



Northern Futures

2008-2016

Retrospect & Prospect



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Executive Summary

Northern Futures 2008-2016 Retrospect and Prospect: A Critical Assessment was commissioned with the aim of drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of *Northern Futures* service delivery approach and to offer evidence-based recommendations for future improvements.

The report considers in detail the economic and policy contexts in which *Northern Futures* operates and provides an examination of comparable programs; a detailed assessment of *Northern Futures'* Strategic Plans and the experiences of some of their clients and employers. From this evidence an array of real strengths have emerged and some challenges and areas for improvement have been signalled.

Key Findings

The general conclusion is that *Northern Futures* is a highly effective organisation which provides multi-faceted targeted and individualised support to the long term unemployed in the northern suburbs of Geelong. It is an effective advocate in support of its clients and has established a range of partnerships to facilitate training and employment for their clients and to meet the needs of regional employers. It is a cost effective and socially impactful operation that truly changes lives for the better.

***Northern Futures* - Strengths**

Longevity and scale – *Northern Futures* has been established in one form or other for over eight years. In that time, it has forged strong links with key stakeholders and delivered real improvements to the lives of close to 1 000 variously disadvantaged and disengaged residents of Geelong's northern suburbs. The small scale of the operation allows ready communication and alignment of goals across the region.

Reputation – *Northern Futures* has long worked pro-actively with unemployed residents of the 3214 area and in its considered approach to clients, has built up massive local credibility and status. It is regularly approached by the unemployed, Jobactive agencies, employers and key regional organisations for advice and to take on additional activities on their behalf.

Value for money – *Northern Futures* data for 2015 shows that through their program they can move a long term unemployed person into paid work for a one-off cost of approximately \$13 993. This compares favourably with the cost of New Start Allowance at \$13 746 per annum for a single person (\$14 869 if they have children) which does not include additional benefits paid for children or rent subsidies. This comparison provides a clear indication that *Northern Futures'* programs are cost effective as well as socially beneficial.

***Northern Futures* Steering Committee** is long established and comprised of key regional stakeholders and people able to deliver (be it jobs, political influence, clients, training or relevant insights). At times members have been very effective lobbyists for *Northern Futures*. Composition is regularly reviewed and new members recruited for their capacity to assist in achieving organisational goals.

Bridges Out of Poverty is the philosophical framework that underpins Northern Future's approach to service delivery. It emphasises both individual responsibility and class positions while also valuing the whole person. It is readily understood and appreciated by staff, employers and clients. It facilitates a shared understanding of the needs of people living in entrenched poverty and the value of multifaceted, targeted and personalised interventions to assist them into employment.

Staff – the staff of *Northern Futures* are one of its greatest asset. Most workers, come from the area or have strong connections with it, all understand the practical application of the *Bridges out of Poverty* approach and all believe in the *Northern Futures* model. This gives the organisation great strength and continuity. Staff are committed to the people they serve and their commitment and passion underpins all aspects of the *Northern Futures* model.

A holistic approach – *Northern Futures'* clients are carefully screened to determine if they are "ready" to take on the various training and placement packages offered. Once accepted they are offered ongoing and wide ranging supports, tailored to their specific needs. This includes formal training, work placements and employment opportunities but also transport, food, advice on housing, health, a sympathetic and on-going ear, even cash to support so that people can realise their training and employment objectives.

Education and training – *Northern Futures* has a partnership with The Gordon to provide 'place-based' TAFE training at the Norlane Community Centre. In addition, it has developed sensitive pre-training - most notably the *Getting Ahead* program – in recognition of its clients' needs for training in basic work disciplines, presentation, literacy and confidence building. Consultation with clients and employers showed this pre-training is a key factor in getting placements and staying in employment.

Location – *Northern Futures* provision of 'place-based' services is enhanced by its location in the Norlane Community Centre, a community hub; warm, inviting and concrete in its offering of assistance (including food, information, support, computers, training and education). The co-location with other social services means *Northern Futures* clients' with multiple needs can be positively assisted in one place. This can create a sense of community and belonging for those experiencing isolation or social disengagement.

Relationships – This assessment details the wide range of relationships *Northern Futures* has built up to achieve its vision of a sustainable 3214 community and give its clients the best possible training and employment opportunities. These relationships with employers, government agencies, trainers, job service providers and clients help to embed *Northern Futures* in northern Geelong and underpin and support all its activities.

Self-evaluation – *Northern Futures* has commissioned several evaluations of its programs as well as this critical assessment of its operations. *Northern Futures* has therefore been an open learning organisation and its success is partly the result of this self-critical orientation.

***Northern Futures* - Future Challenges**

Effective advocacy – Since *Northern Futures* began a range of other organisations with a focus on addressing key regional issues have become active in Geelong's regional revitalisation, many of which are represented on the Steering Committee. The existence of various organisations with similar objectives and shared agendas raises the distinct possibility of duplication or cross-purpose activity. This could undermine *Northern Futures'* ability to effectively advocate on behalf of some of the most disadvantaged members of the community.

To maintain and enhance *Northern Futures'* effectiveness and capacity as a regional advocate the Steering Committee should be used as a forum for greater co-ordination of lobbying and planning activities (see Recommendation 1).

Risks – Recent history over 2016 highlighted two potentially serious risks for *Northern Futures* – changes in Government policy which meant no client referrals from Jobactive agencies (Jas) and the sudden departure of key staff. While ultimately dealt with through the hard work of Steering Committee members and other staff members, these events exposed the need for a Risk Assessment to be undertaken and reviewed on an annual basis (see Recommendation 2).

Strategic Planning – There have been two detailed Strategic Plans over the course of the organisation's history, but as this report has shown, they have proven difficult to assess because of the absence of clear KPIs and the absence of a forum in which performance can be assessed. (see Recommendation 3)

Governance – While the Steering Committee is highly effective and acts in an advisory way, it is not a Board. It does not set strategic direction nor is it directly accountable for actions, though often mobilised to assist in the delivery of *Northern Futures'* objectives. A move towards incorporation currently under advisement by *Northern Futures* would allow for more accountability at a local level and facilitate the involvement of key stakeholders in setting and monitoring the strategic direction of *Northern Futures*. It would and should allow for better data collection and reporting, particularly around KPIs and budget matters. It would also allow greater co-ordination with other regional organisations in setting priorities and political lobbying (see Recommendations 1 and 3)

Funding – From the outset the organisation has been funded in a host of different ways and has attracted funds from various sources, allowing some freedom and innovative programs to emerge. However, secure on-going funding for core services is a concern that needs the concerted attention of a new Board (and perhaps the inclusion of employers) to help solve future funding challenges resulting from any worsening of the economic conditions in Geelong (Recommendation 4).

Recommendations:

- 1. To support *Northern Futures* as an effective advocate, there should be greater co-ordination of lobbying and planning activity with all major regional organisations through its Steering Committee (or Advisory Board) to ensure consistent policy priorities for the Corio-Norlane area.**
- 2. That *Northern Futures* undertake a Risk Assessment to foresee and plan for any potentially destabilising events within its operating environment. The Risk Assessment should be reviewed at least annually.**
- 3. That *Northern Futures* focus on its core activities in its Strategic Plan and ensure that activities related to advocacy, recruitment, client support, training and placement, employer engagement and the employment of clients are central. These objectives to be enhanced by policy work to support economic growth and be underpinned by effective organisational performance and advocacy.**

All Strategic Plan Objectives need to have KPIs; a few simple and accessible indicators of success should be derived and monitored. They should reflect the core objectives of Supporting Economic Growth, Linking Labour Supply and Demand, Education and Training, Employment Outcomes and Industry Collaboration.

- 4. That reporting on the Strategic Plan occurs annually along with more regular reports to the Steering Committee/Advisory Board on performance against agreed criteria. A priority will be to secure funding beyond 2018.**



1. Introduction

The Northern suburbs of Geelong, once the industrial power house of the city, have for too long been associated with a decline in industry and a rise in social disadvantage. The long-term decline of manufacturing jobs, the privatisation of many social services and changing policies towards public housing and the unemployed have indeed exacerbated these problems. There are now high levels of long term unemployment, limited educational qualifications, and a concentration of very low income households in public and private housing. It is also an area with a strong sense of community and residents who are working together on actions to improve the local economic base and urban fabric during a period of major transformation of the regional economy. Addressed by several government initiatives, there is also a strong contingent of community groups who aim to engage and positively support this region, one of which is *Northern Futures*.

Northern Futures aim is “To create a sustainable 3214 community by strengthening the local economy and linking the needs of community and employers” (a Vision that headlined both the 2009 and 2014 Strategic Plans). Since 2008, the primary means of delivering on this vision has involved lobbying and advocacy as well as training and job brokering. The latter has changed many lives for the better in the region.

Northern Futures delivers on this vision through Strategic Plan commitments to Collaboration, Engagement, Opportunity, Enhancement, Inclusiveness, Connectivity and Advocacy which support its real Achievements in training the long term unemployed; boosting their confidence and skill levels and linking them with potential employers (Northern Futures 2009). The outcome in many cases is that *Northern Futures*’ clients secure employment or go on to further education. A relatively high level of success is achieved, measured by the numbers and proportions of referrals who complete training (88% in 2015), secure placements and employment (56% in 2015 and an average of 29% after 16 weeks).

The model used by *Northern Futures* is replicated in other Victorian Work and Learning Centres, but is also very much anchored in this place. This 'place-based' model is underpinned by a particular philosophy, a strong focus on local personnel, multi-faceted support services and maintaining strong connections to community leaders and groups, JSAs/JAs, training providers and employers.

It is important to know if such programs are effective, both in delivering on stated objectives and in meeting the desires of the unemployed, addressing the needs of employers and delivering on larger agendas for social inclusion and regional economic and social development.

Professor Louise Johnson from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University, was commissioned in May 2015 to undertake a long term critical assessment of *Northern Futures*. Informed by national and international literatures on programs which assist the long term unemployed into employment, this assessment focuses on the aims and objectives of *Northern Futures* as elaborated in its two Strategic Plans. In the context of globalisation and policies on economic regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion, this Report will draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the *Northern Futures* approach and offer evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

This assessment, conducted over 2015-16:

1. Locates *Northern Futures* into the larger history of global and national change as it has impacted on Geelong, particularly the decline of manufacturing and government measures to assist this locality and the unemployed; and
2. Assesses the objectives of *Northern Futures* as set out in its two Strategic Plans, including its policy impact, stakeholder engagements, spatial and personal outcomes, over eight years; and
3. From this assessment distils best practice and offers guidance for improving outcomes for the various clients and stakeholders that make up *Northern Futures*.

Methods included an international and national literature review and interviews with *Northern Futures* staff, partner employers, training providers and long term clients (as approved by the Deakin University Ethics Committee HAE-15-129).

Aim: To critically assess the successes and limitations of *Northern Futures* to improve the effectiveness of the organisation and its strategies for economic independence and social inclusion in the northern suburbs of Geelong, Victoria.

Outcomes:

- A comprehensive history of *Northern Futures* from its origins out of a Jobs Summit in 2007 to its first Strategic Plan (2009) and the newest Strategic Plan of 2014-2018, up to 2016; highlighting key elements of its success – the Steering Committee, underpinning philosophy, wrap around servicing, stakeholder engagement, regular evaluation, training, education and employment outcomes as well as life changing experiences for clients
- A critical evaluation of *Northern Futures* in terms of its long term strategic goals of enhancing economic independence and social inclusion in the northern suburbs of Geelong
- Concrete and evidence-based suggestions for improvement in the realisation of *Northern Futures*' objectives
- A Report to the *Northern Futures* Steering Committee which may be made available to other community and regional organisations aiming to achieve comparable goals of economic independence and social inclusion
- A series of academic publications to ensure the *Northern Futures* model is more widely known, nationally and internationally



2. Geelong and its international and national contexts

Across Europe, the United States and Australia there is a populist feeling that the last few decades of economic restructuring have decimated entire regions and communities, while the policy interventions to assist have not been effective in re-engaging those displaced by this process. Disaffection at the consequences of non-inclusive redevelopment are having major political impacts in these regions; expressed in the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom (UK), in the election of Donald Trump in the United States (US) and the rising level of support for the *Front National* in France, Golden Dawn in Greece, Italy's Five Star Movement and One Nation in Australia. It is therefore not only an important social challenge but an urgent political one to ensure that urban and regional redevelopment policies include those who have been displaced. Alternatives are required so that more intense social and spatial polarisation cannot emerge from ongoing rounds of economic restructuring. One such alternative can be seen in the aims and work of *Northern Futures*.

Three relevant academic literatures and policy arenas assist in understanding the context in which *Northern Futures* emerged and now operates. These consider the causes and policy responses to regional economic restructuring, urban social polarisation and social exclusion and provide the background for this assessment.

2.1 Regional economic restructuring and policy responses

The notion of regional economic restructuring goes back to the 1970s round of globalisation and deindustrialisation which impacted on many western countries (see Bluestone and Harrison (1982), Hanson and Pratt (1995), Piore and Sabel (1984) and Harvey (1982, 1989) on the US and Massey (1984, 1994), Hudson (2002, 2009) and Cooke (1984, 1989) for Europe and the UK, including Australia (Fagan and Weber 1999).

David Harvey argues that during this period, the United States and many other western countries experienced a crisis in the profitability of many industries, which led to a flight of investment and jobs to what became newly industrialising countries (Harvey 1982, 1989). From these countries a flood of exports then further decimated the manufacturing core of many developed economies. A slightly different argument was developed by a group of Locality Study researchers in England and Europe who focused on how this process produced a new, spatial division of labour which was highly gendered. Thus, for example Doreen Massey argued that in 1980s Britain, the unionised, high cost male labour of the south east was displaced by a more feminised, non- unionised workforce in other parts of the country as newly mobile, technologically connected corporations split and relocated their operations (Massey 1984. See also Cooke 1989; Lancaster Regionalism Group 1985; Lewis 1984).

Nash and Fernandez-Kelly (1983), Chapkis and Enloe (1983); War on Want (1983) and Mitter (1986) amongst others, broadened the scale at which they saw the gendered and racialized division of labour being reconstituted to include the whole world. Such a global labour market may see low cost and non-unionised young, female Filipino textile and electronics workers mobilised into Western-owned factories in special export processing zones, to produce low cost goods for the burgeoning first world market.

The consequences for something like the textile industry in developed economies and regions was devastating (see Froebel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1980 and Johnson 1990). It was this process and its impact on Australia that Johnson studied in her PhD (Johnson 1990, 1992) as the 1970s and 1980s saw the collapse of that industry in the Geelong region, leading to the mass retrenchment of many female textile workers. In the 1990s and 2000s it was the car and truck industries which underwent a series of comparable shocks, leading to masses of unemployed male workers, many of whom live in the northern suburbs of Geelong.

In the face of these various economic challenges in Geelong, a Jobs Summit was held in 2007 in the area most impacted - at Corio. From this emerged the need for a group: "To take the lead in planning and leveraging whole of government and community support to *minimise the social and economic impact on the Northern suburbs of Geelong associated with the downturn in the manufacturing industries*" (Northern Futures 2009: 5. Emphasis added). With the guidance of key local politicians *Northern Futures* was created to ease the impact of these major shocks to the local economy and society.

The policy response to related regional decline has varied internationally. In the case of Europe, governments in the 1970s facilitated a redistribution of investment from core industrial areas to less developed regions, aiming to boost the growth of export industries (Hudson 2002; Carlsson et. al. 2014). For Carlsson et. al. (2014) such policies produced some single industry developments in a few peripheral areas, until they too came into crisis in the 1980s. Consequently, new government restructuring policies were introduced to focus on the diversification of local economies.

Carlsson et. al. (2014) document and assess a suite of Regional Restructuring Policies and cash injections in Norway which aimed to develop profitable jobs, achieve a more robust and diversified economic structure and strengthen business. The evaluation of these policies, enacted over 70 municipalities, utilised the concept of “regional resilience” – meaning a place’s resistance and consequent response and potential recovery from a shock. Such resilience is seen to depend on the availability of material and human resources, how they are used and the region’s intersection with wider value chains and production networks.

In Australia, regional development policy has long been fragmented across the three levels of government with Dollery et. al. (2011: 241) maintaining that regional initiatives have been inadequately funded and patchily pursued. Regional policy emanating from the Federal level, rarely has a high priority and tends to facilitate private developments, promote local infrastructure investments and co-ordinate economic development strategies (Dollery et.al. 2011). In addition to sporadic regional development policies, the Federal government oversights an array of industry and regional support policies, usually developed and implemented in response to times of crisis. Most notably for Geelong, this has included interventions to support regional development authorities, the region’s textile and car industries and more recently the area as a whole.



Massive government subsidies have supported many regional employment programs to address economic restructuring and relocate or expand industries and service operations. In conducting an overview of the 135 structural adjustment programs, Andrew Beer (2015) identified as the most expensive the Automobile Competitive Investment Scheme at A\$7 billion. This was one of several packages directed to the car industry over the last twenty years – including the Button Plan (1984) and the Green Car Fund (2007-2013) - which together with a long history of slowly declining tariff protection, aimed to assist the car industry to adapt to changing technologies and greater global competition (Clibborn et. al 2016).

In addition to industry supports, there are programs to reduce the impacts of changes on communities and regions. These are mainly labour market schemes which assist workers displaced by plant closures. Such help includes expedited access to high level support, training assistance and support to establish a business. Currently such programs are operating in Geelong through the Gordon Institute to facilitate the retraining of displaced Ford Company workers. Beer suggests that such programs can be confounded by older workers leaving the workforce altogether and won't succeed unless there are a range of alternative employment opportunities. They can also retrain workers into new economic areas but in doing so crowd out others who may equally needing employment (such as school leavers or new arrivals to the area). Beer maintains that such programs are rarely successful in either saving industries or re-employing the many who might be displaced. However, he also recognises that such actions are necessary as the costs to individuals of inaction are unacceptably high and for a region might lead to a loss of business confidence, erosion of human capital, lower social capital and the overall loss of productive capital. Further, he maintains that human capital is a driver of growth and as the Australian labour force is relatively immobile, solutions to labour displacement must be found locally using available skills and abilities as these are the very foundation of a regional workforce which can attract new investment (Beer 2015).

The most concerted of these efforts to support local employment growth was the Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund (GRIIF), established in light of Ford announcing the closure of its engine plant in 2013. Running over three years, the scheme involved the expenditure of \$24.5 million (with \$15million from the Federal Government, \$4.5 from the Victorian State and \$5 million from Ford) to generate a projected 840 new jobs and diversify the regional economy (AusIndustry 2013). To address the risk of such funds propping up failing industries or leading to business relocating from other areas, funds would only be allocated to new businesses who could at least match the funding provided. Significantly over 350 of these jobs were to be located in the northern parts of Geelong, notably at the expansion of the Cotton On head office in North Geelong (with a tax payer subsidy of \$3.4 million and company expenditure of \$8.72 million), leading to 300 employees, a number of whom ultimately came via *Northern Futures*

(Australian Government <https://www.business.gov.au/assistance/geelong-region-innovation-and-investment-fund/griif-projects-supported> Accessed 27.11.2016).

Thus, Geelong has a long history of being supported (but also undermined) by industry policy. It also has a local history of regional development agencies; with the Geelong Regional (Planning) Authority of the mid 1970s being supplanted by the Geelong Regional Commission (from 1977 to 1993) and thence the City of Greater Geelong (COGG) from 1993, until its replacement by administrators in 2015 (McLean 2005).

If the COGG was the product of State driven local government amalgamations rather than a specific move towards regional planning, the creation of the G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, initiated in 2001 across six local government areas has been a critical development in co-ordinated, locally driven regional development with concerted lobbying across its nine Pillar or action Groups.

One of these Pillars is *Economic Development* which has argued for the expansion of Avalon Airport, the building of the Geelong Ring Road and associated industrial estates, small business development and promotion of a skilled workforce. Kilpatrick singles out G21 but also the Committee for Geelong and the Geelong Football Club as key organisations that have facilitated understanding and agreement on common goals across the region. Each also has a bank of projects in order of priority and the ear of State and Federal governments to successfully attract large projects. She argues, following Daley and Lacey (2011), that Geelong is proof that government investment in “lagging” regions can pay off, but this funding must be targeted to projects aligned with a regionally developed and shared vision as well as a plan based on strengths, hard evidence and research (Kilpatrick 2013).

The activities and advocacy by G21 and the Committee for Geelong are all directly relevant to the operation of *Northern Futures*, which in its strategic plan for 2009-2013 (*The Way Forward* 2009) singled out the expansion of Avalon airport and development of the Heales Road industrial estate adjacent to the northern section of the Ring Road and a reskilling of the local workforce as initiatives critical to the economic and social revitalisation of Geelong’s northern suburbs.

There is also a strong emphasis in the 2014-2018 Plan on Advocacy and Policy intervention. Aligning *Northern Futures* work in this sphere with that of other key regional organisations will be critical to their successful realisation.



Even more directly connected to the *Northern Futures* social inclusion agenda are the activities of the Health and Well Being Pillar Group of G21, which has as one of its Priority Projects *Addressing disadvantage in Corio-Norlane*.

Significantly the Health and Wellbeing Pillar Group is currently supporting action to reduce unemployment as the way to ease social disadvantage, by bringing together philanthropic, business, government and community organisations to create job opportunities via local procurement policies, investment in SMEs in targeted areas and “demand-led brokerage” to link jobs and job seekers.

Like *Northern Futures*, this Pillar group lists as some of its achievements: the successful delivery of State and Federal funding for the regeneration of Northern Bay College, the New Norlane housing project, monies for Barwon Health North and the Geelong Region Opportunities for Work or GROW.

GROW is an employment brokering, collective impact organisation that has secured significant State funding to co-ordinate businesses both procuring their inputs locally and employing locally in key disadvantaged parts of the G21 region – Corio-Norlane, Whittington and Colac. Aligned with one of the Strategic Objectives of the 2014-2018 Plan for *Northern Futures* (See Part 5), GROW is working alongside and hopefully **with** *Northern Futures* in the realisation of comparable objectives.

Significantly these and other key regional organisations - G21, Avalon Airport, the City of Greater Geelong, Barwon Health, Northern Bay College, the State Department of Housing and now GROW as well as Federal and State MPs and major employers - are all represented on the *Northern Futures* Steering Committee, allowing a sharing of agendas across these many organisations and the possibility of co-ordinated lobbying.

However, the existence of G21, its various Pillar Groups, the Committee for Geelong and the regional council (or administrators), GROW and *Northern Futures*, as well as other organisations outside of these key ones in the area – such as Diversitat - does raise the very real possibility of duplication, cross-purpose activity and even contradictory priorities, as all seek to deliver on Geelong's regional revitalisation.

Recommendation 1. To support *Northern Futures* as an effective advocate, there should be greater co-ordination of lobbying and planning activity with all major regional organisations through its Steering Committee, to ensure consistent policy priorities for the Corio-Norlane area.

2.2 Social polarisation and policy actions

Social and spatial inequality has long been part of the industrial city (see for example Marcuse 1993). Many argue that these social divides have been intensified during the most recent round of economic restructuring and global urbanisation (for example Brenner 2002; Dicken 1992; Fainstein et. al. 1992; Sassen 1994; Marcuse 1997; Walks 2001). The question then is whether social and spatial inequality has been exacerbated by recent rounds of economic restructuring in Australia despite numerous policy interventions to ameliorate it.

Research across Australia on the spatial implications of economic restructuring indicates that there is a direct link between manufacturing decline and the growth of unemployment and poverty in the cities and regions concerned.

This has been documented by Stilwell (1989) and Fagan (1994) in case studies of Sydney's outer suburbs; the Social Justice Consultative Council (1992) for Melbourne; and by Forster (1986), Peel (1995) and Baum and Hassan (1993) for Adelaide's north-western and northern suburbs. Such studies and others for Australia as a whole - including Australian Urban and Regional Development Review (1995); Badcock (1997a and b); Baum et.al. 2005; Hunter and Gregory (1996); Murphy and Watson (1994); Saunders (2013); Pawson and Harath (2015) - document how the wealthiest and poorest communities in Australian cities are now more socially separated than they were in the 1970s. This they connect to both changes in the labour market and the operation of the welfare system.

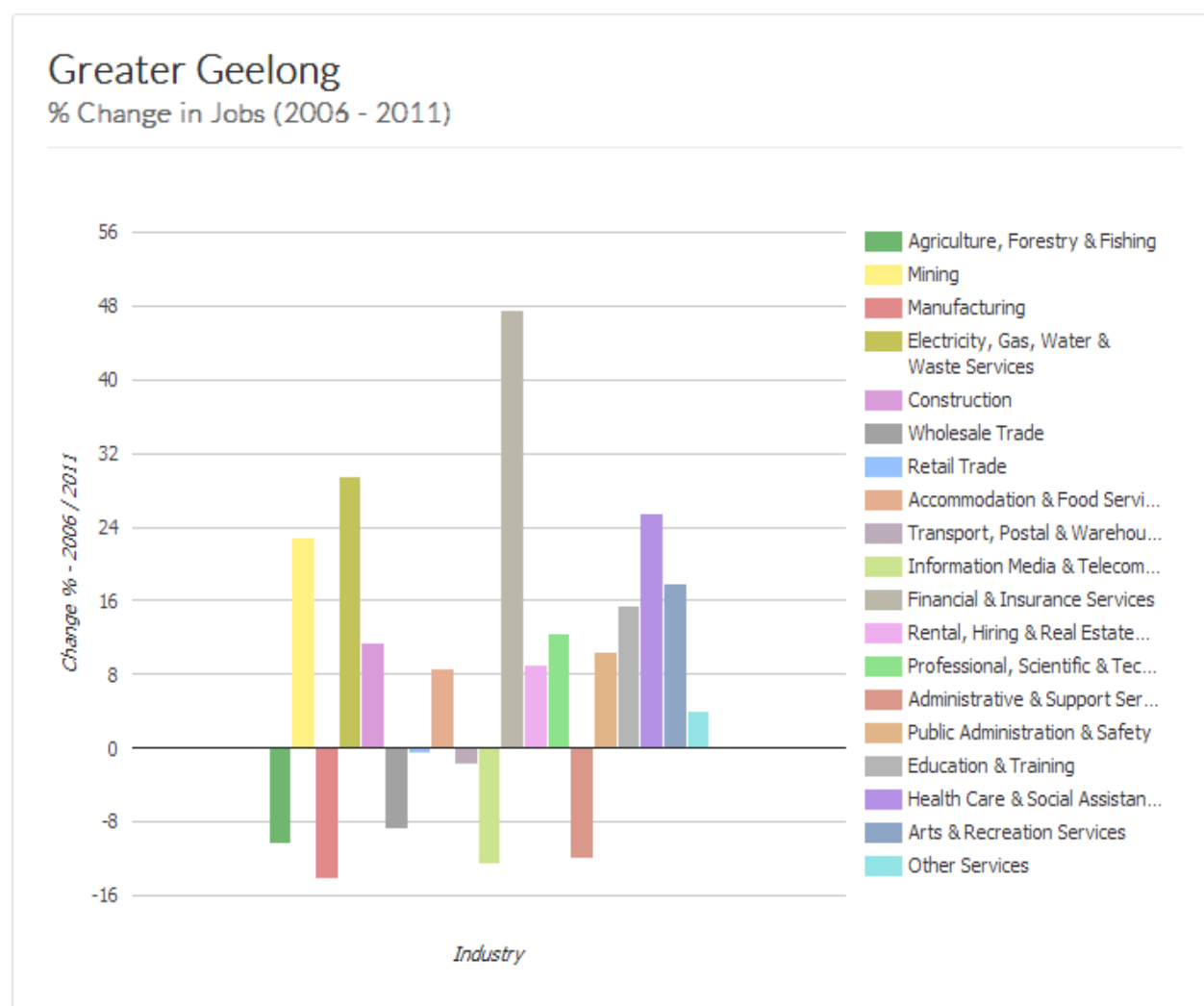
At the theoretical level, consensus is growing that there are three sources of increased social polarisation: transformations in the division of labour; restructuring of governance, in relation to the dismantling of the welfare state; and a demographic transition towards ageing, single and single parent households (Baum 2015: 3).

Firstly, the issue of **labour market transformation**. In Australia, this has taken two main forms, the already discussed decline in manufacturing but also a growth in service industries, characterised by a feminisation and casualisation of the workforce. These changes have brought both an expansion in high end, skilled professional jobs and low end, low skilled and insecure jobs. Such changes have both structural and spatial implications (Badcock 2000). In the case of Geelong, there has been a massive fall in the number and proportion of workers in the manufacturing sector and a rise in the number of workers in some parts of the service industries.

Significantly many of the manufacturing plants and workers affected by these changes were located in the northern suburbs of the city.

As Figure 1 indicates from 2006 to 2011, there was a fall of over 14% in Manufacturing employment in the Greater Geelong area – from 11 890 to 10 207 – while over the same time period there have been increases in employment in Financial and Insurance Services of 47.5% (from 1589 to 2339), in Health and Social Assistance of 25.5% (from 10 025 to 12 578), in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (12.4%), Construction (11.4%), Public Administration and Safety (10.5%) and Accommodation and Food Services (8.7%) (Enterprise Geelong 2016).

Figure 1 Greater Geelong - Changes in employment by industry 2006-2011



(<http://www.economicprofile.com.au/geelong/trends/jobs#change> Accessed 10.11.2016)

Significantly, for *Northern Futures*, such employment growth has been associated with the relocation to Geelong from Melbourne of the Transport Accident Commission (in 2009 with the inflow of over 600 workers), the massive expansion in the warehouse operation of Cotton On, growth in the health sector (especially in Barwon Health and aged care) and in hospitality and food service operations across the city. While there has been a major increase in unemployment in Geelong, particularly in the northern suburbs, there have also been areas of economic expansion, even labour shortages.



Organisations such as *Northern Futures* have been made aware of these shortages – from a 2009 labour market analyses by the City of Greater Geelong and contacts with employers – and can therefore be geared up to address them.

It is these sectors, particularly transport, warehousing, aged care, health and hospitality as well as organisations such as the TAC and Cotton On that have been critical destinations for *Northern Futures'* clients (See Part 5).

However, one of the more important dimensions of the decline of Manufacturing and growth in Services has been the **exacerbation of social polarisation** in Geelong over the last few decades. This has occurred despite numerous Federal, State and local policy interventions intended to ameliorate this trend and the impressive work of *Northern*

Futures at the local level. Thus while only 11% of the city's workforce are engaged in Manufacturing, in the northern suburbs of Corio and Norlane close to 20% work in industry. The obverse is the location of service workers: concentrated around the CBD and in southern parts of the city.

The 2007 Draft G21 Regional Plan noted that “the region has 11.2% (9 120) of direct jobs at risk in the following industries: auto parts, basic metal and plastic products, chemicals, textiles, clothing and footwear, food processing, machinery and equipment, and miscellaneous manufacturing” (G21 2007), most of these are in the northern parts of the city.

As noted previously, this area is further distinguished by its quantity of public housing and low household incomes. These patterns are further exacerbated by the long-term decline of manufacturing and concomitant rise in unemployment in this area. The comparison and divergence of this area from the rest of the city and Melbourne is shown in Table 1 which compares the northern industrial suburbs of Corio-Norlane with the solid professional area of Newtown and thence with the entire region and metropolitan capital.

Table 1 Indicators of economic and social structure – Corio-Norlane, Newtown, Greater Geelong and Melbourne (2011)

Indicators	Corio-Norlane	Newtown	Greater Geelong	Melbourne
% Employed in Manufacturing	17.7	8.4	10.9	10.8
% Labourers	20.7	5.7	10.3	8.0
% Managers and Professionals	13.5	49.1	21.2	36.4
% Public housing	22 Norlane 10 Corio	2.8	3.0	3.4
Average Wage/Salary income	40 433	43 538 (2007)	46 936	52 470
% Unemployed	10.9	3.5	5.3	5.5

(Source: Profile.id 2015)

These figures do not just confirm the class structure of the city, but prefigure its social polarisation. There are two major measures of socio-spatial divergence in Australia: the Australian Bureau of Statistics SEIFA index of Social Disadvantage and that calculated by Tony Vinson (Vinson 2007 and DOTE 2015) and others for the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The results for Corio-Norlane confirm the **worsening** situation of this area as it moved from Band 3 to Band 1 in the Vinson report over the period 2007 to 2015. It is currently ranked as one of the most disadvantaged localities in the country. The Bands combine a host of indicators of social dislocation and disadvantage: Unemployment levels, Criminal convictions, Disability rates, Child maltreatment, Low family income, Rental assistance, Family violence and Psychiatric hospital admissions. So too with the SEIFA Index, (detailed in Table 2) where Corio and Norlane, and proximate areas in the northern part of Geelong, have all become **more disadvantaged** from 2001 until 2011 as their scores move further and further away from 1000 or the Australian average.

Table 2 SEIFA Index 2001 and 2011 (No disadvantage = 1000)

Area	2001	2011
Corio (ABS State Suburb)	864.86	856
Norlane-North Shore (State Suburb)	770.01	754.4
Norlane (S)	759	745.4

(Source: ABS 2001 and 2011)

It is important to understand why this is occurring. In part it is related to the fact that these indicators are derived from the rankings across the country and so they are relative rather than absolute measures. The worsening may also be the result of government policy (see next section). For as the sell off and residualisation of public housing continues, those who are allocated the remaining units tend to score higher on the indicators of disadvantage, as only the most disadvantaged can access the public housing units still available.

Secondly then, in explaining the growth in social polarisation across Geelong, is the **shift towards the neo-liberal state**. During the 1980s, the belief grew in Australia that the only workable response to globalisation was neo-liberalism (Pusey 1991; Stilwell 1993; Wiseman 1998). This was to occur via trade liberalisation, financial deregulation and competitive public tendering, local government reorganisation and infrastructure pricing. Such an approach to government was also extended to schooling, aged care and hospitals, job placement and retraining services (Grattan 1996), all of which were extensively privatised. Primarily, the impact was on employment, especially in those industries and regions that had historically been protected and supported by government trade policies – such as the textile and car industries discussed previously. These privatisation policies had specific implications for the northern parts of Geelong due to its traditional concentration of public housing tenants and high levels of unemployment.

The commercialisation of job service providers began in 1997 via a tendering process and payment for results. The shift from the Federal Government run Centrelink to an array of other providers in a Jobs Network in 2009 and thence to Job Services Australia (JSA) and Jobactive (JA) in 2015 has meant that *Northern Futures* could emerge as a legitimate provider of high level job services.

But it also meant that it is totally dependent on an array of competing, often commercial agencies, to refer clients. They have regularly done so – as Jobactive providers are unable to deliver the appropriate, intensive and tailored support required to assist people in Categories 3 and 4 into the workforce. However, there are risks associated with these organisations coming and going or not referring clients to *Northern Futures* and their susceptibility to policy changes is high.

This was all too painfully revealed when Work for the Dole policies were changed in early 2016 to basically rule out *Northern Futures* courses being accredited for Work for the Dole recipients. It took major, and ultimately effective lobbying for the *Northern Futures* programs to be reinstated as legitimate. Whilst this was occurring, client referrals ceased and the activities of *Northern Futures* were severely limited.

These events affirmed the success of Strategic Plan (2014-2018) Objective No 1 Policy and Advocacy – *to be effective advocates for the community* – and the critical weight wielded by key members of the Steering Committee. However, they also exposed the vulnerability of *Northern Futures* to remotely made policy decisions and underscored the value of a Risk Assessment Plan for the organisation.

Recommendation 2 That *Northern Futures* undertake a Risk Assessment to foresee and plan for any potentially destabilising events within its operating environment. The Risk Assessment should be reviewed at least annually

The more stringent targeting of housing assistance has increased the concentration of poor households on public housing estates and hence the degree of socio-spatial polarisation in Geelong and other Australian cities (Whiteford 1995). For Burbidge and Winter (1996), growing spatial inequality is closely tied in with public housing policies on location, rent levels and eligibility.

Priority allocation schemes, increased rents for those with the capacity to pay and more targeted rent rebates have led to changes in who becomes a public housing tenant. Increasingly these are people on social security benefits so that in the space of a generation the blue collar working class occupants of public housing in Australia have been replaced by the non-working poor. For *Northern Futures*, such shifts mean that while the privatisation of unemployment training and job placement services created a space for their services, changes to the social geography of Geelong has meant its public housing clients are more numerous, and tend to be more challenging.

Finally, in the exacerbation of social polarisation, there are **demographic changes** resulting from a growth in single person households, the aged and single parent families. These social groups and household formations have long been associated with poverty in Australia and they have been growing in number over the last few decades, intensifying poverty levels and social polarisation. Unlike US and British cities where unemployment, poverty and urban decay is concentrated in inner city areas, in Australia the location of the poor is more ambiguous and often suburban.

For Corio-Norlane, the reality of entrenched social disadvantage relates to the economic restructuring of its major globalised employers and a more punitive public housing regime. These developments, along with demographic changes to household formation, both explain and further exacerbate its disadvantage.

There have been many attempts to ameliorate these indicators, by government actions to improve the local schools, invest in better health facilities, upgrade public housing stock, improve the physical environment (by investing in and upgrading local parks) and, through a co-ordinated Neighbourhood Renewal program (2001-2008).



The State Government policy of a “Fairer Victoria” instigated a series of Neighbourhood Renewal projects and its Year 8 Report (2010) noted the achievement of more than 1380 upgrades to public housing, over 600 employment outcomes, 750 extra training opportunities for residents and many open spaces, parks and playground redevelopments.

Shield, Graham and Taket (2011) examined Neighbourhood Renewal in Victoria as a program that might effectively address social polarisation and inclusion. Their evaluation showed it improved services, trust in government, community participation and sense of control over decision-making. Neighbourhood Renewal was therefore a highly effective whole of government set of interventions into the Corio-Norlane area that resulted in noticeable social improvements and visible upgrades to the physical environment, especially houses and parks.

Significantly the first tranche of funding to support *Northern Futures* was delivered as part of Neighbourhood Renewal. This array of initiatives was a vital part of improving the social environment of Corio-Norlane and is a critical policy context for *Northern Futures*. Within this regime *Northern Futures* achieved over 100 employment outcomes (in 2009) and assisted with the development of two new social enterprises: Homes@Create and the Urban Bean Café (Year 8 Review: 26).

Neighbourhood Renewal was a Bracks Labor Government initiative and when this administration was replaced by the Napthine Liberal Government in 2011, it was abandoned as a policy, although several of its components were rediscovered and enhanced later. Thus, in 2014 the New Norlane program was established within the Victorian State Housing Department with a commitment of \$80 million to build 320 new public and affordable housing units in this area. The aim was to broaden the tenure mix (as a number will be build and sold into the private housing market) whilst enhancing the quality of the housing stock and streetscapes. In addition, the program provided opportunities for some *Northern Futures* clients to be trained as apprentices with the three building companies involved.

These actions have been consistent with the aims of *Northern Futures* to enhance the physical as well as social fabric of the area while helping to grow its employment base. Another change of government policy meant the cessation of this obviously successful program, a pattern which highlights the vulnerability of the operating environment to policy shifts.

Despite these efforts, as noted above, the pattern of socio-spatial disadvantage in the area has continued to worsen. Clearly, there is a need for other and perhaps different interventions to progress social inclusion.

2.3 Facilitating social inclusion

The analysis of social exclusion emerged out of a long-standing concern with the measurement and alleviation of poverty and its quantification in 19th century England by reformers such as Booth and Rowntree. In the 1970s Rene Lenoir used the term “excluded” to refer to the handicapped, substance abusers, juvenile delinquents and deviant groups disallowed access to social insurance in France (Silver 2010). French social policies from the 1970s addressed social exclusion and the rights of marginalised communities such as single parents, people with mental illness and the unemployed (Pereira and Whiteford 2013). From the 1980s the term was extended to the long term unemployed and the young and old who had been displaced by de-industrialisation and more recently to include those impacted by joblessness, homelessness and racism.

The French notion of social exclusion was hard to reconcile with the Anglo-American association of poverty with welfare dependence and individual failings (Silver 2010). Thus, in Britain when the Blair Labour Government was elected in 1997, whilst acknowledging Labour’s traditional concern with easing poverty and inequality, it redefined social disadvantage as a moral hazard, thereby removing any necessity or commitment to redistributive justice. Similarly, in the United States, where the poor were conceived as suffering from a “culture of dependency” better addressed by individual rather than structural solutions. From this, the notion of mutual obligation emerged. Mutual obligation focussed on individuals and groups who were excluded because they didn’t “fit” and who should be reformed through inculcating a stronger sense of social responsibility, without which governments were no longer obliged to support them.

In practice, Blair’s Social Exclusion Unit pursued “joined up solutions to joined-up problems”. Multiply disadvantaged populations called for locally-based tailored combinations of services (Levitas 2005; Silver 2010). Drawing from the British experience, South Australia adopted a social inclusion agenda in 2002, aiming to create “a society where all people feel valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs – both physical and emotional – are met”. Initiatives involved not only NGOs but churches, with the Brotherhood of St Laurence being a key advocate. This has resulted in moral, communitarian, even religious connotations being prominent in the Australian approach to social inclusion (Silver 2010: 184).

In 2008 a Social Inclusion Agenda was launched by the new Federal Labor government. This was underpinned by the idea that for people to be socially included, they needed to have “the resources, opportunities, capabilities and responsibilities to learn, work, engage and have a voice” (DPMC 2010). In such a view, disadvantage is not solely an economic state and poverty is acknowledged as multi-faceted. Community disadvantage is thereby deemed a complex interplay between the characteristics of residents – including unemployment, poverty and low income - and the effects of the social and environmental context, including weak social networks and relative lack of opportunities (Rhys 2011).

Over the last 40 years in Australia, perceptions of the poor and unemployed have shifted from the failure of the economy to provide jobs to the failure of the poor and unemployed to find jobs. Prior to this shift, the Australian government accepted responsibility for full employment and when it failed, was required to provide income support. Within the neo-liberal state however, welfare reforms of the late 1990s moved responsibility for unemployment firmly back onto individuals who in return for welfare benefits were required to meet their “mutual obligation” to society (Philip and Mallen 2015). Consequently, Welfare to Work programs were developed and in 2015 expanded to include Work for the Dole, with strict personal responsibilities and punitive regimes, all based on mutual obligation rather than any notion of collective responsibility or government commitment.

Currently there are two agendas running in relation to the methods Australian governments use to address unemployment and social disadvantage. One relates to labour market and welfare programs which enforce personal responsibility and whose overall objective is to get people into paid work while reducing state expenditure. The other takes a less individualised approach and is based on a more social and place-based multi-faceted notion of inclusion. Such agendas can often pull in opposite directions but also provide opportunities for organisations such as *Northern Futures* to work within both spaces.

This section has considered the policy contexts in which *Northern Futures* was created, its establishment in response to the decline in manufacturing jobs in Geelong; government initiatives to support regional jobs growth and facilitate social inclusion (Neighbourhood Renewal) and the impact on its operations of a welfare to work regime.

Just how effective *Northern Futures* is in relation to comparable programs and against its own objectives will be assessed in the following sections.

3. Evidence from comparable programs



3.1 Comparable programs in Victoria

There are few programs in Victoria directly comparable to *Northern Futures*. Established by the local community in 2007 *Northern Futures* operated for several years as a stand-alone model with a strong local focus and a distinct philosophical base.

In 2012 the Victorian Government, in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Lawrence (BSL) and local community groups used a similar model to establish a network of Work and Learning Centres in areas with a high concentration of public housing and disadvantage. *Northern Futures* now comprises one of five in this network – the others are located within Melbourne (Fitzroy) and across regional Victoria (in Shepparton, Moe and Ballarat) - and as such benefits from their funding, shared infrastructure, data bases and staff support. Being part of this network also generates a forum for information sharing and a framework for performance oversight and evaluation.

Northern Futures is currently funded for 4 years (2015-2019) to deliver services as part of the Work and Learning Centres Network, but unlike other centres in the program has a much broader remit for its services. In 2015 *Northern Futures* received just over 27% of its income from this program compared to 44.5% from the Skilling the Bay program (see Appendix 10.1) a 'place-based' partnership with The Gordon (Geelong TAFE) and Deakin University to support a culture of education and lifelong learning and assist clients to prepare for the jobs of the future. *Northern Futures'* relationships with employers also differs from other organisations in the network in that it has long term 'place-based' partnerships with several of Geelong's largest and most established employers, some of which commit to taking a minimum number of trainees per year.

Thus, while the Work and Learning Centre approach is comparable to that used by *Northern Futures* – in their shared focus on multiply disadvantaged long term unemployed people who they support into formal training and employment - there are key differences in the way services are delivered and embedded within local areas.

Despite these differences, measured outcomes from the Work and Learning Centres Network can help to identify valuable elements of the *Northern Futures* model; provide comparable benchmarks and highlight the particularities of a model that pre-dates the other Centres.

Outcomes from the Work and Learning Centres were measured in 2014 when the group were subject to a “progress report” based on data analysis, a series of entry and exit interviews and one focus group (Bodsworth 2014). The key message was that these Centres are a success. They produce good training and employment outcomes and provide valuable life skills to their clients. They do so by harnessing local networks to access secure jobs and training, by focusing on career planning, training and work and prioritising assistance to clients with multiple barriers.

In short, they provide what Bodsworth describes as a “second chance” to those who JAs regard as “too hard” – “for those who have been failed by the employment services system” - and who are long term and often multiply disadvantaged.

The data analysis in the Bodsworth report showed that, **44% of the Work and Learning Centre clients were supported to achieve a job placement with 59% of these (or 25% of the overall group) retaining employment for 16 weeks** (Bodsworth 2014: v-vi). Comparable job placement data collected by *Northern Futures* in 2015 shows a significantly higher success rate, in that **56% achieved employment** with a further 18% of clients going on to further education and only 21% disengaged (See Appendix 10.1).

As discussed above *Northern Futures* is differentiated from the other Centres by its long established ‘place-based’ relationships with employers and training providers. This, together with a focus on targeted and individualised client programs based on the *Bridges out of Poverty* philosophy, could well explain the higher success rates achieved by *Northern Futures*.

3.2 Comparable international and Australian programs

In an international review of “active labour market measures for the long-term unemployed”, Meager and Evans (1997) considered over 100 programs, primarily from Europe and England. Most were single action based, such as using wage subsidies, retraining or counselling, rather than the multi-faceted approach used by *Northern Futures*. Some that were comparable – such as Jobstart and Jobtrain in the UK – were evaluated against control groups, leading to selection bias in sampling and difficulty in connecting their success rates to those of *Northern Futures*. Participants in UK Jobstart had subsequent employment rates twice as high as the control group (at 60% rather than 30%) but there was a selection bias in the sample (Meager and Evans 1997: 29). So too the UK Jobtrain Program was assessed using a “matched comparison group analysis” technique.

This program of structured and supported job training generated employment rates 12% higher than the comparison group. However, the program proved less effective than other schemes – such as Job Clubs – and had the strongest impact soon after training, with unemployed ex-participants having similar job-finding chances as the comparison group.



In short comparing *Northern Futures* to these programs proved very difficult as they differed significantly. However, the review did throw up some general insights into what works. Programs that are closely linked to the regular labour market and economy and which involve job training initiatives or work placements in regular workplaces, have greater effectiveness in improving the employment of the long term unemployed. They further note that the role of employers along with small scale and embeddedness are all critical success factors (Meager and Evans 1997: 73-77). As discussed earlier, these are all attributes shared by *Northern Futures* which have contributed to its success.

In Queensland, the Participate in Prosperity Program (2007-2012) is seen by QCOSS as a successful employment service model for Stream 4 job seekers, generating a **39% employment rate for highly disadvantaged jobseekers** between 2011-2012 (as derived by a Deloitte Access Economics evaluation). Subsequently QCOSS recommended a targeted and responsive service that could be a description of the *Northern Futures* model i.e. one that is:

1. Located in a community-based organisation
2. Provides intensive individual case management for clients
3. Focused on obtaining personal and social outcomes alongside employment outcomes
4. Enables innovative and flexible funding approaches (QCOSS 2015: 2)

In addition, supportive pre-vocational training which combines work skills and personal development have been found to be crucial first steps in assisting the disadvantaged long term unemployed. Traineeships and work experience help to build confidence and give a practical grounding to further education and training.

Research has also found that post-placement support was crucial to job retention as new employees often face serious difficulties in adjusting or re-adjusting to the rigours of a workplace (Martyn 2004).

In 2002 Davidson assessed a range of employment assistance programs for long-term unemployed people across Australia, including Jobstart and Jobskills (both of which involved the Federal government subsidising employment for 6 or 12 months as well as training and work placements) and Intensive Employment Assistance (somewhat akin to that offered by *Northern Futures* to Category 3 and 4 long term unemployed). While he cautions about the difficulties in comparing employment outcomes of different labour market programs (2002: 112) he proceeds to note that:

Jobstart engaged with 83% long term unemployed people of whom 59% were employed three months later at an average cost of \$2 160.

Jobskills had 93% long term unemployed as clients and 41% of these were employed three months later at an average cost of \$8 860.

Such funding allocation does not include that given to employers to subsidise wage costs and the resulting very large expense of these programs meant that they were discontinued.

Intensive Assistance targeted the most disadvantage jobseekers (62%) and with the expenditure of between \$4 500 to \$8 500 per client, achieved a **36% employment outcome after three months. Over eight years *Northern Futures* achieves between a 29% to 44% outcome**, depending on the nature of the referral. In **2015 it achieved a 56% employment rate at an average cost per client of \$13 993** (see Appendix 10.1).

From this limited review of other programs, it can be concluded that very few mirror *Northern Futures* in its 'place-based' partnership approach and client focused philosophy.

However, learnings from other places and programs confirm that any successful model needs to be based in a region that has a relatively buoyant labour market - if there are not jobs, only limited success can be anticipated. This labour market needs to be well known and an active brief kept on its dynamics and changes, by sector, location, type of work, skills required etc. The fact that *Northern Futures* actively engages with numerous employers (around 50-60) to gauge their changing labour needs and works with the City of Greater Geelong to ensure it has an overview of the region's skills gaps, is a vital part of its high success rate.

In summary, successful approaches are those that build social capital, establish personal networks for clients, are embedded, small scale and involve employers in the design and running of programs. These elements are all critical and have been an integral part of *Northern Futures* since its inception.

4. History and philosophy of *Northern Futures*

4.1 History



In August 2007, as the ongoing wind down of manufacturing in Geelong intensified, a Northern Suburbs Jobs Summit led by State and Federal members of parliament brought together local business and community representatives and residents to discuss employment issues in northern Geelong.

One outcome was the establishment of a steering committee - known as *Northern Futures* - to take the lead in planning and leveraging whole of government and community support to minimise the social and economic impact on Geelong's 3214 suburbs. *Northern Futures* was funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services in February 2008.

Links established with Neighbourhood Renewal saw early success with a submission to put 20 local people into employment. This was part of general support for Neighbourhood Renewal at the time and was in turn informed by the Business Extension and Retention Survey (or BEAR) project to document skills gaps in the region.

Further substantial funding for *Northern Futures* came from the Department of Education and Neighbourhood Renewal via the auspices of other organisations i.e. ENCOMPASS disability service, CREATE, the City of Greater Geelong and finally by Norlane Community Centre. This funding allowed the employment of firstly a Project Officer, then other staff. From the outset, *Northern Futures* has been an intentionally lean organisation with a small core of dedicated staff augmented by additional staff funded through specific program or project funding.

This has allowed the organisation to thrive in an environment characterised by variable and multi-faceted funding streams - usually via State government departments, Skilling the Bay and more recently by “prime providers” such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence who subcontract *Northern Futures* to deliver services within the Work and Learning Centre Network. In addition, a service charge is paid through the Federal system for successful training and employment outcomes. See Appendix 9 for *Northern Futures* funding (2015).

In September 2008, a *Northern Futures* “3214 Way Forward” Forum was held, bringing together leaders from the broad spectrum of government, industry, health, education and employment services to agree on a course of action for the next three years.

The end result was the *Northern Futures Strategic Plan – The Way Forward: A Strategic Plan for Social Transformation (2009-2013)* that has helped to guide the work of *Northern Futures* (<http://northernfuturesgeelong.net.history/html> Accessed 28.2.2012).

The Plan encompassed a variety of actions, including work with the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) to take on Northern Future’s clients as trainees. Funded and supported by the TAC from 2009 to 2014, 26 trainees have been incorporated into the organisation and 16 have been employed outside or gone on to more study. 75% of these trainees are taken from the 3214 area and there is an ongoing commitment to take about 12 per annum through *Northern Futures*.

After some initial doubts about the efficacy of the training *Northern Futures* provided through its *Getting Ahead* course, trainee graduates of this course are now sought after by TAC managers.

Northern Futures works in partnership with The Gordon (Geelong TAFE) to develop and deliver appropriate and ‘place-based’ training for their clients e.g. *Certificate II Business Basics* delivered at the Norlane Community Centre. As well as these vocational courses, *Northern Futures* also recognised a need for training in basic work disciplines, presentation, literacy and, particularly with their client base, confidence building. To meet this training gap, it consulted with accredited providers to create and deliver, the *Getting Ahead* program, also at the Norlane Community Centre. This training program drew on the *Bridges out of Poverty* teachings to help people understand the barriers created by a life of disadvantage. Facilitated training on the *Bridges of Poverty* education framework is also provided to employers, so there is a shared understanding when participants reach the job placement phase. Students, graduates and employers all readily acknowledge the critical importance of the *Getting Ahead* program as a fundamental starting point to re-aligning beliefs and attitudes towards training and employment and developing a capacity for engagement. The practical application of the *Bridges out of Poverty* framework underpins the successful *Northern Futures* approach and is further considered below (See Part 4.2).

Much of the *Northern Futures* success story is based on this ability to actively and holistically engage with clients and recognise both their personal strengths and the barriers holding them back. This use of an asset rather than a deficit model supports clients to develop positive predispositions which with targeted and individualised support can ultimately translate into marketable, job ready and job keeping skills.

In 2010 a scoping study established that a *Certificate IV in Logistics and Supply Chain Principles* could break the unemployment cycle for young residents of 3214. In response, *Northern Futures* offered an integrated program that included vocational training, personal support, industry experience and work place mentoring. A number of the participants in this program went on to secure work in administration, human services and retail as well as transport and warehousing.

This program, along with two others offered by *Northern Futures* were evaluated in 2012 and the resulting report: 'Building Pathways to a Brighter Futures' concluded that it was a "highly effective program with an average 71.5% success rate (from recruitment to completed training and employment)", training 67 long term, multiply disadvantaged residents of the northern suburbs at an average cost of \$5 300 per student (Johnson 2012: 2).



A further evaluation of six *Northern Futures* clients who had completed a *Certificate II in Transport and Logistics* showed that five out of the six successfully secured ongoing full time jobs with Cotton On (Distribution Centre) at Lara (Johnson 2013). This program "Turning Lives Around 180o" revealed a very high success rate, well above the average for *Northern Futures* (29%-44%) and comparable programs considered in Part 3 (which ranged from 25% -39%).

The work of *Northern Futures* has been informed by two Strategic Plans (See Part 5) and encompassed a range of projects, funding arrangements and staffing configurations. Throughout all these changes, the one constant has been the existence of a high level **Steering Committee** with members drawn from all walks of life who share a common interest in an economically sustainable 3214 community and a belief that secure long term employment can help turn even the most disadvantaged lives around.

Membership of the Steering Committee is comprised of key Geelong politicians (from the State and Federal level), peak organisations (COGG, Committee for Geelong, G21, GROW), education providers (The Gordon, Northern Bay College, Deakin University), Job Service Agencies and major employers (Avalon Airport, Cotton On, Viva Energy, Barwon Health, TAC etc). The following individuals, organisations and positions are, or have been, represented on the *Northern Futures* Steering Committee:

Andrew Lawson	Gforce Employment Solutions
Avalon Airport	Give Where You Live
Barwon Child, Youth and Family	The Gordon TAFE
Barwon Health	GROW
Bethany Community Services	Hamlan Homes
Bounce Australia	Victorian Member for Lara
Centrelink	Federal Member for Corio
Committee for Geelong	MatchWorks
Commonwealth Department of Employment	Norlane Community Centre
Corio Medical Clinic	Northern Bay College
Cotton On	Praecedo International
Deakin University	Transport Accident Commission
Encompass Community Services	Viva Energy
Enterprise Geelong	Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
G21	Workskil Australia
Geelong Chamber of Commerce	

(<http://northernfuturesgeelong.net/steering-committee/> Accessed 15 01.2017)

Composition is regularly reviewed and new members recruited to assist in realising organisational goals. Membership might change in response to new employers in the area; policy changes or a JA no longer referring clients.

Those on the committee are very senior members of their organisations and can offer informed input, concrete support and make things happen if needed. The Group meets six times a year, and its role is an advisory but critical one. It has been spectacularly effective in delivering customised training, placements, trainee and employment opportunities, relevant information and, when necessary, effective lobbying. Members have a strong obligation to attend meetings, deeply understand and are committed to the objectives of *Northern Futures* and provide positive assistance to it.

This history is summarised in Table 3:

Table 3 The evolution of *Northern Futures* 2002-2016

Year	“Ownership”	Scope/Scale/ Program	Funding	Partners
2002	Neighbourhood Renewal	Corio-Norlane Neighbourhood Renewal – State	Neighbourhood Renewal Fee for Service	DHS Employers Training providers
2008	CREATE	Corio-Norlane	City of Greater Geelong	CREATE Employers Training providers Steering Committee
2011	Brotherhood of St Laurence Work and Learning Centres Alcoa Foundation’s Global Internship Program	Victoria-wide network of 5 centres ALCOA	State DHS to Brotherhood to employ a Manager and one Worker ALCOA	Brotherhood of St Laurence Employers Training providers Steering Committee ALCOA
2013	Norlane Community Centre	Corio-Norlane Northern Bay Guarantee	DHS Shell	Brotherhood of St Laurence Employers Training providers Steering Committee Shell
2014	Brotherhood of St Laurence Work and Learning Centre Network Skiing the Bay Alcoa Foundation’s Global Internship Program	Corio-Norlane WLC = State wide Northern Bay Guarantee	Victorian government DHS (2 staff) Skiing the Bay (2 staff)	Employers Training providers Steering Committee Shell
2015	Brotherhood of St Laurence Work and Learning Centre Network Skiing the Bay Alcoa Foundation’s Global Internship Program	Work and Learning Centre Northern Bay Guarantee	DHS and Skiing the Bay Shell/Viva Energy	Shell/Viva Energy

4.2 A philosophical approach

The operation of *Northern Futures* is informed by the philosophy and approach of the American educationist Ruby Payne, and her *Bridges out of Poverty* framework. The framework provides strategies and activities to assist social, health and community based professionals who work with people in poverty to help them build on their strengths while also addressing whole of life limitations – in education, cultural capital and confidence as well as associated problems of illness, mental health, substance abuse, disability and marginal housing (Payne 1996).

The approach is both profoundly conservative – as Payne works with localities and governments to incorporate the unemployed – and transformative – as her approach aims to foster real individual changes and class mobility.

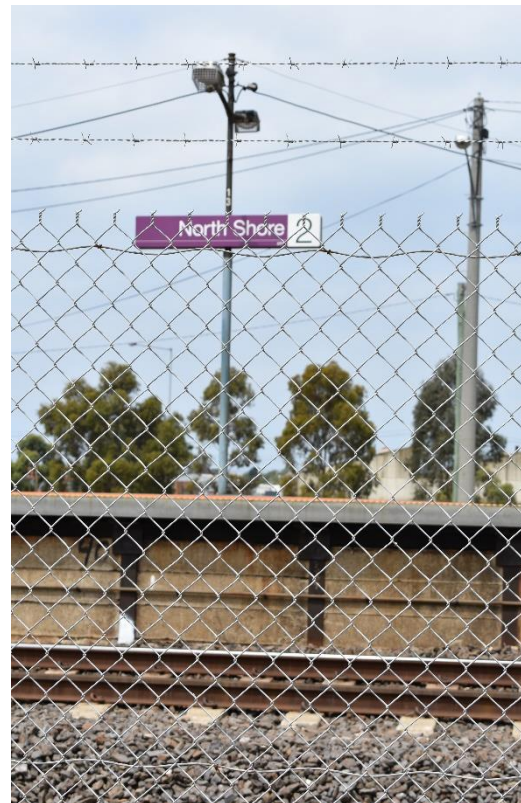
The results of using this approach at *Northern Futures* are impressive in that relatively large numbers of long term unemployed people embrace the approach and move into sustained jobs. The Bridges approach distinguishes between situational, short term poverty (from, for example, losing a job or occasional illness) and multi-generational poverty, which is both structural and deeply associated with a poverty culture.

For Payne, such a culture is not future oriented and does not value education or delaying gratification, rather it emphasises relationships, the here and now and entertainment, with a fatalistic view of the future (Payne et. al 2010).

To move out of poverty, she argues there is a need to change this mind set as well as the resource base of individuals. For Payne, to only change one element – for example to organise training or a job – without changing the mind set or class culture, will result in regression and failure. There is also a recognition that to move out of poverty requires opportunity and responsibility, so that newly employed people assume a whole new outlook (Hack 2011).

Such an approach to the unemployed, in its emphasis on class cultures and the possibility of knowing and changing these, makes the program relevant and accessible to not only managers and employers but also to welfare sector workers and those in poverty themselves (de Vol et. al. 2011).

Widely utilised across the United States, the *Bridges out of Poverty* approach has informed businesses and communities as well as individuals. Businesses utilizing the concepts are reported to have improved retention rates and productivity amongst low income workers.



Community organisations draw on it to move individuals from a reliance on public programs to more stable employment and earned income, thereby expanding their tax base and overall economic viability (Hack 2011).

Bridges out of Poverty is a powerful and persuasive framework. It has underpinned the *Northern Futures* approach and been used to better inform Steering Committee members, key workers, local technical education trainers as well as many major employers. It has been subject to critique for its focus on the individual person in poverty, a deficit model of their capabilities and the emphasis on cultures rather than structures and policies (for example Gorski 2005).

However, the framework as utilised by *Northern Futures* involves valuing clients through an asset rather than a deficit approach and changing their structural position through multi-faceted ‘never give up’ support and targeted and individualised training and employment programs.



Before acceptance into any of their programs *Northern Futures*’ staff insist that participants are “ready to change” and recognise that their outlooks must alter if they are to attain a job and social mobility. The trainees have been exposed to these ideas, either through intensive day long programs or shorter sessions with key advocates. Many employers interviewed for this assessment, *Northern Futures* staff and trainers agreed that the *Bridges out of Poverty* framework made a lot of sense, has informed their actions and assisted in their understanding of themselves and *Northern Futures*’ clients.

Employers interviewed in 2013 and 2016, particularly appreciated acknowledgement of the silent languages of class and class-based expectations which they held and are lived by their newest employees. This framework, and their partnership with *Northern Futures*, elicited empathy and understanding of the client and a commitment to actively engage with their structural and cultural positions in an ongoing and holistic way (Johnson 2013, Appendix 9.3).

For the trainees, this framework enhanced an understanding of themselves and the changes that were needed to move out of poverty, not just unemployment. Many reported not only their bleak backgrounds – which took in long term unemployment, criminal activity, homelessness, desperate poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, violence, single parenthood and mental health problems – but the importance of understanding these positions in class and cultural terms. Most had functional familial links and related to various communities (of young people, drinkers, gamblers, single parents, their neighbourhood) so were not necessarily socially disengaged, but they were economically marginalised and universally had low self-esteem.

The changes they articulated about themselves as they moved into training and employment included not only changes to their financial position but also in their outlooks. These changes went beyond the immediate to include an actively created future, broader social engagement and a resource base from which they could purchase mobility (a car is critical in this poorly serviced, relatively remote suburb), insurance, plan for holidays and conceive of an education or career path where before none of this was possible (Interviews 2013 and 2016).

Overall then, the *Bridges out of Poverty* framework enhances understanding, raises expectations and broadens and deepens the degree of change achieved by *Northern Futures'* clients. Interviewees in 2013 and in 2016 reported more positive family and community connections resulting from changes to their material conditions.

It can therefore be expected that the longer-term outcomes would be profound and involve not only moving out of poverty into paid work (gaining more economic capital) accumulating vocational learning from accredited training and job disciplines (cultural capital) but also building social capital from more extensive social inclusion.

To assess how successful the *Northern Futures* approach was over time was gauged by follow up interviews with 9 clients. The results are reported in Part 6.1, following an assessment of the two Strategic Plans in Part 5.

5. Northern Futures Strategic Plans – Realising the Objectives



Northern Futures has had two major Strategic Plans over its eight-year history:

1. *The Way Forward. A Strategic Plan for Social Transformation (2009-2013)*
2. *3214 Northern Futures Strategic Plan (2014-2018) A Strategic Plan for the Social Revolution of 3214*

The Vision and Mission for *Northern Futures* have remained consistent in both:

Vision: *To create a sustainable 3214 community by strengthening the local economy and linking the needs of community and employers.*

Mission: *To create employment and training opportunities for the 60% of people in our community most at risk of becoming or remaining workless.*

A key part of this assessment is to consider the achievement of strategic goals against set objectives. They can also be assessed against the various principles that have underpinned the operation of *Northern Futures*: *collaboration, advocacy, engagement, connectivity, opportunity, enhancement, inclusiveness and achievement.*

Firstly, it must be noted that there is a great deal of overlap between the two in terms of their key objectives, though their ranking and designation (referred to as Actions in 2009 and Priority Areas in 2014) has altered, as shown below:

1. Supporting economic growth (No 1 in 2009, No 2 in 2014)
2. Strengthening education and training (No 3 in 2009 and 2014)
3. Workforce placement (Present in 2014 but not explicit in 2009)
4. Linking labour supply and demand (Action Area No 2 in 2009. Not explicit in 2014)
5. Industry collaboration (added in the 2014 plan as an explicit Priority Area)

In the 2014 Plan, two additional Priority Areas were added:

6. Policy and Advocacy (No 1 in the 2014 Plan) and
7. Organisational performance

Two approaches will be used to focus on these objectives and consider their realisation against actions and indicators.:

1. One will attempt to quantify the aims contained in the two plans, looking at the period 2006-2011 for which there is hard data, and
2. The other will more discursively address the Action and Priority Areas.

5.1 Achievements by numbers

The indicators to be used in this assessment have been derived from the two Strategic Plans. It should be noted that many of these indicators cannot be quantitatively verified; they are either unavailable or difficult to obtain for Corio-Norlane or as a series to allow monitoring over time. Thus, in both Strategic Plans, key measures for *Supporting Economic Growth* were:

- **Business investment** (when data is only available for the Number of Businesses)
- **Government investment** (when there are many layers of government, all acting in often un-co-ordinated ways with no cumulative tally of expenditure readily available)
- **Port investment** (Port activity is available but not investment. It can be taken as a surrogate but does not apply exclusively to Corio-Norlane)
- **Avalon Airport investment and employment** (only the latter can be readily derived and it relates to the whole of Geelong, not specific to Corio-Norlane)
- **Retail investment and employment** (only the latter is available for the region and Corio-Norlane over time)
- **Numbers and the proportion of unemployed** (a key readily accessible, if controversial, set of numbers)

Indicators for the *Linking of Labour Supply to Demand* were:

- **To grow tourism jobs** (Tourism employment is not directly measured, but a surrogate is employment in Accommodation and Food Services)
- **Number of youth who are unemployed** (Available)
- **Proportion of those over 65 who are working** (Not readily available. But numbers/proportion over 65 is accessible for the region and Corio-Norlane)
- **Number of GPs in the area** (Not readily available)
- **Year 12 completion rates** (Available for the region and Corio-Norlane)
- **Participation in post-secondary education** (Available for TAFE and University)
- **Growth in economic output** (Available only for the City of Greater Geelong)

And those related to *Education and Training* were:

- **80% of the Northern Futures cohort** will complete a qualification
- **140 people per year** will be assisted by *Northern Futures*
- **Secure and greater funding** (Details of *Northern Futures* funding is not readily available due to the auspice by Norlane Community House and the variety of funding streams)

Table 4 sets out the available data against the objectives of the Strategic Plans:

Table 4 Strategic Plan objectives and outcomes, by data available 2006-2011

Objective and Indicator	City of Greater Geelong		Corio (C)-Norlane (N)	
	2006/7	2011	2006/7	2011
<i>Supporting economic growth</i>				
No. of businesses	939	873	Not available	
Port activity (Millions of Tons)	10.8	15.4	Irrelevant to Corio-Norlane	
Avalon employment		756 (2012)		
Retail employment (Number)	11 780	12 104	740 (C)	806(C)
Unemployment Nos.	5785	5631	262 (N)	333 (N)
Unemployment (%)	4.3	5.99	1 184	1 229
			11.8 (C)	12.1 (C)
			16.8 (N)	16.7 (N)
<i>Linking labour supply and demand</i>				
Tourism jobs	5507	6394	329 (C)	473 (C)
(Accomm. + Food)			192 (N)	179 (N)
Youth unemployment %	6.2 (2016)		16.5 (2016)	
% Over 65 years old	12.8	16.8	12.4 (C)	11.5 (C)
			19 (N)	18.1(N)
Year 12 Completion	36.3	41.6	23.9 (C)	26.2(C)
			21.0 (N)	24.8 (N)
Participation in TAFE/University	5.1	6.0	2.7 (C)	3.6 (C)
			2.8 (N)	3.7 (N)
Grow economic output by 15%	GNP=\$10.1 billion (2012)		Not available	
<i>Education and Training</i>			Completion Rates 2011-2015	
80% will complete a qualification			Business Admin (92%)	
			Health/Com Services (68%)	
			Transport/Logistics (69%)	
			Construction (55%)	
140 clients pa			Average 71 pa 2010-2015	
<i>Northern Futures performance</i>			Annual data is available but difficult to access overall as data kept in form required for each funder	
Numbers of clients				
Numbers in training				
Numbers in Placements				
Numbers in Employment - 16 weeks; 52 weeks				

Sources: ABS Corio-Norlane SA2 National Regional Profile, 2011; <http://profile.id.com.au/geelong/> Accessed 28/11/2016; City of Geelong (2012) Economic Indicators Bulletin; Northern Futures Strategic Plans (for 2009-2013 and 2014-2018); Northern Futures Data, as tabled at the March 2016 Steering Committee meeting.

On the raw data presented above it is difficult to assess the success of *Northern Futures*. In part this is due to a paucity of data and the poor quality of what is available, but also because results are difficult to disassociate from other influences.

One important and successful indicator is the growing number of people in Corio-Norlane who have finished Year 12 and gone on to post-secondary education. However, this is occurring across the greater Geelong region and it is therefore unclear what specific role *Northern Futures* may have played in this development.

So too the growth in employment of key economic sectors such as Retail and Accommodation and Food. This may indeed be related to the Hospitality training courses offered at *Northern Futures*, but does not explain the region wide growth in these areas or the fall in employment in Accommodation and Food in Norlane.

On some vitally important indicators – unemployment numbers and rates – the results are mixed. There was a small fall in the unemployment rate for Norlane and a rise in both the numbers and proportions in Corio. This occurred when there were significant rises across the City of Greater Geelong and could suggest that increases in unemployment in the northern suburbs might well have been far worse were it **not** for *Northern Futures*, though any such conclusion would be a tentative one.

Notable in this exercise are the numbers of indicators in both Strategic Plans which cannot be quantified or readily derived, either for the whole region or for Corio-Norlane. There are also indicators used in the Strategic Plans for which data is not available over time. It is therefore recommended that *Northern Futures* reviews the Indicators it uses to assess its own performance for reporting on the current Strategic Plan and certainly for subsequent plans. A set of measures need to be derived for which data is readily available at the regional and local scales, can be secured in a time series and which standardise ways of assessing its performance (Recommendation 3).

Other numbers which indicate the success of *Northern Futures* relate to referrals and recruitment, participation in accredited courses, graduations, work placements and on-going employment, for 16 and then 52 weeks. Various reports to the *Northern Futures* Steering Committee show the following:

The Federal Department of Employment (accessing *Northern Futures* data bases in 2016) calculated that:

- For the period 2011 to 2015 a total of 803 clients were registered with *Northern Futures*.
- 426 were funded referrals and of these 279 secured Placements (65%) and 189 (or 44%) were in work after 16 weeks.
- Of the 803 referrals, 355 (or 44%) were in Placements and 230 (or 29%) in work after 16 weeks.

This does **not** compare well with the equivalent figures for all Victorian Work and Learning Centres, where comparable figures are around 49% for Employment Placements and 54% in jobs 16 weeks later for all clients (funded and non-funded) (See Bodsworth 2014).

However, the data is notoriously difficult to secure and in another set, sent to the Brotherhood of St Laurence as part of the reporting requirements for a Work and Learning Centre (over a different time period i.e. three years from 2012-2015) the figures are:

- Number of clients: 686 (against a target of 656)
- Number who secured employment: 438 or 64%
- Numbers in employment after 16 weeks: 270 or 39.4%

In addition, there are figures for those who completed accredited training (286) and those who completed non-accredited training (412). A total of 698; difficult to reconcile with a total of 686 clients.

Table 5 Numbers of *Northern Futures* clients – from contact to employment

Year	Registered	Employment Placements	Place't Rate (%)	16 Week Outcome	16 Wk Rate (%)	52 Week Outcome	52 Wk Rate (%)
2009	TAC Traineeships	12	70	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2010	7	7	100	6	86	3	43
2011	85	71	84	54	65	30	35
2012	130	76	58	54	41	38	29
2013	88	61	70	46	52	23	26
2014	75	49	65	30	40	9	12
2015	108	60	60	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Source *Northern Futures* October 2015 and 2016)

In addition to these gross numbers – and their variable indications of success – there is data on individual programs oversights by *Northern Futures*. Here the success rates are far more impressive and perhaps the data more reliable. In an evaluation conducted over 2012 of three training course in Logistics, Hospitality and Aged Care, the following was found (See Johnson 2012 for details):

Stage	Logistics	Hospitality	Aged Care
Recruitment	35	30	27
Training	15 + 16 = 31	27	13
Completion	28 90% Completion	18 66.6% completion	12 92% completion
In employment (April 2012)	31 94% From recruitment to employment	21 70% From recruitment to employment	15 55.5% From recruitment to employment

Overall there is a Completion of Training Rate of 83% and an Employment Rate of 71.5%.

A much smaller program, the **Turning Lives Around 180o Project**, which put six Northern Futures clients through training (*Certificate II in Transport and Logistics*) and into employment at Cotton On was evaluated in 2013. Only one participant did not complete the course or secure employment, giving an **83% success rate** (Johnson 2013).

Senior Manager of the **Alcoa Foundation's Global Internship Program** describes *Northern Futures* as delivering "world's best practice" and its graduate employment rate of 70% among its interns was 23% higher than the program average.

A formal evaluation was also completed of the Northern Bay Guarantee program. Initiated by Shell Australia, who approached *Northern Futures* with concerns for young mothers in the area who were limited by their parental status from finishing high school or completing higher education and securing paid work. It became a partnership between Northern Bay College, The Gordon, Deakin University, Viva Energy and *Northern Futures*. The latter was to recruit up to 26 eligible young parents, get them through the *Getting Ahead* Program and offer personalised assistance and their links with employers to facilitate job placements and traineeships (Blake and Vass 2015: 7). The partners guaranteed for two years to provide access to fee free employment development programs, national training programs and degrees. At the end of 2015 it had achieved its high end goal of enabling 20 young parents to participate in a broad range of vocational education and training and four had achieved employment, with high hopes for many of the others. While these were concrete outcomes, the evaluation also notes:

...it is likely that the true return on investment will be realised in the coming years through the young parent's employment and subsequent social and economic contribution to Australian society... The longer-term economic benefit of the project can ... be understood by its potential to reduce intergenerational poverty, and avoiding the subsequent financial demands related to long-term unemployment, poor health, antisocial behaviour and potential (incarceration" (Blake and Vass 2015: 4).

The success of *Northern Futures* is therefore not solely registered by short term statistics. Its objective and achievements are far broader.

5.2 Other Achievements against Strategic Plan objectives

While the quantifiable Objectives for both plans have been considered above, it is also appropriate to assess those that are more discursive, based on advocacy and relationships, as well as the work of the organisation in relation to recruiting long term unemployed people, engaging them in different forms of training and then placing them in employment.

Each of the Strategic Plan Priority Areas and their more detailed strategies will be considered in turn, with the core activities of Training, Placement and Employment considered in more detail than others.

The basis of the assessment is the author's long term membership of the *Northern Futures* Steering Committee (from 2011-2016) and interviews with employers, *Northern Futures* staff and training providers along with two previous evaluations (See Johnson 2012 and 2013).

Strategic Plan No. 1: The Way Forward. A Strategic plan for social transformation 2009-2013

Objectives	Measures taken	Assessment
Action Area 1: Supporting economic growth		
<p>Strategy 1 Future proofing</p> <p>Via supporting the development of a flexible and responsive workforce; encourage investment in R&D to assist industry and develop partnerships to assist competitiveness in a global economy</p>	<p>Formed CNDAB – a Deakin Corio-Norlane Development partnership</p> <p>GIFF supported</p> <p>Joint Deakin-NF team to research new technologies/production methods and local forum for their dissemination</p> <p>Trade Training Centre</p> <p>Development of social procurement strategy</p> <p>New and effective partnerships and training courses – Logistics, CREATE@Work, G-Force</p> <p>BEAR assessment of labour market</p>	<p>CNDAB is now disbanded</p> <p>GIFF was successful though NF role unclear beyond lobbying</p> <p>Well outside core activities of NF. Not pursued long term by Deakin</p> <p>Trade Training Centre set up</p> <p>Realised five years later with GROW</p> <p>Most effective were partnerships with JAs, new training courses and systematic assessment of labour force gaps (needs to be done regularly)</p>
<p>Strategy 2 Infrastructure – Business and industry.</p> <p>Support investment to develop a major transport hub in the northern part of Geelong</p>	<p>Geelong by-pass and Ring Road</p> <p>Heales Rd industrial estate</p> <p>International facilities at Avalon</p> <p>Better port links</p> <p>Geelong Inter-Modal freight terminal at Lara</p>	<p>Transport links are a major comparative advantage for the region but most of these projects are large scale and well beyond NF to deliver though lobbying was useful.</p> <p>Recommend a focus on better local transport which is very poor and impacts on clients</p>
<p>Strategy 3 Neighbourhood economy - especially vibrant local retail precincts</p>	<p>DHS Norlane Regeneration Plan for new houses, Northern Water Plant and Neighbourhood Renewal, especially upgrade of local parks and schools</p> <p>BEAR and local procurement</p> <p>Lift local retail precincts</p>	<p>Many of these objectives were achieved as part of larger State government programs for local regeneration and improvement</p> <p>The one serious gap is the boosting of local retail precincts.</p>

Objectives	Measures taken	Assessment
Action Area 1: Linking labour supply and demand		
<p>Strategy 4 Reduce worklessness</p> <p>Via creating supportive pathways into jobs that match the skills and aspirations of local residents</p>	<p>Support for social enterprises – CREATE@Work and Rosewall Training Care</p> <p>Shell restoration of Limeburners Lagoon with community input</p> <p>As part of Neighbourhood Renewal and partnerships with Matchworks and TAC people put into training and work</p> <p>Develop a pre-vocational course and targeted training with TAFE</p> <p>Central and local contact point for advice, training and employment information</p> <p>Employ local campaign</p>	<p>55 placements achieved</p> <p>BEAR program to explore and remove barriers to the growth of local enterprises and support local employment</p> <p>Development of a pre-vocational program (Getting Ahead)</p> <p>TAC engaged 27 trainees</p> <p>Partnership with Diversitat for work with refugees on training and engagement</p> <p>Norlane Community Centre became a local contact point for advice, training and employment information.</p> <p>GROW eventually pursued this agenda</p>
<p>Strategy 5 Increasing productivity</p>	<p>Support health services redevelopment and healthy cities accreditation</p> <p>Support social enterprises eg Urban Bean Café (2010)</p>	<p>This is a rather vague and overly ambitious objective.</p> <p>Urban Bean Café supported</p>
<p>Strategy 6 Infrastructure to connect communities</p>	<p>Work with CNDAB to promote walkability and positive health outcomes-Neighbourhood Renewal</p> <p>Re-development of the North Geelong railway station</p>	<p>Overly vague and part of larger agendas</p> <p>The North Geelong station is still a poorly designed facility. More urgent is to improve local public transport connections – not achieved</p>
<p>Strategy 7 Support small to medium enterprises via better links with employment service providers, training providers and local employment</p>	<p>G21 employer tool kit</p> <p>Employer Reference Group established</p> <p>Set up a local Development Authority</p> <p>Outreach centre for careers advice and training information</p>	<p>Reference Group and local Development Authority not established</p> <p>NF becomes the outreach centre at NCC</p>
<p>Strategy 8 Improve school retention and completion rates</p>	<p>NF works with and supports school-based initiatives and dedicated programs to link school leavers with employers</p> <p>Partnership with JSAs, CREATE, Matchworks, G-Force leads to</p> <p>100 employment outcomes</p>	<p>Set up a skills store/outreach centre</p> <p>Ultimately the Alcoa Foundation and Shell support young school leavers into training and work via NF at NCC</p>

Objectives	Measures taken	Assessment
Action Area 1: Linking labour supply and demand cont.		
Strategy 9 Provide high quality and accessible learning infrastructure	Trade Training Centre Diversitat Hub Neighbourhood Houses deliver courses with social enterprises	Trade Training Centre established Diversitate Hub built but no ongoing relationship with NF TAFE aligned with local needs NCC becomes the central point of contact for locals seeking training and jobs
Strategy 10 Enhanced support services to encourage participation in education and paid work	Redevelopment of the Norlane Community Centre and co-location of many relevant agencies Young Mums programs in local schools	This aim and set of actions replicates many of those noted earlier Shell program to support young mums in association with NF
Strategy 11 Improve access to early education	Co-location of services – early years, health, social and employment Support new school pilot programs for extended school opening hours and support for vulnerable students	Support given to the co-location of many services and expansion of those offered via local schools

Many of these objectives relate to what became the core set of activities of *Northern Futures* – community engagement at the Norlane Community Centre with a host of co-located services, the development of customised training courses offered from there and strong partnerships with Job Service Agencies and employers. In addition, there was a great deal of advocacy and support given to larger programs running in the area – such as Neighbourhood Renewal and Building the Education Revolution.

This plan in its emphasis on these activities is a focused and sound one, though it is also repetitive in its Strategies (especially around delivering education) and some go well beyond the capacity of *Northern Futures* to deliver (such as the Geelong Ring Road, revitalising North Geelong station or an expansion to international facilities at Avalon). However, if the core activities of *Northern Futures* are focused on, this plan was highly successful in prefiguring positive outcomes for the organisation.

The same cannot be said for the subsequent Strategic Plan (for 2014-2018).

Strategic Plan No 2.: 3214 Northern Futures Strategic Plan 2014-2018

Priority Area 1 Policy and Advocacy

Use our expertise and proven track record to become the key advocate group for the Northern Suburbs. Use our accredited voice to shape policy on education, training and employment for the better.

Objectives	Measures Taken (Noted in Plan)	Assessment
<p>1 Position NF as the key advocate for the northern suburbs</p> <p>Provide evidence based public comment on education, training and employment</p> <p>Contribute to shaping policy by writing submissions</p>	<p>Regular press statements on NF actions</p> <p><i>Government requests input</i></p> <p><i>Expertise is recognised by government and industry</i></p> <p><i>Comparable organisations seek “a consultancy” with NF</i></p>	<p>NF worked with local Federal MPs, G21 and COG to have the Work for the Dole rules altered to admit the Northern Futures training regime as a legitimate activity (June 2016).</p> <p>Effective recruitment of key regional stakeholders onto the Steering Committee</p> <p>Industry approaches NF</p> <p>Approached by GROW to be a key organisation to deliver on their objectives in the northern Geelong</p>
<p>2 Create stronger partnerships to strengthen NF voice</p>	<p><i>Seek out and strengthen strategic partnerships</i></p> <p>NF has very many effective partnerships as represented by membership of its Steering Committee</p>	<p>NF is recognised as a key organisation by COGG, G21 and others.</p>
<p>3 Develop a proactive advocacy plan on significant issues</p>	<p><i>Develop a series of policy papers on key issues</i></p> <p><i>Proactively contribute to policy that impacts on the northern suburbs</i></p>	<p>Submissions on key policies are done as required. There has not been a series of policy papers on any policy actions which impact on the northern suburbs.</p>
<p>4 Secure funding</p>		<p>Funding has been secured via auspicing by a number of key organisations (COGG, Skilling the Bay, Work and Learning Centres), others for project-based support (Alcoa, Viva Energy) as well as by partnering with JAs.</p>

Priority Area 2 Supporting Economic Growth

Work alongside community leaders (sic) work on creating Economic Independence and Social Inclusion for the Northern Suburbs to drive the economic development in (sic) the area

Objectives	Measures taken (Noted in Plans)	Assessment of effectiveness
<p>1 Support the northern suburbs industries to attract investment that promotes growth</p> <p>Facilitating cross-industry partnerships to attract potential investment</p>	<p>Extensive partnering with industry for tours, placements, experts and employment</p> <p>Annual industry breakfasts</p> <p><i>Participation in GROW and its social procurement strategy</i></p> <p><i>Participation in regional transitioning forums</i></p>	<p>Relationships with industry partners in general are good</p> <p>Unclear how these relations have led to new investment or industry collaborations</p> <p>Engagement with GROW and regular participation in regional development forums</p>
<p>2 Identify jobs of the future</p> <p>Develop a skilled, flexible and responsive workforce that supports the Northern Suburbs industries growth and transition</p> <p>NF Participates in the social procurement strategy GROW</p>	<p>Liaison with industry to ensure training matches needs</p> <p><i>Close connection with COG and its regular jobs gap analysis</i></p> <p>(See Priority Area 3 for engagement with and promotion of annual jobs gap report)</p>	<p>Interviews with employers confirm that NF clients are well equipped to meet their changing needs.</p> <p>Regular contact between NF staff and industry is vital and in general is sufficient, though these relationships also need careful management and nurturing</p> <p>NF is participating in GROW</p>
<p>3 Secure investment for the key infrastructure required to develop the Northern Suburbs into a major transport hub</p>	<p><i>Facilitate cross-industry partnerships and be a voice for a major transport hub</i></p>	<p>Securing the connection of a rail, road and air set of linkages and a major transport hub in the northern suburbs is a regional objective that NF can contribute to but cannot deliver</p>
<p>4 Support the economic growth and independence of the Northern Suburbs</p>	<p>Advocate and support the development of local infrastructure and land use strategies to attract investment and growth</p>	<p>Seen most successfully in the development of the Heales Road industrial estate (a regional project)</p> <p>While senior NF staff can lend their voice to such efforts, other staff energy should perhaps not be diverted to this cause.</p>

Priority Area 3 Education and training

Support the Geelong economy further by identifying key employment gaps and ensuring a flexible approach to shape our education and training programs to meet the needs of the economy

Objectives	Measures taken (Noted in plans)	Assessment of effectiveness
<p>1 To strengthen the education and training arm to further enhance its ability to adapt with the needs of the economy and jobs gaps</p> <p>By ensuring the Education and Training arm of NF is nimble and adaptable to the region's changing economic priorities</p>	<p>Development of the Getting Ahead program, a Certificate 1 basic introduction to work qualification.</p> <p>Modification and local delivery of training programs to both meet the needs of employers but also to boost attendance and completion rates.</p> <p>Extension of courses to take in new employer needs, such as introducing Business Basics and connecting more strongly with the expanding health and insurance sectors.</p>	<p>Getting Ahead has been critical in connecting long term, disengaged unemployed people to the disciplines and skills needed for studying and (re)entering the paid workforce.</p> <p>Running customised 'place-based' courses at the Norlane Community Centre and staff willingness to ensure clients get to classes, by physically transporting them if necessary, has been critical to client access and on-going attendance.</p> <p>Extension in the number and form of training courses and connection with more employers has enhanced the range of openings and success possibilities for clients</p>
<p>2 Work with COGG to identify and circulate the skills gap audit</p>	<p>Use the skills gap audit to customise the courses and employment opportunities offered</p>	<p>Identifying and responding to skills gaps is a critical task for NF and a combination of good industry links and connection with the COGG survey has ensured that this is working well.</p> <p>Need to ensure labour market surveys continue.</p>
<p>3 Partner with like organisations who can assist in adapting the education and training streams as needed</p>	<p>Partnered with Skilling the Bay (1/1/2015)</p> <p>Partnered with Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative (in 2016) to broaden the client base and range of course offered</p>	<p>NF currently works with only one course provider – The Gordon – and this partnership is working very well.</p> <p>There are vulnerabilities in this solo connection such as a dependence on the good will of individuals to allow course modification to suit NF clients and susceptibility to any changes in Gordon funding that might impact on its ability to continue providing small enrolment courses.</p>

<p>4 NF will package their education and training model and on-sell it to government or other like organisations around Australia.</p> <p>As a consequence NF will be recognised as the Flagship organisation in education and training to fill workforce gaps in disadvantaged communities</p>	<p>The idea of packaging the NF model for others was recommended in earlier evaluations (Johnson 2012 and 2013).</p> <p>The NF model was recognised with an award at the 2015 Long Term Unemployment National Conference.</p> <p>Just how the model is to be promoted nationally is not clear in the Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>The Northern Futures model has yet to be codified, confirmed as successful (compared with others and its own objectives) and marketed to the nation.</p> <p>It is also comparable, but different, to 4 other Work and Learning Centres. This assessment finds that NF is strong in comparison to these other Work and Learning Centres.</p> <p>However, it is questionable whether the strengths of NF's 'place-based' model, deeply embedded in the Bridges out of Poverty philosophy and relatively small in scale, can be readily translated and used in other localities.</p>
<p>5 To continue to grow the training and education arm in order to reach more people.</p> <p>Work with government to increase funding to increase the capacity and reach of NF</p> <p>Partner with local community organisations to increase participant pool and reach</p> <p>Secure a sustainable funding source for the Education and Training programs</p>	<p>Reaching out and making new relationships across Victoria via the Work and Learning Centres</p> <p>Formally partnered with The Gordon to offer tailored courses</p> <p>Partnered with Wathaurong to extend participant pool and reach.</p> <p>Formal partners acknowledged on web site and include: Alcoa, Skilling the Bay, Barwon Health</p>	<p>Not clear how national links with education and training providers have been made.</p> <p>Funding beyond 2018 yet to be secured.</p>

Priority Area 4 Workforce placement

Increase our current workforce placements to positively shape the Northern Suburbs unemployment rate and ensure ongoing long-term employment opportunities for the area

Objectives	Measures taken (Noted in plans)	Assessment of effectiveness
<p>1 To prove the benefits of NF workforce placement model in a tangible way.</p> <p>Geelong organisations will seek out NF clients to become their employees</p>	<p><i>Develop tools to measure the costs and benefits of transitioning people into employment.</i></p> <p><i>Promote the benefit of the model and its positive impact on Geelong</i></p> <p>New manufacturing company AVASS contacted NF for skilled workers (Minutes 11/3/2016).</p>	<p>Not completed by December 2016</p> <p>Done regularly via press releases, media coverage and videos</p> <p>NF is being contacted by new and expanding companies in the region for their well-regarded trainees.</p>
<p>2 Increase the pool of workplaces taking NF participants</p>	<p><i>Encourage workplaces to join via positive promotion and annual celebration</i></p> <p><i>Proactively seek out business identified through the skills gap audits</i></p> <p><i>Increase the yield per business, NF participants will secure long term employment above industry standards</i></p>	<p>Over 50 industries/workplaces took NF clients in 2016.</p> <p>Annual Business Breakfast a valuable and appreciated recognition of business as is their invitation to trainee graduations</p> <p>Not clear what “industry standards” are and they are no doubt variable. Data on retention rates below and in general are good.</p>
<p>3 Position the NF model as best practice for the use of other government and community organisations (Repeats Objective 3.3 Above)</p>	<p><i>Advocate and implement systems to measure the inputs and outputs of the Model.</i></p> <p><i>Patent the NF Workforce Placement Model and make it available nationally and internationally.</i></p>	<p>See 3.3 above regarding work required to codify and document model and assess applicability for use in other localities.</p> <p>Regular presentations at the Annual Unemployment Conference and publication to be continued.</p>

Priority Area 5 Delivery and collaboration

Proactively and positively work with supporting industries to achieve higher and longer term workforce placements – working for amore holistic approach

Objectives	Measures taken (Noted in plans)	Assessment of effectiveness
1 To strengthen and clearly define collaborative relationships with JSAs	<i>Clarity and formality of relationships with JSAs needed.</i>	MOUs exist with JSAs/JAs but do not cover all exigencies. For example, changes to Work for the Dole rules in 2015-16 meant JAs stopped referring clients to NF. They were not formally obliged to do so and it took 6 months to re-establish the flow of clients. This should be addressed as part of regular risk assessments (see Recommendation 2)
2 To promote best practice collaboration with JSAs working with NF	<i>JSA will work proactively and positively with NF to achieve the best outcomes for participants</i>	There is a need for JAs and NF to work closely together, for their mutual benefit, and this mostly works well.
3 To ensure government departments publicly communicate their support for NF	<i>Define and agree on the NF cohort</i> <i>Lobby government for assurance of JAs sustainability of funding per placement if working with NF</i> <i>Improve efficiency of Centrelink referrals</i>	MOUs have been entered into with Jas

Priority Area 6 Organisational performance

Securing the future sustainability of Northern Futures through the adoption of best practice systems and additional resources where required. Secure ongoing funding source/s

Objectives	Measures taken (Noted in plans)	Assessment of effectiveness
1 To elevate focus on quality and best practice systems and service delivery	<p><i>Implementation of reporting and monitoring systems to support regulatory compliance and aid in transparency of statistics</i></p> <p><i>Stronger risk management system to ensure the highest level of safety and security of workers</i></p>	<p>Regular reports of performance made to the Steering Committee (2011-15).</p> <p>Acquittal of all funding completed and compliance secured.</p> <p>Annual audits successfully completed.</p> <p>OHS Management system in place.</p>
2 To ensure organisational resources match current and future organisational capacity and are utilised effectively	<p>Increased focus on running NF at full capacity and measure what this looks like.</p> <p>Build a business case for ongoing government, NGO and corporate funding.</p>	<p>Organisational resources currently match need.</p> <p>Measurements against Strategic Plan Objectives need to be improved. (See Recommendation)</p>
3 To increase focus on governance	<p>Continued holistic approach with a current and robust Steering Committee with membership from current and emerging sectors of Geelong</p> <p>The Steering Committee members need to be inducted and clear in their role and responsibilities</p> <p>Funding from government to support the lifting of standards and procedures and the codification of processes and procedures.</p>	<p>The Steering Committee is one of the great strengths of NF. Its membership includes all levels of government, key regional organisations, major employers, training operations and JAs, and represents the stakeholders needed for NF to be effective.</p> <p>An induction process and Terms of Reference for this Committee are in place.</p>

For a relatively small organisation with a modest array of staff and resources, the six objectives and related actions in the 2014-2018 Plan are hugely ambitious. There is also some repetition within the 2014-2018 Plan (in relation to the derivation and use of jobs gap data and on the need for secure ongoing funding) but more significantly, a number of the actions have NOT been realised.

Based on the audit above, Table 7 summarises the realisation of the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan's objectives as follows:

Table 7 Summary of 2014-2018 Strategic Plan goals and actions

Priority area and Actions	Yes	No	Maybe
1. Policy and Advocacy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NF as the key advocate for the region NF has strong partnerships NF engages in proactive advocacy Funding is secure (beyond 2018) 	X X	X	X
2. Supporting Economic Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attract investment Identify jobs of the future Skilled/flexible/responsive workers Participation in social procurement/GROW Secure a major transport hub Secure economic growth and independence for region 	X X X	X X	X
3. Education and Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen education and training to meet needs Strengthen education and training to facilitate growth Develop relevant partnerships NF as a Flagship model that can be patented and sold 	X X		X X
4. Workforce Placement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure effectiveness Organisations seek out NF clients Increase pool of participating employers 	X X X		
5. Delivery and collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalise and define relationships with JSAs Governments publicly support NF 	X		X
6. Organisational Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems to monitor practice Resources match capacity Focus on Governance, especially with the Steering Committee 	X X		X

Such an audit highlights what *Northern Futures* does, and does well, while throwing into sharp relief the areas where improvements are needed and where objectives might be modified.

Clearly *Northern Futures* is realising its objectives to have large numbers of strong partnerships, particularly with employers, but also JAs, training providers and regional organisations. *Northern Futures* is also achieving its objectives to develop and deliver the training and workers needed to meet the changing needs of employers in the region.

However, there are also a number of core areas where *Northern Futures* needs to focus its attention, to both realise the objectives of its own Strategic Plan and to be a more robust and effective organisation.

To achieve this *Northern Futures* needs far better monitoring and systems to document and assess progress. This will generate sound, up to date information on which it can build a strong business case to secure funding, from either the government or corporate sectors.

Specific recommendations are:

Recommendation 3. That *Northern Futures* should focus on its core activities and in its Strategic Plan ensure that advocacy, recruitment, client support, training and placement, employer engagement and the employment of clients is central. These objectives will be enhanced by Policy work to Support Economic Growth and be underpinned by effective Organisational Performance.

All Strategic Plan Objectives need to have KPIs; a few simple and accessible indicators of success should be derived and monitored. They should reflect the core objectives of Supporting Economic Growth, Linking Labour Supply and Demand, Education and Training, Employment Outcomes and Industry Collaboration.

Recommendation 4. Annual reporting on the Strategic Plan needs to occur along with regular reports to the Steering Committee/Advisory Committee on performance against agreed criteria. A priority will be to secure funding beyond 2018.

6. The experiences of Clients and Employers



6.1 Client experiences

For the Director of GROW: *Northern Future's* role is to engage with individuals to assess and identify any specific barriers they may have to accessing education/training and pathways to employment. Then, to work with them to manage these barriers to resolution. This is done through individualised, tailored, responsive support for even the least engaged unemployed person - and never giving up. This creates a space for clients to develop self-belief, connection to purpose, preparedness for education and training, capacity building, monitoring, ongoing problem solving and motivation to enter the workforce. (Interview 10.9.2015).

Interviews with long term clients of *Northern Futures* confirm this assessment and give an insight into how transformative the experience of interacting with this organisation can be.

Northern Futures provided to this evaluation a list of 10 clients who had given consent to be interviewed. Getting in contact with the persons on the list proved to be a difficult and lengthy process. While *Northern Futures* has interacted with many more clients and contact details of others who have secured traineeships with Barwon Health and the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) are available, the requirements of Deakin University Ethics Committee approval were that only those who had given consent to *Northern Futures* could be interviewed. And of these, only anonymous comments can be presented to protect the privacy of those involved.

Some information on other clients was available, and informative. Thus, for Barwon Health, the long-term experience of *Northern Futures* clients reveals a positive story of employment and further study as shown in Table 8:

Table 8 Barwon Health trainee experiences, 2014-2015

Year	Employed in Barwon Health	Employed outside of Barwon Health	Study or traineeship	Dropped out or No position
2014	8	1	0	0
2015	15	2	9	2

This is a strong outcome, as a large majority of those referred to Barwon Health were still in employment one to two years on. At the TAC, many *Northern Futures* clients were still working there after completion of their traineeships and all but one were viewed as highly competent, job ready and good employees.

Of the 10 *Northern Futures* clients who gave consent to be interviewed 9 were located and their details are in Table 9 below:

Table 9 Northern Futures (NF) Long Term Client Experiences

Client No	Year at NF	Directly after training	(May-Nov 2016)
1	2013	Cotton On	Numerous jobs and now pumping petrol
2	2013	Startrack	Startrack
3	2010	Cotton On	Unemployed
4	2014	Geelong Hospital	Nursing training
5	2013	Cotton On	House renovation – Moved to WA
6	2014	Case Craft	Case Craft
7	2015	Geelong Hospital	Private Security
8	2012	Godfrey Hirst	Cotton On (PT)
9	2015	Aged Care	Parenting – then Aged Care
10	-	-	-

(Source: Interviews May and November, 2016)

All but one of the *Northern Futures* clients interviewed were either in paid employment, if they weren't, they had chosen to care for their children (before using their training) or to undertake further training. In the one case of unemployment the person was burdened by a criminal record.

Those in paid work, and those who chose not to be, had nothing but praise for the support, care, skills and confidence that *Northern Futures* had given them. Further, most had turned their lives around from long term unemployment, relatively bleak situations of poverty, drug addition, single parenthood and mental health challenges. Comments on the role *Northern Futures* had played in their lives included:

Great, a vital part of the 3214 community. Without them, far more people would be in distress. They gave us all help to hold it together. Without them I would not have made it. They offer support not just for work but for personal stuff (Interview May 2016: Client 1).

They were very supportive. I wanted to give up many times...I would have given up loads of times if it wasn't for them (Interview December 2016, Client 9).

The job histories for the last 3-5 years of those interviewed was not always neat and could involve cycling from part time to full time jobs and then periods of unemployment, but as documented above, most had found jobs that they were now holding on to.

Many commented on the targeted and individualised support offered by *Northern Futures*, citing on-going offers of personal support, transport, general advice and proactive interventions to assist with housing and health issues. It was clear this holistic approach made a critical difference to their capacity to stay with the program. For example:

They were hands on...helping all the time. I love to continue with them nearby (Interview June 2016, Client 4).

They helped with some short-term money...They genuinely want to help. (XXX) was passionate and incredibly helpful. She would chase the (absent) ones down, pick them up if necessary (Interview May 2016, Client 6).

Equally critical were the relationships *Northern Futures* had with employers. Those that engaged with the program willingly took on clients referred to them and if not able to provide full time work, wherever possible gave them a trial, placement or traineeship.

These results are not just about employment. Consistent with the *Bridges of Poverty* approach, several respondents described how their lives had been transformed. Not only by achieving secure incomes and work-related orientations, but also more stable housing, a car perhaps, holidays and a sense of the future, including marriage and children. Things that had not seemed possible before.

Suggestions for improvement of the services offered by *Northern Futures* were non-existent, all the clients interviewed had only praise for the organisation and their experiences with it! Some illustrative comments:

They were fantastic. Couldn't be any better. Even now they help even if I'm not on their program. Helped me with food vouchers and to get out of a jam (Interview June 2016, Client 3)

Northern Futures were bloody terrific. Never had to wait for an answer and they supported me right through (Interview November 2016, Client 7).

All pretty great. Access always there to talk (Interview November 2016, Client No 8).

6.2 Employers experiences and suggestions

The *Northern Futures* web-site describes their partnerships with employers as follows:

Industry Partners work in collaboration with Northern Futures in two significant ways. They host industry visits for students undertaking certificate courses. These site visits provide students with valuable hands-on experience and the opportunity to see how their learning in the classroom translates into real life. It is a crucial step in helping students become job ready.

Northern Future's Industry Partners also provide employment opportunities, scholarships and work experience for Northern Futures graduates. Our Industry Partners get to know students throughout their courses and know that Northern Futures will link them with highly trained and supported individuals who are ready for work and who want to work.

Your support as an Industry Partner will help Northern Futures rebuild the 3214 area and the greater Geelong region. (<http://northernfuturesgeelong.net/get-involved/> Accessed 17.01 2017)

Since 2008 *Northern Futures* has extended this invitation to local businesses and for those that have engaged and maintained an on-going relationship with the organisation it has been an interesting, educational and mutually beneficial partnership.

Northern Futures' capacity to establish and maintain productive and on-going partnerships with employers is one of its core strengths. Industry partners support the work Northern Futures does in the 3214 area and many commit to an on-going take up of clients from *Northern Futures*.

As one commented:

We would use Northern Futures again and understand people from them and recommend them to other organisations. I know I can ring them (vs other organisations who are not as supportive or as open). They come every month, are open, listen, respond and are honest and appreciative (Employer 2016).

Currently there are at least 15 employers actively partnering with Northern Futures. Those consulted for this assessment were:

Table 10 Northern Futures Industry Partners - Interviewed, June 2016

Name of organisation	Sector and main activity	Relationship with Northern Futures and client intake
Barwon Health	Health services (7 000 staff)	Traineeships (7) and employment of graduates
City of Greater Geelong	Local government (2 700 staff)	Takes on work placements (3-4), trainees and employees (5+)
Channels Authority	Port Authority (6 staff)	Site visits only. Very small operation
Cotton On	Apparel importer Warehouse (255 staff) Head Office (1 000 staff)	Interns and employees (over 23 to date)
DEWLP	State Planning Authority	Site visits and Traineeships (3) offered
DHHS	State Health Department	Traineeships (6-7) and site visits
Godfrey Hirst	Carpet manufacturer (400 staff)	Site visits, expert input (interviewing and resumes) and casual workers (40-45)
Transport Accident Commission	State Independent Authority	Trainees (12 p.a. Up to 70 in total)
Viva Energy	Oil refining (400 staff, 350 contractors)	Tours of the plant, Apprentices (6) and trainees (for Administration 2)

The experience of employers (such as Cotton On Group, TAC, Viva Energy, Barwon Health, Showerline, Barrier Group, Transport Accident Commission) has varied. In 2007 following initial contact and engagement several issues were raised by employers. Problems identified included no follow through, the people sent as workers did not match requirements and then were not managed in an ongoing way, *Northern Futures* didn't appear to be listening and some employers felt let down. At this early stage a clear need to improve both support for the industry and the person being placed with them was identified (Interview, NF 12.8.15).

Interviews for this evaluation found a very different experience, with employers universally positive about their links with Northern Futures and their clients. Although some of the early problems may persist, as one employer noted:

Not all are successful. First ones not quite as successful...they weren't work ready. There were a few problems around behaviour, no real concept of a real workplace. We have constant conversations with Northern Futures, the Human Resources Manager and G-Force (Employer 2016)

The views, experiences and comments of employers interviewed for this assessment are summarised below:

There is a real commitment to *Northern Futures* and what it is trying to achieve in the northern suburbs of Geelong as well as to unemployed and disadvantaged individuals. This commitment is usually from the very top of the organisation and arose from a personal approach by a *Northern Futures* staff member, attending a *Northern Futures* graduation or/and meeting *Northern Futures'* clients. Such positive experiences were deemed "infectious" and often travelled down the organisation as the commitment is put into various forms of practice. This connection with *Northern Futures* often meshes well with broader commitments to Corporate Social Responsibility, "it is the right thing

to do”, and is a tangible manifestation of that policy and outlook. To illustrate with the words of employers:

To fulfil our corporate social responsibility, I didn't have to go to Northern Futures. But it happened because of the relationships that had been developed (Employer)

It is such a big thing for these people to turn their lives around...I see the transformation – from shattered confidence to dignity and hope” (Employer)

Even the small numbers are vital as it turns lives, families and communities around (Employer)

It is not about being philanthropic. The reality is of introducing people into the organisation. We need to have people who add value, even those with challenges in their lives. We have had one very good experience (with a NF client) and she was much better than those from other organisations (Employer)

There is recognition by some, especially in the social services field, that employment is a critical social determinant of good health and wellbeing. Engaging people from the northern suburbs in training, work placement and employment was viewed as supporting “clients” and lessening the demands on these services (such as health and social security payments)

There is a great deal of respect – if not enthusiastic admiration - for the *Northern Futures* approach, especially the holistic services, the *Bridges out of Poverty* framework and individual staff. Some had been to *Bridges* courses, others knew of the approach and basically “did it”, perhaps without formally knowing the framework.

There is also a more recent commitment to the “collective impact” of the GROW model and a willingness to work with a number of partners – eg Job Active Agencies, *Northern Futures* and educational organisations – to deliver efficient, holistic programs and outcomes. Assisted by regular meetings (monthly in most cases).

Most are very happy with the partnership and working relationship with *Northern Futures*. The staff are seen as very responsive, answering calls and contacts quickly and efficiently. Most problems are solved quickly either through direct contact or via the regular meetings

NF staff “came in straight away, very responsive” they are “Sensational! Amazing” (Employer)

They are fantastic and helpful. Always there at the end of the phone to pick up any issues and deal with it. They are right onto it and responsive to any question. Very enthusiastic” (Employer)

We use the Northern Futures staff to our advantage. If a worker doesn't turn up, they will follow up (rather than us which saves us time). They are very passionate and committed to what they do (Employers).

There are interesting as well as unintended/unanticipated impacts on the organisations involved with *Northern Futures*, such as increasing their “diversity” and openness to difference, changing the views of middle level managers and the nature of the workforce, even how their work is to be done, all in positive ways.

Adding value is also intangible. Others (in the organisation) need to value diversity and appreciate the importance of changing some ones’ life and gain a reward from just that. (Employer)

Northern Futures’ clients for at least some organisations, did not require any more “work” than other new employees or trainees. They came work ready, were well supported by and “added value” to the organisations.

It is the right thing to do. The calibre of people is great, there is also the CSR aspect and a dose of reality in the workplace. In contrast to the existing workforce which is ageing and has an average tenure of 17 years with a sense of entitlement, the Northern Futures people are keen and ready to work and develop (Employer)

Most apprentices have a real hunger to learn, especially those from Northern Futures. They are really hungry and realise their special position (Employer)

Not all trainees or work placement *Northern Futures* clients were directly employed by the organisation. Some did not see this as integral to the relationship, others did, and this perhaps needs clarification. Some employers just don’t have lots of new positions, have a different process for filling them and see the giving of work experience as “enough”. There is a need, therefore, to be sensitive to and appreciative of the needs and limits of the organisation.

Trainees from *Northern Futures* Business Basics course end up in a wide range of positions e.g. payroll, communications, strategy, program delivery. Those in Health may go into aged care, dental, bio-medical engineering, research and ethics. This is possible in a large organisation and shows the adaptability of *Northern Futures’* graduates, who can be “sought after” by managers.

What is critical is not just the skills and formal qualifications they but the values, outlooks and attitudes of successful *Northern Futures’* clients. Being confident, positive, ethical and reliable is just as important.

Getting to the graduations I notice a change in the group, the growth of confidence (Employer)

Northern Futures staff have key relationships and knowledge of the needs of local businesses built up over time. This is a major strength and much valued by their industry partners.

Employer identified risks and suggested improvements

Potential risks

- 1 Direct engagement with CEOs is vital. At times this has not gone well, not happened or needs to be revisited. Without CEO buy in, the relationship will not happen or not realise its full potential.
- 2 A better sense of mutual respect between *Northern Futures* and its stakeholders who do have relevant knowledge, other demands on their time and resources. All are committed but need to be treated with respect and not regularly asked about doing more.
- 3 Taking a set number of trainees each year may not always work as job openings may be limited and not suitable for all. There needs to be flexibility in setting the targets and possibly using a placement and then casual employment model to trial people which could lead to a better strike/employment rate. Training time lines should also be better meshed with employer needs, if they are seasonal.

Traineeships are demanding and a big time investment (Employer)

- 4 It needs to be acknowledged that *Northern Futures'* clients may not work out and may well be demanding of time and energy above and beyond what an employer, with all the best intentions in the world, is willing to expend.

Northern Futures client/trainee has lowered the output as a result of her social anxiety disorder. She won't use the phone, talk to people so we redesigned the role around her...we talked with her trainer and XXX (from Northern Futures) and we will get to 12 months but we won't retain her (Employer)

- 5 Risk management of retaining key staff and their knowledge and connections in the region. The whole operation is very relationship orientated and succession planning and knowledge transfer is of concern to partners. There is a need to be sensitive that people are not interchangeable and staff replacements may not automatically work.

We deal with other workplace organisations and Northern Futures are the most responsive and we get what we want. It is about relationships (Employer)

Suggested improvements

1. Employers – especially the larger ones – have real resources that could be made available to deal with changes and challenges to *Northern Futures* funding, resourcing and staffing.
2. Some partners may need to affirm and perhaps justify the value of the connection with *Northern Futures* to their staff/Board/other stakeholders. A more formal “thanks” for offering placements, tours and other resources, along with relevant feedback would assist these employers.
3. In some organisations, there is a greater need and demand than there are clients/applicants. This is related to the JA referral problem of 2016, but is still limiting the effectiveness and reputation of *Northern Futures*. *Northern Futures* needs to urgently work to increase the supply of trainees and workers for those employers who need them.
4. At what point do *Northern Futures* staff let their trainees/clients “go” and negotiate their own places and issues in the workplace? At times employers thought it was too soon (and there were problems) but at other times, employers noted the wish for trainees to be independent and deal directly with them rather than through *Northern Futures* staff. Sensitivity to this issue is recommended to ease any tensions in the relationship between *Northern Futures*, their clients and the employer.
5. Clarification of the model and how, exactly, it works may be in order. Especially as staff changes within employers may mean institutional knowledge and experience is lost. An annual briefing would assist here and allow stakeholders to be updated on any changes in the operating environment for both employers and *Northern Futures*.

7. Strengths and Challenges for *Northern Futures*



The following summary of *Northern Futures*' strengths and the future challenges it faces is drawn from a detailed consideration of economic and policy contexts; an examination of comparable programs; a detailed assessment of *Northern Futures*' Strategic Plans and the experiences of some of their clients and employers. From this evidence an array of real strengths have emerged and some limitations and areas for improvement have been signalled.

These strengths and challenges are the key findings of this assessment and form the basis of the Recommendations, noted throughout this document.

7.1 Strengths

Longevity and scale – *Northern Futures* has been established in one form or other since 2008 and over eight years, has established many valuable links with key stakeholders in the area, refined its approach and delivered real improvements to the lives of close to 1 000 variously disadvantaged and disengaged residents of Geelong's northern suburbs. Ranging in size from two to five employees, the relatively small scale of the operation allows ready communication, alignment of goals and the potential for effective connections across the region.

Reputation – *Northern Futures* has long worked pro-actively with long-term unemployed residents of the 3214 area and in its considered approach to clients, has built up massive credibility and status within the area. It is approached by the unemployed, by Job Active agencies and employers as well as key regional organisations for advice and to extend its activities.

Value for money – *Northern Futures* data obtained for 2015 (See Appendix 10.1) shows that of the 108 clients assisted, 60 went into paid employment and a further 19 went on to further education for a total expenditure of \$839 558. This represents a cost of \$13 993 to move one long term unemployed person into paid work. If the numbers in further training are added, the cost reduces to \$10 627 per person. These clients ultimately go on to become tax payers and then would no longer be in receipt of various forms of welfare.

The costs of supporting a single unemployed person on New Start Allowance is \$13 746 per annum and the rate for a single person with children is \$14 869 per annum, these (together with any additional entitlements for children of rent subsidies) are on-going annual costs to government. A *Northern Futures* client that successfully transitions to employment generates a one-off cost of approximately the same amount as 1 years New Start Allowance. This indicates that the program is both cost effective and socially beneficial over time.

Staff – the staff of *Northern Futures* are one of its greatest asset. Most of its workers, come from the area or have strong connections with it, all understand the practical application of the *Bridges out of Poverty* approach and all believe in the *Northern Futures* model. This gives the organisation great strength and continuity. Staff are committed to the people they serve, to them working at *Northern Futures* is more of a calling than a job. This commitment and passion underpins all aspects of the *Northern Futures* model.

Steering Committee- is long established and comprised of key regional stakeholders and people able to deliver (be it jobs, political influence, clients, training or relevant insights). At times members, have been very effective lobbyists for *Northern Futures*. Composition is regularly reviewed and new members recruited according to their capacity to assist in achieving organisational goals.

Bridges Out of Poverty is a framework which emphasises both individual responsibility and class positions while also valuing the whole person. It is readily understood and widely disseminated across *Northern Futures* staff, and to potential and actual employers, other service providers and the clients themselves. This facilitates a shared understanding of what is needed for a person living in entrenched poverty to overcome barriers to employment and the value of multifaceted interventions, targeted and personalised for individual clients.

A holistic approach – *Northern Futures* clients are carefully screened to determine if they are “ready” to take on the various training and placement packages offered. Once accepted they will be offered ongoing and wide ranging supports, tailored to their specific needs. This includes not only formal training, work placements and employment opportunities but also transport, food, advice on housing, health, a sympathetic and on-going ear, even actual cash to allow people to attend and realise their training and employment objectives.

Education and training – *Northern Futures* has a partnership with The Gordon to provide ‘place-based’ TAFE training at the Norlane Community Centre. In addition, it has developed sensitive pre-training - most notably the *Getting Ahead* program – in recognition of the need for training in basic work disciplines, presentation, literacy and particularly with their client base, confidence building. As the consultation with clients and employers showed this pre-training is a key factor in getting placements and staying in employment.

Location – *Northern Futures* belief in place-based services is further enhanced by its location in the Norlane Community Centre, a community hub; warm, inviting and concrete in its offering of assistance (including food, information, support, computers, training and education).

The co-location with other social services offering their own broad array of support, means *Northern Futures* clients with multiple issues, can be positively assisted at one place. This can also help to create a sense of community and belonging for those who may have been experiencing isolation or social disengagement.

Relationships:

With employers – A bank of employers have been built up and these relationships are generally well managed and maintained, allowing *Northern Futures*' clients to have relatively good success rates in relation to their ongoing employment.

The relationship is not one way, but clearly benefits the employers, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility compact, but also in providing job-ready workers to meet skills gaps.

The close and ongoing relationships with employers means that their changing training and skill needs are known by *Northern Futures* and can be met with customised courses and workers, such as Business Basics and courses in Transport and Logistics, Hospitality and Aged Care.

With trainers – The relationships with education and training providers has altered over the years, but in general they are good and allow both the delivery on site of courses – hence making them accessible to northern suburbs clients – and their customisation to both the clientele and the needs of employers.

With JSAs/JAs – This relationship is critical in that it delivers many referrals to *Northern Futures*. While at times fractious with or subject to major challenges in the light of government policy changes (such as in 2016) in general these arrangements are good, though they could be more formalised to ensure greater continuity and clarity of responsibilities.

With Clients – These are the relationships which matter the most, as without the credibility, sensitivity and positive outcomes, there would be no *Northern Futures* and certainly not a high level of success in achieving long term outcomes. It is the whole package of approach, screening, support, training, employer liaison and ongoing care which allows *Northern Future* to be so strong in this region.

Regular evaluations – *Northern Futures* has commissioned several evaluations of its programs and now this critical assessment of the overall organisation. Those in the past have been only mildly critical and most of their recommendations have been adopted. *Northern Futures* has therefore been an open learning organisation and its success is partly the result of this self-critical orientation.

7.2 Challenges

Effective advocacy – Since *Northern Futures* inception a range of other organisations with a focus on addressing key regional issues have become active in Geelong's regional revitalisation (and many of these are represented on the Steering Committee). The existence of a number of organisations with common objectives and shared agendas raises the distinct possibility of duplication or cross-purpose activity. This could undermine *Northern Futures* ability to effectively advocate on behalf of some of the most disadvantaged members of the community.

To maintain and enhance *Northern Futures*' effectiveness and capacity as regional advocate the Steering Committee should be used as a forum for greater co-ordination of lobbying and planning activities (Recommendation 1).

Risks – Recent history over 2016 highlighted two potentially serious risks for *Northern Futures* – changes in Government policy which meant no client referrals from JAs and the sudden departure of key staff. While ultimately dealt with through the hard work of Steering Committee members and other staff members these events exposed the need for a Risk Assessment to be undertaken and reviewed on an annual basis (Recommendation 2).

Strategic Planning – There have been two detailed Strategic Plans over the course of the organisation's history, but as this report has shown they have proven difficult to assess because of the absence of clear KPIs and the absence of a forum in which performance can be assessed. (Recommendation 3 addresses these limitations).

Governance – While there is a highly effective Steering Committee, the Committee acts in an advisory way but is not a Board and does not set strategic direction nor is it directly accountable for actions, though often mobilised to assist in the delivery of *Northern Futures* objectives. A move towards incorporation currently under advisement by *Northern Futures* would allow it to be more accountable at a local level and facilitate the involvement of key stakeholders in setting and monitoring the strategic direction of *Northern Futures*. It would and should allow better data collection and reporting, particularly around KPIs and budget matters. It would also allow greater co-ordination with other regional organisations in setting priorities and political lobbying (Recommendation 1 and 3 support this).

Funding – The organisation has been funded in a host of different ways in the past and has drawn funds from various sources, allowing some freedom and innovative programs to emerge. However secure on-going funding for core services is a concern that needs the concerted attention of a new Board and perhaps inclusion of employers to help solving any future funding challenges resulting from worsening economic conditions in Geelong (Recommendation 4).

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9. Appendixes

9.1 Northern Futures 2015 Data Analysis – Clients and Budget

The following data follows the path of clients engaged in courses.

2015	Enrolments	Completions	Transition to Employment	Transition to Education	Disengaged	Ongoing
CSS May 15	11	9	5	4	3	
CSS May 15	8	8	7	0	1	
AC Feb 15	9	8	6	1	2	
WH 1/02/2015	12	12	9	0	3	
WH 1/10/2015	8	5	5	0	3	
BB MAR 2015	10	9	8	1	1	
BB OCT 2015	11	10	5	2	2	
GA MAR 2015	14	13	3	7	3	
GA OCT 2016	14	10	2	4	4	
PSA 2015	11	11	10		1	
TOTALS 2015	108	95	60	19	23	
	100%	88%	56%	18%	21%	6%

2015 Calendar Year – Profit & Loss (Accrual Basis)

Income

Grant/scholarships received	\$61,678.92	
BSL Funding	\$230,000.00	
Skilling The Bay	\$375,643.63	
Alcoa	\$74,412.56	
Gifts	\$3,373.27	
Support fees	\$88,786.29	
Events held	\$5,590.72	
Other costs recouped from GTO	\$472.58	
	<u>\$839,957.97</u>	<u>\$839,957.97</u>

9.2 Interview schedules: employers, training providers and clients

Questions/Topics for Employers

1. What is your industry? Details of your operation – no. of employees, employment needs, industry outlook
2. Can you describe the nature of your relationship with Northern Futures? When and how it began and developed?
3. How many NF clients have you had on placement?
4. How many NF clients have you had as employees?
5. Have you found NF clients to be well trained/disciplined/good workers?
6. What was the nature of the support offered to you and these workers by Northern Futures?
7. Have there been any problems or issues with NF workers? How were they addressed?
8. What is your assessment of NF as an organisation? Are there any areas from your viewpoint that could be improved?

Questions/Topics for Training Providers

1. What is your area of expertise?
2. Can you describe the nature of your relationship with Northern Futures? When and how did it begin and develop?
3. How many NF clients have you had?
4. Have you found NF clients to be disciplined and good workers?
5. Have there been any problems or issues with NF students? How were they addressed?
6. What is your assessment of NF as an organisation? Are there any areas from your viewpoint that could be improved?

Questions/Topics for Past Clients

1. What is your educational, housing and employment history?
2. How did you come to connect with Northern Futures?
3. What sort of training, work placement and job opportunities have you had after your contact with NF?
4. How has your life changed since coming into contact with NF?
5. Have you had any issues with NF?
6. What is your assessment of NF as an organisation? Are there any areas from your viewpoint that could be improved?

9.3 List of interviewees

Northern Futures staff

Education and training providers

Name	Role
The Gordon	Since 2012 the sole provider of courses, in Aged Care, Business Basics, Getting Ahead and Transport and Logistics

Employers (Names of those interviewed withheld for ethical reasons)

Name of organisation	Sector and main activity
Barwon Health	Large health service provider (7 000 staff)
City of Greater Geelong	Local government (2 700 staff)
Channels Authority	Port Authority (6 staff)
Cotton On	Warehouse (255) and head office (1 000) of apparel importer
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP)	State planning authority
Department of Health and Human Services	State Human Services department
Godfrey Hirst	Carpet manufacturer (400 staff)
Transport Accident Commission	State level Independent Authority
Viva Energy	Oil refining (400 employees and 350 contractors)

Other Work and Learning Centres – Fitzroy

Clients – names cannot be revealed because of the Ethics Committee conditions for anonymity, but 10 interviewed.

Sources – Northern Futures provided a list of 18 who had been contacted to give their permission to be interviewed (of these only 10 agreed to be contacted).

Others interviewed:

GROW Director