

From Entitlement to Experiment

Industry report on case studies
of high performing providers

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Introduction

The provision of tailored support to assist jobseekers with complex needs to move from welfare to work is a long-standing goal of Australia's employment services system. This report presents the results of an exploratory study conducted by a research team from the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, and La Trobe University to understand 'what works' in supporting more disadvantaged jobseekers to move from welfare to work. The study was undertaken in partnership with Jobs Australia, the National Employment Services Association (NESA) and Westgate Community Initiatives Group (WCIG), with additional funding from an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP150100277). It builds on the team's long-standing program of research on welfare reform and the frontline of employment services delivery. This dates back to the late 1990s and has included four surveys of the Australian employment services sector workforce (in 1998, 2008, 2012, and 2016) along with comparative research in the UK and the Netherlands.

The study arose from the recognition that a major challenge of employment programs in Australia to date 'has been their lack of impact on outcomes for the most highly disadvantaged jobseekers' (Borland et al. 2016: 3). While Australia's employment services are reasonably successful in achieving outcomes with jobseekers who are closer to the labour market (currently Stream A clients), the system has been much less successful in assisting the long-term unemployed and those experiencing personal issues such as mental health problems, substance dependency, domestic violence, homelessness, and criminal records to find work. This issue has been described as the system's 'Achilles heel' (Davidson 2014).

It is a problem that has persisted from *Job Network* (1998 - 2008) through to the *Job Services Australia* (2009-15) and *Jobactive* contracts (2015-2020). This is evidenced by the low number of 26-week employment outcomes that providers have historically achieved with jobseekers in the highest service stream. For example, from 1 July 2009 to 31 March 2011, under the *Job Services Australia* contract, providers claimed a total of 13,400 26-week employment outcomes with clients in Stream 4 (OECD 2012: 123). This accounted for just 9 per cent of all full employment outcomes claimed over this period. More recently, over the period 1 July 2015 to 31 May 2018 under the *Jobactive* contract:

- 29,310 Stream C jobseekers were successfully supported into 26 weeks or more of employment
- This accounted for just 10 per cent of all full employment outcomes over this period (Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018).

As acknowledged in the Australian Government's discussion paper on *The Next Generation of Employment Services*, the average duration in employment services among the Stream C cohort is currently 5 years. While there is widespread recognition of the need to 'do more to support jobseekers who face complex barriers to find work' (Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018: 24) there is, as Perkins argues, 'little consensus about what form this should take' (2011: 13). Despite overall low rates of employment for harder-to-help clients across the system, a small number of providers have consistently achieved a high level of performance in placing and sustaining jobseekers in the highest service stream in employment. To gain an understanding of 'what works' in supporting more disadvantaged jobseekers into work, we conducted four case studies with 'high performing' *Jobactive* agencies in New South Wales and Victoria over an 18-month period from late 2016 until mid-2018.

The four case study sites and the research approach are described in the next section of the report. This is followed by a consideration of some of the key challenges that the study indicated agencies face in working with harder-to-help clients, including: issues around the streaming and assessment of jobseekers and the high rate of temporary suspensions among the Stream C cohort. Following this, the remainder of the report details our findings on the approaches that the case study agencies took to working with jobseekers as well as to working with employers, which was an important focus of their servicing activities.

Acknowledgements

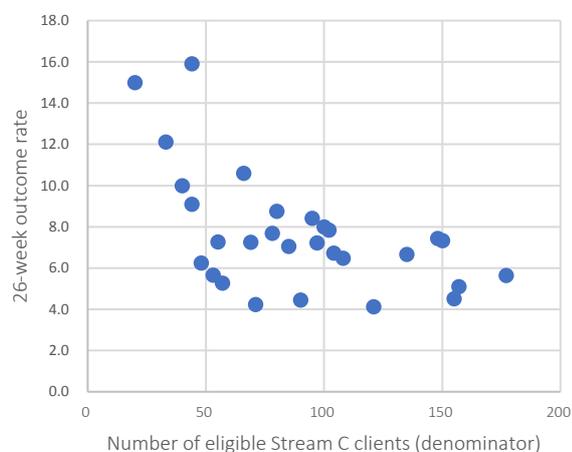
This research would not have been possible without the generous support of our research partners: NESA, Jobs Australia and WCIG. The team would also like to acknowledge the funding received from the Australian Research Council, and the assistance of the Department of Jobs and Small Business in providing data for the selection of the case study sites. Most importantly, we would like to express our enormous gratitude to the four agencies that participated in the study, and their staff, who afforded us very generous amounts of time and access in undertaking this research.

I. Case study sites and research method

To select four high performing sites for the research, we approached the Department of Jobs and Small Business to provide a list of the highest performing Jobactive sites in Victoria and New South Wales, based on the proportion of 26-week outcomes each had achieved with their Stream C clients as evaluated for the June 2016 Star Ratings. The Department identified the highest performing sites in Victoria and New South Wales and provided a list of 29 sites from across both states, where agency management had agreed in principle to participate in the research. Site outcome data for each stream (4, 12, and 26-week outcomes) were also provided with this list, enabling us to compare the relative performance of agencies on the list.

A noticeable pattern was that several of the high performing sites had relatively small numbers of Stream C clients with which they were eligible to claim 26-week outcomes. For example, four out of the five sites with the highest Stream C 26-week outcome rate had fewer than 45 Stream C clients in total with whom they were eligible to achieve a 26-week employment outcome.

Figure 1.1: Outcome rate by denominator



From this list of 29 sites, four offices were purposively chosen to provide variation along ‘theoretically relevant conditions’ (Greer et al. 2018: 1433) related to performance such as geography and ownership structure. This was to facilitate exploration of elements of success that could be embedded in different organizational contexts and locations. Accordingly, the sample was designed so that no two offices were operated by the same provider or located in the same region. This reduced the number of eligible sites, as the 29 offices were operated by only ten providers in nine employment regions. To avoid the risk that agencies’ high performance may have been skewed by very small

caseloads, we also avoided selecting sites with very low denominators (less than 60 Stream Cs in total). Furthermore, the sites were chosen to incorporate a mix of for-profit and non-profit agencies, as well as sites in a regional location and in areas with high unemployment. Further details about each of the case study sites are included in Table 1.1. This information is presented in anonymized form to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the agencies that participated in the research, their staff, and the jobseekers that were tracked over the course of the research. For similar reasons, the excerpts from interviews with staff and observations from field visits detailed throughout this report are reported in a de-identified way.

As the data in Table 1.1 shows, the four selected sites varied in terms of their staffing models, the frequency of client appointments, and the total number of clients on their caseloads. The smallest office comprised just one full-time employment consultant supported by a site manager who oversaw the operation of several agency sites. This was in contrast to the two largest sites, which were staffed by 7 to 8 people. The consultants at these larger sites also predominantly worked with jobseekers in Streams B and C, or in Stream A, whereas consultants at the two smaller offices worked with all service streams. The number of jobseekers per full-time consultant also varied considerably between the sites:

I have about a hundred. (INT14, Consultant)

I think it’s like 150. (INT11, Consultant)

I think it’s like 180. (INT21, Consultant)

I only know because [manager] tells me sometimes, ‘Oh my God [name], your caseload is 160.’ And I go ‘Ah, is it?’ I mean it’s so transient. (INT1, Consultant)

These differences reflected variations in the frequency of client-appointments, which ranged from a minimum of fortnightly contact at two sites, to every three weeks at another site, to monthly appointments at the fourth site. Although a manager at this fourth site explained that it was ‘up to the nous of the consultant’ to determine whether individual clients required more frequent, fortnightly contact: ‘That will be up to the consultant to decide where that Stream C is up to. (INT19, Manager).’ However, by the end of the study, Stream C clients at the fourth site were attending appointments every two weeks after an additional consultant was recruited to work with Stream A clients.

Another convergence in practice was in how appointments were conducted. From midway through the study, appointments with jobseekers at all sites were predominantly conducted in the open at consultants' desks. This was unless jobseekers specifically requested to meet in private. Indeed, only two sites had dedicated interview rooms although either the site manager's office or a training room could be used at the other sites if jobseekers required or requested to see consultants in private.

A final point of difference related to the use of performance incentives. Staff at all four sites had monthly job placement and outcome targets they were expected to achieve, and their progress towards these targets was visibly tracked on whiteboards displayed on office walls. But only two of the agencies paid bonuses if staff met or exceeded their targets.

I don't get any bonuses. I mean you want to perform well for your employer of course but you want to look after your clients as well. (INT1, Consultant)

Not in this contract... So it used to be if you were three-and-a-half, four and then five. Five you'd get the top. So that was our incentive in the last bonus, and it was because everyone is driven by the extras that you can get. (INT9, Consultant)

We get bonuses, \$500 a quarter if we meet our individual KPIs There's also on top of that a \$500 quarter bonus if we reach 5-star (INT13, Consultant)

We get bonuses for Star Ratings [up to \$1,000 per quarter] ... (INT20, Manager)

Frontline staff

At the commencement of the study, just under half the employment consultants had been working in the sector for less than two years after changing careers from customer service or administrative roles in other industries. Nevertheless, at three of the sites, this was blended with more experienced colleagues with over five years' experience working as an employment services professional.

The managers at each site had all been working in the employment services industry for seven years or more. Each had previous experience of working as a case manager/employment consultant, and two of the site managers had previously been clients of the agencies they now worked for. Excluding one site manager who had only been working with the agency since the start of the Jobactive contract, the remaining site managers had a long history of working for their respective agencies and had been promoted from within to the role of site manager.

Table 1.1: Overview of case study sites

Location	Approx. caseload	On-site Jobactive staff	Other details
Outer Melbourne	600	Receptionist Manager 3 employment consultants (1 part-time) Business development consultant Post-placement support officer	A newly established Jobactive site, co-located with a Disability Employment Services site and managed by a not-for-profit agency. The employment consultants generally specialised in managing either Stream A clients or jobseekers in Streams B and C. The two Stream B/C consultants met with clients every three weeks, and the site also engaged an external psychologist one day per week to assist with assessing client barriers and capabilities. Post-placement support was provided by a specialist staff member, unlike the other sites in the study, where this was managed directly by the employment consultants. In addition to the case study site, the site manager was also responsible for managing outreach sites.
Outer Melbourne	450	Receptionist Manager 3 employment consultants (1 part-time)	A long-standing employment service office, managed by a not-for-profit agency. The three consultants managed jobseekers from all streams, meeting with Stream C clients on a fortnightly basis. The onsite staff were supported by a business development officer and counsellor employed by the provider at a sister office, and who serviced jobseekers from multiple sites in the region.
Melbourne	700	Manager (shared) 4 employment consultants Life-skills coordinator Psychologist Business Development Officer	A newly established Jobactive site, managed by a for-profit agency. Consultants specialised in either Stream A clients or those in Streams B and C. The two Stream B/C consultants met with clients on a fortnightly basis. The life-skills coordinator, psychologist and business development officer were shared across multiple agency sites but also physically located at the case study site for a minimum of one day per week. The site manager managed two agency sites.
Regional New South Wales	250	Manager (shared) Employment consultant	A long-stand employment service office, managed by a not-for-profit agency. The consultant managed the entire caseload, meeting with clients approximately once a month. The site manager managed several sites in the region.

And then some things happened and I actually was a client. Then I was doing a construction course with [provider] and a traineeship in admin came up so I applied for it, and I got the job. I wasn't suited to the admin role, so they put me in as an employment consultant. (INT20, Manager)

I was jobseeker myself... And then the employment consultant I had... she said to me "We've got a receptionist role going here, perfect opportunity"... I went in for an interview and then I ended up getting a job. So it wasn't as though I planned to get into this industry. However, I always had a passion, or I guess a want and need to help people. But at that point in time, when I started in this industry, I didn't realise how massive it was. (INT2, Manager)

Many other frontline staff in this study similarly reported a passion for helping people, and that they derived enormous fulfilment from supporting clients to overcome their barriers and find work:

I think I'm a people person ... the satisfaction that I gained seeing the change in people coming from, you know, with a lot of barriers and then helping them through that and them getting them a job. (INT13, Consultant)

I just like supporting people with different issues ... People with, you know, drug and alcohol issues at home and domestic violence at home, it all goes with employment because employment's what you get paid for. (INT8, Consultant)

It was really, really rewarding to know that you've changed somebody's life ... It's definitely what we are in community services for. (INT21, Consultant)

What I love about my job is when there is someone genuinely that wants to work, they've been down their luck a little bit and I can actually get them into work and I see a smile on their face. That to me is very fulfilling with the job I do because I've experienced a lot in my past, I've been where they are at ... (INT18, Business Development Consultant)

Research method

The research was undertaken over 18-months and comprised several types of data collection. The first stage involved two members of the research team spending two to three days at each site, observing appointments with jobseekers (with the agreement of jobseekers), staff meetings, and the general working environments of each office. Further observational

research was repeated twelve-months later. Each office visit generated around 30 pages of typed field notes, from each of the researchers, providing a strong level of confidence in our observations and that we captured the totality of operations, from multiple perspectives. The observational research was supplemented by interviews with client-facing staff at each site, including interviews with new staff that commenced part-way through the study. Twenty-one different staff were interviewed in total from across the four sites, including: 6 site managers (including 2 replaced managers), 10 employment consultants (including 2 replaced consultants), 2 reverse marketers and 3 specialist staff.

The final component of the research involved longitudinal qualitative research with the employment consultants, who were re-interviewed every two months about how they were working with a sample of their Stream C caseload. Approximately 10 jobseekers per full-time consultant were chosen in collaboration with site management to follow at each site. The sample was designed to include a diverse range of jobseekers by age, gender, and duration on benefits. Initially, 74 jobseekers were chosen to follow across the four sites. However, due to the number of jobseekers who transferred to another agency or went on a long-term medical exemption in the early months of the research, an additional 32 jobseekers were included in the sample from mid-way through the study. This brought the total number of tracked jobseekers across the four sites to 106. Although some of these jobseekers were tracked only very briefly. This issue of the volatility of the Stream C caseload emerged as a significant challenge and is discussed in Section 2 of this report.

Although longitudinal interviews have been widely used to study *jobseekers'* experiences of employment services, frontline workers' perspectives on helping clients have rarely been examined through such an approach. Studies of the frontline delivery of employment services have predominantly followed a cross-sectional design, gathering data about practices at specific moments through surveys or interviews rather than tracking the evolution of caseworkers' approaches over a sustained period. Adopting this longitudinal approach enabled us to consider how client servicing strategies evolved over time, and as clients moved through distinct phases of activation. More generally, the research method allowed us to triangulate between the observational, interview, and longitudinal data to capture key dimensions of frontline work.

2. Transfers and suspensions

One of the challenges that quickly emerged in undertaking the longitudinal aspect of the research was the high number of jobseekers in the initial sample that became inactive or exited from sites' caseload for reasons other than employment. Excluding referrals to alternative programs such as Disability Employment Services, which are discussed in Section 3:

- 33 of the Stream C jobseekers that we tracked were no longer on agencies' caseloads at the end of the study nor were they in employment;
- This included 28 out of the original sample of 74 Stream C jobseekers (38%).

Four jobseekers were exited from sites' caseloads early in the study after failing to regularly report to Centrelink, and never recommenced in *Jobactive* during the study:

She's gone ... I can't even phone her. I have tried to phone her with job opportunities before and there is absolutely no point because there is no one in the house who speaks English... She could have found full-time employment and it could be a placement that I can't get... She could have passed away. Realistically, how do we know? (INT1, Consultant)

He's gone off the face of the earth too mate. He had a lot of issues, homelessness and that. Didn't turn up to an appointment, so he's no longer around. (INT8, Consultant)

A further five jobseekers became indefinitely suspended from sites' caseloads after being incarcerated:

They don't get suspended off our system, their address gets changed to the city, to Spencer St. And that way we know that they're incarcerated. So he's on a nil rate ... I just keep checking to see if he comes [back on]. (INT11, Consultant)

Then I found out he was in jail and I'm like, how can we keep rescheduling for someone who's in jail and we don't know when they're going to come back out? (INT12, Consultant)

Caseload volatility was an issue encountered at each site in the study. Over the study, at least a quarter of the original sample of jobseekers *at each site* either:

- Transferred to another provider;
- Were exited by Centrelink for not reporting (and did not recommence in *Jobactive*); or
- Were indefinitely suspended due to incarceration.

The data reported in Figure 2.1 shows that, in most cases, the reason clients exited sites' caseloads was because they had transferred to another *Jobactive* provider. Housing insecurity is an issue faced by many more highly disadvantaged jobseekers, and it was not uncommon for jobseekers in the study to be automatically transferred to another provider after changing address. For example, a consultant at one site described how a client had recently found secure housing and was automatically transferred to another provider by Centrelink:

He didn't want to transfer job service providers. But it seems that when he's gone to Centrelink to change his address, he has actually changed providers ... But he has found secure housing which was a huge milestone for him. He's in community housing in [suburb] and he didn't get to choose the location. (INT1, Consultant)

In some cases, clients were only on sites' caseloads for a very brief period after relocating to find housing:

We've just been like a stepping stone ... A couple of mine have gone on to [housing service], as in housing. So they've gone on to that side of town ... So it's just in and out. (Consultant, INT9)

I had a couple of appointments and they weren't really [productive]. She's got a lot of mental health issues, a lot of mental health issues. She went to [inter-state] I think, for Christmas and was institutionalised up there and then came back down here and then went back, and is now permanently [inter-state]. (INT3, Consultant)

Figure 2.1: Exits from sample due to transfers, incarceration or not reporting to Centrelink (number of jobseekers)



In a small number of cases involving longer-term clients, the possibility of transferring to another provider was suggested by agency staff. This was after they had unsuccessfully tried to work with those clients to support them into employment. Perceiving that they were not making any progress, the option of transferring to another provider was offered:

We asked her if she would actually like to try another provider to see if they could do something we can't. And she was happy to do that... (INT20, Manager)

Well basically, [she] wasn't getting anywhere with me ... Every time I tried to push her for anything she just put up barriers and there was always something going on that she couldn't help... In the end, I offered for her to be transferred somewhere closer to her home and she just took it. (INT11, Consultant)

However, this circumstance was uncommon and only applied to five jobseekers across the four sites.

Medical and personal crisis exemptions

A related issue affecting agencies' ability to work with clients on a sustained basis was the volume of exemptions for medical or personal reasons received by jobseekers during the study. Over the study, 29 different jobseekers (27%) from across all sites were granted at least one period of exemption from participating in employment services by Centrelink for medical or personal crisis reasons. In most cases (21 out of 29), the exemptions that jobseekers received were either long-term (over a month) or jobseekers received multiple exemptions over the course the study.

In several cases, jobseekers were repeatedly exempted from their participation requirements and were barely actively commenced on agencies' caseloads at all. For example, a consultant at one of the Melbourne sites described a newly commenced client who immediately went on suspension for nine months for medical reasons:

He'd been on previous medical certificates for a long time. And he'd let it lapse. So he came on my books and was here for a very, very short time and then got his medical back up and running again and has gone again. (INT11, consultant)

There was a perception among some frontline staff that medical exemptions were being used by some clients as a way of avoiding their mutual obligation requirements:

I guess sometimes it's the easy option for clients to get a medical certificate and just get an exemption,

and otherwise they know the requirements that they have, whether it's Work-for-the-Dole or job search. (INT17, Life skills coordinator)

I decided to push him because I really thought that I could work with him – just for little jobs like a car detailer... And I said, "Come on [name] we really need to work together now and get you into something." And he sat there and he agreed and the next thing I know he's suspended on my system on a medical incapacity exemption... So he's actually gone above me... back to his doctor and to Centrelink and said, "I need an exemption because they are pushing me too hard." Maybe, I don't know. (INT11, Consultant)

[Jobseeker] was referred to an activity but, as always, didn't show up to the induction. So we've been trying to get him in to be referred to another activity, and then he just comes up as a medical exemption. As they all do... I think once this medical finishes, he'll get another one. (INT12, Consultant)

In some of the cases that we followed, medical or personal crisis exemptions appeared to have been triggered either by an increase in client's activity requirements or by the submission of a compliance failure report resulting in a payment penalty. For instance, in four of the cases of medical exemptions that we tracked, jobseekers' period of exemption immediately followed from the submission of a Participation Report (PR) or Provider Appointment Report (PAR):

I guess it [a PAR] put in motion another medical certificate from him, because he's gone and gotten one and handed it in [for a three-month exemption]. (INT6, Consultant)

She is falling behind in Work for the Dole hours ... and I have PR'd her [for non-attendance at WfD] ... But now she's got a medical certificate for like the next month and a-half. (Consultant, INT11)

However, our data also suggested that a considerable proportion of the jobseekers who received temporary exemptions over the course of the study had been actively encouraged to apply for an exemption on the grounds that their consultant perceived they would be unable to meet their participation requirements. Medical and personal crisis exemptions were recommended as a way of avoiding the risk of incurring a payment penalty for jobseekers who were unable to meet their participation requirements:

The last thing we want to do is set up a jobseeker to fail. And obviously we have our requirements that we have to meet as a provider to the government too... And sometimes medical exemptions and personal crisis exemptions are the better way to go when you know someone's not going to meet their requirements. (INT21, Consultant)

At her last appointment, [jobseeker] was made aware that she has to be referred to employability skills training ... I don't think that she's capable to be honest. But she does know that she will be going to this if she doesn't have a medical exemption to get her suspended on the system. So she was going to go and see [her doctor]. (INT11, Consultant)

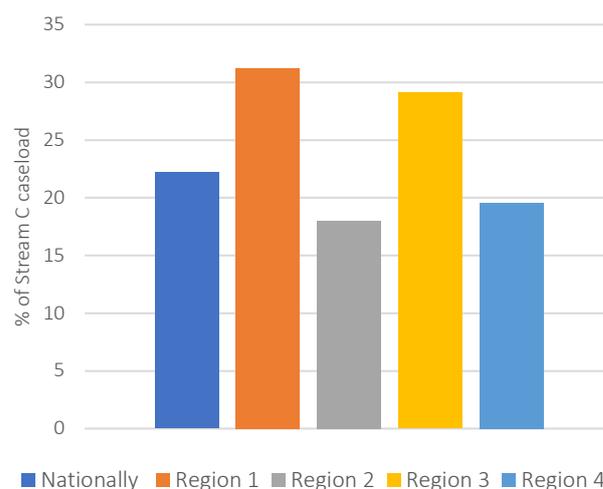
She suffers from a little bit of mental health ... And to buy her time, and because she's in the Work-for-the-Dole phase, I have actually said for her to go to her GP and get me a medical certificate just to buy some time and to take some pressure off having to look for work and, you know, having to come into appointments and so forth. (INT13, Consultant)

As highlighted in the above comment, Work-for-the-Dole requirements during jobseekers' annual activity phase were often the context in which agency staff perceived that it may be prudent or necessary for jobseekers to attain a medical or personal crisis exemption.

Agencies had some discretion to enable Stream C clients to meet their annual activity requirements through alternatives such as accredited training or a health maintenance program. However, frontline staff reported that if jobseekers weren't engaged in appropriate training or a non-vocational alternative they had little choice but to either refer clients to an activity or to encourage clients to apply for a temporary exemption if they perceived that they would be unable to meet their annual activity requirements:

I found a form on the system, it's a mutual obligation form that doctors can fill-out ... I found that from our compliance lady ... So now I am just telling them "Go to your doctors, get them to fill it out. It prevents you from your mutual obligations. If [Centrelink] are not accepting medicals then this will help"... But if they're not suspended they've still got to comply ... and that's been our worst nightmare here at the moment. (INT9, Consultant)

Figure 2.2: Stream C caseload suspended due to incarceration, medical exemption or personal crisis on 31 December 2017



The high rate of medical and personal crisis exemptions among the most disadvantaged client cohort has previously been identified as major source of concern in relation to providers' capacity to achieve outcomes with harder-to-help clients (OECD 2012: 120-22).

Data requested from the Department of Jobs and Small Business shows that, as at the 31 December 2017, 22.2 per cent of the national Stream C caseload was temporarily suspended due to receiving a personal crisis or medical exemption or incarceration. However, as shown in Figure 2.2, this suspension rate varied considerably between the different employment regions in which the case study sites were located, either reflecting significant health-related differences in the characteristics of Stream C jobseekers in these regions or variability in local Centrelink practices concerning the granting of exemptions.

I think Centrelink are a little bit too lenient here in [Region 1]. Because they accept a lot of medical certificates... He's had one, two... five medical incapacity exemptions that I can just see since 2016. So, if you've had five medical certificates, and long periods—at least two to three months each time, they should be booking in another assessment ... But that's what they're like at [Region 1]. (INT6, Consultant)

3. Streaming and assessment

The assessment of jobseekers' distance from employment, and identification of any personal issues or barriers they are experiencing, plays a central role in determining which service stream of *Jobactive* they are referred into and the level of support they can be provided with. While in some countries such as Denmark the profiling of jobseekers' level of disadvantage is integrated with employment support, in Australia this assessment process is managed by Centrelink rather than *Jobactive* agencies, using a statistical profiling tool, the Jobseeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). Depending on the JSCI score, jobseekers are either referred directly into Stream A or a further, more comprehensive Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) is undertaken to determine if they should be referred into a higher service stream or potentially Disability Employment Services. In addition to determining which stream jobseekers are referred into, this assessment process also informs what mutual obligation and participation requirements jobseekers are required to meet to continue receiving payments.

Previous studies have identified concerns about 'problems of misclassification' (Caswell et al. 2010: 394) and the accuracy of this assessment process, which relies on the voluntary disclosure of sensitive personal information such as mental illness or substance dependency by jobseekers to Centrelink. Although this study did not initially set out to consider issues of jobseeker classification in detail, it became apparent during the early stages of fieldwork that the streaming and assessment of jobseekers by Centrelink was highly problematic. As the study progressed, increasing examples were documented of jobseekers who had been referred back to Centrelink for re-assessment, and of Stream C clients who had initially been referred to the agencies in either Stream A or B. The longitudinal data we collected suggested that:

- Problems of jobseeker misclassification were *very common*; and
- Substantial amounts of time were taken up with correcting the officially documented assessment of clients' barriers to ensure they were re-referred into the appropriate service stream.

Employment services staff that participated in the research reported a lack of confidence in how jobseekers were initially streamed by Centrelink:

We can never work out how Centrelink justifies why the jobseeker is in B and not in C; why the jobseeker is in Stream C and not DES. (INT14, Consultant)

I would say they're probably about 60 to 70 per cent accurate and then "Good Luck." You might be straight out of prison and you're an A. Who knows? We don't know what the measuring stick is anymore. (INT15, Manager)

A particular source of concern was the profiling of jobseekers via the JSCI, which, was perceived as a 'very robotic' (INT 19, Manager) process. Frontline staff reported that JSCIs repeatedly failed to identify the full extent of clients' barriers, which they attributed to the impersonal, phone-based nature of the assessment:

It's over the phone...It's 'Tell me about your, you know, have you been in jail? Have you been unemployed for more than two years?' People don't want to talk about stuff like that. So you find that JSCIs are really incomplete in that they really haven't got to know the jobseeker and it's really impersonal. (INT5, Manager)

[Jobseekers are] being asked these really quite personal questions and they're not prepared to divulge the information to a stranger over the phone. So [the assessments] often are, you know, fairly out of whack. (INT1, Consultant)

Most people don't want to disclose stuff over the phone to someone. And the difficult thing has been that when they do come to us with the barriers and then we are sat identifying and getting into the nitty gritty, you look at their JSCI and it doesn't reflect anything. So ideally I don't think the JSCI should be done with Centrelink at the beginning ... I know myself that I wouldn't be happy to disclose personal information over the phone to someone that I don't even know. (INT9, Consultant)

As our study only tracked jobseekers in Stream C we did not capture the full extent of the issues faced by agencies in this regard. Nevertheless, we identified multiple examples of Stream C jobseekers who had been initially referred in an inappropriate stream. This applied across all four sites, with nine of the Stream C jobseekers that we tracked having initially been referred to the agencies either in Stream A (5 cases) or B (4 cases).

We are very, very good at identifying a Stream A that should be a Stream C ... Company-wide we're good at that but I know that this site is very good at recognising that. (Manager, INT19)

So we quite often get a lot of Stream A jobseekers that the girls will see and go "That's not an A." ... They'll be talking to them quite quickly about medical issues and non-vocational issues and saying "Come back with some evidence and show me." So that way we can see that they're going to have what's required for an ESAt. (INT5, Manager)

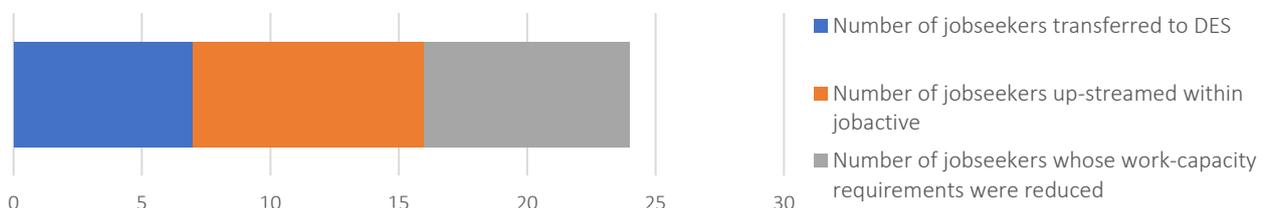
A repeatedly encountered issue was the inability of the JSCI process to accurately capture whether jobseekers had spent time in prison. Several of the jobseekers who had been up-streamed from A to C were ex-offenders:

[Jobseeker] actually came through initially as a Stream A and he's one of the ones that we detected at his initial appointment that he had served time in prison. (INT21, Consultant)

[Jobseeker's] a twice released prisoner, presenting as a Stream A. I wrote a note for him to take to Centrelink to request an ESAt. I didn't commence him on that day because he's come in as this full-time with several [issues] ... (INT1, Consultant)

The process of 'upstreaming' jobseekers was time intensive. Agencies were unable to arrange ESAt appointments directly for jobseekers in Streams A or B. These appointments had to be arranged by Centrelink, resulting in jobseekers 'having to go back and forward for the first six months' (INT9, Consultant) between the jobactive agencies, the medical practitioners (GPs or specialists) that they needed to obtain medical evidence for an ESAt from, and the local Centrelink office. Psychologists engaged by two of the agencies played an important role in mediating this process and advocating 'with Centrelink so [clients] get reassessed, and whether or not jobactive is the most suitable service' (INT17, Life-skills coordinator). At one site, an externally contracted psychologist was available one day per week to meet clients to conduct an assessment which then, according to the consultants, could be used 'as evidence for a re-assessment by Centrelink' (INT6, consultant).

Figure 3.1: Re-assessment of jobseekers (number of jobseekers)



At another site, a directly employed in-house psychologist performed a similar role:

We have that opportunity to work on a deeper level with the clients and then really assess, well to a point, which direction might be better for them ... To start looking at work or maybe they need a bit more direction with it or maybe ... no DES would be more appropriate, or even DSP. (INT16, Psychologist)

In total, 16 of the jobseekers that we tracked were successfully up-streamed by agencies during their period of assistance, either from a lower (A or B) to a higher (C) stream within Jobactive or from Stream C into Disability Employment Services. For example, seven of the jobseekers followed over the study were referred by agencies for a re-assessment by Centrelink that resulted in a transfer to Disability Employment Services. A further eight remained in Stream C but were re-categorised with reduced work capacity requirements. As Figure 3.1 shows, altogether just under a quarter of the jobseekers that we tracked were re-classified in some way during their period with the agency. This provides an indication of the magnitude of streaming and misclassification issues, and the considerable time and resources that agencies spent working with clients to ensure that they were in a suitable service stream, with appropriate participation and work capacity requirements. It also adds to the caseload volatility issues described in the previous section.

The first thing that I did was I got him an appointment with the psychologist... had his ESAt, he got his reduced work capacity. (INT6, Consultant)

I spoke with [support worker] over the phone... "Listen, I don't think we're the best service for him. And he needs another ESAt done." So between us, I organised the ESAt, and [support worker] said "Look, I'm going to go as his support person to make sure that it gets done properly." And as a result he's gone to DES. (INT 9, Consultant)

She's just got a lot going on ... and I personally don't think she's in a position to work. I think DSP is a good path, or DES ... I've let her deal with [counsellor] just to get this DSP, all the documentation ready, to apply for that. (INT13, Consultant)

4. Employment transitions and outcomes

A significant proportion of the jobseekers followed over the study exited from agencies' caseloads without finding employment. Nevertheless, we also tracked 20 jobseekers that agencies successfully achieved a full (26-week) employment outcome with. In addition, at the conclusion of the study, a further eight jobseekers were commenced in employment although they had yet to reach six months of sustained employment. A remaining 28 jobseekers from the total sample of Stream C clients followed were still unemployed and actively commenced on sites' caseload at the end of the study, with a further 6 temporarily suspended on sites' caseloads at the final point of data collection.

In summary, as Figure 4.1 shows, upon conclusion of data collection:

- 28 jobseekers were in employment, including 20 who had sustained six months or more of paid work;
- 34 jobseekers were either still actively looking for work or on a temporary suspension;
- 44 jobseekers had exited sites' caseloads without finding employment for reasons such as transferring to another provider, incarceration, or referral into an alternative program such as DES or the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS).

The full employment outcomes that we tracked included a mix of jobseekers who had found their own employment as well as others who had been brokered into a job placement by the agency. Agencies'

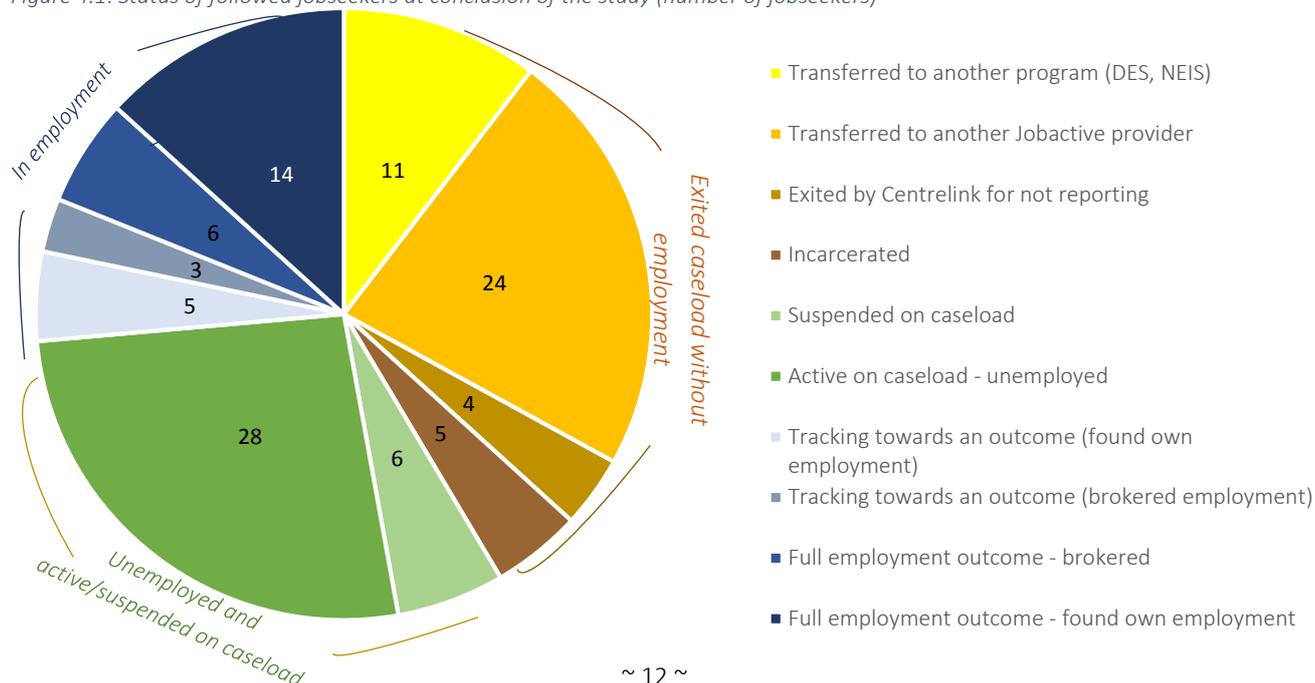
approaches to working with employers and brokering job placements are described further in Section 6. In one example, of a jobseeker who sustained six months of brokered employment, the consultant explained that it only took 'two appoints' before they had 'had him placed' in a steel-labouring job (INT1, Consultant). Although this was highly unusual, and the remaining examples of sustained brokered job placements all concerned clients who had been on agencies' caseloads for at least one if not several years. These jobseekers were eligible for wage subsidies, and all cases but one involved a wage subsidy paid to the employer. For example, one consultant described how a local medical practice that she placed one of her Stream C clients into a receptionist role with was attracted by the prospect of receiving a \$10,000 Re-Start wage subsidy:

I think the \$10,000 Re-Start wage subsidy has attracted the employer to give her a go. But one thing is the employer wants to go for a mature aged lady, they don't want any[body] young ... and she fitted the criteria perfectly (INT13, Consultant).

Our data suggested that wage subsidies were a widely used tool to reverse market Stream C clients to employers that agencies engaged with:

That's the main tool. You also say look, we have non-vocational people that we can help, in case there's something going on. We can help with clothing and so forth as well. But the majority of employers these days, because of all the

Figure 4.1: Status of followed jobseekers at conclusion of the study (number of jobseekers)



government advertising, already know about the wage subsidies and is one of the first things they ask about. (INT18, Business Development Consultant)

When you have got someone that hasn't worked in a while offer the employer wage subsidies ... You can sell it as "I know you have got to give them training so we'll subsidise this ... we'll make sure that we get all their work clothes." (INT20, Manager)

Wage subsidies were also offered to employers that jobseekers had independently secured work trials or placements with as a way of incentivising them to offer employment. Although our data suggested that very few of those who sustained six months of employment via their own found employment were on a wage subsidy.

[Jobseeker] has been taking her résumé around to all the local cafes and restaurants ... She did a two-day try out at a restaurant ... She didn't get a call back from that one, so I am going to contact them and maybe just go down there and offer the wage sub and have a chat with them. (INT11, Consultant)

Indeed, several of the examples of jobseekers who sustained six months of found own employment concerned clients who were only commenced on agencies' caseloads for a brief period before finding employment. For example, at one site, a jobseeker secured a warehousing role through contacts from a previous employer after only three appointments:

I probably only saw [jobseeker] about three times before he got placed ... I just did his résumé and, yeah, pretty much we just went through it and re-assessed it and tried to fill in some of the gaps that he had. I just made sure that he was right in his mind ... because I had referred him to another job which he didn't want to do ... So that was good to know when he was ready to go back. (INT9, Consultant)

In an example from another site, a consultant described how a homeless jobseeker who commenced on her caseload in mid-2017 found himself a job as a chef's apprentice by the following September:

He was literally squatting somewhere. But when he presented to us, you can't tell that he is homeless ... He wanted to be a chef apprentice. He found himself a chef apprentice ... My side: fix his résumé, provide some tram tickets/myki tickets for him to go for interviews, clothing assistance, everything he did himself. (INT14, Consultant)

The types of employment that jobseekers were placed into over the study were varied, and included: labouring roles, retail and hospitality positions, hairdressing, aged care attendant, beautician, nurse, medical receptionist, tyre-fitter, research services, cleaning, security operations, and warehousing roles. Beyond those who sustained six months or more of employment, we also documented many other examples of people who transitioned into work for briefer periods. In total, among the 106 jobseekers tracked:

- 48 were placed into employment for a period during the study, including 22 in brokered vacancies;
- Agencies achieved at least one 4-week or partial outcome with 40 of the jobseekers in the study, and at least one 12-week outcome with 29 jobseekers.

Placements ended prematurely for multiple reasons. In some cases, the placements themselves were only occasional jobs lasting days or weeks. In others, jobseekers were dismissed for misconduct or lost their employment due to ill-health. And, in many other examples, the employment was on a casual basis and the availability of shifts gradually declined whether through a lack of work or concerns about their productivity.

We had a job at [a furniture company], which I put him up for. He got it. He worked there but then they let him go saying they weren't busy any more. (INT13, Consultant)

She feel out of her job [working in car showroom] ... After having her teeth and that done she's actually got, like she had an abscess that she had to go and get surgically removed. Just a whole heap of things. So at the moment she is on a medical exemption because she's not well. (INT9, Consultant)

That employment [at a butcher's] has stopped because ... Well they put in new machinery, so she wasn't needed anymore. They put in a packing machine. (INT3, Consultant)

[Jobseeker] decided that he would light a cigarette in a non-smoking area on the work site and they sacked him. (INT1, Consultant)

The remaining sections of the report describe in further detail the approaches that the agencies took to working with their Stream C clients, including the types of support provided and how they sought to engage and work with employers to secure job outcomes.

5. Working with jobseekers

In this section, we describe the key ways in which the agencies and frontline staff in the study worked with jobseekers. This included the different forms of assistance that they provided jobseekers to (re)enter employment, such as job-search assistance; ancillary support with interview and travel costs when finding or commencing employment; training to enhance employability; and non-vocational support with personal issues. It also included aspects of the client-caseworker relationship that frontline staff regarded as important in engaging and working with 'harder-to-help' jobseekers with complex needs.

Client engagement and building rapport

A striking observation made early in the fieldwork was that almost all consultants were easily able to relay important information about their entire case load, including jobseekers' family circumstance, personal issues and more. Even staff not directly responsible for servicing particular jobseekers, such as site managers and consultants who managed other clients, appeared to know many of the agency's caseload by name.

During field visits, we repeatedly observed consultants discussing and updating colleagues about individual jobseekers, and without any need to refer to case notes. Yet when asked whether particular jobseekers that they were meeting or discussing were in Stream C, they often could not answer this without referring to their notes.

In interviewees, both consultants and site managers stressed the importance of treating jobseekers as individuals rather than viewing them in categorical terms. As consultants from different sites explained:

I don't really look at what Stream they are to be honest ... To me it's irrelevant. It depends on how they present to me and what their barriers are ... What stream they are in is not my primary focus. I treat them all like individuals with individual barriers. (INT 1, Consultant)

Everyone is an individual. So I quickly, I don't know. It's hard to put in place because I treat everyone differently. (INT8, Consultant)

Each client is different. I've never conducted an appointment the same as the first one. You can't because everyone's situation is different. (INT21, Consultant)

This view was echoed by several of the managers of the sites that we observed:

Yes we have a format to follow, yes we have guidelines. But...everybody is an individual. And I think the minute that people feel like they're being cow-tagged as the same that's when you are not going to get results. That's when people feel like they are just a number. (INT19, Manager)

Even though we work under black and white guidelines... it's not a black and white approach as to how you communicate and build that relationship ... It's always going to be different and I think that's the glory of it. Because there are so many different personalities [we're] dealing with. (INT2, Manager)

When asked about the qualities that employment consultants needed to do their jobs, many interviewees told us that the capacity to gain rapport and to listen to and have empathy for clients were highly important:

So a good consultant doesn't be powerful, doesn't be rude, doesn't be judgemental ... You have to be compassionate: empathy, sympathy, understand a bit. (INT19, Manager)

Communication skills... Not just how to talk to jobseekers but also listen to them. (INT14, consultant)

If you are going to go into being a consultant, you know what you have to do workwise. But to have the will to communicate and understand people will get you further. I always say "Put yourself in their shoes." I've been unemployed for three months before and I hated [it] ... So yeah, just communicate and be willing to support people. Like I say, always say, understand them. But support them. Don't have that sheet up, if someone yells at you or whatever, don't take it to heart because they're just frustrated with everything that goes on. We're here to do the job at hand but there's other barriers that they have in life, not their personal barriers they have Centrelink to deal with! (INT8, Consultant)

I think you've got to have empathy, I think you've got to have patience. And I think you've got to be able to listen. It's almost like a counselling role, you know, where you listen to them. (INT11, Consultant)

At the same time, frontline staff also recognised that monitoring clients' mutual obligation and participation

requirements was also a necessary aspect of their job. There was an acknowledgement of the need to be able to walk the ‘fine line between empathy and compliance’ (INT3, consultant) and that adopting a sterner approach might sometimes be required. One site manager perceived that this was the key quality that employment consultants needed in their jobs, explaining:

[A consultant] needs to be someone that can actually be stern. Because a lot have been in the system a long time ... So someone has to be stern - be able to be stern, hold their ground for more than one reason obviously, to deal with them and what they need to be doing – but also have some compassion because of obviously like domestic violence and everything we do have come through here. (INT10, Manager)

Our field observations provided further evidence of the emphasis staff placed on adopting a relaxed approach with clients, as well as the rapport that existed with many of their clients. In appointments that we observed, jobseekers were frequently referred to informally as ‘mate’, ‘darling’, ‘friend’, ‘a good girl’. As a consultant at one site explained when describing the difference between the case study office and previous offices that she had worked at within the same organisation:

It's comfortable ... That's the best way to explain it. They [jobseekers] walk in the door and they're like "Hi [consultant], how are you going?" Whereas before it was, you know, they'd come and sit at your desk and you'd feel like ... and I guess that's the one thing that is working well here is they're taking that interview feeling away from it. It's "come in and tell me about yourself." And then it's "how can I help you?" And it's also putting it back on the jobseeker as well ... "So what do you want out of this? How can I help you achieve where you want to be?" So that's one thing that I've found very much works with the clients, is asking them what they want not telling them what they need to do. (INT21, consultant)

Over the study, we documented multiple examples of jobseekers expressing praise and appreciation for the support they were receiving from their consultants. For example, during appointments, when consultants would go to collect documents from the printer or copier, clients would on occasion tell us that the consultant ‘is a really good worker ... the best [they've] ever had.’ In one appointment observed near Christmas time, the jobseeker presented her consultant with a box of Ferro

Roche chocolates as a gift while other consultants reported during follow-up interviews that they had been given chocolates or flowers as a gesture of appreciation after those clients had found employment.

Job searching and compliance

Turning to the specifics of the support provided, our data suggested that the nature of this support varied according to how frontline staff assessed clients’ capacity to work at given points. This was particularly the case in relation to whether to include job search requirements in clients’ Job Plans, and how many.

While pursuing employment was recognised as the ultimate goal, frontline staff also reported that some clients were a considerable distance from being ‘job ready’ and that non-vocational barriers would need to be first addressed.

The issues can be minute to wow. The wow ones, of course you're not going to go near employment at all... But some people they might be work ready, way work-ready, but they might have stopped taking their medication for depression or whatever. Working out if we can get them back on that medication that's the only barrier (INT20, Manager)

Accordingly, there was a perception among many interviewees that including job search requirements in clients’ Job Plans was not always appropriate - especially in cases of jobseekers with severe mental health issues or alcohol or drug dependence.

Of the 106 jobseekers who were tracked at different points over the study, 21 (or 20%) had no job search requirements for a duration of the study. Excluding one site which almost always required clients to job search, these 21 jobseekers were spread relatively evenly across the other three sites. In interviews, consultants explained their rationale for not including job search requirements in terms of the magnitude of the personal issues that clients were dealing with, coupled with concerns about the compliance implications that including job search requirements would have if people were unable to meet their requirements:

I don't have job searches in his Job Plan at this stage because I was trying to use the softer approach. (INT3, Consultant)

But I knew there was underlying things and I didn't want to pursue her looking for a job if there's no stable accommodation and she's got other stuff

going on. Because I don't want her to get worse. (INT13, Consultant)

We don't have job searching in there at the moment. And especially with this new compliance framework that's coming in... We've got to be putting into job seeker's job plans exactly what they're achievable of meeting. (INT21, Consultant)

Our data suggested that only three jobseekers in total across the four sites had been reported for non-compliance with job search requirements. Although Participation Reports were recommended for other circumstances (e.g. Work-for-the-Dole activities).

I've just had to actually PR him twice. He hasn't been in for job [searching] that I saw in his appointment last week. And I put it in his job plan and changed the days and everything, because he just wasn't coming. So we put it back in there and explained his requirements. So he didn't turn up last week again. So I've done one PR and I'm going to do the other one this afternoon. (INT11, Consultant)

Altogether, only 17 examples were documented of jobseekers who had either a Participation Report (PR) or Provider Appointment Report (PAR) lodged against them by the agencies in the study (at least three at each site, although one site alone accounted for 6 out of the 9 documented examples of jobseekers being PR'd). However, payment suspensions for missing appointments without a valid reason appeared to be more routinely used, with 32 examples of different jobseekers who had had a Non-Attendance Report (NAR) applied over the course of the study. Again, there were multiple examples from each of the four sites.

As exemplified in the comments reported below, the agencies as well as workers in this study had mixed and varying views about the use of the jobseeker compliance framework, and application of payment penalties:

I don't think strict compliance is the best way to engage all jobseekers. And I don't think there is anyone that would disagree with me on that. But sometimes, jobseekers, if there's no consequence to

not meeting their requirements, they won't. (INT1, Consultant)

We really don't [use penalties] ... very rarely mate. Why take something away from them when they haven't got much as it is? You know if it was something severe, yes. But, I mean, if it was just not coming to the appointment we could do a payment penalty. But where's that going to get us? It's probably going to get him angrier with us, not trusting with us... (INT20, Manager)

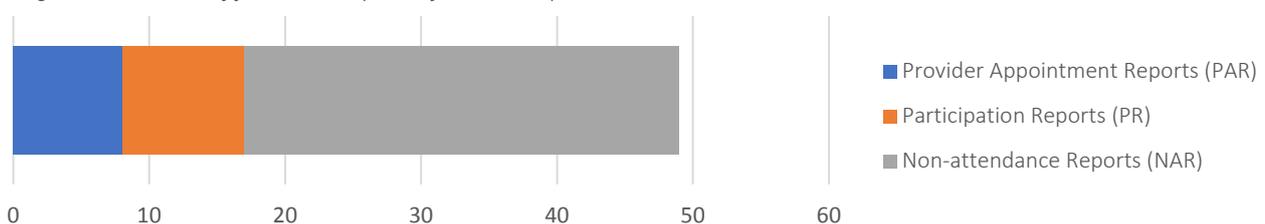
If their job search isn't done satisfactorily they will get PR'ed on occasions. Discretion can be used at times. If they don't turn up to their job search appointments without [a] reasonable excuse they'll get PRed for that one as well, and then obviously WfD non-attendance... (INT10, Manager)

A small number of the jobseekers that we tracked were required to attend job search appointments with their provider for several days per fortnight. Over the study, 12 of the jobseekers that we followed were required to undertake supervised job searching on-site for a period during the study. However, our data suggested that this approach was only utilised at two sites. Consultants at these two sites suggested the approach could help determine whether some of their clients were already working cash-in-hand. They also suggested that it could increase the number of jobs clients were applying for, and their chances of finding employment:

I think just bringing her into the office for that job searching a few hours a week really just quadruples what you're applying for. And obviously that's just getting more and more chances. So I'm hoping something very soon. (INT11, Consultant)

I've got some people coming in twice a week, job search twice a week. The ones, there are some people that have been on the system and I'm trying to weed out because I feel like they're working. So I've got a few of them, a handful, get them twice a week. (INT13, Consultant)

Figure 5.1: Number of jobseekers reported for non-compliance



Job-matching and labour market support

While a proportion of jobseekers were regarded as being some distance from 'job ready', the assistance provided to others focused on finding employment from early on. This assistance took several forms, ranging from 'soft skills' and 'work ready' training, to job matching and vacancy referral, to ancillary assistance such as work clothing and travel support to facilitate wider job searching and attendance at interviews.

Job-matching and vacancy referral

Our data suggested that job-matching and vacancy referral were a key focus of the support provided to Stream C jobseekers. As a manager explained during an initial field visit in which we observed numerous jobseekers being pre-screened and referred to information sessions for food-processing and call-centre positions that labour hire agencies were recruiting for:

We have catch ups daily where we are chit-chatting in the back office about what we are doing – referrals to this. And my biggest thing is just to encourage; to refer to every opportunity that you can. (INT2, Manager)

As discussed in Section 5, the agencies had different approaches to employer engagement and resourced this in varying ways. Nevertheless, at each site, we either observed or tracked in interviews numerous examples of Stream C clients being referred to vacancies directly brokered by the employment agencies:

So he came in and said he's now suitable to look for and obtain employment... So we applied for two positions ... And then last time I saw him ... we once again put him forward for four positions. (INT6, Consultant)

So I got him an interview yesterday. The employer was in here yesterday interviewing him as a labourer ... It was stuff he had done before. Plumbing, labouring... So, yeah, they offered him a position yesterday and he started today. (INT12, Consultant)

We had a job at [a furniture company], which I put him up for. He got it. He worked there but then they let him go saying they weren't busy any more ... Then the second job, I've got a friend who's a roof tiler and he needed a labourer. So I put him forward to my friend ... (INT13, Consultant)

I spoke to him two days ago. He had just attended an interview with [building supplies company] and then we sent him for another job for hotel

maintenance, and he's coming in to see me on Monday, let's see how things go (INT14, Consultant)

So [jobseeker] has recently, on Monday, just got a new job... Another brokered one too ... She's gone into housekeeping with a motel. (INT21, Consultant)

Over the study we tracked:

- 42 jobseekers who had been forwarded for brokered vacancies, although not all were successful in gaining an interview.
- 22 different jobseekers, including at least four clients from each site, who *commenced* in at least one position brokered with an employer.

This included referrals to group interviews with large employers and labour hire agencies, as well as individual vacancies with small, local employers. For example, during a field visit, a consultant at one site explained how the agency had recently developed a relationship with a labour hire agency in the arena that would regularly recruit its clients for casual labouring positions. The employer would meet clients on-site and conduct group interviews and was willing to hire jobseekers without a police check:

These guys are massive. Like we've probably put 10 people forward... If they show up, they're fit, they've got work. It's just setting up, like [events] and stages and things like that ... which is perfect for our people. Because they're not asking for résumés, they're not asking for Police Checks or anything like that. And its 24 bucks an hour, and we're jumping the loop of having to look at dodgy résumés that have got massive gaps in them ... I've got about five people coming tomorrow because the employer is coming in-house to meet with all our potential jobseekers. (INT13, Consultant)

A consultant at another site described how one of the organisation's Business Development Consultants (BDCs) had recently secured a large employer that simultaneously recruited multiple candidates for call-centre positions. She had just referred one Stream C client for a pre-screening session at a sister office:

It's one of our internal, our business development managers, pulled them in. So when we just get the email saying '[Company] is now recruiting' and we send them referrals ... They have usually 20, I think, at a time. They pre-screen them at our office in ... and then they give them a typing test, and just to see, tell them about the position and if they go to the next stage they get an interview (INT11, Consultant)

Our field research indicated that databases of available jobs were also maintained by each agency, which consultants reported they would use to discuss vacancies with clients during appointments. At two of the agencies, dedicated BDCs also worked on-site for a period each week, enabling them to meet with and discuss potential vacancies with both consultants and clients. Consultants at these sites reported regular contact with their BDC colleagues about potential vacancies for individual clients. This included maintaining a list of their most job-ready candidates that they would discuss with BDCs as well as arranging for jobseekers to meet with the BDCs:

I think I've put her for some retail assistant, I've put her for admin all-rounder, receptionist roles ... Probably every second visit I'll get her to meet with [BDC] just to refresh his memory. But she's actually on my job ready list that I provide to [BDC] ... We often provide [BDC] with our top 10 job ready clients so that's his focus for the month. (INT3, Consultant)

[Jobseeker] coming in every week to see me and [BDC]. And we put him to different jobs that he can do. I sent his résumé for a few different jobs like pick-packing, any job in labouring. (INT14, Consultant)

In considering whether to refer jobseekers to specific vacancies or not, frontline staff from the different case study sites expressed reluctance to refer clients to vacancies unless they aligned with clients' goals:

I've still got to make sure that jobseekers are getting referred to work that they want .. I don't want to start forcing people to do a job that they don't want because it's just not going to last. And the employer is not going to be happy. (INT4, BDC)

We get emails into the organisation that they're running a pre-employment program. So we'll look at our caseload, and we'll probably go through our Cs and Bs to see who's ready ... And then call them to see if they are interested. There's no use setting them up to fail and saying, "We're putting you through this, you have to do it." (INT8, consultant)

I need to check with her that it's what she wants to do. Because if it's not what she wants to do, she's not going to do it. She won't be able to maintain her focus, she won't be able to learn what's required because she needs to be in a situation where she trusts everyone, where she likes everyone and she wants to do it or it won't work out. (INT1, Consultant)

Ancillary support

This emphasis on job matching and vacancy referral was supplemented by practical and financial assistance to meet the costs of attending interviews and work trials, as well as assisting with documentary evidence that clients might need when applying for jobs. For example, during field visits we witnessed several examples of consultants organising Police Checks and Working with Children checks on behalf of clients during appointments. Consultants also reported that they had assisted several of the jobseekers followed in this study to acquire documentation such as birth certificates needed to confirm their identity to apply for jobs:

I organised his birth certificate because he said he's got no ID... He was alone here and he said 'I'm ready to work.' We actually applied for some jobs. We contacted previous employers that he had worked for. (INT13, Consultant)

We came in her and I got her to; we did the police check, her credit check, and did it online, got her photos done and then it just all came through the other day, approved. (INT9, Consultant)

Jobseekers were also provided with work clothing needed to attend interviews or work trials, as well as fuel vouchers or public transport tickets to cover the costs associated with travelling to interviews and work trials. In total, we documented at least 31 different examples of jobseekers who had been provided with either clothing or transport assistance, drawing on the pool of Employment Funds available at each site:

So the 13th of last month, he had two job interviews ... And he requested fuel vouchers. And I did go and get him one ... and also sent him to [workwear shop], he needed to get some clothes just in case he got the position so that he could start the next day. But he wasn't successful (INT11, Consultant).

It cost us about \$500 for the uniform. And I think one of the very critical ones is I remember on the second day of his job trial ... the Centrelink banking system wasn't working, he didn't get paid on time, and he didn't have petrol to go to work. He sent me an email or text or something asking me to call him back. He has no money to pay petrol and it ended up ... I asked him to go the nearest petrol station, put in the petrol and we paid it over the phone (INT14, Consultant).

In one example, a Melbourne agency paid for eleven days of taxi fares to enable one of their Stream C clients

who had recently completed a Certificate in Security Operations to travel to a short-term employment working as a security guard at a festival event. The client was a mature-age migrant jobseeker, who was unable to drive and hadn't worked in many years. But the job involved starting at 6am, so the agency paid for taxis so that she could gain recent work experience:

It's a very good experience for her because she hasn't worked in the industry for the last eight years. And there was a hiccup at the time that she got the job, because she doesn't drive. And the [event] started at 6. She worked from 6 to 10. We paid for 11 days' taxi for her to get there at 6 in the morning... (INT14, Consultant)

In the regional area where part of the study was conducted, the lack of public transport infrastructure increased the necessity for jobseekers to be able to drive in order to widen the range of areas where they could look for work. The data that we gathered on the forms of support delivered to clients suggested this agency placed a particular focus on assisting its Stream C clients to gain driving licenses. The wider organisation had an affiliated driver-training school, and the site used the Employment Fund to pay for a driving-instructor to give lessons from the site office. We observed this occurring during one of our field visits, but our follow-up interview data also identified multiple additional examples of clients who had been assisted to gain their driving licence. In total, six of the jobseekers that we followed at this site were assisted to gain a driving licence through the provision of driving lessons and organisation of driving tests. As the site's manager explained in relation to the priority they attached to assisting clients in this way:

A lot of EF money is spent on driving lessons ... Because you'll find, a lot of young ones but even people over 25, their parents might've not had a car. Their parents might've not had a license. So even if they were to get their license they've got no one to teach them. So we've actually got the 'drive-a-car' coming here today. (INT20, Manager)

In one example, the site also paid to register a car that a Stream C client had purchased while, during an appointment between the site manager and a client who had been interviewed for a job as a disability support worker, he offered to pay for six months of comprehensive car insurance if she got the job.

'Soft Skills' and 'Work Ready' Programs

In addition to the ancillary support identified above, 'soft skills' and 'work ready' training in aspects such as interview skills, goal-setting and résumé writing was provided to a number of the jobseekers in this study. Although only 13 of the jobseekers that we tracked were referred to such motivational and work ready skills programs. Almost half of these were clients of one Melbourne site, that had contracted the organisation Bounce to deliver its multi-week life-coaching and work-skills program on three separate occasions during the study. Six of the jobseekers followed at this site were referred into one of the waves of the program over the study. In interviews, the consultants explained that the site begun contracting Bounce to deliver life-coaching to clients on site after learning of other sites' positive experiences. They also perceived that the motivational and goal-setting focus of the program benefited Stream C clients who had been long-term unemployed. As a consultant explained in relation to a Bounce program that one of her clients had completed:

I mean they covered a lot of topics. First was résumé building, where their weaknesses are and where they lack confidence, and he addressed that. Goal-setting is probably a big one, and where they want to see themselves and realistically what kind of jobs they should be applying for. Yeah, it was really confidence building. They were part of a really good team where they helped each other and spent quite a bit of time and they gained rapport with each other ... (INT13, Consultant)

Another site organised Bounce programs on a more occasional basis, 'usually... about once a year' (INT1, Consultant). Two of the jobseekers followed at this site were referred to the program. During the remainder of the year, the agency's approach to 'soft skills' training involved clients attending two-hour modules on aspects such as basic computer skills, résumé preparation, or cover writing. These modules were delivered in the office's job search hub by the employment consultant primarily responsible for working with Stream A clients:

We used to do job search training, like a two-week, kind of soft skills course ... It's a good way to flush out people who might be working ... [Colleague] runs her job search hubs on the hidden job search market and, also résumés and interview skills, which is what that two-week program was. But she's broken it up into workshops ... So we put clients into that. It's a lot less though, because it's only two hours for the workshop ... (INT6, Consultant)

At a third site, three of the jobseekers that we followed were referred to the organisation’s internal ‘work ready’ program towards the end of the study: a six-day group training program spread over three consecutive weeks ‘which is all about confidence, interviews, résumés, lots of different elements of employment and things that lead up to anchoring it...’ (INT21, Consultant). The program was delivered on-site by the organisation’s training division and repeated monthly for any potential clients that the consultant and site manager identified could benefit from the program.

Vocational and accredited training

Whereas our data suggested that ‘soft skills’ and ‘work ready’ programmes were relatively infrequently used, the agencies in this study appeared to make more extensive use of formal training in specific vocational skills that they considered were in demand within their geographical areas. These included referrals to short courses (e.g. 2 days) to gain entry-level accreditations to work in specific industries such as hospitality, warehousing, and traffic management. Examples included supporting clients to gain work tickets such as Responsible Service of Alcohol, Food Handling, or Forklift licences. But several of the jobseekers that we followed were also assisted to undertake Certificate II level (or higher) qualifications in areas such as Community Services, Individualised Support (Aged Care), Beauty Therapy, and Civil Construction.

As Figure 5.2 shows, in total, across the four sites: 15 of the jobseekers that we followed were referred to a Certificate level or higher course while an addition 20 were referred to short courses, paid for by the agencies, to gain minimum requirements needed to work in specific industries such as hospitality (e.g. Food Handling Certificate) or construction (e.g. White Card). At each site, at least 30 per cent of the Stream C jobseekers that we followed were referred to undertake training.

Figure 5.3: Vocational sectors of short-courses and training programs (number of jobseekers)

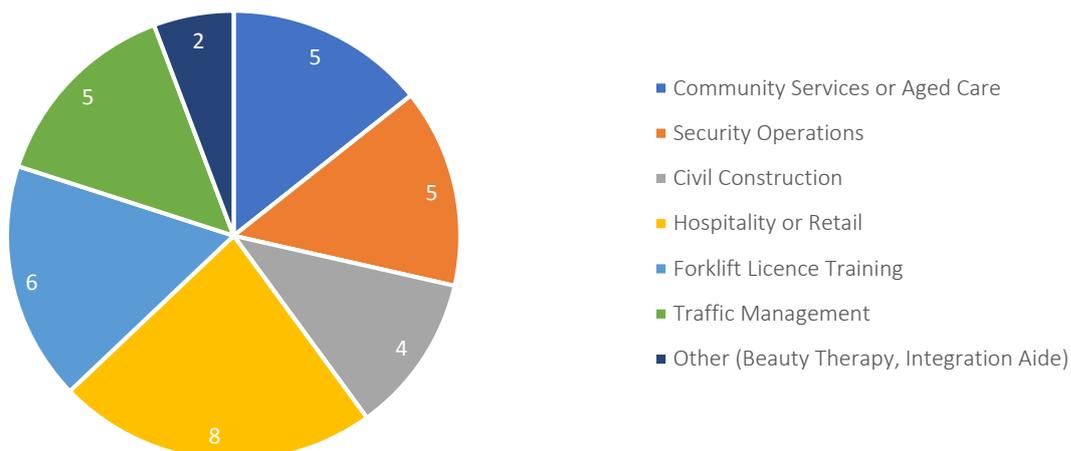


Figure 5.2: Number of jobseekers referred to training

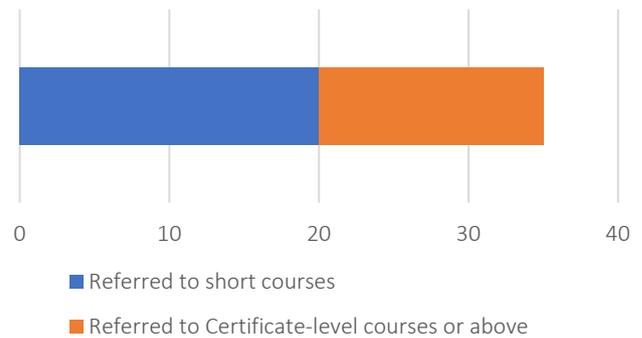


Figure 5.3 shows the different vocational sectors that this training related to, with short-courses in Hospitality & Retail, Traffic Management, and Forklift Licence Training accounting for the bulk of training referrals. Programs in Aged Care, Community Services, and Security Operations were also frequently used. The training activities that jobseekers were referred to were predominantly delivered by external Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Site staff reported that they had preferred providers they would use based on their previous experience of former clients who had subsequently secured employment following training, and also the level of contact that RTOs maintained in relation to documenting client attendance:

[RTO] have their onsite employment services. We don’t get a lot of work through them. But they do run good courses, and the feedback from them to us is really good. So if people are not attending, we always know about it ... I’m really quite particular about which ones I do use because ones that we’ve had in the past that have had good reputation and good outcomes for us. (INT9, Consultant)

Like we do with every training company, we normally send one or two with them, test the waters first ... From the first two that we tested the waters with, they [both] come out with employment. So then we sent as many as they would take off us, as many as we had that wanted to do it ... So we tried

them out, because we don't do training for training's sake. (INT21, Consultant)

... Are they learning the vocational skills to take them into work or am I setting them up to fail by using certain RTOs? So this is why I'm selective and will go with, and I tend to ask the guys here. Like [consultant] will say to me 'Who should I use for that?' And I say 'Well what suppliers do the consultants use here and what do they like using here?' And if it's good, and we can get our tax invoice on time and all of that works as well with compliance, then fine. (INT5, Manager)

The circumstances in which jobseekers were referred to training varied. For example, our follow-up interview data suggested that three jobseekers were referred to courses to gain forklift or bobcat licences because these qualifications were required by current or potential employers the jobseekers were in contact with:

Today he came up to me ... He goes "I've got a friend that they need a forklift driver I want to go for it." He says "I need a forklift licence." I said "Come in, let's organise it." (INT13, Consultant)

We're also putting him through, the employer says he needs like a Bobcat license, an excavator license. (INT8, Consultant)

Other training courses that jobseekers were referred to functioned as pre-employment programs that provided possibilities of employment with affiliated employers.

For example, shortly after the commencement of the research, one site began utilising an RTO that had a relationship with a major labour hire agency that provided concierge staff for properties. Jobseekers interested in working in security operations would be referred to an information session where they would be pre-screened by the RTO to determine their suitability to work in the sector. As part of the training, interviews would also be arranged with the labour hire agency and security licence and reference checks would also be arranged for those who completed the program:

We've just established a working relationship with a company called [name] and they work in conjunction with the recruitment agency that recruits all the ... So it's all a little bit of a 'we all work together.' So everyone and anyone that is remotely interested, we'll send to a pre-screen with them ... And some of them will go to the information session, and the pre-screening, and [RTO] will say 'They're not right' or the candidate will say 'No that's not the

right job for me' ... They will come out and they will meet one jobseeker at a time if we've got someone interested ... (INT3, Consultant)

The same site adopted a similar approach in relation to referring jobseekers to undertake training in Aged Care, where the RTO that delivered the training had established links to employers and incorporated work placements at organisations looking to directly recruit candidates from the program.

These approaches were replicated at other sites. For example, jobseekers at another site were referred to an RTO that delivered training in Individualised Support on-site at a major aged care provider in the area. The training included work placements at this provider, with the possibility of follow-on employment at the facility where the training was delivered. Shortly after the commencement of the study, a Stream C jobseeker that we followed was referred into the program before later going on to secure employment at the facility where the training was delivered, leading to a full employment outcome. The Site Manager explained that he had tried to persuade the jobseeker to do the training on several occasions previously:

I spoke to [her] on several occasions about doing Aged Care. Because I thought she was nice and soft, and spoken, and a lovely person ... We agreed to pay the concession fee because it's a smart skilled course, which will cost us \$240, which is not an issue. We will buy all the work clothing and all that. Because, with this particular course, it's actually run out of the aged care facility. So every day they see her walking in dressed and all that, which we've found is a very high rate of employment after it. (INT20, Manager)

This site also utilised a pre-employment program when referring jobseekers to training in Traffic Management, where the training was delivered as part of a broader recruitment process run by a labour hire agency seeking candidates to fill traffic management vacancies on infrastructure projects. At another site, in which two of the jobseekers that we followed were also referred to training in Security Operations, this was also via an RTO that had relationships with employers in the sector. A consultant explained that she liked to use this RTO for security training because the RTO arranged interviews with potential employers as part of the course:

They have information sessions every day... The other things is... because they are so big in the security training, a lot of employers are going

through them to get security officers. Ok [jobseeker] went for a few interviews [arising from the course], [another jobseeker] went for one interview, so there are interviews for them. (INT14, Consultant)

In other examples that we tracked, jobseekers were funded to undertake training via programs that they identified themselves and approached consultants about. This included examples of Traffic Management courses that jobseekers at one of the sites expressed interest in as well, as well as training in Beauty Therapy and as an Integration Aide worker that another site had paid for two of its Stream C clients to do:

And the Traffic Management course he just needed to do, he came back to me with one price of \$399 ... But it's a little bit too far away. So I said "Go and see if you can find one that's a little bit earlier so we can get you into it and out of it and hopefully working" ... So he's going to get back to me with which one he wants to do. (INT11, Consultant)

So he said he had a passion for maybe going back to school and doing a teaching aide course. So we got that, we paid for it. It was like six or seven hundred dollars ... He said can I pay for it? I said "Yeah, for sure." (INT13, Consultant)

After two or three sessions, [psychologist] came and told me, '[Consultant], give it a go for the Beauty ... She started the Beauty two years ago with another provider, and then now if she has to do it again we have to pay full fee, \$2,000, so we paid it. (INT14, Consultant)

Non-vocational support

In addition to vocational barriers such as a lack of qualifications or recent work history, Stream C jobseekers often experience personal or non-vocational issues such as mental ill health, risk of homelessness, domestic violence, or substance dependency issues affecting their (re)integration into employment. Supporting such clients to address personal issues via referrals to complimentary services was identified by many of those we interviewed as a key priority before clients were ready to look for work:

Drug addiction is probably the big one, and alcoholism. With that comes mental health and it's just going back to getting them the help, and that can take a lot. Some of them want to dive into work, and it's – I don't want to push that, I don't want to make them worse or dig them into a further hole. So

that's why I just concentrate on referring them to non-voc (INT13, Consultant)

Like I said, you've got to get that base right. So if there's someone that needs counselling or whatever, or drug and alcohol counselling in their barriers, so you'll ask them if they're going to see a counsellor or you could refer them to a doctor to get that assessment done ... (INT8, Consultant)

I suppose you've got to address their personal barriers first and try and assist them with that. Otherwise they're not job ready. So you could anchor them in employment, but they won't be able to retain it ... So it is about steering. Ok, first couple of appointments, we're going to talk about your barriers, see what we can do for that. Give them some strategies on, you know, it could be mental health care plans, that sort of stuff. Then, moving forward, you're trying to steer that conversation going "this is what you are here for". (INT3, Consultant)

So encouraging them to seek help is often where we come into it. And with that comes building a rapport ... so that they trust you enough that they'll listen to you when you suggest that they go to their GP. Because we're not psychologists; we're not drug and alcohol counsellors; we're actually here to help them find work. But overcome the barriers first. So that's always a matter of referral. We get people coming crying because they've been kicked out of home and they've got nowhere to stay. We will refer them on to emergency housing... So there are phone numbers that we can ring, and there is outsourcing and pamphlets and phone numbers that we can give our clients as well. (INT1, Consultant)

The data we collected on the forms of non-vocational assistance provided to jobseekers suggested that linking clients with appropriate mental health and counselling services was a particular priority for the agencies and staff in this study. This was the most common form of non-vocational support provided to the jobseekers that we followed. Over the study, we identified 21 different jobseekers that agency staff had tried to link into mental health and counselling services, often via first directing jobseekers to their GP to provide a formal referral.

One agency directly employed psychologists to work across its sites. A psychologist attended the site one day per week to see clients for one-hour counselling sessions, while a life-skills coordinator also worked on-site one day per week to triage clients to external

support and complimentary services. Consultants could refer their clients to this psychologist for up to ten appointments, which would be funded through the site's Employment Fund. Over the study, seven of the jobseekers that we tracked were referred to this in-counselling service:

So the social issues, the consultants will refer to say [life-skills coordinator], for example, and it's really just about housing or it could be legal or those types of issues ... So she'll see, 'Oh well this person actually needs counselling' and she can't provide that so she'll refer to me and yeah we can work together. Sometimes I'll refer to her too because I'm like "Oh well, the whole session was on housing" ... So yeah, then I'll refer to her for example. (INT16, Psychologist)

We work on addressing the barriers ... So barriers that we address could be housing issues, drug and alcohol, legal issues, financial issues. And then there is the medical, you know, the health issues that they have and that's where the assessments come in ... The focus is more on linking them in support services. But to get there sometimes it does take time. (INT17, Life-Skills Coordinator)

At another agency, the organisation also employed a psychologist to conduct client assessments and triage jobseekers to additional support services. Clients could be referred for three appointments, although the psychologist worked out of two other agency sites, each located 15km away. As the site manager explained:

We do have a counsellor ... and she works out of [two other agency sites]. So we do get most booked into there and then she can also further put them onto where they need to be ... She's got the contacts. She knows exactly who, what, when, how to get in. Otherwise we do send them, if they've got no one, we generally do get them to go to their GP and get a mental health plan done. And then they are actually referred to certain free sessions with someone in the field that they need. (INT10, Manager)

Over the study, six of the jobseekers that we followed at this site were referred to counselling with the organisation's psychologist.

The two other sites utilised externally contracted psychologists to work with clients on a more occasional basis, with fewer examples of jobseekers being referred to these external psychologists for assistance. At one of

these sites, the externally contracted psychologist was primarily utilised to provide a one-off assessment of clients and to triage them to additional support services such as to arrange mental health care plans or connect them with a Centrelink social worker. During one of the follow up interviews, a consultant explained that she had recently referred a Stream A client to this psychologist because of the multitude of issues he presented with:

I've used her recently for a Stream A client who is homeless, pregnant girlfriend, they're living in a car, he has legal issues, previous incarceration, drug issues, the list goes on. So far from Stream A client that's where he is at the moment. Referred him to [psychologist] last week and yeah we've already got the ball rolling in terms of he has an assessor at [crisis housing agency] that's helping them find accommodation. [Psychologist] is connecting him with a social worker at Centrelink. We also have him - he has a GP referral, which he has taken to his GP and has a mental health care plan. So now we're getting him connected with a psychologist ... Which takes a lot of the pressure off me trying to get these people connected with so many different services. (INT6, Consultant)

At the other, this psychologist conducted a series of counselling sessions with clients but was used infrequently over the study. Only two of the jobseekers that we followed at this site were referred to these counselling sessions, toward the end of the study.

They will get certified counsellors or psychiatrists to come out on site and work with a number of clients ... where they will come down once a week, once a fortnight, and have hour sessions with the client and we take that out of each client's EF. (INT21, Consultant)

Besides referring clients to in-house counselling, our data suggested the predominant approach was to direct jobseekers to their GP for a mental health care plan and specialist referral:

I've encouraged her to link herself with a mental care plan so she's got ongoing, and she's not chopping and changing from different psychologists to different psychologists. Sort of more consistent. (INT3, consultant)

But when they do a mental health plan, they've always got the option of using their regular doctor because it doesn't matter what doctor it comes

from, as long as their doctor understands their situation. We tell the job seeker what they need to go and talk to the doctor about and what they need from the doctor, so we give them all that information, and if they don't have a doctor we do use the Super Clinic. (INT21, Consultant)

Besides linking jobseekers with mental health and counselling services, we also tracked numerous examples of agencies assisting clients with securing housing. At one of the sites, three of the jobseekers that we followed were provided with financial assistance to secure rental accommodation. For example, during a follow-up interview, a consultant recounted how she worked intensively with a client in a domestic violence relationship to assist her in 'getting ... away from a very toxic environment':

[She] had numerous appointments here in this office with myself alone and had multiple conversations about trying to assist her to get away from it. I did a lot of confidence building with [her] ... So, then I assisted her in relocating out to be closer to work because at one stage she was living in her car. So, I think we helped pay her rent at the new place for her to be able to stay there because she fell behind a little bit. (INT21, consultant)

In another example concerning an indigenous client, the site utilised the Employment Fund to pay for a residential rehab program, and later, three weeks of accommodation in a residence for indigenous students:

[H]e needed payment to get into a rehab and detox [program]... I checked it all out and I assisted with that ... But out of the EF we actually paid for his entry into rehab... And when he was able to ring me he started ringing me. And then sometimes it got every week; every week he would ring me there for a long while. And we just got talking, and I could hear him getting better and better. He was just saying how what he wanted to do, and he didn't want to go back to that. And it was just a really good rapport we built. (INT20, Manager)

These examples of direct financial provision to assist in addressing housing and substance dependency issues were unusual. At other sites, our data suggested that the approach was predominantly for consultants to direct clients to external welfare agencies, or to refer them to the agencies' in-house psychologists to broker this assistance. In total across the study, eight of the jobseekers that we followed were either assisted with

housing issues or referred to external welfare agencies for such support:

When I first met her she was living in her car ... I suggested that she go to [welfare agency that provides crisis housing and supported accommodation for young people] and find some additional resources that way. (INT3, consultant)

So he spent that night in his car and he came into me the next day and didn't know what he was going to do ... So when I rang the housing, nobody answered. They said "we're too busy, we've got too many clients at the moment. We can't [take anybody]." Also I rang another emergency housing number and they told us what to do was just to go down to [suburb] – and I looked up all the addresses ... and then they will assess all the clients out the front and take them in. (INT11, Consultant)

The boarding house, that was something that when she was homeless our life-skills coordinator did give her a list of resources and where to go and call. And yeah, with our life-skills coordinator's assistance she got into the boarding house. (INT14, Consultant)

5. Working with employers

As described in the previous section, many of the jobseekers followed over the study were referred to numerous brokered vacancies by the agencies, with 22 jobseekers placed into at least one brokered position. In this section, we describe the agencies' respective approaches to employer engagement and the nature of the businesses that we observed agencies brokering employment with.

Approaches to employer engagement

Internationally, there is a growing recognition that in order for welfare-to-work programs to be effective 'employers' involvement is critical' (van Berkel et al. 2017: 503). The importance of employer engagement is also reflected in the Australian Government's discussion paper on *The Next Generation of Employment Services*, which acknowledges that: 'No employment service model can work without successful employer engagement' (DJSB 2018: 38).

The agencies in this study engaged with employers in multiple ways, with responsibility for managing employer engagement allocated differently at the various sites. One site had its own dedicated Business Development Consultant (BDC), who was responsible for gathering vacancies exclusively for the site and was identified by colleagues as playing an important role in contributing to the performance of the site:

I do think that part of [site]'s Stream C success is [BDC]'s proactiveness ... I know that jobseekers respond to him and call him all the time ... And he does have that brilliant rapport with them. I think that makes the world of difference. So, yeah, he's really good. And he does take the time to get to know everybody. He would know the majority of the caseload. We'll he'd know all the Cs definitely, the ones that are ready to go. (INT2, Manager)

At the two other Melbourne sites, the BDCs were shared across multiple sites within the same employment region. However, at one of these sites, the BDC worked out of the case study site one day per week whereas, at the other, the BDC was based at another office and corresponded with the consultants and other site staff mainly by phone or email. During an interview, the BDC at the first of these sites explained that he preferred to work directly onsite as he felt that this gave him greater access to jobseekers:

I find that if I'm at the site and I am looking for a certain candidate for a job, what usually happens is I listen at what is happening, the interactions happening with the consultant and the job seeker. Now, the majority of the time these poor consultants have got so much to do and so much admin and they forget about my vacancy. While I'm there, I go 'Hang on a minute, I've got this job, are you interested?' And usually I get 'Yes, I'm interested in working' and I just marry it up. And I get better results that way, being on site than being stuck in an office waiting for referrals because it slips their mind. They've got a case load of 100 or whatever it is and they're seeing appointments and they're answering the phone and they're doing their admin and everything else. (INT18, BDC)

The BDCs at the three Melbourne sites also managed the relationships with the employers during the post-placement phase, which included gathering payslip documentation for processing claims and responding to any identified employer concerns such as additional training that placed clients may have needed to sustain employment. At the fourth site, responsibility for employer-engagement was shared between the site manager and the employment consultant. As the Site Manager explained when asked about the agency's approach to employer-engagement:

I actually do employer-engagement as well... So, with the [consultants], we will set a certain time once a week where they can out and do face-to-face. And I will go out and do face-to-face. I do not like phone, I do not like cold calling. I'd rather get in the car and go and knock on doors and build that relationship. (INT20, Manager)

We set aside times and we'll go out ... And it's good too. We're local people. So I also have like all the social media and things like that. Like a lot of people are advertising through that now. So if I see something come on – there was a receptionist position that was advertised on there about two weeks ago. I jumped on and contacted that employer for one of our clients and she got back to me almost straight away. (INT21, Consultant)

Notwithstanding agencies' different approaches to resourcing employer-engagement, our data suggested that each site blended a combination of regionally-led employer relationships with local contacts with small-

and-medium sized businesses at a site level. That is, agencies simultaneously drew on both approaches. Sites in which frontline staff such as managers or business development consultants reverse marketed jobseekers directly to local employers also made use of regionally-driven approaches at a broader organisational level. For example, several of the jobseekers that we tracked at the site with its own dedicated BDC were referred to vacancies brokered by BDCs at other sites within the same organisation, or to vacancies managed at a regional level by senior management staff. Likewise, at the fourth case study site, where responsibility for employer-engagement was shared between the site manager and consultant. A staff member who managed this site for a period during the study also had responsibility for bringing in business from large employers in the region that the organisation could place jobseekers from multiple sites with:

I actually just got quite a large contract for us. When I say contract, we're one of the people that they're using. And that was from going out and doing marketing months beforehand and introducing myself, introducing our industry, talking about what we are, what we stand for... how it's about work ready people ... So now we have, between January and January, depending on their contract, up to one hundred vacancies ... So between [two other sites] and here we can fill that with our people, which is fantastic ... So that ball started rolling, two-to-three weeks ago we started on that. So we sent out seven people, six of those so far it looks like have been successful. They've been sent for their medicals, all the rest of it. (INT19, Manager)

Conversely, sites which predominately relied on BDCs based off-site to establish relationships with employers also tended to have their own links with local employers that the sites managed directly. As the manager of one of the sites where responsibility for employer engagement was predominantly undertaken by BDCs at a regional level explained:

Obviously, there's a lot of recruitment agencies in this area that we have got some rapport with [lists three agencies locally managed by the site] ... So they're all local to this area who hold most of the warehousing jobs. So we have to keep a good relationship with them if we want to jump the queue or anything ... We've got a couple of little scattered employers, just small businesses that will call on us when they need it and everything as well. (INT10, Manager)

Engaging with employers at both a local/site and regionally-driven level each appeared important to how agencies sought to place clients into brokered positions. By engaging with employers at a region level and sharing vacancies across multiple sites, agencies could expand the size of the businesses they were engaging with in the knowledge that they could fill positions from multiple sites to meet employer demand. Sharing vacancies between sites was beneficial for organisations' Star Ratings at a wider regional level, even if it meant that individual sites did not derive immediate benefit from those job placements. As a manager of one site explained in relation to the observation that several of the site's Stream C clients appeared to have been placed into vacancies brokered by consultants at other sites:

We're also marked on the Star Rating as a region ... If we get big numbers of jobs which sometimes we'll have an employer that may want 20 people, that will go out to everyone ... We've got to work together to keep the company alive and to keep us all ticking over. (INT20, Manager)

Similarly, when asked about the willingness of BDCs to share vacancies beyond the immediate sites where they worked, consultant at a Melbourne site explained:

Usually, they extend the placements out once they aren't able to fill them. I mean, they would still be meeting individual performance by still getting a job seeker placed into their vacancies. (INT6, Consultant)

The data collected over the study suggested that the agencies engaged with employers of varying size, ranging from large multinational corporations and labour hire agencies to small-and-medium sized local employers. The process for referring jobseekers to vacancies also varied depending on the type of businesses agencies were engaging with, and the number of jobseekers those employers were seeking to recruit.

Pre-employment programs

In some examples, agencies worked with very large employers and third-party recruitment firms looking to simultaneously recruit tens of jobseekers to fill roles such as food processing and production, traffic management on construction projects, and call centre positions for government agencies. This included some of the principal labour hire firms working with Jobactive agencies at a national level (DJSB 2018: 99), and who were working with several providers to bulk supply

jobseekers for multiple vacancies they had been contracted to fill. The referral process often involved clients attending information sessions run by recruiters and being pre-screened for roles before progressing to the formal interview stage.

Pre-employment training in job-specific skills demanded by the employers, and paid for by the agencies, was also frequently a component of this process. Examples included five-day pre-employment training in food handling and related certificates that jobseekers would need to work in food processing and production roles; multi-week training in driver operations for potential vacancies as rail replacement bus drivers; and pre-employment programs for kitchen-hand roles with aged care providers. For example, during a field visit at one of the sites, the site manager explained that a senior management colleague had brought an established relationship with a major labour hire company that was recruiting for tens of call-centre and meat processing positions across the region. Eighty jobseekers from across two of the agency's sites had attended information sessions and group interviews in relation to the vacancies within the previous two days:

It's just opening up so many opportunities for us. And I think yesterday, at the [call centre] info session, we had about 50 attendees over the two sessions. And for [process work positions], today, we had 30 interviews booked in ... For the meat processing, because it's employer required training, so the employer is saying that "in order to take on these jobseekers they need to have X, Y, Z". So [provider] is saying "alright, we'll get it up and running." (INT2, Manager)

The site's BDC similarly outlined the referral process for the food processing positions as involving:

First their résumés and contact information get sent to [labour hire agency]. Then they get briefly phone-screened. Then there's interviews, which are being held today ... I believe it is a group interview and one on one interview ... As I said, their clients – which are these big food manufacturers ... part of the contract with [labour hire] is that these guys need ASOP training or Food Safety. (INT4, BDC)

During the initial period of field research, the site was also referring jobseekers to information and pre-screening sessions for a five-week driver-training program delivered by an RTO that was recruiting drivers to work in the public transport sector.

I think the training that is going on right now, like the [driver training], I think that's leading to a job. They're doing their own screening and whoever they find suitable they'll put through the training, which will lead to a job. (INT4, BDC)

In follow up interviews, we tracked numerous other examples of jobseekers from different sites being referred to information sessions and pre-employment training as part of the vacancy referral process. This included one Stream C jobseeker at the regional case study site who had anchored a Traffic Management job on construction sites after completing a pre-employment training program, paid for by the provider and delivered in collaboration with an external RTO:

We put him forward for like, it didn't need any experience, like Traffic Control... And then he did the training and then he's anchored the employment out of it. And it was a paid course that he did too... It was kind of like another pre-employment program ... One of the other consultants from one of the other sites, she gets quite a lot of referrals from them. So, yeah, they got in contact with her. She does quite a lot of big projects and does like a pre-employment program. And then we put him forward for that, and he's doing really well. (INT21, Consultant)

In an example from a different site, a jobseeker that we tracked was referred to a vacancy with a palette manufacturing business, along with eight jobseekers from other sites, via a pre-employment program arranged by the regional BDC:

I referred him to a position through our Business Development Manager ... putting together palettes: sort of taking them apart and fixing them, and things like that. So he was one of about nine people put forward and I think he's down to the last two. So he's been for several interviews and trials ... and then he had to do the pre-employment program through them. (INT11, Consultant)

Relationships with local employers

Notwithstanding the use of pre-employment programs and regionally-brokered relationships with employers, our data also suggested that local relationships with employers managed at a site level also played an important role in securing vacancies for Stream C clients. Over the study, two types of relationships with local employers became evident. The first were employer-initiated contacts by small business owners, who unexpectedly contacted sites to recruit for

positions that had become vacant. These were new employers that the sites had no previous dealings with. In an example from one Melbourne site, a consultant described how she had just referred one of the Stream C jobseekers who we were tracking for a hospitality position that an employer had contacted the site about:

A new café has just opened up, I took the job yesterday ... Very easy to get to and it's café [work]. So there should be no nights. You know, it'd be perfect for her. They want wage subsidies, which she's got, and they just want someone 20 to 30 hours per week. (INT11, Consultant)

At another site, two of the full-employment outcomes that we tracked arose after nearby employers contacted the site to recruit for individual positions. One was a plumbing supplies store located on the same street. The other was a medical practice that was looking to hire a mature age jobseeker to avail of the Restart Wage subsidy. In each case, which both concerned clients who had been unemployed for several years, staff were able to refer the jobseekers for a direct interview with the business manager without the need for any pre-screening of candidates or pre-employment training:

An employer two-doors down walked in. They sell plumbing supplies. They were needing two staff members. I put [jobseeker] up, they loved him. They employed him straightaway ... He needed to actually order stock and so forth. I thought he would be good with customers and the administrative things ... (INT13, Consultant)

Then I came across this job [after the business contacted the site], but they were looking for a more mature person. I thought you're not standing, you've done a little bit of admin work, it's not hard, telephone work, they're willing to train you and it's just up the road ... They liked her. I made sure I was liaising with her employer every second to third day to make sure things were going to happen. (INT18, BDC)

At the regional case study site, one of the Stream C jobseekers that the agency achieved a full employment outcome with - a victim of domestic violence - was placed into a cleaning job at a caravan sales yard. The yard was owned by an acquaintance of the site's employment consultant, who learned of the vacancy through a mutual friend. The consultant discussed the vacancy with the site manager, who met with the employer to assess the suitability of the vacancy:

The employer actually came through a personal friend of mine who is a friend of hers who owns the actual ... like a sale yard ... So, they wanted someone that had a really high standard in cleaning ... So I knew that she'd be great for it. And I also explained to [jobseeker] when referring her for the job that this was a personal friend of my friend, so unless she's going to give it 110 percent I was going to not put her forward ... So [colleagues] actually went out to site to meet with the employer, to make sure that [jobseeker] would be suited for the job and she would fit in with the atmosphere out there. And she did. Like I just said then, there was absolutely no issues whatsoever. And I think they actually took a wage subsidy. They did a wage subsidy. They've just offered up another vacancy. (INT21, Consultant)

The second type of local employer relationships concerned businesses that site staff had an established relationship, and history of placing candidates with. Examples included a laundry detergent manufacturer that the BDC at one Melbourne site had placed several Stream C jobseekers with, and a railing manufacturing business that the manager of the regional agency had placed 13 jobseekers with.

They're a laundry detergent manufacturer ... This employer tends to take them on based on attitude and obviously ability but doesn't really do much interviewing. She'll give them a trial and go from there, judging on their work rather than appearance. So we've had a few there. (INT4, BDC)

This relationship I built with this employer when I first took over ... So what I done one day is when she needed people I actually asked her if I could come out and meet her face-to-face instead of email and phone. So once I done that we supplied [her] with a good person, who had been unemployed for two years. So during all this time she refuses to speak to anyone else in the company bar me because I think we just built that bond where I don't fluff around with asking her anything, she doesn't fluff around with me. We answer each other if we need to answer each other. There's no big spiel about any guidelines or anything like that. She's not into, and I don't want to put that pressure on her... So during that time she's come back to me several times with the trust that I will refer decent people. So she doesn't use anyone else now bar me. (INT20, Manager)

A feature of these linkages was that they tended to be person-to-person centred and dependent on the accumulated trust between specific staff and individual business managers. More generally, staff involved in brokering relationships with employers reported that they preferred to cultivate direct contacts with small-to-medium sized business owners rather than dealing with the HR departments of larger organisations:

When you have got employers that are big companies, they have to use the HR department. But it's really, really hard to build a rapport with the one person because you call that HR department, mate, you're going to get 10 different people every time you call ... We prefer to use the more direct employers where we can work with. Normally, I don't flog the employers I work with. I normally try and work directly with either general managers or the overseers, not the HR department ... You build that rapport. You do the right thing by them, they'll come back to you every time. (INT20, Manager)

Primarily just local... So probably smaller to medium-sized, where the manager that I'm speaking with also does the recruiting rather than going through the whole HR Department and whatnot. That's the most luck we've had ... (INT4, BDC)

Two additional Stream C jobseekers that we tracked to full 26-week outcomes were placed by agencies into vacancies with local employers that they had pre-existing relationships with. One example concerned a mature-age jobseeker from a migrant background that had been placed into full-time dispatch role with a bakery supply business that the site's BDC had previously placed jobseekers with. The other example, from a different site, concerned a jobseeker who had

been on the agency's caseload for five years that they anchored into a full-time position as a trades assistant with a local manufacturing company that the site manager had cultivated a strong relationship with:

... He purely got that job on us selling his attitude to the employer, as he hadn't had any dispatch experience in Australia, not even from his home country. That was a unique role. He didn't really have the experience as to what the employer was looking for ... When they interviewed him they were happy, and put him on, and they've been happy ever since. (INT10, BDC)

... I sent some people and she was like, "I didn't like none of them." I said, "Well, I've got another good bloke. How about I just send him out see you for an interview" ... So I sent him out and virtually she liked him, put him on, we offered the wage sub ... I think the good thing was it was a built relationship for six months or more with the employer where she started having that absolute trust in my referrals to virtually sometimes not even look at their résumé ... She took another bloke off us that she looked at his résumé and wasn't even going to interview him. And I said, 'You need to interview him.' She interviewed him, he got put on permanent. (INT20, Manager)

These examples of full-outcomes achieved with local employers contrasted with the results that agencies achieved in referring Stream C jobseekers to jobs brokered with labour hire agencies, none of which resulted in full-employment outcomes. However, this may have reflected the short-term or casual nature of these positions. The small scale of this study does not allow us to draw any conclusions from this difference in result.

8. Work environment

Work environments and the nature of inter-personal relationships between management and staff can have important impacts on organisational performance. For example, studies of organisational characteristics and the delivery of case management within human service organisations suggest that the degree of worker participation in organizational decision-making and peer support from colleagues influences the quality of the caseworker-client relationship (Raeymaeckers & Dierckx 2012; Wallach & Mueller 2006). In this section, we report on the work environments of the case study sites, including the team dynamics observed at the agency offices and the nature of the supervisory relationship between managers and consultants.

Team work and peer support

Our observational and interview data suggested that there was a high level of collaboration between staff at most of the sites. When asked to reflect on the factors contributing to their office's performance, the most common explanation given by interviewees was the level of team work among staff at their office. Although the importance of a supportive site manager was also mentioned by several interviewees alongside this. As frontline staff from each site explained:

I think we're a good team, we all like each other, we all get along, we all want good outcomes for each other. So I think team work here is really good and I think that's important ... (INT1, Consultant)

It's a small office. I think no one mucks around, we all sort of work pretty solid. And [site manager] runs a pretty tight ship ... And we work as a team actually, I would say. We're together in this to get that [Star Rating] up to perfection. We work as a team and we help each other out all the time (INT11, Consultant)

We back each other up, I think this is very important ... I think it's team work effort and I'm glad that [name] is a very good manager. He really, he backs us up all the way, all the time. (INT14, Consultant)

I think as a team we work well, there's a lot of communication ... We're on the same page, we know what the barriers [are], we have a goal, try to address it. A lot of activity happening as well. You know I see [site] doing a lot of referral to courses, to training that we have there So I think just the fact that there's a lot of activity and we're all working together. (INT17, life-skills coordinator)

Good team work, understanding, treating people as individuals, non-judgemental and actually getting the tasks done ... Like if we say we're going to do something then we're going to do it. And they know that. They feel the power of that when they come in here, they feel that energy that comes from management and staff. (INT19, Manager)

Those with experience of working in different offices perceived that the case study sites had a stronger team work ethic than previous sites they had worked at:

It's a very strong team, stronger than what I've worked in, in the past ... I just think the consultants work really well together ... [T]here's always a lot of conversation between the four of us. It works really well. Management is great. (INT6, Consultant)

I find everyone is passionate, everyone cares, and everyone is happy to pick up where someone else isn't available ... I do find compared to other companies I've worked for yeah if you've got a good working team. And there's a lot of knowledge out there so that helps. (INT7, PPS officer)

Aspects of sites' servicing models necessitated a collaborative approach, such as when referring clients to brokered vacancies which depended upon coordination between the business development and employment consultants. But the nature of collaboration between staff also extended to assisting each other with various administrative and job tasks, as well as discussing and taking advice from colleagues about strategies for servicing individual clients.

During field visits, for example, we observed multiple examples of staff jointly assisting with administrative and job tasks such as arranging claims documentation, relocation subsidies, administering JSCIs, and purchasing items for clients such as work clothing, fuel vouchers, and mobile phones. Another frequently observed pattern was consultants discussing client cases in order to get advice about how to resolve issues they were experiencing such as low attendance rates or difficulties getting jobseekers to interviews. Even at the smallest site, which was staffed by a part-time manager and consultant, colleagues frequently dialogued over upcoming pre-employment programs and job vacancies that may be suited to particular jobseekers on the site's caseload. The site manager also physically assisted with purchasing interview clothing for several of the jobseekers attending appointments during field visits, as

well as joining in on some appointments to discuss training options and potential job placements with clients meeting the consultant:

I still see people and help everyone ... There might be a jobseeker that comes in and I might walk up and buy 'em stuff. Like whatever they need, I might organise the training for them; I might organise this for them' I might do their résumé for them ... I might have people that need re-engagements that walk in but the diary is full for the consultant. So I'll just make a re-engagement. (INT20, Site Manager)

At another site, meetings were held at least once a week to collectively discuss jobseekers who were entering the Work-for-the-Dole phase or who consultants were uncertain how to progress towards an outcome:

We have ... like a little meeting in the morning just to see what we are doing with each person predominantly and getting advice off others "What should I do with him?" (INT13, Consultant)

The two Stream B/C consultants at this site also reported occasionally swapping some of their clients to see if colleagues could make progress with these jobseekers in a way that they had been unable to do. Over the study, four of the jobseekers tracked at this site were swapped between the consultants for this reason:

I think I'm not getting him anywhere ... So I think the good thing about us is okay sometimes when you get kind of stuck with the jobseeker, we will just swap the caseload ... So, with this man, and anytime when we are not getting progress that's the time when we think about "how about we swap some caseloads". (INT14, Consultant)

I just came to a point where I didn't know what to do and I thought [colleague] may have a better opportunity... Sometimes you get too fixated and you can't see maybe there is a better option. I got to that point, so I said "[Colleague]". (INT13, Consultant)

At other sites, the processes for collectively problem-solving client cases were less formalised. Nevertheless, the open plan layout of the offices coupled with the familiarity of many jobseekers by name to most staff appeared to facilitate frequent informal exchanges among colleagues. This included regularly discussing and taking advice from other consultants and site managers about approaches to client servicing or approaching colleagues with clarificatory questions about whether particular items of expenditure such as

car servicing or driving lessons would be appropriate interventions for Stream C clients. As the manager one site explained in relation to the frequent exchanges we observed between her, the consultants and business development consultant over individual clients:

We have site meetings once a month, we have catch ups daily where we are chit-chatting in the back office about what we are doing – referrals ... I'm able to communicate with staff all day ... and I get to understand about what blockages they have and how we can, "ok let's work on a strategy on how we can get over that."...So we'll all turn around and discuss it together. And I think that is really good because we are open, transparent, chit-chat and are able to come up with solutions or a strategy if they think it's not doable. (INT2, Site Manager)

During field visits at two offices, staff were observed joining each other's appointments to reiterate messages colleagues were conveying or to provide additional advice to clients. Examples ranged from consultants joining appointments to recommend that jobseekers needed to be referred for a re-assessment, to communicating available job vacancies, to offering guidance about interview clothing and what clients should say in meetings with potential employers:

I think it's a good thing about the open space office, we can hear the conversations ... And I love to join in for the conversation. But I'm glad that I have a very good team and they don't mind me to just jump in sometimes. (INT14, Consultant)

Supervision

While our data indicated that frontline staff regularly sought advice from colleagues and managers about what steps to take with clients, consultants at the same time reported that they were supported to make individual decisions about the management of their caseloads; that they could make decisions without seeking management approval and were rarely instructed to work with clients in prescribed ways. Although their performance in terms of job placements and employment outcomes was closely monitored. At all four sites, consultants had personal monthly targets for the number of placements, 4-week, 12-week, and 26-week outcomes they were expected to achieve. Progress towards these targets was written up on white boards displayed on office walls and regularly reviewed by managers:

We have monthly catch ups is to go over their caseloads. Make sure what's in the pipeline for the next month, let's review your last month? ... In conjunction to that, there is an individual development plan that we set quite clear objectives and targets for them so they know exactly where they are at, exactly what's expected of them as well. And that's usually broken down into a Stream B target and a Stream C target for them as well, about placements. (INT2, Site Manager)

So Monday I will go through all the reports ... Have we increased performance over the week? We have all these reports on performance. And when [name] is claiming her outcomes ... with her 12 and 26-weeks I can see the report and whether, compared to the national average, that has taken us up or down and how many more outcomes we need to be region best. (INT5, Manager)

We get monitored on all our placements, our outcomes. The ones in red [on the whiteboard] are what we're supposed to get and the ones in blue are what we've got to date. (INT9, Consultant)

[Provider] has its own system where we can go and input their monthly results. So if we see something falling behind we can pick up on it ... So it's like a performance development system so that that way we monitor it. (INT10, Manager)

What we're doing now is we're asking our staff what they have got in the pipeline and what they think they can achieve ... And then, that is their target for the month ... With the outcomes it's a little bit different ... I'll predict at the start of the month that we're going to get 10x4s, 6x12s, 10x26-weekers and then that's what we're going to work on. So we've got to get that across the line. (INT20, Manager)

Despite this emphasis on performance and outcome measurement, consultants generally perceived that their managers afforded them latitude to make decisions about their caseload provided they remained within the parameters of the contract guidelines. For example, they reported being able to choose which training providers to use when referring clients to courses and that they could make purchases for clients without requiring manager approval – unless it was a big amount. Although several commented that, as a matter of courtesy, they would often run those decisions past site managers, they did not feel compelled to do so:

If I'm not sure about something I go and ask. So I report because I choose to... and maybe that's partly why you enjoy your job because you aren't being – there's no micromanaging at all. (INT1, Consultant)

Because I've been here for a while, I usually take onus on myself to make a decision. But we would definitely run it by them, especially if it was a big expense. But otherwise, the majority of the time, we would make our own decision. (INT6, Consultant)

There's no boundary there... If it's a massive amount, probably if it was over say three or four hundred, yeah I would run it past [site manager] ... There's no figure per se that I have to speak to [site manager] about it. (INT13, Consultant)

Unless the amount is more than \$500, or I think there's a dilemma there, as long as they are meeting the guidelines and we are helping the jobseekers and the jobseekers are genuine to look for work; work-related items, yeah ... (INT14, Consultant)

In interviews, managers likewise reported entrusting consultants to make individual decisions and that they avoided prescribing how clients should be managed:

I don't dictate how they work with Stream Cs because they're performing well with Stream Bs and Cs, so they must be doing something right. If I hear something I'll say something. If they're not making use of a resource or a tool ...or maybe I've had an experience with a scenario that they haven't ... (INT5, Manager)

I can't tell them how to see a jobseeker. I haven't been in that for years ... Each of them have got their own traits and they manage their caseloads differently, and they manage each individual differently. (INT15, Manager)

They're left alone unless ... If something was to not look right or start dropping off then maybe a little bit of micro-management will close in... Other than that they're left. They come - the doors are always open and they come in and ask away if they're ever not sure. (INT10, Manager)

I find being relaxed you get more out of your staff. Of course, if staff are doing wrong you've got to pull them aside and have a chat ... just let them know that it could be done better another way. Yeah very relaxed. If everything is going with the flow I'm fine as long as they are getting me referrals when I've got jobs. (INT20, Manager)

Training

A third aspect of their work environment valued by staff besides peer support and having a supportive manager was the training that they were provided with. At the commencement of the study, nearly half the employment consultants working with Stream B and C clients had only been working in the industry for less than two years. Each site also experienced a change in consultants during the study. Consequently, there was a need for agencies to regularly train new staff. This is an issue more widely faced by Jobactive providers, with industry-wide surveys indicating an average annual staff turnover rate of more than 40 per cent (NESA 2016). Our data suggested that staff received training through a combination of formal training delivered off-site over several days and job shadowing experienced colleagues to gain a practical understanding of client servicing.

At one site, where two consultants had been recruited from outside the sector, these new staff members were mentored through job shadowing an experienced consultant for six weeks before taking over the site's Stream B and C caseload. At two other sites, new consultants shadowed colleagues for two-weeks:

I got [a] really good two weeks of training where I would job shadow ... So I would sit with the other consultants and it was interesting too because you got to see how each consultant works with their clients. And everyone is different. Everyone has their styles and their groove and what works for them. And I also then got training with the site manager as well. (INT21, Consultant)

I've shadowed E.C's. I've done all the, they provide a vast amount of training. They provide a vast amount of support. It's just what registers ... We have done suicide prevention. I've done that component. But it's only been a day's training. However, you can expand on that if required. (INT3, Consultant)

This job shadowing supplemented formal training modules in aspects of the system, the compliance framework, administrative and IT systems, and strategies for working with particular client cohorts, such as indigenous clients or jobseekers, who had experienced domestic violence:

They will be employed by us and, if possible ...they will go to [head office] for a week and people will run through things with them, training. And then whatever they need, so we've got [name]. She's the

job placement capability manager. So what [name] will do, she'll do a lot of mentoring with them. She'll come sit with them at appointments. [She's] very good on engaging someone ... Then we've got [name], which she's more of a technical, systems [person] ... So if I've got a new starter tomorrow [she'll] come out and spend a week with them and she'll go through the systems with them. Like job plans, everything like that ... and then we've also got a trainer in Work-for-the-Dole. (INT20, Manager)

I think once every two months, there's formal employment consultant training. So whether it's a freshen up on some stuff that we've done or something new that's been introduced by the Department that our Systems Manager has looked at and then filters it down Anyone new, we have a proper induction where they spend it at Head Office, one day. They then come here and are generally buddied up with someone and then within the next fortnight there's a training schedule that we set up. (INT15, Manager)

Just recently [provider] have put a big package together that I was a part of ... You do a week block and then you have a break and you come back and do a three-day block and then you come back and do a one-day block. (INT8, Consultant)

Over the study, agency staff also received update training as new programs or guidelines were issued by the Department that they needed to be informed about:

Last year was about 10 times ... So health and safety, then just updates on new programs and how we use the programs, and how to assist our clients correctly ... Some of the department's systems have updated so we just need to learn a bit more about it and know how to use it properly. (INT12, Consultant)

We do compliance all throughout the year if any new compliance training comes up ... [Site manager] has sent me off for every single training so that I can have a refresh. So last week I went to [another site] spent a few hours doing claims training, which is a really good refresh. Yesterday I did Work-for-the-Dole, and then next week I have something else. But I've got something every single week, and it's intensive. You know, they go through the contracts and the guidelines and they tell us exactly what we can do and what we can't do. (INT6, Consultant)

Conclusion

Australia's contracted employment services system is regarded internationally as one of the most efficient public employment services systems. This is in terms of the average cost to the government per employment outcome and the speed at which many participants transition from welfare to work (OECD 2012). However, it has consistently struggled to achieve outcomes with more disadvantaged, 'harder-to-help' jobseekers facing a combination of personal and vocational barriers to employment and at risk of very-long term unemployment.

A small number of providers have, however, consistently achieved high outcomes with this cohort, in terms of the proportions of their Stream C caseloads that they have placed and sustained in 26-weeks or more of employment. This report has detailed the findings of exploratively case study research with four such providers to understand 'what works' in supporting disadvantaged jobseekers with complex needs.

The exploratory nature and small-scale of the study limits the extent to which the findings described in this report can be generalised to explain the characteristics of 'high performing' employment agencies more broadly. Nevertheless, the study sheds some important light on the challenges that agencies face in working with more disadvantaged jobseekers. These include:

- *High rates of caseload attrition and suspensions* due to jobseekers moving address and transferring to another provider, becoming incarcerated, or receiving temporary medical incapacity exemptions from their participation requirements;
- *Streaming and assessment misclassifications* and the substantial amounts of time and resources that re-categorising jobseekers and referring them for re-assessments takes up.

It also offers insights into the servicing strategies of high performing agencies. In particular, the data collected via fieldwork and interviews suggests that these agencies:

- Emphasise the necessity of treating jobseekers as individuals rather than in categorical terms;
- Blend local and regional approaches to employer engagement;
- Provide repeated referrals to job placements, accompanied by ancillary job search support such as interview and work clothing and assistance with transport costs.

High levels of teamwork and collaboration between the site managers, employment consultants, and business development consultants responsible for supporting Stream C jobseekers into employment appear to be a further characteristic of the work environment of most of these agencies.

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