



# Blazing the Trail

Higher Apprenticeships Pilot  
for the social service sector

**WIDI** WORKFORCE  
INNOVATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

# Filling the leadership gap within the social service sector

## Applying the Higher Apprenticeships Model to Leadership Development

The Higher Apprenticeships Pilot (HAP) project is the result of a partnership between WIDI, the Department of Education and RMIT's College of Vocational Education (CoVE), along with a group of seven industry partners – Scope, Jewish Care, Villa Maria Catholic Homes, Ermha365, BapCare, St John of God Accord and Life Without Barriers. The project objective is to assist in meeting both the attraction and retention objectives of the sector by providing a work-based pathway for upskilling existing front-line supervisors and team leaders through the creation of a co-designed, scalable and sustainable higher apprenticeship training model.

The social services sector in Victoria is large and highly diverse, providing significant economic and social benefits to the community. It is also a sector facing a period of unprecedented change, with changing demographics driving a dramatic increase in demand for services; changing policies and the implementation of new approaches resulting from five recent Royal Commissions; the impacts of COVID-19; NDIS policy reforms and their anticipated increase on service demand; and the resulting heightened demands on workforce supply, capacity and capability.

The sector currently has one of the largest and fastest-growing workforces in the state, with more than 468,000 people directly employed in health and social assistance.<sup>1</sup> Due to increasing demand for social services, that number is projected to grow by more than 14 per cent to over 535,000 by 2025, and strong leadership will be central to the ability of both the sector and the organisations within it to respond effectively to the wide range of transformational changes that are currently occurring.

Preliminary workforce analysis conducted by WIDI in 2019 also found that over 1,000 additional managers will be required across the social service sector in Victoria in the period to 2023 as a result of increased demand for services. It is therefore critical that the sector is able to retain and develop talent with strong leadership potential to guide the sector through this period of growth and transformation.

However, in consultation with over 50 sector leaders, WIDI found that existing leadership development opportunities tailored specifically for the social service sector are seriously lacking. There are few formal management and leadership development pathways, and limited uptake of the formal qualifications that are currently available, leaving significant capability gaps across the sector.



## WIDI

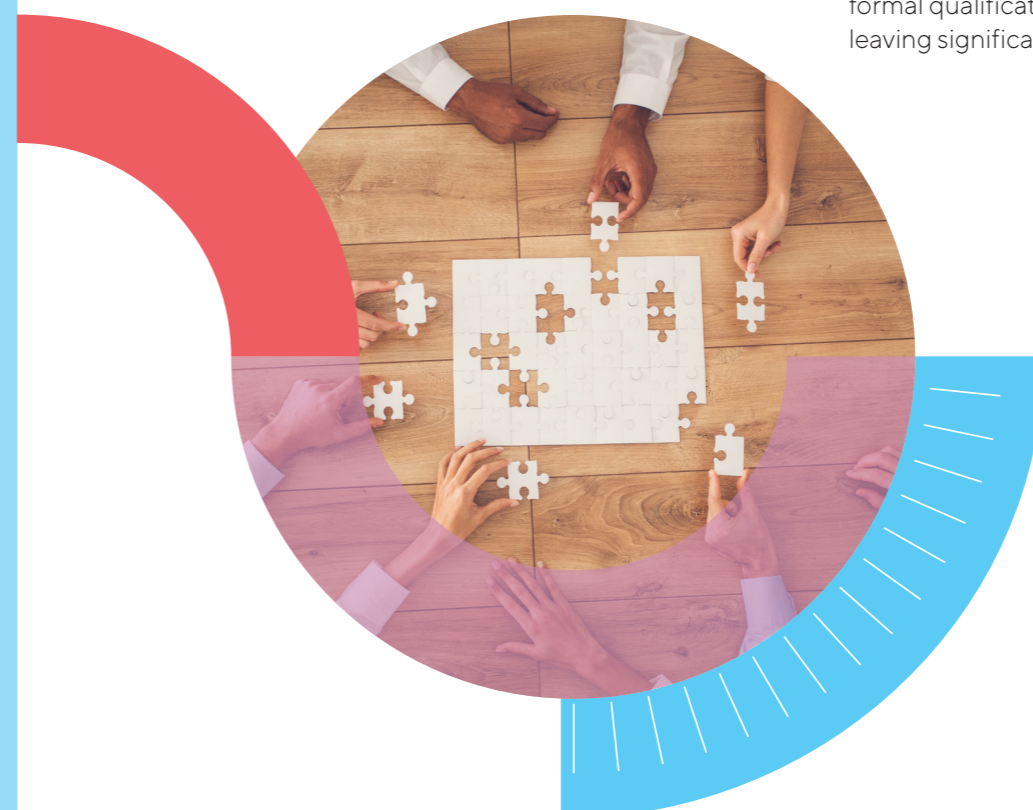
The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) drives innovation in education, training and applied research to enable the growth and transformation of the social service industry. It employs an innovative and highly impactful model that places key stakeholders at the centre of its work to set priorities, co-design solutions, and to lead and guide the transformation of service approaches. WIDI partners with diverse social service organisations and government to build a high-quality workforce for the sector, which is particularly important at this time of major growth and disruption.

## Acknowledgements

The Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands across Australia on which this project was conducted. In particular WIDI would like to acknowledge the people of the Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands WIDI conducts its business. We would like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions made to the project by the 24 participants in the pilot program, the seven industry partners, and the numerous staff from WIDI, RMIT University College of Vocational Education and in particular to acknowledge the funding of this project by the Department of Education and Training, Victoria.

## Industry partners



<sup>1</sup> NSC (2022), Labour Market Information Portal – Regional Employment Projections: Five years to November 2025, National Skills Commission, Canberra, Available: <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections> [Accessed 15 February 2022].

# Learning together

## Co-design and Development of the Pilot

The focus of the HAP project was to research, co-design, pilot and evaluate a training program and delivery model to enable upskilling of entry-level and mid-tier social service sector leaders in order to better meet service transformation, quality and demand challenges.

Through extensive engagement and collaboration with the sector, it was determined that the best way to upskill social service sector leaders was through recognised training that contained a significant work-based component. The intention was that the HAP project would lead to the development of an industry endorsed and recognised training pathway into leadership roles for the social service sector.

The HAP project team identified the Advanced Diploma in Community Sector Management (ADCSM) as the prototype training package to test

for suitability, and it was subsequently rolled into a higher apprenticeship-like model for delivery, testing and refinement with industry employers.

A suite of other co-design work was undertaken with industry to test and iterate the training package content, its delivery and accompanying frameworks related to recognised prior learning and the inclusion of clear leadership development pathways.

Over 18 months, the HAP project engaged with industry to explore the design and development of an industry-endorsed higher apprenticeship training model which would be appropriate for broader scale-up. Within RMIT, the Vocational Education Design Team led the design work, the College of Vocational Education (CoVE) focussed on the teaching delivery and product-development work, while project management was led by WIDI.

Throughout the project, an action research pilot cohort of 24 participants was able to test and refine ideas. This gave the project team deep insight into learning needs and preferences, as well as the capability needs of teachers and supervisors. The characteristics of these participants are outlined below.

Overarching the entire project was a thorough evaluation of the project's design, implementation and operations undertaken by WIDI's evaluation team. The evaluation work employed a developmental approach with findings being fed back at agreed milestones to stakeholders and aligned with key project milestones to support the continual improvement of project operational activity.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

| CHARACTERISTIC                               | CATEGORY   | PER CENT RESPONSES |
|--|--|--------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                                | Female   | 74%                |
|  | Male   | 26%                |
| <b>Qualifications held on entry to pilot</b> | Bachelor's Degree or Higher  | 15%                |
|  | Advanced Diploma   | 8%                 |
|  | Diploma  | 46%                |
|  | Certificate IV   | 65%                |
|  | None   | 4%                 |
| <b>Aspirations</b>                           | Career Progression   | 30%                |
|  | Consolidate Skills   | 38%                |
|  | Both of the above  | 30%                |
| <b>Main reasons for study</b>                | Job requirement  | 92%                |
|  | Job opportunities  | 8%                 |
| <b>Geography</b>                             | Participants were mostly Melbourne Metro based, with a maximum distance from the CBD of 89km |                    |



## Project elements



FIGURE 1: PROJECT ELEMENTS

## From pilot to program

### Leveraging Learnings to Develop a Best-Practice Leadership Training Model

The pilot enabled the development of a best-practice training model for mid-tier managers and leaders in the social service sector that meets both the practical and educational needs and requirements of participants, employers, and education providers.

During the delivery of the pilot program, ongoing work took place to design and develop the higher-apprenticeship qualification for the social service sector through action research and consultation with the pilot participants and partner organisations.

An interim research report provided insights into potential scalable models for a higher apprenticeship program for the social service sector, analysing the findings from a series of co-design workshops conducted with partners, participants and teaching staff involved in the pilot. The report highlighted the importance of the following aspects:

- accredited training for leadership and management
- the need for a nationally recognised qualification to professionalise the sector
- the importance of applied learning, allowing for reflective practice, workplace coaching and peer assessment
- the benefits of social learning and networking opportunities
- flexible learning options, including online delivery

Consultation was conducted more broadly across the social service sector with the view to informing the co-design and development of the project. The consultation process found that the following aspects were important to the sector:

- improving the ability to attract and retain staff who genuinely want to work in the sector
- encouraging a more diverse range of people to transition into the sector
- provision of mentoring and supervision as part of professional development
- development of transferable skills
- building a pipeline of future leaders
- low-cost professional development options

Research also examined the knowledge, skills, behaviour and mindset requirements for emerging and mid-tier managers and leaders, and confirmed the suitability of the Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management as delivered in the pilot program.

Based on these intensive research and co-design outcomes, the higher apprenticeships model was designed as an integrated program of structured learning that incorporates elements of a traditional apprenticeship program.

FIGURE 2: 70:20:10 DELIVERY MODEL AS APPLIED TO THE ADCSM

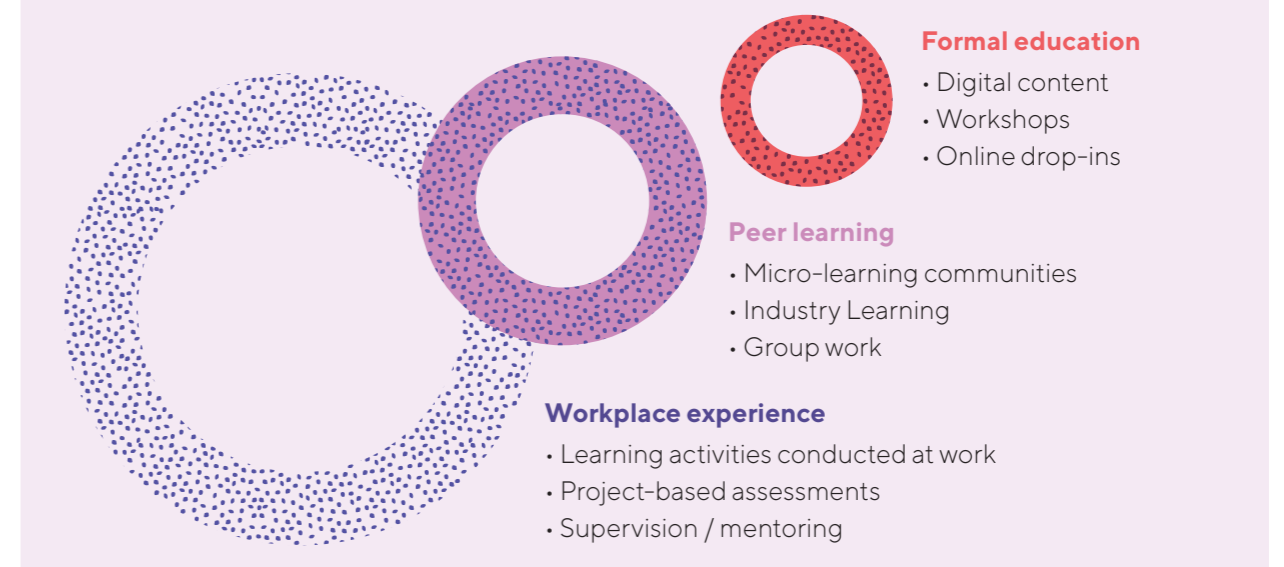


FIGURE 3: PATHWAY MODEL



To maximise engagement, flexibility, and completion, the model utilises a cluster style/skill set approach of four key learning areas, with underpinning learning and an overarching reflective practice module designed to introduce a culture of lifelong learning to participants. Importantly, each component has been designed to be completed as a standalone module, meaning that once government approval has been received to embed these skill sets within the ADCSM qualification, participants will have the flexibility to start or stop at different points, supporting the need for many participants to pause their studies due to increased work demands.

The higher apprenticeship model was created on the assumption that, eventually, there would be two learning streams; a skill set for entry-level leaders as a pathway into the ADCSM, as well as the ADCSM for mid-tier managers and leaders. From meetings and

consultation with industry partners, the model above was designed to provide a seamless pathway from Certificate III through to Higher Education.

The chosen delivery strategy is based on the 70:20:10 model, allowing for more of the learning to occur in the workplace. The 70, 20 and 10 categories refer to the different ways people learn and develop in their roles at work and can be explained simply as experiential learning (70), social learning (20), and formal learning (10).

The program also includes a comprehensive Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework and meaningful pathway options to employment opportunities/advancement and further study. Coaching and mentoring are key components of the model as well as a strong partnership between industry, employers, and formal education.

## Proof of concept

### Meeting The Needs of Participants, Employers and the Social Service Sector

The project has proven that there is significant industry interest in a higher apprenticeship-type model, through a work-integrated training model that includes pathways for both emerging and existing mid-tier managers and leaders. The model meets both the practical and educational needs and requirements of participants, employers and education providers, demonstrating the way forward for supporting the sector by equipping leaders and managers to meet their workforce challenges.

Engagement of partners and participants was significant, ensuring a high degree of sectoral input into the design and development of the program. Of the 24 participants who commenced the pilot program, 21 saw it through to completion. In addition, the qualification rate of 87.5 per cent for the pilot is significantly higher than the projected completion rate for VET qualifications of diploma level (or higher) in Australia of 63.1 per cent.

In addition, the success of the HAP project has already led to the revision and expansion of the model into the Higher Apprenticeship and Traineeships (Social Services) Extension Project (HATSSEP). There are currently 131 emerging and mid-tier managers and leaders enrolled in the redesigned and developed ADCSM, encompassing both metropolitan and regional delivery groups. This project is being undertaken in parallel to the broader Skills in Practice (SKiP) project funded through the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR). HATSSEP includes delivery of training to existing workers in the sector with the ADCSM, and CHC43015 Certificate IV in Disability.

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“In just a few short years since establishment, ermha365 has seen WIDI bring new thought leadership to enduring issues in social service sectors and has benefited from our leaders participate in higher education opportunities.”

Sector Employer

“

“The majority of everything that we covered ... it’s helpful for me now. It’s helpful for me if and when I become a manager. It’s helpful for me if I become a director. It’s helpful for me if I become, you know ... that team leading stuff, anything from team leader and above.”

Participant

“

“[The participants] loved it and [have] sung the praises of the program... which is great because it means ... we chose the right people ... the feedback was exemplary ... about the course itself, so that’s good.”

Sector Employer

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“And I think the majority of things that I would have liked to have been taught were taught so, you know, leading teams and growth and upskilling and being innovative with the ideas. That was all there and that was all so helpful, and I use it all the time.”

Participant

FIGURE 4: THE HIGHER APPRENTICESHIPS MODEL FOR THE ADCSM



TABLE 2: OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

| PILOT OBJECTIVE   | PROGRAM OUTCOME  |
|---|--|
| Determine interest in higher apprenticeship model for social service sector leaders   | → There is significant and increasing sectoral interest in the higher apprenticeships model for developing the capability of emerging and established leaders in the sector, and there is a keenness to participate in the design, development and testing of the model. |
| Determine whether the Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management (ADCSM) fits the knowledge, skills and behavioural development needs of the social service sector | → The ADCSM is appropriate based on its module content and suitability for meeting the development needs of established leaders in the sector.   |
| Determine whether the training delivery model retains and engages participants through to completion  | → The support mechanisms in place contributed to high retention through the program, but formalised mentoring in the workplace would further enhance outcomes.   |
| Identify barriers and enablers to scale the higher apprenticeships model  | → Further testing of the HAP model is needed to confirm whether the model is suitable for sector-wide scaling, but early indicators are positive. Funding of the next iteration of the training model in larger cohort models will provide further evidence.             |

## Opportunities for greater impact

### Scaling The Model Across the Social Service Sector

**The HAP project has demonstrated the value of the application of a higher apprenticeships educational model to the social service sector for the first time.** This innovative approach now has the potential to be applied more broadly across the sector, providing a much-needed opportunity to build a strong workforce pipeline, as well as enhancing leadership capability and capacity across a wider range of social services.

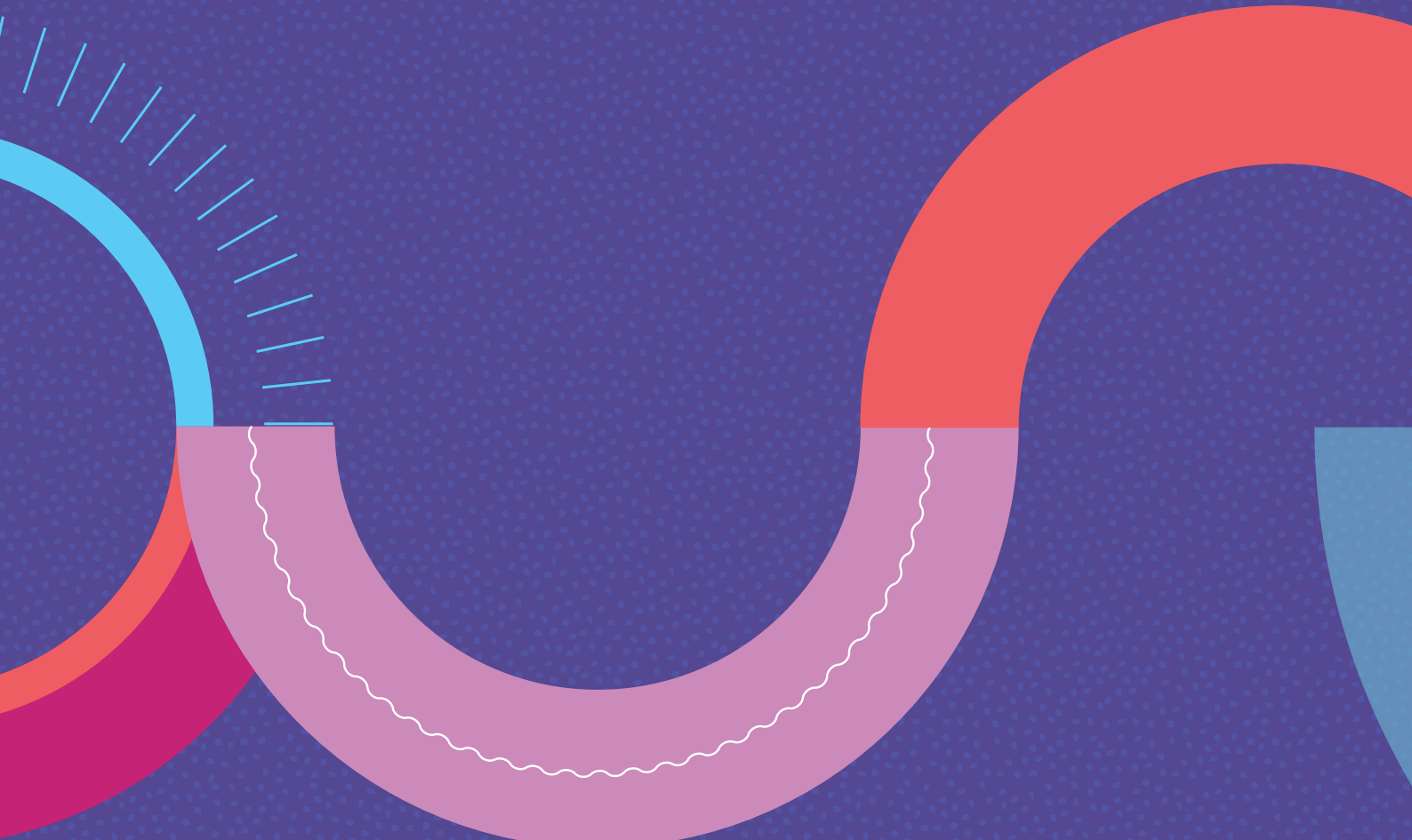
Strong leadership will be central to the ability of both the sector and the organisations within it to respond effectively to the increasing demand and transformational change facing the sector. Through the HAP project, this innovative model of leadership development, tailored specifically to the needs of the social service sector, enables participants to ‘learn while they earn’, as well as contributing to

attracting and retaining high performing staff to meet the challenges of the future.

The success of this project has highlighted the opportunity to test the model across other industry service providers, as well as more broadly across different sector workforces. Immediate workforce needs include areas such as mental health, which is currently experiencing unprecedented service demand due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a result of policy response to the Royal Commission.

WIDI looks forward to continuing this work in conjunction with government and the social service sector and is calling for expressions of interest from industry partners interested in participating in future development of the model.





FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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