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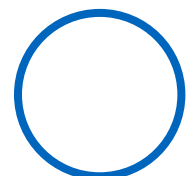
Evaluation of the Empower Program: ***Final Report***

Prepared for Whittlesea Community Connections

22 January 2025



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About Synergistiq

Established in 1990, Synergistiq works to strengthen and measure social impact through education, employment, and engagement. We seek to contribute to an Australia where everyone has equitable access to opportunity to reach their potential.

Our work is guided by our values of collaboration, community, and learning, and underpinned by respect, ethics, reflection, and the courage to speak with integrity, even when challenging.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of lands on which we work, land that has never been ceded. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge their rich and continuing contribution to knowledge, learning and intergenerational understanding of those Elders.

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List of Abbreviations

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
KEQ	Key evaluation questions
LGA	Local government area
OfY	Office for Youth
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
WCC	Whittlesea Community Connections

Executive Summary

Introduction

In recent years, levels of student disengagement, poor mental health, youth unemployment, and lack of connection to community have become significant issues faced by young people in Victoria.

With these issues heightened in the City of Whittlesea local government area (LGA), Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) delivers the Empower Program to young people in the local area. The Empower program is funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the Department/DFFH) and seeks to support young people through one-on-one casework assistance and referrals to relevant services. WCC have delivered the program since 2019. Through case management support, the program aims to assist young people to re-engage in education, gain employment skills and improve their mental health and sense of connection with their community.

Background on the evaluation

In July 2024, WCC engaged Synergistiq to conduct a rapid evaluation of the Empower Program. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify the extent to which intended objectives have been met over the 2022 – 2024 delivery period. As part of the evaluation, key stakeholders were engaged to share their insights on the program. This included program participants, school staff, partner organisation representatives, a representative from the Office for Youth (OfY – the relevant Division within DFFH) and WCC program staff. This was complemented with program data collected by WCC throughout implementation. Qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted, with findings presented against key evaluation questions (KEQs).

Key findings

The Empower program met its objectives in providing individualised, strengths-based support to young people, reaching 173 participants between 2022-2024. Most participants identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), with some identifying as LGBTQIA+ and First Nations.

The Empower Youth Worker (EYW) provided one-on-one support to young people, offering practical advice and assistance, in alignment with aspirational plans developed with participants. The approach adopted by the EYW was a strength of the program, with all participants surveyed finding it 'very helpful'.

Long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with schools and partner organisations were also a key strength and enabled young people's participation and outcomes gained. However, staff turnover among partner organisations was an issue highlighted by program staff. With many relationships being informal, this effects the sustainability of these partnerships.

The program has met its short-term outcomes (i.e. stakeholders are aware of Empower and young people attend sessions, articulate goals, create plans and receive referrals) and there is some evidence to suggest that medium-term outcomes are being met. These include stakeholder reports of:

- re-engagement in education
- improved attitudes towards education
- increased employment knowledge and skills
- greater awareness of career pathways
- improved mental health
- increased sense of connection
- increased awareness of supports available.

Agreed targets for the number of clients reached by the program per year were achieved in 2022 and 2024. Despite this target not being met in 2023, the program still recorded a higher overall number of clients reached than the targets for the three years combined. This resulted in efficiencies being realised, with the cost per client 10% lower than forecast.

Some areas for improvement were identified by stakeholders. Program staff and OfY identified reporting as a challenge, with further detail on program outcomes requested by the OfY. A Council representative also identified that raising the profile of the program in the local area would be beneficial, via increased promotional materials showcasing client journeys and a strengthened relationship with Council.

There is an ongoing need for the Empower Program to provide support to young people in the City of Whittlesea. High rates of student disengagement, youth unemployment and mental health issues remain critical concerns for young people across Victoria. For young people in Whittlesea, these concerns are heightened, compounded by added levels of disadvantage¹. Gaps are present across service delivery seeking to address these issues, with current program offerings unable to meet the demand. Without the Empower Program, young people would have fewer avenues to access vital supports. The program contributes to DFFH's youth strategy², by offering localised, strengths-based support for young people, and aligns with DFFH focus areas, such as youth wellbeing, education, employment, and community participation. It also aligns with the Victorian Department of Education's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) 2.0, which focuses on student learning and wellbeing.

¹ The City of Whittlesea has a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) score of 990, indicating a higher level of disadvantage compared to most other Melbourne LGA's. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016.

² DFFH (2022). *Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027*.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward to shape the ongoing effectiveness of the Empower Program:

- **Funding Empower:**
 - Government should seek to continue funding for the Empower Program, as it contributes to key government objectives, especially within the City of Whittlesea which experiences heightened levels of disadvantage.
 - Consideration should also be given to expanding funding due to unmet demand in the region.
- **Lifting Empower's profile:**
 - WCC liaise with the OfY to identify further strategies to report on outputs and outcomes in an efficient manner.
 - WCC to explore opportunities for the sharing of information on the needs and experiences of young people in Whittlesea with government and other stakeholders.
- **Strong and sustainable partnerships:**
 - WCC strengthen the sustainability of relationships with partner organisations by formalising relationships, such as via Memorandums of Understanding, guiding how the organisations will work with one another.

Introduction

Program background

Student disengagement from education is a key issue across the education sector at present. This challenge is a critical one for the City of Whittlesea, in Melbourne's North East, with high levels of student disengagement reported in recent years. According to 2021 ABS data, 11.5% of students (over the age of 15) were partially disengaged (3,171 students)³. Recent data collected by Whittlesea Community Connect (WCC) from 20 primary and secondary schools in the area suggests that this number may be higher, with reports of approximately 40% of students either partially or totally disengaged.

Funded by the OfY, WCC has delivered the Empower Program since 2019. The Empower Program works to engage and support vulnerable young people to improve their health and wellbeing, and social, civic and economic participation opportunities.

The Empower Program's objectives are:

- to build rapport with participants in a one-on-one casework setting
- to identify needs and barriers in young participants' circumstances
- to build aspirational plans around the needs and barriers identified
- to set and plan short, mid and long-term goals
- to create appropriate referral pathways for young participants, acting as a support and guide for them whilst building their independence
- to re-engage youth into education, employment and community.

To achieve these objectives, the program's EYW assists young people (12-25 years old) at risk of disengagement or are already disengaged from education, through case-managed individualised and targeted support. Young people can self-refer to the program or be referred through their school or another service provider. Once engaged, the EYW and the young person work together to develop self-identified aspirational goals related to education, employment, health and social connectedness. As part of these plans, EYW refer young people to a range of services and opportunities including GPs, education, employment, L2P driving programs, mental health services, youth services/programs, housing, financial assistance, community health services and services for refugees or people seeking asylum.

The Empower Program has engaged 173 young people between 2022-2024. Most of these participants are from CALD backgrounds, with some identifying as LGBTQIA+ and First Nations.

Common presenting issues and/or barriers experienced by young people engaged include:

- poor mental health
- difficulty in navigating services, such as mental health and re-engagement in education supports

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Centre of Population and Housing (2021). *Census*.

- high levels of disengagement from school
- high levels of disengagement from community and social participation
- low levels of knowledge related to gaining employment.

In 2022 the OfY engaged an external consultancy, Grosvenor, to evaluate the Empower Program. The evaluation found that the program was progressing toward its short-term outcomes, with participants reporting notable benefits derived from the Empower Program, with young people reporting improved mental health, re-engaging in education and gaining exposure to new opportunities.

Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

In July 2024, Synergistiq was engaged by WCC to evaluate the Empower Program. The purpose of the evaluation is to review the last few years (2022-2024) of implementation and assess the extent to which intended objectives have been met.

Synergistiq has conducted a rapid evaluation of the Empower Program between August and December 2024. The evaluation has engaged a variety of key stakeholders to provide comprehensive insight into its rollout and impact.

With a previous summative evaluation conducted in 2021, as mentioned earlier, evaluation of the 2019-2021 period is out of scope for this evaluation.

Key Evaluation Questions

In response to the purpose of the evaluation, KEQs have been identified to guide a review of the program and reflect the Lapsing Program Standards of the Department of Treasury and Finance. KEQs are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. KEQs identified for the Empower Program evaluation.

Evaluation domain	Key evaluation questions
Appropriateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does the Empower Program address identified needs? • How does the program align with other programs and Department objectives?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the program implemented as intended? • What have been the barriers and enablers to implementation? • To what extent have the program’s intended objectives been achieved?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget and timeframe?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were program resources allocated effectively and efficiently to achieve objectives? • Has the program demonstrated value for money?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the program met its short, medium and long-term outcomes? • What were the unintended outcomes (positive or negative) of the program? • Are program outcomes likely to be sustained over time?

Methodology

A mixed methods design, using qualitative and quantitative data, was adopted for this evaluation. This has taken place over three stages: project commencement, data collection, and analysis and reporting.

Phase 1: Project commencement

At project commencement, Synergistiq met with WCC to define the purpose and scope of the evaluation and ways of working. A project logic workshop was also held with key stakeholders, where Synergistiq worked with the WCC team to gain an understanding of program activities, outputs, outcomes and overall goals. This also allowed for the exploration of the program's role in its local context, relevant stakeholders, and assumptions underlying program delivery.

This informed the development of a Project Logic and an Evaluation Framework, which guided the evaluation.

Phase 2: Data collection

Data collection included a review of program data, including:

- 2022, 2023 and 2024 Empower Program survey data
- 2023 feedback on the Empower program for the Office for Youth
- 2022 Youth Disengagement working document
- Research youth costing, and research and statistics documents.

Additional documents were also reviewed for background, including:

- 2021 Evaluation Internal Clients Export
- current evaluation survey for past Empower clients (2019-current)

Primary data was also collected from key stakeholders. This is summarised in the table below.

Table 2. Primary data collection for the Empower Program Evaluation.

Stakeholder type	Number of stakeholders reached
Program staff	1 focus group (n=4)
Whittlesea City Council	1 interview (n=1)
Office for Youth	1 interview (n=1)
Empower participants	Participant survey (n=9)
School staff	School staff survey (n=4)

Partner organisations	Partner organisation survey (n=6)
Total stakeholders engaged: 24	

The partner organisation surveys saw good uptake, with 75% of those invited to participate completing the survey. School staff and partner organisation surveys also achieved reasonable uptake, with 40% of school staff invited completing surveys. The participant survey saw a proportionally lower uptake with approximately 10% of those invited then participating. This participation by stakeholders was facilitated in large part by ongoing engagement by WCC with key stakeholders to promote the evaluation. It should also be acknowledged that school staff are time poor, with high workloads and complex student needs, causing added barriers to participation. Young people are also a hard to engage cohort, especially those facing additional challenges.

Phase 3: Analysis and reporting

Analysis has involved the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. We have conducted statistical analysis of survey and program data, as well as thematic analysis of the focus group, interviews and case studies. From this, findings have been drawn out in relation to KEQs, providing an evidence base to inform future delivery of the Empower Program.

Limitations

As a rapid evaluation, this evaluation is limited by the breadth and depth of data able to be collected. While representatives across all stakeholder groups were engaged in this evaluation, providing valuable insight into program implementation and outcomes across the reporting period, a longer-term evaluation would be able to capture richer insights, particularly regarding medium-term outcomes, such as more in-depth data collection with young people about their experiences, and the extent of educational/employment retention.

As noted above, school staff and young people face added challenges in participating in evaluations. While approaches were adopted to minimise burden, such as the use of accessible engagement materials, and one-on-one engagement by WCC with these cohorts, barriers may have limited involvement of some individuals in the evaluations.

Given the small datasets in this evaluation, findings should be considered indicative.

Findings Summary

The table below summarises key findings against KEQs. A ‘traffic light’ system has been used to signal the extent to which each domain has been achieved (i.e. green = there is sufficient evidence to suggest the area has been met, orange = there is some evidence, and red = there is insufficient evidence).

Table 3. Summary of key findings against KEQs.

Evaluation domain	Key evaluation questions	Findings summary
Appropriateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the Empower Program address identified needs? How does the program align with other programs and Department objectives? 	<p>Empower provides an important avenue through which young people can access supports, with high levels of need in the Whittlesea area and gaps in available support. The program aligns with relevant programs and DFFH and Department of Education policies.</p>
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the program implemented as intended? What have been the barriers and enablers to implementation? To what extent have the program’s intended objectives been achieved? 	<p>Empower Program was implemented as expected and met most client targets. Participants, school staff and partner organisations reported positive experiences of the program, finding the support offered invaluable. Barriers to implementation were identified as staff turnover at partner organisations, school management buy-in, lack of in-depth awareness of the program among local stakeholders, reporting quality and time spent on reporting, and program staff recruitment. Enablers were identified as the holistic approach adopted by the program, and the in-depth relationships cultivated.</p>
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget and timeframe? Were program resources allocated effectively and 	<p>Empower proved efficient in its delivery, exceeding client targets across the three years combined. This resulted in a lower cost per client than projected in DFFH funding. The overall cost per client was \$1,304, representing a cost reduction of \$104 per client (7%). The program has also recorded a lower cost per client than similar programs.</p>

	<p>efficiently to achieve objectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the program demonstrated value for money? 	
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the program met its short, medium and long-term outcomes? • What were the unintended outcomes (positive or negative) of the program? • Are program outcomes likely to be sustained over time? 	<p>Empower has met its short-term goals (i.e. participants attending sessions and working with EYW to develop aspirational plans), with some evidence to suggest medium-term goals are being met (i.e. re-engagement in education, increased employment knowledge and skills, etc.), however future data collection would enable a fuller picture of these outcomes.</p>

Findings by KEQ

Appropriateness

With gaps in available support from other programs, Empower provides an important avenue through which young people can access education, employment, mental health and other services, and gain support, skills and connection. The Program is in alignment with and contributes to DFFH and Department of Education policies and objectives to support young people in Victoria.

To what extent does the Empower Program address identified needs?

Student disengagement from education is a critical issue in Victorian schools, with added barriers such as socio-economic disadvantage, poor mental health, language barriers, family violence and homelessness compounding this issue.

The Navigator Program is currently implemented across the state to help address this issue. However, a lack of referrals to the program and a long waitlist makes the program difficult to access in a timely manner for many young people. According to the 2022 audit of the Navigator Program⁴, 1.3% of all Victorian school students aged 12-17 met the criteria for Navigator, but of these, only one in five were referred to the program. According to the audit, this totals approximately 6,893 students who could not access this support. It also identified that the demand for the program exceeds the number of places across the state, leading to long wait lists in some areas. For some, this is up to 12 months.

The level of student disengagement is higher in the City of Whittlesea compared to Greater Melbourne⁵. In 2021, 8.7% of 15-24-year-olds in Whittlesea were disengaged compared with 7.0% across Greater Melbourne. According to the Navigator audit, 1.2% of students in North Eastern Melbourne (where Whittlesea is located) are eligible for Navigator. Of those eligible, 10.6% were referred to the program. This signals a significant unmet need in the area. Due to this issue, the Empower Program receives referrals from Navigator to cater to this unmet demand. It is clear that Empower is catering to a critical need for support for young people in Whittlesea. However, with Empower funded to support only 50 young people per year, there likely remain gaps beyond what the program can reach.

This concern is shared by local council stakeholders, who considered that the Empower program was an important initiative dealing with a much larger systemic issue in education

“What we're finding is that schools are tricky and under-resourced. It's harder for teachers to develop good relationships with students. Teachers are definitely saying that young people's attention spans are a lot lower and we see that that's an observable thing. That social and emotional learning is really quite different to what it was in the ability to emotionally regulate, to perceive and understand other people's intent, etc. is really a lot more compromised now and all of that impacts

⁴ Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022). Effectiveness of the Navigator Program.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Centre of Population and Housing (2021). *Census*.

school disengagement. So I think Empower ... It's a small little fish dabbling along the edges of you know what is a major problem that governments really need to grapple with." Council representative.

In surveys, school staff involved with the Empower Program reflected on student disengagement at their schools, with all (n=4) identifying this as an issue (Figure 1).

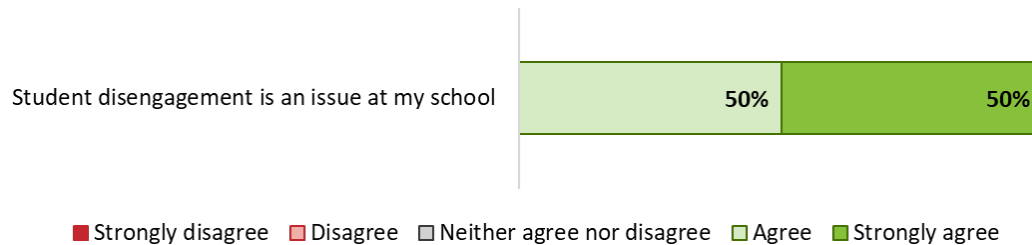


Figure 1. School staff survey: The extent to which student disengagement is an issue at their school.

In open-ended responses, they suggested that the following factors contributed to this issue:

- mental health
- complex family issues
- learning difficulties
- disabilities
- social-emotional difficulties
- gaps in education
- a lack of interest.

In response to this issue, school staff and a partner organisation representatives surveyed felt that the Empower Program plays an important role in their local area to support young people.

“The Empower program is an invaluable asset to the community. It bridges the gap of support that schools are often missing and aids as an extra support for many of our families that are finding it increasingly difficult to find appropriate supports within the community.” School staff.

“Needed in the local area not enough services for young people.” Partner organisation representative.

Beyond disengagement from education, the Empower Program also addresses a need in the local area in assisting young people to enter employment. The City of Whittlesea has one of the highest unemployment rates in North-Eastern Melbourne, with 5% of the population unemployed in June 2024 (compared with 4.3% the previous year)⁶. Young people, in particular, face challenges in entering employment, with data showing that young people (15-24) in the City of Whittlesea experience double the unemployment rate compared with the broader municipality⁷. Therefore, the need to support young people with employment skills is acute.

⁶ Jobs and Skills Australia (2024). Monthly Labour Market Dashboards.

⁷ City of Whittlesea (2023). Economic Participation Plan 2023-2026.

The OfY representative interviewed suggested that the Empower Program was currently filling a need in the Whittlesea area and indicated that there is an ongoing need in the area with heightened issues for young people post-covid. They commented that without Empower, there would be fewer avenues for young people to access support, in an ecosystem that already sees higher demand than service availability.

"I think it would mean that there would be less avenues for young people to seek support from. It's already fairly well known that there's already a lot of demand on services ... So it may be that it takes a bit longer for a young person to find that support." OfY representative.

How does the program align with other programs and Department objectives?

The Empower Program aligns with several Victorian Government priorities. The program has worked to support DFFH's youth strategy – *'Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027* – with localised, strengths-based support for young people, which focuses on addressing issues such as disengaging from education before young people become long-term disengaged. The program aligns with DFFH focus areas, including:

- Improving young people's health and wellbeing, education, training, skills development and career pathways
- Boosting young people's participation in community and civic life
- Addressing youth disengagement from family, education and training, employment and community.⁸

It is also in alignment with the Victorian Department of FISO 2.0, which focuses on student learning and wellbeing, informed by findings of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System⁹.

Effectiveness

Overall, the Empower Program was implemented as expected and met most client targets, aside from 2023 due to staff being relocated internally. Participants, school staff and partner organisations surveyed reported positive experiences with the program and found it a valuable support for young people in Whittlesea. The OfY representative shared this view, noting that changes to reporting would aid assessments of effectiveness by government. Similarly, a Council representative felt that a greater profile and communication about the program would assist ongoing delivery and program outcomes.

⁸ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2024). Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Annual Report 2023-24.

⁹ State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (2021). Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System Final Report.

Was the program implemented as intended?

Participation summary

Between 2022-2024, Empower supported 173 young people. Among those who participated in 2022 and 2023 (n=115, for which demographic data by year was available):

- 88% (n=95) identified as being from CALD backgrounds
- 12% (n=13) identified as LGBTQIA+
- 6% (n=7) were First Nations.

Almost half of participants were male (49%, n=52), with 41% (n=43) being female and 10% (n=11) identifying as non-binary.

Over a third of participants (38%, n=41) were aged between 12-15 years, with 44% (n=47) between 16-20 years old, and 19% (n=20) were 21-25.

Program staff reported that the EYW supports approximately 10 clients per week in one-on-one sessions, and a further 5-10 in each of the groups (i.e. Rainbow Group and the Young Women's Group).

Casework summary: 2019-2024

WCC compiled a synthesis of casework data for the Empower Program, summarising information from 769 sessions with 141 clients – providing a snapshot of Empower's reach since its inception. This identified that:

- clients were born in over 21 different countries. Outside of those born in Australia, common countries of birth included Iran and Syria. Common languages other than English spoken by clients included Arabic and Persian.
- among total clients, 48% (n=67) identified as male, 47% (n=66) as female, 3% (n=4) as non-binary or gender diverse, and 3% (n=4) as trans.
- clients engaged presented with a range of circumstances such as unemployment (18%, n=26), long-term disability or health conditions (18%, n=25), and homelessness or at-risk of homelessness (12%, n=17).
- clients reached by the program lived in 19 different suburbs. Most were located in the Whittlesea LGA predominantly in Whittlesea LGA, including Epping, Thomastown, Mill Park, Mernda, Doreen, Lalor and South Morang.
- 23% (n=32) of clients had one casework session recorded. Despite an initial decline in the number of sessions attended by clients, close to half (46%, n=65) attended five or more.

Stakeholder awareness

All school staff surveyed (n=4) reported being aware of the Empower Program. They described becoming aware of the Empower Program from a few avenues. These included:

- Education sessions

- A referral from the Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Pre-existing relationships or knowledge of WCC from other programs they deliver.

“We have worked with Whittlesea Community Connections for the last 8 years and have been aware of many of the programs that they have offered to support families and young people in the area.” School staff.

All school staff surveyed (n=4) reported that their school had accessed the Empower Program to support students at their school.

When asked how aware of the Empower Program they were, most partner organisation representatives surveyed (67%, n=4) reported being ‘very’ aware, while 33% (n=2) answered that they were ‘somewhat’ aware. Partner organisations demonstrated a good understanding of what the Empower Program is trying to achieve, identifying the following:

- improve young people’s quality of life, health, social connectedness and sense of empowerment
- provide short-term case management for young people in Whittlesea
- re-engage young people in education and/or employment via mentorship
- connect young people with the community and provide them with localised information and referrals to relevant services.

Engaging young people in Empower

The Empower Program engages young people through a variety of channels, such as through schools, and referrals from other service providers. Of the young people surveyed, all (100%, n=8) reported first hearing about the Empower Program from their school. Empower program data also showed that almost half (43%, n=61) of all referrals to the program have come from educational agencies (Figure 2). While multiple avenues are critical for capturing as many young people as possible, this highlights the important role of the program’s relationship with schools, in particular.

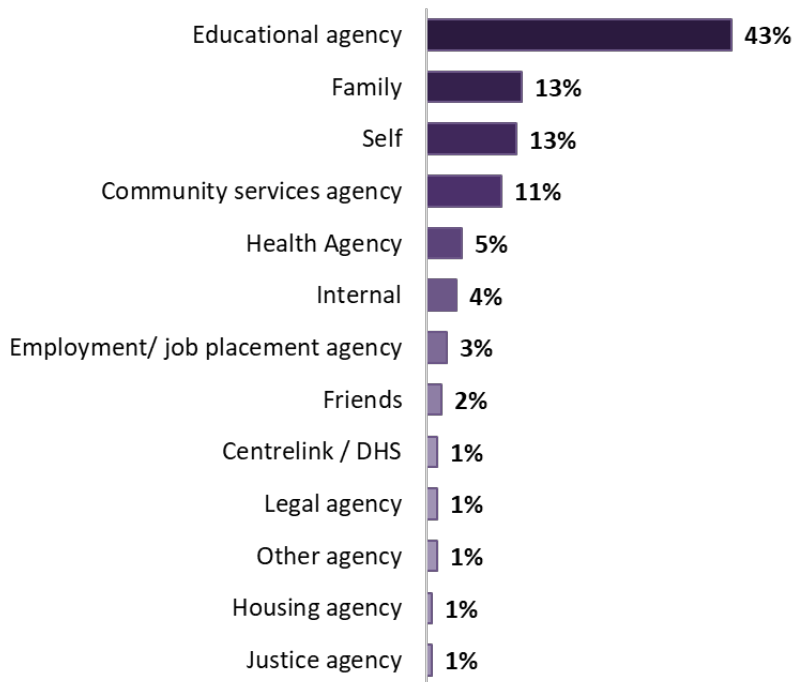


Figure 2. Referral sources to the Empower Program.

Reflecting on what made them decide to participate in the program, a few participants surveyed commented that they needed support, either in general or for specific purposes, such as getting a job.

“Because we had some trouble.” Participant.

“I needed help that’s why” Participant.

“Helping me with getting my first job.” Participant.

Two suggested that the referral itself motivated their participation. Another identified wanting to gain assistance with goal setting as their reason for participating.

“I’ve heard really good things about this program and got referred to it through my teacher and it has been so much help.” Participant.

Participation in Empower

During the focus group, program staff described what young people experience as part of the Empower Program. This includes one-on-one support in sessions with the EYW, as well as the option to participate in groups such as Rainbow Group or the Young Women’s Group. In surveys, school staff detailed the case management support, employment assistance, and group programs (i.e. young women’s group, rainbow groups) offered by the program.

“I work one-on-one with that young person. So, I do case management ... I’ll meet with the young person either enrolled in an educational facility, I will go meet them there if that’s what they prefer or they can come and meet me at our offices ... I

meet with them one-on-one, get to know them a little bit in the first couple sessions, and then I do some goal-setting with them. [We] look at what it is that they want to achieve, look at maybe some of the barriers that are stopping them from achieving those goals and then work with them to put in some little strategies in play to help them achieve that.” Program staff.

All young people surveyed (100%, n=9) found working with the EYW ‘very helpful’. Elaborating on these responses, participants described appreciating the support and ideas provided, particularly in relation to achieving their established goals. One detailed how the EYW had been helping them to get a job and find study options at a local TAFE.

“Because they help me with my goals and are nice.” Participant.

“Helping me with getting a job and a course at [education institution – name removed].” Participant.

As part of the Empower Program, participants surveyed described getting assistance with:

- Updating their resume and looking for employment or volunteering opportunities
- Finding a new school
- Identifying goals and how to achieve them
- Working on life skills.

“I talked to one of the members and they helped me get a job, find a new school and support in all ways.” Participant.

“Talk and plan the goals I would like to achieve and actually putting it into practice by doing small steps at time.” Participant.

Participants outlined practical assistance provided by the EYW, including working through each step in the job application process (resume writing, writing a cover letter and applying), developing plans and navigating course options and timetabling.

The majority of participants (88%, n=7) surveyed suggested that they were not referred to another organisation/provider through the Empower Program. One participant indicated that they did work with another organisation through Empower and identified this as a youth services organisation.

According to Empower casework data, over half of the 769 casework sessions with participants (56%, n=499) focused on employment, training and education (Figure 3). This was followed by family functioning (17%, n=134) and mental health (16%, n=126).

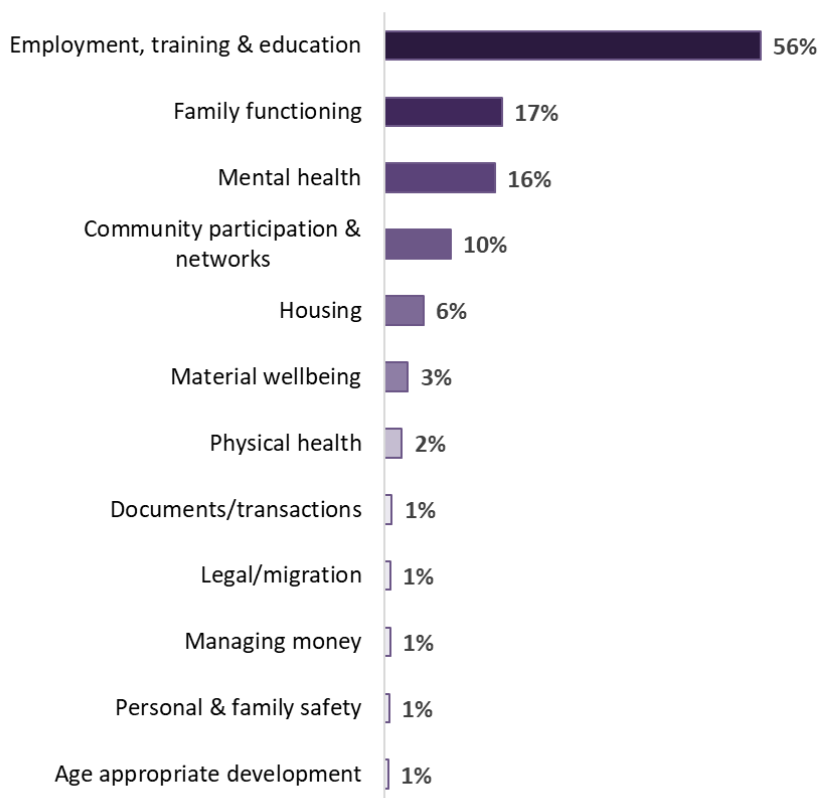


Figure 3. Primary casework issues addressed.

Empower Program case studies:

Analysis of case studies on the Empower Program (n=7) compiled by WCC identified the following focus areas in support provided to young people:

- education (n=7)
- mental health (n=6)
- social connection (n=3)
- employment (n=3)
- physical health (n=1)

To address these issues, intervention approaches included:

- referrals to mental health services (n=4)
- connecting participants with other young people via a Youth Advisory Group, Rainbow Group or youth group (n=4)
- creating aspiration plans (n=3)
- building rapport (n=2)
- collaborating with family (n=1)
- support for the recognition of qualifications (n=1)
- advocating to their school regarding bullying (n=1)
- referral to physical health service (n=1)

- finding alternative education options and/or supporting educational enrolment (n=3)
- employment or volunteering support (n=3)
- supporting social and personal development (n=2)
- referral to family violence service (n=1)

Empower casework data documented 104 referrals to organisations/services between 2019-2024. This included 57 formal referrals and 47 informal referrals. Referral destinations included:

- WCC volunteering
- mental health support
- GP
- employment support
- TAFE
- material aid
- health providers
- Centrelink
- driving programs
- housing support
- other youth services.

Disengagement from education also proved to be a common reason for referrals to partner organisations, with most partner organisation representatives surveyed (83%, n=5) receiving referrals on this basis (Figure 4). Many also identified receiving referrals due to disengagement from the community and/or social participation (83%, n=5), and/or low employment knowledge (83%, n=5). Others (67%, n=4) pointed to poor mental health as a reason for referral to their organisation, while another – selecting ‘other’ – commented that legal support was required.

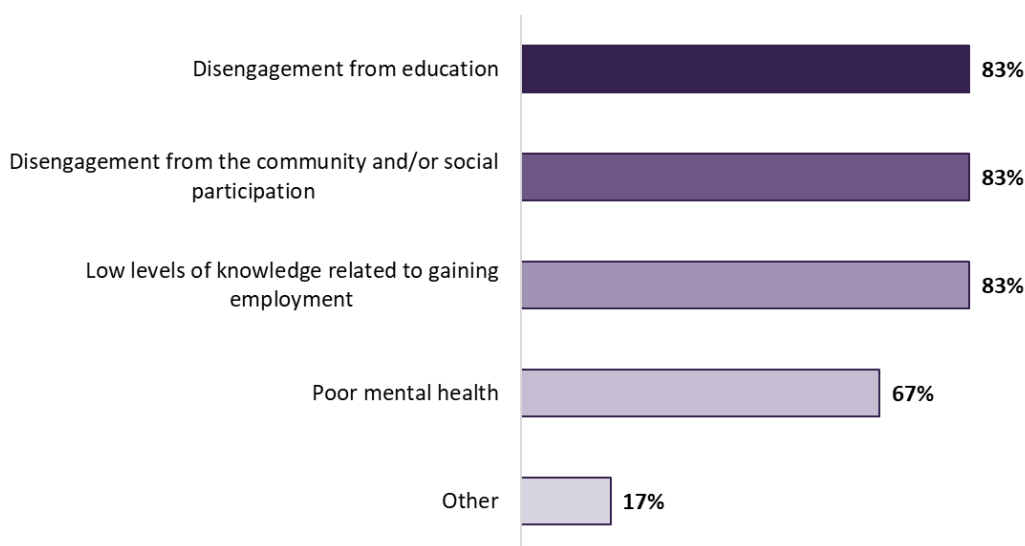


Figure 4. Partner organisation survey: reasons for referral to partner organisations.

Partner organisation representatives elaborated on the support their organisation provided to young people once referred to them by Empower. This included:

- working with young people and their families for early crime intervention/reducing criminogenic behaviour
- providing assessment and referrals as appropriate, such as parenting support and other youth work teams
- attending meetings between schools and families
- providing information regarding the homelessness service system, housing options and transport assistance.

A few respondents also described how the program had been a useful referral pathway for the young people with whom they were working. The support Empower provides young people regarding education re-engagement and employment were highlighted as particular reasons for referral. Other representatives commented on how Empower provides additional wrap-around support and how it helps young people avoid anti-social behaviour.

“Empower forms a very important part of a suite of services we work with to address youth at risk of increased risk-taking behaviour. Empower is one service that we regularly use to help address a highly important aspect of our program that sees young people engaged with education and employment. Other affiliated organisations we work with address other elements of the young person's lives in other ways (mental health, family support, drug and alcohol abuse, negative peer group influences).” Partner organisation representative.

“My team work with families who often have young people at risk of, or actually, disengaging from school, or the broader community, for various reasons. These youth have been referred to the Empower program with positive outcomes.” Partner organisation representative.

“I've accessed WCC due to supporting a young person that lived in the region.” Partner organisation representative.

Partnerships

The Empower Program relies on partnerships with schools, which refer students to the program, and other organisations/services, who they receive referrals from, and to which Empower refers young people. Current partnerships include 20 schools and 7 organisations. As program staff noted, these vary from more formal to informal relationships. Program staff suggested that some of these partnerships were long-established, building on some pre-existing relationships prior to the Empower Program, while others had been developed over the course of the program. They described partnerships with schools as having developed based on an assessment of local need. This identification of needs in partner schools has continued as the program has evolved, with the implementation of the Young Women’s Groups and Rainbow Group, for example.

“Some [partnerships] are existing, so before Empower. But a lot of them have been built up throughout Empower as well ... [with some schools] like where [the EYW] is now with the girls group and the Rainbow Group, we've been running them for

quite a while ... we identified a need there a little while ago around young people who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who this is not necessarily the cultural norm for them. So there's no real safe place for them to meet together. So we understand that and we're building trust with the well-being team and sometimes the management team." Program staff.

Program staff suggested that relationships with partner organisations had been developed and maintained through connecting across the network of service providers, sharing information and regularly checking in.

School staff surveyed valued their involvement with Empower, with all (n=4) reporting being 'very' satisfied with the program. They shared how they find the program to be an invaluable support and the EYW an asset to this.

"[The EYW] has been ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC to work with this year! [The EYW] goes above and beyond for the students, keeps the team updated and reaches out whenever required. [She] is a fantastic asset to your team." School staff.

Similarly, partner organisation representatives surveyed suggested that the Empower Program complements their work and/or other programs they are affiliated with. All (100%, n=6) indicated that referrals are two-way, with Empower referring young people to their organisation and vice versa.

Most school staff surveyed (75%, n=3) suggested there were no areas in which the program could improve. Another commented that conducting home visits would aid the program's effectiveness.

Partner organisation representatives felt also there were no changes needed to improve Empower's effectiveness. Instead, they highlighted the program's value in supporting young people in the local area.

While Empower has fostered effective relationships with schools and partner organisations, these relationships vary from formal to informal relationships. Due to the nature of these partnerships often being dependent on relationships between staff at WCC and partner organisations/schools, program staff highlighted staff turnover as an issue during implementation, with relationships needing to be rebuilt.

Beyond direct relationships with schools and partner organisations, Empower also fosters connections with local council and other services in the area. A Council representative interviewed suggested that they do not have a "day-to-day" relationship with the program, but rather Empower is a component of the local support ecosystem which Council or other organisations may refer people on to.

"We do have a partnership with a couple of local providers providing a program for young people that are having some challenges around school engagement and they, potentially, are the cohort that would be referred to empower. But mainly what happens is that we'll get general requests from either stakeholders - Sometimes that's Victoria Pol, sometimes it's maternal child health, sometimes it's just general public inquiries and sometimes it's from co-located mental health

services around finding a fit for young people that need some short term kind of linkages and case support and empower is where that fits.” Council representative.

While overall positive in their appraisal of the program, the Council representative felt that the partnership between the program and Council could be strengthened. This would allow Council greater insight into Empower’s activities and outcomes and vice versa, allowing for a robust awareness of Council’s offerings by Empower program staff. This would enhance two-way referral pathways and coordinated support for young people in Whittlesea.

Relationship with DFFH/OfY

The OfY representative interviewed valued the intent and the actions taken through the Empower Program. Their recognition of the program can be even further strengthened through more consistent reporting on outcomes, which has been requested by OfY previously. The OfY representative suggested that this issue was not a significant problem but pointed to the importance of adequate information to inform budget bids.

For program staff, reporting was identified as a burden, due to the amount of time they have dedicated to it. They also highlighted how delays in work plans being finalised have impacted the rollout of the program with schools. Program staff also felt constrained in how to best demonstrate their impact to the department, and noted how the addition of case studies in recent years had helped to convey program outcomes.

Program staff also identified a desire for greater sharing of sector insights across DHHS, based on knowledge from the program, but felt that there were often limited avenues for this.

“Some of that information might trickle through in terms of case studies or some of the referral pathways, but it's not something they're [DFFH] particularly looking for. We use it ourselves though. That information, because it is it, is critical and over the years we've tried to raise some of those key issues or try and bring people together to talk about it. You know, a few years ago with juvenile justice was a was a key theme. So we tried to bring people around that. At the moment it's probably more around family violence, mental health, so we use it for our own planning and development purposes, but it's not necessarily going anywhere else in the department.” Program staff.

What have been the barriers and enablers to implementation?

As outlined in the sections above, stakeholders to the evaluation identified the following barriers to program implementation:

- staff turnover at partner organisations
- buy-in by school management
- a lack of awareness or in-depth knowledge about the program among local service providers, and integration into local network
- reporting quality and time spent on reporting.

The OfY representative highlighted recruitment as a barrier for the Empower Program post-Covid (including the four other organisations funded to deliver Empower). Similarly, program staff commented on difficulties they have encountered in recruiting for the EYW role, noting that it requires a certain skill set.

The OfY representative also felt that the “broadbrush”, holistic approach adopted by the program in working with young people was an enabler to effective delivery.

To what extent have the program’s intended objectives been achieved?

As seen in Table 4, program data shows that Empower exceeded the target number of clients in 2022 and 2024. This target was not met in 2023, as the EYW was seconded for 14 weeks, limiting the number of clients reached.

Table 4. Target and actual client reach, 2022-2023.

Year	Target	Actual
2022	50 clients	64 clients
2023	50 clients	44 clients
2024	50 clients	65 clients

Program staff and the OfY representative suggested that, on the whole, the program’s intended objectives had been met. Program staff suggested that flexibility on the part of the Department has enabled the program to adapt each year while still meeting intended objectives.

Evidence against the program’s stated objectives is summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Evidence against stated program objectives.

Objectives	Evidence
Build rapport with participants in a one-on-one casework setting	All participants surveyed (n=9) found working with the EYW ‘very helpful’. School staff surveyed also described the strong rapport the EYW was able to build with their students.
To identify needs and barriers in young participants' circumstances	Participants, school staff and partner organisation representatives surveyed described tailored support offered to participants based on varying issues they were referred to the program about.
To build aspirational plans around the needs and barriers identified	In surveys, participants working with the EYW to create aspirations plans to achieve their goals.
To set and plan short, mid and long-term goals	As above.

<p>To create appropriate referral pathways for young participants, acting as a support and guide for them whilst building their independence</p>	<p>The Empower Program recorded 104 referrals to organisations/services between 2019-2024. These included services related to employment/volunteering, mental/physical health, education, housing and others.</p> <p>Partner organisations surveyed reported being satisfied with their partnerships with Empower, finding it a valuable support for young people which complements their work.</p>
<p>To re-engage youth into education, employment and community.</p>	<p>Employment, education and training was the most common focus area in Empower casework data, with 56% (n=429) of sessions between 2019-2024 focusing on this. 44% (n=4) of participants surveyed reported knowing more about getting a job and about future career options, with 22% (n=2) indicating that they felt better about school and went to school more as a result of their participation. 75% (n=3) of school staff identified that students of theirs who had participated in the program had re-engaged in education.</p> <p>75% (n=3) of school staff surveyed also reported increased social connectedness among young people who participated, with one participant surveyed indicating that they felt better about their friends and/or social network.</p> <p>Beyond these reports, no long-term data on participants' ongoing school engagement or employment retention has been captured.</p>

Efficiency

Empower proved efficient in its delivery, exceeding client targets across the three years combined and achieving a lower cost per client than projected in DFFH funding.

Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget and timeframe?

The Empower Program has been delivered largely within scope, budget and timeframe. Between 2022-2024, Empower has been funded \$211,235 by DFFH, along with approximately \$119,160 in-kind contributions from WCC. Total expenditure for the program over the three years was in line with total funding received.

The table below shows funding (DFFH and WCC in-kind) for the Empower Program between 2022 - 2024, as well as expenditure per year.

Table 6. Empower Program funding and expenditure, 2022 - 2024.

Year	DFFH funding	WCC In-kind	Total funding	Total expenditure
2022	\$44,172.14	\$56,328.17	\$100,500.31	\$100,500.31
2023	\$88,776.58	\$16,391.75	\$105,168.33	\$105,168.33
2024	\$78,286.42	\$46,439.80	\$124,726.22	\$124,726.22
Total	\$211,235.14	\$119,159.72	\$330,394.86	\$330,394.86

Over this period, the program has supported 173 clients, exceeding its target of 150 clients reached (50 per year), and achieving an average of 57 across the years combined.

Were program resources allocated effectively and efficiently to achieve objectives?

Program resources were allocated effectively, with 1 FTE role of the EYW dedicated to the program, along with program management from the Child and Youth Lead, and support from the GM Impact & Equity. Efficiencies may also have been realised through Empower leveraging connections forged across other WCC programs.

Has the program demonstrated value for money?

Looking at 2022 - 2024, Empower proved efficient in its delivery. By exceeding client targets in two out of three years, the program achieved a lower cost per client than projected in the funding allocation from DFFH (Figure 5). This resulted in a cost reduction of \$193 (22%) in 2022 and \$361 (23%) in 2024. With fewer clients reached than the target in 2023 due to extended leave of the EYW, the cost per client was \$242 higher than forecast (-14%). However, this cost is offset with efficiencies realised in 2022 and 2024, leading to a lower cost overall per client. Overall, this resulted in a cost reduction of \$104 per client (7%) over the three years, as demonstrated in Figure 5.

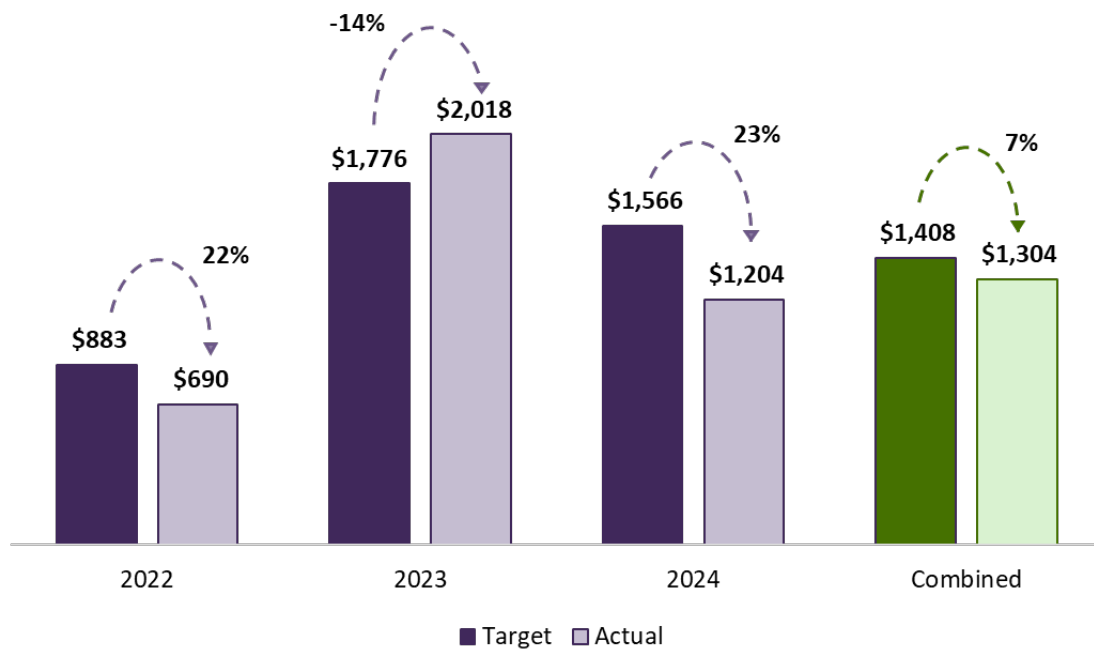


Figure 5. Target and actual cost per client, by year (2022-2024) and overall.

The program has also recorded a lower cost per client than similar programs, such as the Navigator Program, which allocated approximately \$22.5m in 2023-24 to support almost 3,000 students (an estimate of approximately \$7,500 per student)¹⁰.

Impact

To what extent has the program met its short, medium and long-term outcomes?

The Empower Program has met its short-term goals, with evidence demonstrating that young people have accessed the program, built rapport with the EYW, created aspiration plans, gained referrals and exhibited increased self-esteem and improved attitudes towards education, employment and community. There is some evidence to suggest that medium-term goals are being met, with some participants re-engaging in education, reporting greater knowledge around employment and accessing services to support them, and feeling more connected. Further data collection in the future will enable a more in-depth understanding of the extent to which these have been met and the sustainability of program outcomes.

In surveys, young people were asked about key changes in their life as a result of their participation in the Empower Program. Almost half (44%, n=4) reported that they now knew more about getting a job and about future career options. Almost a quarter (22%, n=2) identified feeling happier, feeling better about school, going to school more and knowing where they can go to get support (Figure 6). One participant suggested that they now felt better about their friends or social network.

¹⁰ Victorian Department of Education (2024). *Department of Education Annual Report 2023-24*. Synergistiq Pty Ltd. ABN 20 059 274 430 Ph +61 3 9946 6800

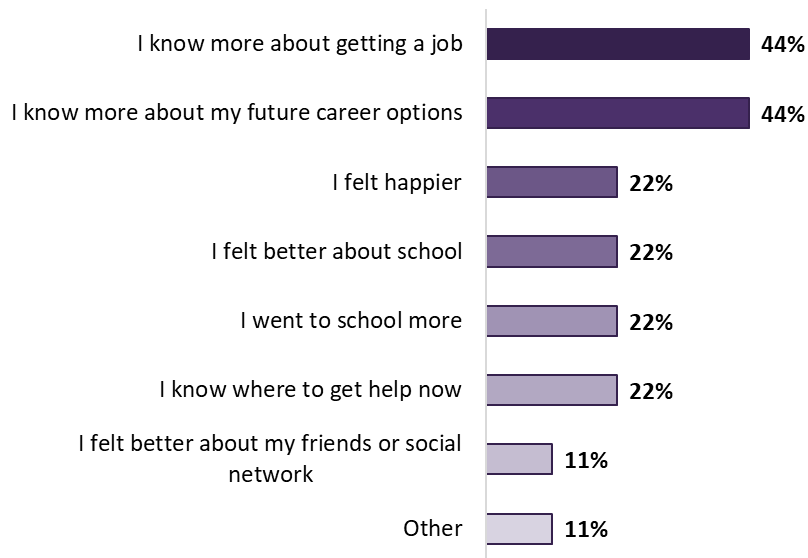


Figure 6. Participant survey: participant outcomes.

Most school staff surveyed (75%, n=3) pointed to re-engagement in education and increased social connectedness as key participant outcomes they had observed (Figure 7). Half (50%, n=2) also indicated that students of theirs who had participated in Empower had improved employment knowledge, mental health as a result of the program.

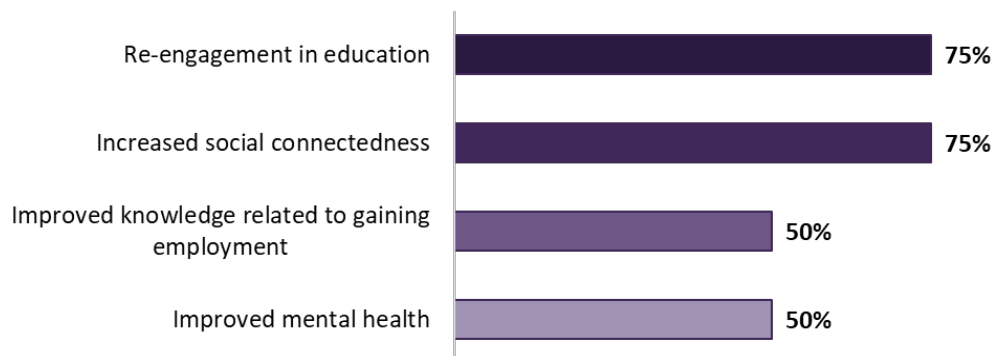


Figure 7. School staff survey: participant outcomes.

School staff offered examples of participant outcomes observed in open-ended responses. In these, school staff highlighted how the program positively impacted young people’s mental health, social connection, engagement in education, and knowledge about education pathways and employment.

“We have had a number of students/families that have engaged in supports via Empower and this has assisted in them gaining access to further mental health support externally from the school, they have been able to gain support in alternative education pathways and employment increased engagement here at school resulting in greater connections socially for the young people.” School staff.

“[The EYW] has been a great help to many students, in introducing them to other pathways they could potentially explore, as well as strategies and techniques they

can utilise to overcome their mental health struggles and attend school.” School staff.

“Student re-engage after chronic attendance issues and bridge gap with school.” School staff.

Similarly, many partner organisations representatives (83%, n=5) also pointed to increased social connectedness as a key outcome for young people as a result of participating in Empower (Figure 8). The same number of respondents (83%, n=5) also reported improved knowledge related to gaining employment as an outcome observed, with 67% (n=4) suggesting the program encouraged young people’s re-engagement in education. One respondent, who selected ‘other’, commented that improved mental health had been another key outcome of involvement in Empower, with young people receiving diagnoses for various disorders which in turn led to suitable supports.

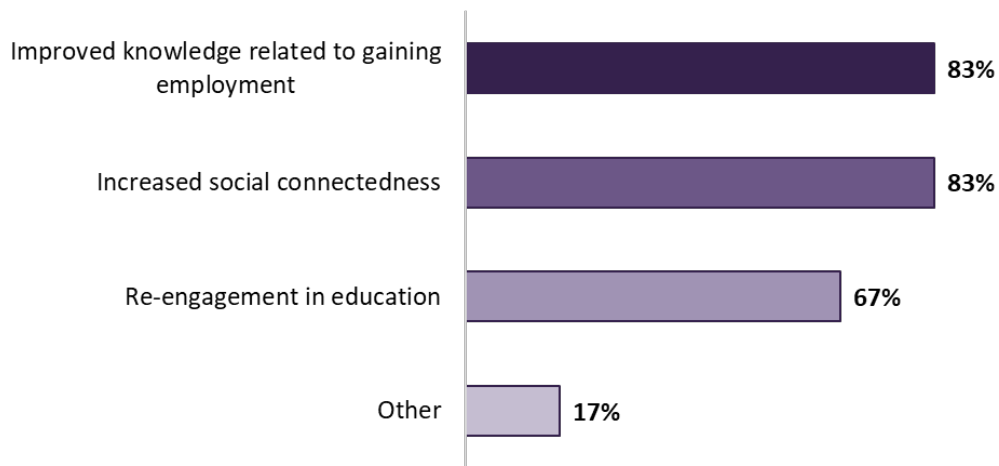


Figure 8. Partner organisation survey: participant outcomes.

Partner organisation representatives elaborated on the changes they had observed in young people in open-ended responses. Two described increased confidence, in themselves and in accessing services. Another commented on young people’s readiness to access the supports offered through Empower, such as gaining employment assistance which aided their ability to afford housing. A fourth respondent described how the type of relationships fostered by the program with young people has been key to building a long-term relationship and providing young people with employment assistance. They also suggested that the program was playing a beneficial role in the reduction of risk-taking behaviour among young people.

“All of the young people referred to Empower have received vocation assistance but it appears this is being viewed as a mentoring service from many of young people with is proving to be extremely beneficial. Where many of our supporting organisations have seen disengagement from participation by the young person, Empower appears to be able to sustain these relationships. While the program I work with is currently under its own evaluation it appears that the young people that we have worked with, and in turn, referred to Empower are seeing a significant reduction in risk-taking behaviour via their engagement with pro-social activities such as a vocation.” Partner organisation representative.

Casework summary: 2019-2024

WCC's synthesis of Empower casework data (including 769 sessions with 141 clients) included records of outcomes achieved by some clients. These included:

- improved engagement in education (28%, n=40), including some clients referred to alternative schooling
- attainment of job placements for previously unemployed clients (n=7).

The average number of casework sessions for those who achieved these outcomes was nine, suggesting that longer involvement with the program may have enabled these outcomes.

Empower Program case studies:

An analysis of case studies identified the following participant outcomes:

- Increased connection and sense of belonging (n=4)
- Access to and engagement with mental health support (n=4)
- Increased employment skills and knowledge (n=3)
- Re-engagement in education (n=3)
- Improved attitude towards education (n=1)
- Improved social skills (n=1)
- Engagement in extracurricular activities (n=1)
- Engagement with family violence support (n=1).

The OfY representative cited the Empower case studies as demonstrating clear evidence of outcomes achieved by the program. Key outcomes included gaining support with employment/training, housing and for mental health.

"I think they really made a difference and it was very beneficial and they could clearly demonstrate that in those case studies ... I also know that their referrals were really good, like they often were very spot on in terms of referring young people to other services and some of those were within Whittlesea, but and some of them were with partners. And I think that was really effective, especially with things like employment or training or mental health ... getting to see a GP or with housing services. So I think it was very effective in that sense as well." OfY representative.

Program staff highlighted the role that the program plays in encouraging educational re-engagement. One example provided was about a participant who had disengaged from school, and over the course of three months working together, the EYW was able to build a trusting relationship with the young person and identify key motivators to encourage their school attendance (seeing

their friends and playing sport). With tailored support around this, the young person then re-engaged in school and attends regularly.

“He attends everyday. Not a fuss. Happy to go. Doesn't enjoy the work, but he's, you know, happy to go. So I think any kind of small step is a win.” Program staff.

They also identified increased self-confidence among participants as another key outcome from Empower.

“With the young people that I work with, it's a quite interesting to see when you first meet them, you know that they not really in a great place, there's a lot going on, and then watching them grow throughout the sessions is something that's really, really nice to see and to have them be able to go “actually, you know what, I've got a lot going for me ... I've got all these things that I can aspire to. And you know, I've got actually someone that can help me with these things” ... so I think, that's a really nice thing that I get to see working with the young people.” Program staff.

Achieving small changes was also highlighted, such as leaving the house and coming to sessions. One suggested that the process of developing a trusting relationship with the EYW was an important outcome in and of itself.

“They don't want a relationship with their teachers, and they find one with [the EYW] and that's so important. So when I'm talking about the little things ... it's just to begin with the doors open and you're thinking about school and second to that, it's like “We might talk to the school about this and I'm in your corner.”” Program staff.

What were the unintended outcomes (positive or negative) of the program?

During the focus group, program staff described how the groups hosted as part of the program – Rainbow Group and the Young Women’s Group – not only facilitated social connection and created safe spaces for young people, but they motivated young people to attend school.

“A lot of the students might not feel that they belong at school. So then that obviously then doesn't encourage them to come to school. So creating I guess a safe space for them to feel welcomed [through Rainbow Group] is great ... a couple of weeks ago we had the well-being teacher and a student actually say “I come to school purely because we have Rainbow Group”, which is excellent 'cause this student isn't very great at coming to school everyday, doesn't really like it, but [Rainbow Group is] a core driver, motivation for them to come to school ... [it's] the same with the Young girls group. I've seen a lot of the young women that I work with, they've had bullying a lot of conflict with friends, [and] again, it discourages them from going to school. So creating a safe space for them to work through that and learn how to be resilient and overcome those sort of issues I feel like definitely does make it more encouraging for them to come to school.” Program staff.

Are program outcomes likely to be sustained over time?

The evaluation has found anecdotal evidence of medium-term outcomes being achieved (such as educational re-engagement and improved employment knowledge and skills). However, data is not readily available to indicate whether these outcomes will be sustained in the longer term.

Discussion and Recommendations

The Empower Program has met its objectives in providing tailored support to young people in Whittlesea. The program reached 173 young people between 2022 – 2024, with many being from CALD backgrounds, and some identifying as LGBTQIA+ and First Nations.

One-on-one support has been offered by the EYW, providing participants with practical skills, advice and assistance in line with their aspirational plans created together. These have focused on areas such as education, employment, mental health, and connections with friends, family and community. The EYW reported observing gradual changes in young people over time, with program staff describing how these “small steps” of attending Empower sessions and developing a trusting relationship were important outcomes for young people. The approach taken by the EYW in fostering these relationships was seen as a key strength of the Empower by program staff. Participants surveyed all suggested that found the EYW ‘very helpful’.

Participants, school staff and partner organisation representatives have described outcomes including re-engagement in education, an improved attitude towards education, increased employment knowledge and skills, a greater awareness of career pathways, improved mental health and an increased sense of connection.

The relationships Empower has cultivated with schools and partner organisations has also been central to the program’s successes. Schools proved to be key referral partners, with the highest number of referrals coming from educational institutions and all participants surveyed (n=8) hearing about the program from their school. Partner organisations reported finding the program valuable, describing both receiving referrals and referring their clients to Empower. The program has recorded 104 referrals to partner organisations since its inception.

There is an ongoing need for the Empower Program to support young people in Whittlesea. Rates of educational disengagement, youth unemployment and mental health issues are pertinent issues among young people across Victoria at the moment. For young people in Whittlesea, many of whom are facing added levels of disadvantage, levels of educational disengagement are comparatively higher than that in Greater Melbourne and youth unemployment is double the rate of unemployment across Whittlesea as a whole. Other programs, such as Navigator, are currently unable to meet the demand for support required by young people in the Whittlesea area. With this in mind, Empower is an important support to prevent further gaps in young people’s access to services and assistance.

The following recommendations are put forward to shape the ongoing effectiveness of the Empower Program:

- **Funding Empower:**
 - Government should seek to continue the Empower Program, as it contributes to key government objectives, especially within the City of Whittlesea which experiences heightened levels of disadvantage.
 - Consideration should also be given to expanding funding due to unmet demand in the region.

- **Lifting Empower's profile:**
 - WCC liaise with the OfY to identify further strategies to report on outputs and outcomes in an efficient manner.
 - WCC to explore opportunities for the sharing of information on the needs and experiences of young people in Whittlesea with government and other stakeholders.
- **Strong and sustainable partnerships:**
 - WCC strengthen the sustainability of relationships with partner organisations by formalising relationships, such as via Memorandums of Understanding, guiding how the organisations will work with one another.

Appendix A: Empower Program Project Logic

Below is the Final Project Logic developed during this evaluation, which maps out the how program activities function to enable intended outcomes. Values have been listed against each component of the Project Logic (i.e. SO1), which are then linked with the Key Evaluation Question and data sources table below, as well as with each question in the data collection tools. This illustrates how the data collected will provide an assessment of the extent to which the components of the Project Logic have been achieved.

Project Logic: Empower Program					
POLICY PRIORITY	Young people have access education and opportunities and are connected to their communities.				
PROBLEM	High levels of disengagement or partial disengagement from education, poor mental health and lack of connection experienced by young people.				
OBJECTIVE	Tailored support is offered to young people to assist reengagement in education, securing employment, improving their mental health & connecting with their community.				
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
I1 Funding from Office for Youth	A1 Staff recruitment and professional development	O1 Number of staff recruited	WCC staff:	WCC staff:	WCC staff:
I2 Funding guidelines	A2 Building networks & referral/specialised pathways (incl. school wellbeing teams)	O2 Staff vacancy rates	S01 Empower is fully staffed with skilled youth-focused professionals who have appropriate referral networks	MO1 Staff of WCC have current knowledge of the needs of young people in the area and how best to support young people	LO1 WCC is viewed as a leader in supporting and advocating for young people in the area
I3 WCC staff expertise	A3 Marketing/publicity	O3 PD attended	S02 Empower uses data to refine/improve program offerings and share learnings with WCC	Participants:	Participants:
I4 WCC professional expertise (child safety)	A4 Conducting workshops (i.e. Rainbow Group)	O4 Program marketing conducted	Participants:	MO2 Young people are progressing/accomplishing their goals	LO2 Young people are valued and have the tools to navigate a successful life
I5 WCC support staff	A5 Accepting referrals	O5 Activities to build networks & referral pathways conducted (e.g. referral)	S03 Young people and other referral agencies are aware of Empower	MO3 Young people have greater resilience and are connected to supports (i.e. health)	LO3 Young people are equipped to achieve their goals, thriving and flourishing
I6 WCC staff existing networks/relationships with schools and referral agencies	A6 Initial triage of clients	O6 Resources	S04 Young people participate in Empower and have access to support	MO4 Young people are re-engaging with either education, training or employment	
I7 WCC Connect Program	A7 Relationship-building activities with clients	O7 Number of clients/repeat clients	S05 Young people build rapport and trust with Empower staff	MO5 Young people have improved relationships with family and community	
I8 Access to mental health/homelessness support	A8 Goal setting and specific support (i.e. CVs)	O8 Client baselines recorded in CDS	S06 Young people feel valued	MO6 Young people refer or talk to their peers to the program	
I9 Intelligence provided by young people	A9 Referrals to services	O9 Number and types of goal setting plans created	S07 Young people are able to articulate their goals		
I10 Community Data System (CDS)	A10 Checking in with referral agencies	O10 Number/type of referrals made and follow ups with agencies	S08 Young people implement goal-setting plans		
	A11 Reviewing goal-setting plans	O11 Number of engagements with client contacts	S09 Young people attend referral agencies		
	A12 Care team meetings	O12 Number of care team and network meeting held	S010 Young people experience: increased self-esteem, increased hope for the future, improved attitude to community, education, training, employment opportunities		
	A13 Participate in network meetings	O13 Number and types of client/program advocacy			
	A14 Advocacy for clients and program				
	A15 Reporting				
	A16 Continuous improvement				
	A17 Knowledge sharing within WCC				

Figure 9. Empower Program project logic.

Appendix B: Evaluation Framework Table

Table 7. Key evaluation questions and data sources.

Domain	Key Evaluation Question	Program data	WCC program managers	Council representatives	Office for Youth	Program partners	Program participants	School staff
Appropriateness	To what extent does the Empower Program address identified needs? (M03-5)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	How does the program align with other programs and Department objectives? (M01-5)		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Effectiveness	Was the program implemented as intended? (A1-17)		✓		✓			
	What have been the barriers and enablers to implementation? (A1-17)		✓					
	To what extent have the program's intended objectives been achieved? (SO3-10)		✓		✓			
Efficiency	Has the program been delivered within its scope, budget and timeframe? (I1-10)	✓	✓		✓			
	Were program resources allocated effectively and efficiently to achieve objectives? (I1-6)	✓	✓		✓			
	Has the program demonstrated value for money? (I1 & 2)	✓	✓		✓			
Impact	To what extent has the program met its short, medium and long-term outcomes? (SO1-LO3)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	What were the unintended outcomes (positive or negative) of the program? (SO1-LO3)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Are program outcomes likely to be sustained over time? (SO1-LO3)		✓			✓	✓	✓

