering suitable conditions or arrangements⁵. In addition to these challenges, many migrants also face employment issues due to lack of understanding of local job search processes, limited knowledge about the Australian economy, lack of English proficiency⁶ and problems with recognition of overseas qualifications.⁷

CASE STUDY

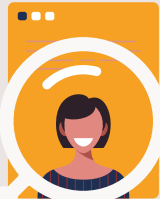
Luma Alhendi’s Story of Resilience:

Luma, a young woman in her early 20s, arrived in Australia as a refugee from Iraq in 2019. With a Certificate IV in Community Services, Luma was eager to pursue a career in the sector but needed guidance on the best way forward. When she connected with mentors at Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), they discussed the value of gaining local experience and knowledge to enhance her employability. Her mentors encouraged her to volunteer at a community service centre to gain valuable insights into the field.

Not long after, a youth-focused job opportunity opened up at WCC—an ideal match for Luma’s aspirations. Her mentors helped her strengthen her resume by incorporating her volunteer experience with youth and tailored her responses to address specific selection criteria for the position.

Though Luma was nervous about her first job interview in Australia, she demonstrated remarkable dedication and enthusiasm during preparation sessions. Mentors guided her through the STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Results) technique, helping her draw on examples from her volunteer work, as she had limited formal employment experience. On the day of the interview, Luma excelled, and within days, she received an offer for the role of Youth Hub Worker.

Now thriving in her new position, Luma expresses happiness, enjoyment, and fulfilment in her work, learning extensively along the way. Her journey from newly-arrived refugee to Youth Hub Worker is a testament to her resilience and to the targeted and effective support provided by WCC.



1 Ressia, S., Strachan, G., & Bailey, J. (2017). Going up or going down? Occupational mobility of skilled migrants in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 55(1), 64–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.12121>

2 Rynderman, J., & Flynn, C. (2016). ‘We didn’t bring the treasure of Pharaoh’: Skilled migrants’ experiences of employment seeking and settling in Australia. *International Social Work*, 59(2), 268–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872813519659>

3 See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/oct-2024>

4 See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2023-24>

5 See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2023-24>

6 Abdelkerim, A. A., & Grace, M. (2012). Challenges to Employment in Newly Emerging African Communities in Australia: A Review of the Literature. *Australian Social Work*, 65(1), 104–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2011.616958>

7 Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment Niches for Recent Refugees: Segmented Labour Market in Twenty-first Century Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19(2), 203–229. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fej016>

Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service (JVMS) Program Overview:



Established in 2016, Jobs Victoria was established to help long-term unemployed Victorians access the support they needed for stable employment, addressing key gaps in the Commonwealth Government’s employment services.

Since its inception—and with a significant boost in funding through the 2020-21 Budget—Jobs Victoria has facilitated employment for over 64,000 Victorians, including more than 52,000 placements since July 2020.

The Victorian Government has committed to investing in jobseekers, helping them find and maintain meaningful employment that aligns with the needs of both jobseekers and employers. This support extends to Aboriginal Victorians, refugees and asylum seekers, individuals with mental health challenges, people involved with the justice system, those with disabilities, young people transitioning from state care, social housing residents, family violence survivors, as well as veterans and their families.

From October 2023, Jobs Victoria Mentor Services (JVMS) have adopted a more focused approach, specifically aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged jobseekers in key locations. The goal is to help them become job-ready by overcoming significant employment barriers, enabling them to secure and maintain work. Mentors work closely with employers to understand their staffing needs and assist in hiring and retaining quality employees.

This targeted mentoring is available in five priority Local Government Areas (LGAs): Greater Dandenong, Brimbank, Hume, Latrobe, and Greater Shepparton.

JVMS at Whittlesea Community Connections:



The mentoring service at the Whittlesea Community Connections is accessible to people living in Hume and surrounding areas who have been unemployed for more than 12 months or facing significant employment barriers in finding and maintaining employment. Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service provides customized support to jobseekers and employers. Participating in the Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service is voluntary.

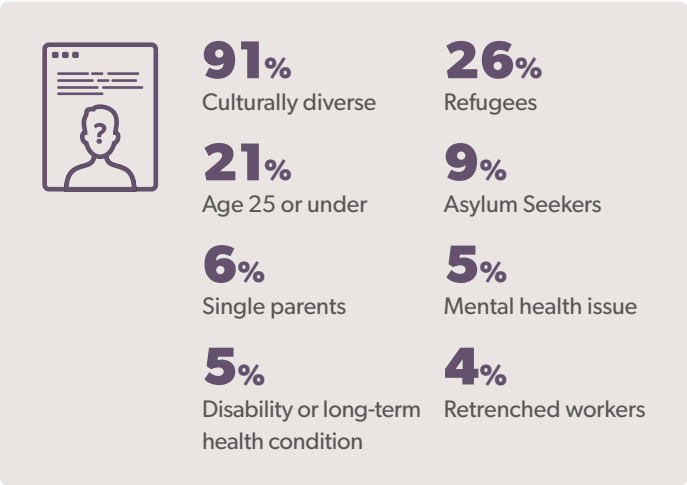
Employers are assisted in identifying and recruiting suitable candidates who have the right skills and knowledge for roles in the business or organisation.

As of November 2024, 274⁸ clients have been placed through this program from Whittlesea Community Connections.

Services provided by Whittlesea Community Connections:

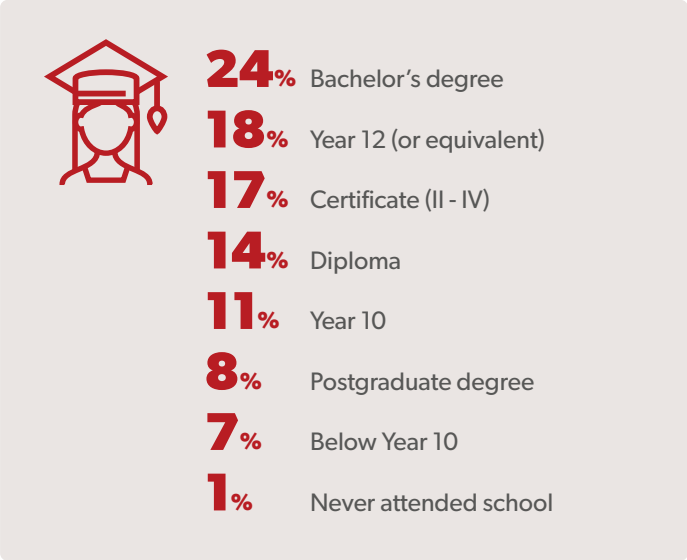
- Active job-search support and job-search mentoring
- Job matching and placement into employment, either directly or via ‘earn and learn’ pathways and other means
- Preparation for interviews, including assistance with work related items for work.
- One on one assistance to create an individualised Employment pathways
- Training and skill development support
- A range of additional services, including transport and other resources required to get to work.
- Post-employment support to help people transition successfully into new roles, adjust to the work environment and maintain job stability

Client Profile

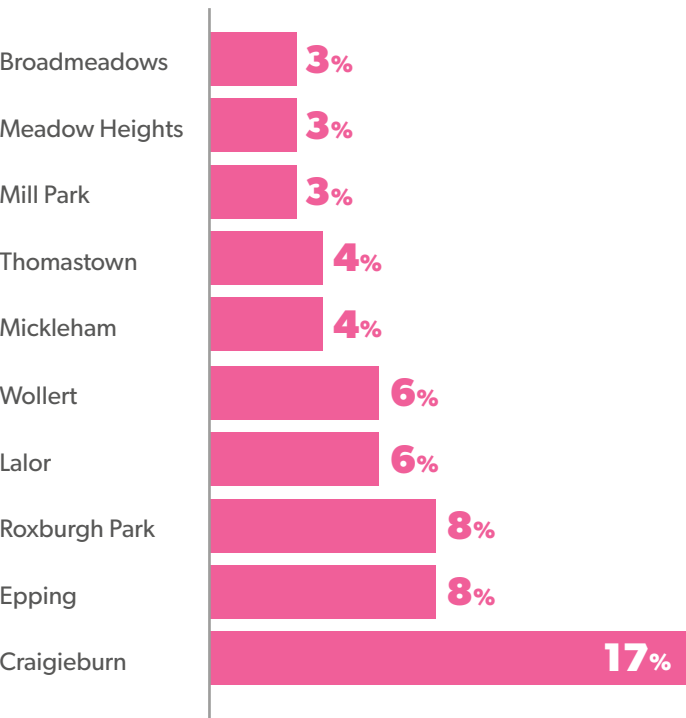


Note - Jobseekers identify with more than 1 category therefore total is >100%

Highest Level of Education



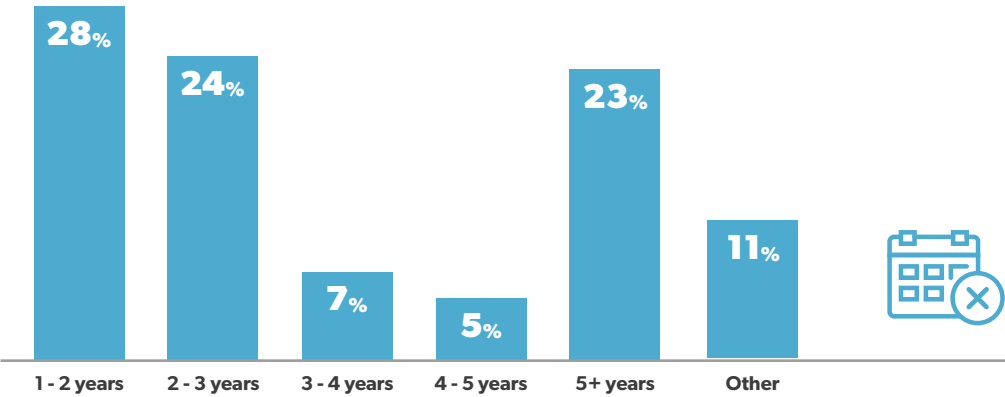
Top 10 Suburbs where clients lived



Top 10 Occupations

- Labourers
- Food Process Workers
- Product Assemblers
- Customer Service Manager
- Warehouse Administrator
- Health and Welfare Support Workers
- Forklift Driver
- Childcare Worker
- Commercial Cleaner
- Handyman

Length of Unemployment



Evaluation Context and Methodology:

The primary objective of this evaluation was to amplify the voices of clients, gaining insights into their satisfaction with the service. Additionally, it aimed to identify areas for improvement, ensuring our offerings align with client needs and expectations.

The data was collected through a client satisfaction survey, which received responses from 81 clients, complemented by in-depth interviews conducted with 10 clients, as well as JVMS mentors and the program lead.

CASE STUDY

Ramesh’s⁹ Path to Employment and Ongoing Career Aspirations:

Ramesh, a man in his late 40’s originally from Nepal, secured an employment through JVMS program. Currently he works as a security screening officer at Melbourne Airport. In Nepal, Ramesh held the position of senior administrative officer at a university, a role he greatly valued. Ramesh first connected with the Jobs Victoria mentoring team by chance at a shopping mall in Craigieburn, where he was introduced to Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) mentors.

WCC mentors supported Ramesh throughout his job search journey, starting with updating his CV to better reflect his skills and experience. Despite his initial efforts and numerous job applications, Ramesh faced challenges securing a role. His mentors provided him with constructive feedback, encouraging him to slow down his speech during interviews—a tip he found particularly valuable for boosting his confidence. Ramesh appreciated the mentors’ willingness to share their own journeys, which helped him feel supported and motivated.

Though Ramesh is satisfied with his current position and values working in a culturally diverse team, he aspires to transition into a role that better aligns with his prior experience in administration. He believes that Jobs Victoria could enhance support for job seekers by offering targeted training, such as English language courses, computer skills development, and other relevant certifications while they are looking for jobs. According to Ramesh, these initiatives would help candidates become job-ready and secure employment more quickly.

Ramesh suggests that the Jobs Victoria team consider engaging skilled professionals to deliver training sessions beyond job-specific skills. He believes that offering workshops on topics like stress management, time management, psychological well-being, and health-related practices could greatly benefit employees. According to Ramesh, such initiatives would help individuals manage workplace stress, adapt to cultural differences, and integrate more effectively into their work environment and community.

9 To maintain confidentiality, a pseudonym has been used.

Client Feedback:

Clients have shared valuable insights that offer a foundation for enhancing our services.

The following recommendations emerged from client feedback:

a. Upskilling Needs:

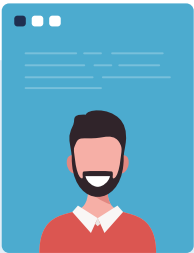
A significant portion of survey participants and interviewees expressed a desire for further training in both computer skills and English language proficiency. 54% of respondents indicated an interest in upskilling through language and communication training, while 52% expressed interest in upskilling in technology and new platforms. Several interviewees specifically mentioned that computer training would assist them in tasks like report writing, completing training modules at work, filing timesheets and completing other office assignments.

b. Career Support:

JVMS mentors try to secure employment for our clients as quickly as possible to provide them with financial stability and security. Sometimes, this means securing entry level positions as a stepping stone. Mentors can support people navigate career pathways post placement including with specialised support from careers counsellors however additional and more targeted support is needed. Highly qualified clients with overseas degrees as one cohort indicated that access to a dedicated career counsellor could be instrumental in supporting their career progression in Australia. They expressed a need for tailored guidance on navigating local employment pathways.

c. Client Engagement Strategies:

Clients expressed deep appreciation for the dedication and commitment of JVMS mentors, acknowledging their crucial role in enhancing service delivery. They particularly valued the mentors’ expertise in drafting a CV and preparing a candidate before an interview, which significantly boosted their confidence and improved their chances of securing employment. The personalised support is provided by mentors based on unique client needs identified during intake. It has played a key role in fostering a positive experience and improving employment outcomes for participants.



Client Feedback

- “This project was practical and very helpful to me.”
- “Cecilia Moses is my mentor. I wanted to express my gratitude for her help and guidance. She is exceptionally talented and a born mentor. She guided me very well. There are no words to express for her help and services.”
- “I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for Norma’s exceptional support and professionalism. She has consistently been attentive, responsive, and compassionate in her approach, making every interaction a positive experience. I truly appreciate all the help she has provided. Thank you, Norma, for your invaluable contribution!”
- “The service provided by Jenny was amazing, she was on top of everything, following up with me all the time, supported me through everything. Very satisfied with her support.”
- “Kimberley’s support, encouragement, mentorship and guidance has been invaluable to me. Thank you so much Whittlesea Community Connections for your help and assistance and for making a difference.”
- “I’m happy with my mentor, he guides me and helps me in finding jobs and educational courses.”

Reflection from our mentors:

As part of the evaluation process, we engaged with mentors and other staff involved in the Jobs Victoria Mentoring Service (JVMS) program.

The JVMS team unanimously agreed that they find the work fulfilling and highly value the camaraderie among colleagues. Staff maintain a Good Practice Register, documenting both positive experiences and challenges, which serves as a valuable learning tool for everyone involved in the project.

Through in-depth interviews, team members also identified several areas for improvement, which are outlined below:

a. Eligibility criteria:

Mentors and other program participants have highlighted the need to relax the current eligibility requirements for accessing this program. To access this program, participants must have been unemployed for over 12 months, among other criteria. Many mentors also report receiving requests for assistance from individuals on different visa types (such as partner visa) and also from people who have been unemployed for shorter periods (3-4 months) but are in urgent need of work. Academic research¹⁰ suggests that increase in income can reduce domestic violence and help in keeping women and children safe as it increases financial stability. The current eligibility criteria prevent these individuals from receiving support.

b. Program sustainability:

Concerns were raised regarding the program’s longevity, with some mentors suggesting that more time would allow for a greater impact. Longer program duration would enable greater and more sustained outcomes, particularly for clients facing long-term barriers to unemployment and require additional support.

c. Networking:

Many mentors highlighted the importance of networking that enable mentors to interact with other stakeholders within the sector. Facilitating opportunities to engage with prospective employers especially within regional high-growth industries would be useful. These events would not only provide networking opportunities for mentors but also help increase the program’s credibility and recognition within the broader community of employers.

CASE STUDY

Story of Alisha¹¹: Return to the Workforce and Pursuit of a New Career

Alisha, originally from Syria, arrived in Australia thirty years ago. As a mother of five, she worked for a few years before pausing her career to focus on raising her family. Once her children were grown, Alisha felt ready to re-enter the workforce—a challenging task after a 20-year gap. She was also apprehensive about her age, fearing it might limit her job prospects.

Alisha’s journey took a positive turn when she met a representative from Jobs Victoria at a Christmas gathering, who referred her to Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC). At WCC, Alisha was introduced to a mentor who offered her valuable guidance in updating her resume, navigating job applications, and preparing for interviews. WCC’s mentors provided her with the tailored support and encouragement she needed to regain her confidence and prepare for the modern job market.

With the guidance of WCC mentors, Alisha successfully secured a role in childcare and is currently working while studying for her Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She aspires to become a kindergarten teacher upon completing her studies.

Alisha’s story highlights her determination and adaptability as she navigates a career restart, and it reflects the impact of WCC’s support in helping her achieve her goals.

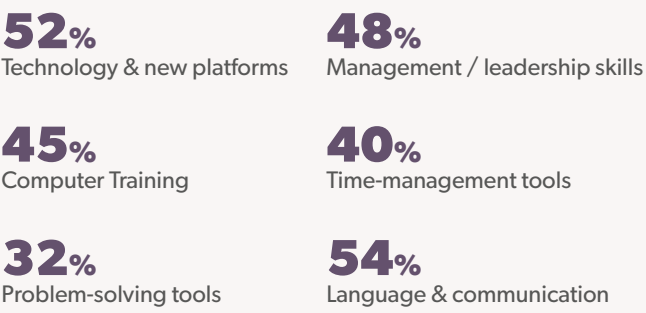
¹⁰ Karinna, S., Johnston, D., & Knott, R. (2024, May 1). Our research shows a strong link between unemployment and domestic violence: what does this mean for income support? Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/our-research-shows-a-strong-link-between-unemployment-and-domestic-violence-what-does-this-mean-for-income-support-228409>

¹¹ To maintain confidentiality, a pseudonym has been used.

Recommendations from our JVMS clients and WCC for improved service delivery:

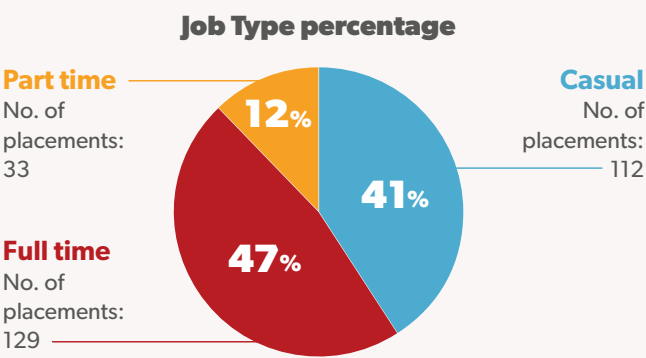
1. Upskilling:

54% of client survey respondents indicated an interest in upskilling in language and communication, 52% in technology and digital literacy and 45% in computer skills. This would assist clients in tasks including report writing, completing training modules at work, timesheets and other office assignments.



2. Flexibility:

For those balancing work, family and other commitments, and particularly women, there is a need for flexible courses in upskilling and training opportunities.



3. Support with Career Progression:

Post employment support that facilitates career progression particularly for people with migrant and refugee backgrounds who have overseas skills and qualifications. Additional support to capitalise on these skills while gaining Australian work experiences is needed.

4. Facilitate access to additional working hours:

A majority of clients (66%) expressed a need for more working hours to achieve greater financial stability and better support their families. Employers and program stakeholders should explore opportunities to provide clients with increased hours.

5. Extending program duration for holistic support:

23% of our clients accessing this program have been unemployed for over five years, requiring additional support to become job-ready. Extending the program’s duration would enable the delivery of comprehensive and holistic services, ensuring these clients receive the tailored assistance needed to achieve sustainable employment.

6. Addressing the Needs of CALD Communities:

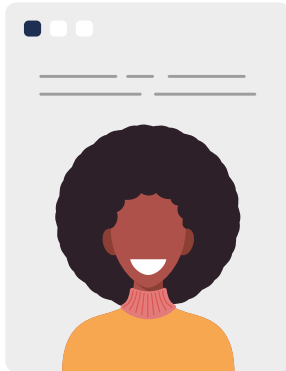
A significant 91% of our clients accessing services come from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. This highlights the pressing need for tailored and specialised services to address their unique challenges. These services could include culturally sensitive career counselling, language support programs, and workshops on navigating the Australian job market.

Top 5 Referral Sources



7. Facilitate Networking Events with Industry Leaders:

Organise dedicated networking events that connect industry leaders with employment services staff. These events would serve as a platform for building relationships with leaders from high-growth industries, enabling staff to identify potential job opportunities and forge connections that directly support their clients’ employment journeys.



“

I would like to appreciate WCC staff for my placement. They treated me with respect, and made me feel that I am important and my opinion is valued. I think that support increased my self-confidence, and pushed me to give more. Everything were perfectly fantastic.”

JVMS CLIENT