



SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO BUILD
BRIGHT FUTURES

Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley Impact Report



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FOREWORD



The establishment of the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program in 2017 aimed to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment in our region by providing intensive, holistic support to people aged 15-25 who have been identified among the most at risk in our community.

Our 'Ladder Legends' have huge potential to make a positive difference for our region's future, so we need to ensure we are providing them with the tools and skills to prepare them for both work and community life.

From the outset, an intensive six-week program helps to boost their confidence and provide opportunities for work exposure or re-engagement in education and training. Many of our Ladder participants have already taken the huge step to pursue training and employment opportunities.

Ladder staff on-the-ground have established strong relationships with local businesses, which has helped to provide a range of work experience opportunities for Ladder participants over the past two years. We are also pleased to be part of this by providing work experience opportunities at the Latrobe Valley Authority.

Complementing this, a focus on life skills in areas such as health and wellbeing and financial management provide the participants with greater agency over their lives and the tools to make the best decisions.

Following the six-week program, participants continue to be supported by Ladder staff and, where appropriate are carefully matched to a community mentor – providing another layer of support and strengthening their connection to community.

Over two years Ladder has supported more than 100 people in the Latrobe Valley, which in many cases has resulted in re-engagement with education or employment opportunities.

We're very pleased to have partnered with Ladder as they are making a huge difference to the lives of people in the Latrobe Valley.

Karen Cain
Chief Executive Officer
Latrobe Valley Authority

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



As the CEO of the AFL Players' Association and the Chair of Ladder, it makes me immensely proud to see how Ladder is working with the AFL industry to make a meaningful difference to the lives of young people in the Latrobe Valley.

Personally, I've had the privilege of meeting young people from the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program on a number of occasions and I've witnessed first-hand the life-changing impact that this program has had.

We've hosted young people for group mentoring sessions at the AFL Players' Association offices in Melbourne. We've engaged our corporate partners, including Lululemon, Shadforth Financial Group and TwoPointZero, to provide educational sessions for young people around health and wellbeing, financial literacy and career pathways. We've hosted two young people – Taylah and Leticia - who have a strong passion for the AFL industry, for formal job tasters. My own staff have had the opportunity to meet the young people and ran a Christmas giving drive.

I would also like to acknowledge the AFL and AFL Clubs who have supported this program with such enthusiasm.



“It never ceases to amaze me the heights of what can be achieved when we unite and collectively work towards a greater purpose.”

AFL players, both male and female, have had opportunities to actively engage with the program and assist Ladder staff with program delivery which has had mutually beneficial results. It has ultimately enhanced the young people's experience as they get to learn from players who have achieved their goals so early on in life. But it has also provided a unique personal and professional development opportunity for players.

At its core, Ladder exists to make young people's lives better. As the official charity of the AFL Players, Ladder is also the vehicle in which players can collectively achieve social change, and as individuals, develop their personal and professional capacity.

Ladder has vast experience and expertise in designing and delivering evidence-based behaviour change programs for young people.

But the AFL industry is adding value to this practice by providing opportunities that boost engagement and make it an unstigmatised program for young people to engage in.

On behalf of the entire Ladder Board, I would like to thank the Latrobe Valley Authority and the Victorian Government for their support of the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program.

And finally, but certainly not least, to the Ladder staff. Thank you for your dedication, passion and professionalism. What has been achieved to date is nothing short of inspirational.

Paul Marsh

AFL Players' Association CEO
Ladder Chairman

FROM OUR CEO A WHOLE OF COMMUNITY APPROACH



“There is a strong link between participation in the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program and increased engagement in education, employment and training activities, improved health and wellbeing, increased self-efficacy, improved independent living skills and increased social and community connections.”

When walking into the Ladder program space in Morwell, I notice immediately that young people are busy preparing the space for the day, tidying up, chatting to each other or making some vegemite toast for breakfast. They are at ease and welcome me into the space – their space.

It's unique for young people to have this level of pride and sense of ownership of a program. We've seen this not only in the way young people engage but also through the high number of self-referrals we get as a result of program participants speaking so highly of their experience to their peers. This organic advocacy is partially what has driven high demand for the program and an ever-growing waitlist.

Since commencement, Ladder has supported 91 young people to unearth their skills and passions, build their independence and self-esteem and ultimately, engage in education, employment and training opportunities.

Through a range of engaging activities, young people have forged strong social connections,



“It is a true privilege to be working alongside the Latrobe Valley community to improve the lives and prospects of young people in the region.”

given back through volunteering and found a sense of place in their community.

The benefits are already visible – young people are engaged in work and study, they are healthier, happier and more confident. This has major mid-term and longer-term benefits for the region from a health, social and economic perspective.

We are immensely proud of the young people and what they have achieved. However, it is important to acknowledge that we have not achieved this alone.

The success of this program can largely be attributed to a whole of community approach. We strongly believe in partnerships, and working across community, corporate, government and other industries to achieve the best outcomes for young people. We are proud to work in partnership with a range of organisations in the Latrobe Valley, that enhance the program offering and enable us to provide holistic support to program participants. We sincerely thank each one

of our supporters for their contribution and support.

A special mention must be made of the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) that showed great leadership and foresight in piloting the program in its infancy. The LVA, led by Karen Cain, has been a true partner and has worked with us to make this program what it is today.

I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the Ladder team who are deeply committed to this program and the young people it supports. The team has been instrumental in achieving these significant outcomes.

We look forward to continuing this important work in the Latrobe Valley and providing a program that supports young people, and the broader community, to thrive.

Stephanie De Campo
Chief Executive Officer
Ladder

THE CHALLENGE

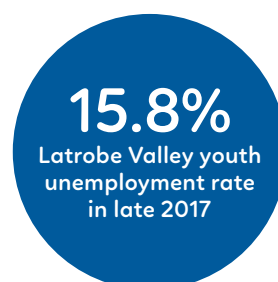
When the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program was announced in late 2017, the region's youth unemployment rate was at 15.8 per cent, compared with a non-metropolitan average of 10.1 per cent.

Starting at this point and with the Latrobe Valley facing further challenges during a period of significant transition in the economy, there was immediate need to ensure young people were not further marginalised, and were supported to thrive so they can take advantage of future opportunities as the region grows.

Research shows a direct correlation between participation in education, employment and training and the wellbeing of a young person. Those who are disengaged are at greater risk of employment insecurity in the longer term which can have serious implications on the individual's self-esteem and mental health, as well as their psychosocial development. More broadly, this disengagement can result in

direct costs to the taxpayer and government through lower tax returns, higher dependence on the public health system, social services and law enforcement.¹

As part of a multitude of initiatives being delivered through the LVA, Ladder was engaged to pilot a program that would work with young people who face barriers to employment or who are at risk of long-term unemployment, to build their individual capacity and engage them in the workforce or re-entry into education and training.



¹ Lamb, S. and Huo, S. Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Mitchell Institute report. No. 02/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne

ALIGNMENT TO VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Ladder's work in Latrobe Valley is part of the broader Victorian Government focus on improving outcomes for the people in the region.

The program aligns with Latrobe Valley Authority's goal to ensure everyone, including young people, are able to take advantage of the region's growth by;

- Focusing on community strengths, pride and identity to strengthen skills for the future economy; building inclusive participation in community life; and opening the community to the world.
- Focusing on competitive industry strengths and investment to develop Latrobe Valley's industries of the future; strengthening business and industry capability; and attracting and growing business.
- Focusing on enhancing natural and built assets to grow smart systems for sustainable resource use; supporting activities that improve health and wellbeing; and taking advantage of the visitor economy.

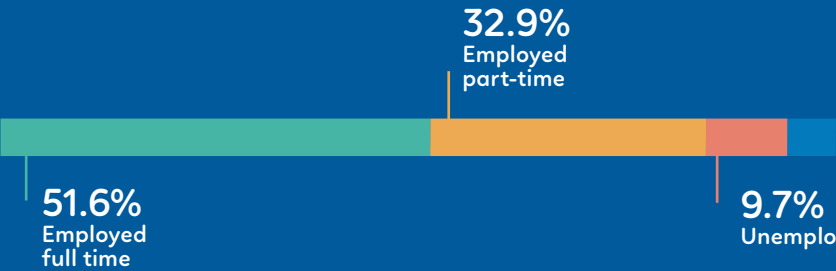
How this is measured:

- a. The Latrobe Valley community participates in and benefits from the economy
- b. The Latrobe Valley's economy is competitive, adaptive and diverse
- c. The Latrobe Valley develops knowledge, skills and attributes for social and economic participation now and in the future
- d. Latrobe Valley communities and individuals respond and adapt to changes in the future
- e. The Latrobe Valley is open, inclusive and collaborative for collective benefit
- f. The Latrobe Valley is socially engaged, cohesive, creative and culturally vibrant
- g. Latrobe Valley community infrastructure is attractive, functional and well used
- h. Latrobe Valley's natural environment is healthy, sustainable and accessible

LATROBE VALLEY SNAPSHOT



Latrobe City is located approximately 150kms east of Melbourne and is one of Victoria's major regional centres.²



There were 32,560 people who reported being in the labour force in the week before Census night in Latrobe Valley. Of these 51.6% were employed full time, 32.9% were employed part-time and 9.7% were unemployed.

Latrobe-Gippsland was identified as a youth unemployment hotspot at a rate of

13.4%⁵

In the 2016 Census, there were

73,099

people in Latrobe Valley.

In the 2016 Census, there were 73,099 people in Latrobe Valley. Of these 48.8% were male and 51.2% were female. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people made up 1.6% of the population.

48.8%
male

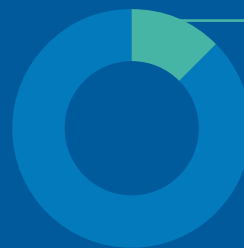


51.2%
female

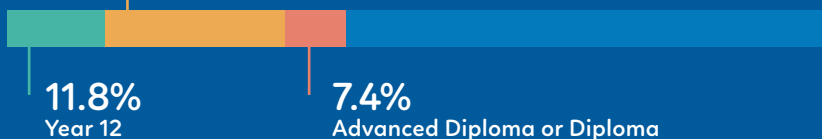
1.6%
Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander



12.5%
(9,165 people) of
the population is
between the age
of 15 – 24



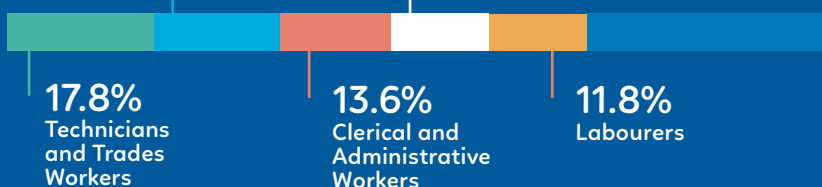
21.9%
Certificate
III or IV



Of people aged 15 and over in Latrobe Valley, 11.8% reported having completed Year 12 as their highest level of educational attainment, 21.9% had completed a Certificate III or IV and 7.4% had completed an Advanced Diploma or Diploma.

15.2%
Professionals

11.9%
Community and Personal
Service Workers



The most common occupations in Latrobe Valley included Technicians and Trades Workers 17.8%, Professionals 15.2%, Clerical and Administrative Workers 13.6%, Community and Personal Service Workers 11.9%, and Labourers 11.8%.⁴

⁴ https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/20504

⁵ <https://www.medianet.com.au/releases/172999/>

LADDER PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program builds independence and self-agency in young people (aged 16 – 25 years) and supports them to engage in education, employment and training.

The program draws on an evidence-based social inclusion model and is designed to help young people at risk of long-term unemployment build confidence, develop community connections and test a range of education, employment and training options.

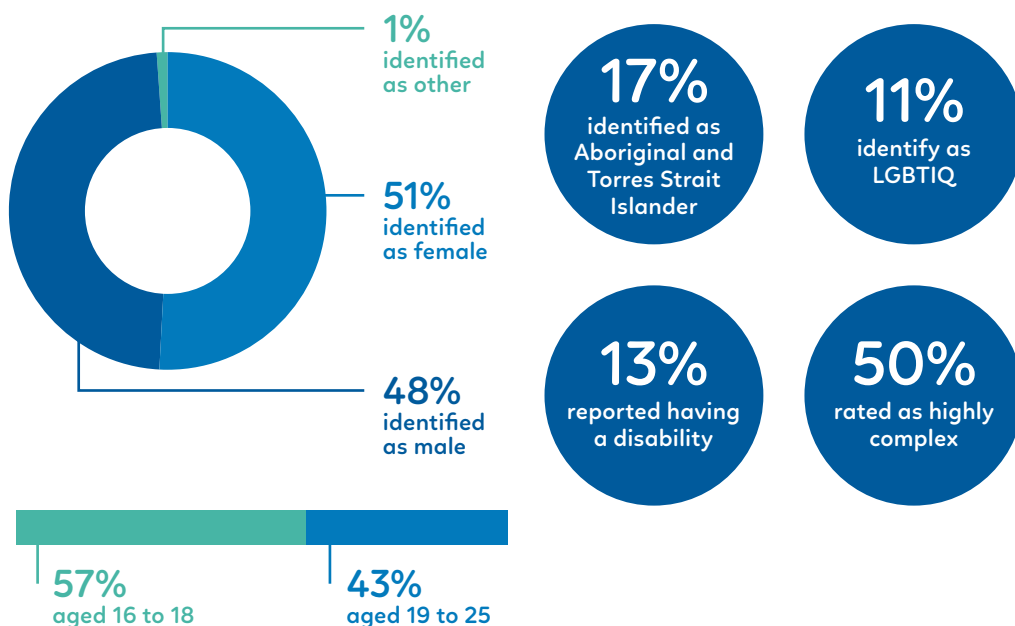
Young people develop a better understanding of their talents, skills and strengths and partake in a number of unique experiences brokered through Ladder's strong connection with the AFL industry.

The program includes:

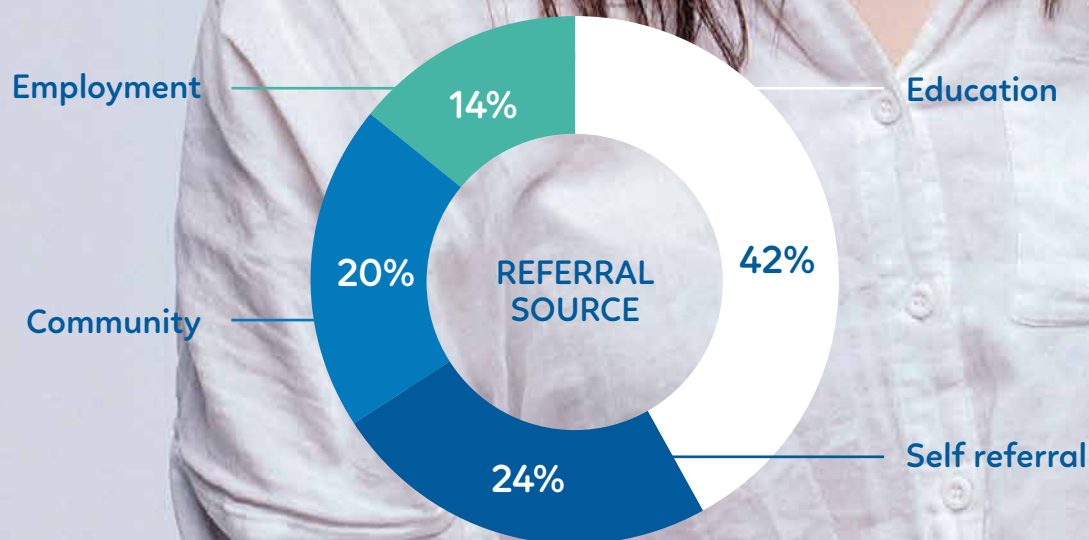
- an intensive six-week development program for up to 12 participants with the end goal being employment, education and training ready
- one-to-one mentoring support from Ladder staff for up to 12 months post program graduation
- tailored employment opportunities and experiences through a network of local and metropolitan businesses
- a community-based mentor (as appropriate) to support goal achievement, increase community connections and create additional opportunities
- a community camp where participants can put into practice the skills they learn over the course of the program.

WHO WE'VE SUPPORTED

Since commencement, 91 young people have completed the Ladder program.



SERVICE DELIVERY



405

group sessions

648

individual sessions

1217

service delivery hours

72+

number of community and AFL activities

50+

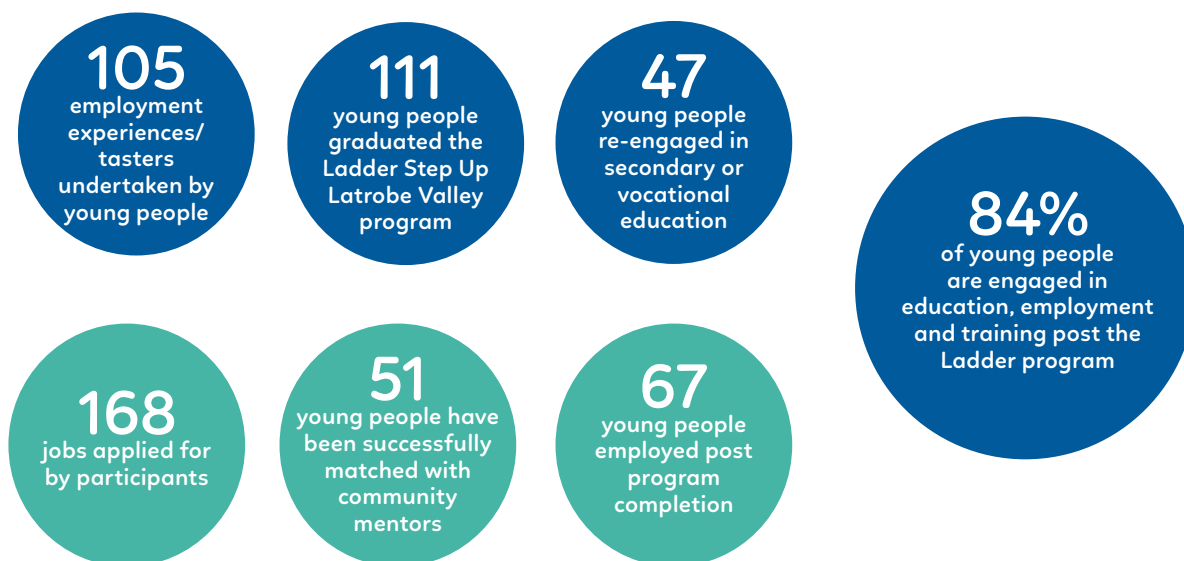
young people on waitlist

OUR IMPACT

Since the program commenced in April 2018, the program has supported 91 young people in the Latrobe Valley. This has included over 405 group sessions, 648 individual sessions and a total of over 1,217 service delivery hours.

Quantitative and qualitative outcomes indicate a strong link between participation in the Ladder program and increased engagement in education, employment and training opportunities, improved health and wellbeing, increased self-efficacy, improved independent living skills and increased social and community connections.

To date, the following positive outcomes have been achieved:



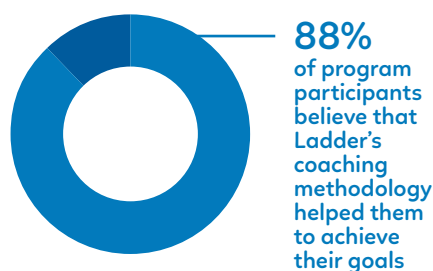
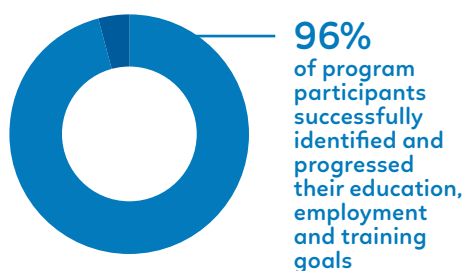
WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTED POST-PROGRAM

The feedback from participants who have completed the program include;

- 95 per cent of program participants would recommend the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program to other young people in their situation
- 92 per cent of program participants feel more motivated to achieve their education, employment and training goals

“This program changed my life and so many others too. Since I first came to Ladder I was very unsure about it, but I soon realised how lucky I have [been] to be able to meet all the new people in the program and get to work with the staff”

Ladder program participant



OUR IMPACT CONTINUED

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HITS LOWEST MARK ON RECORD

In March 2019, the Victorian Government announced that Victoria's regional unemployment rate has dropped to the lowest mark on record and at 4.2 per cent, remains the lowest of all the states. Unemployment fell across a number of regions, including Latrobe-Gippsland. We are proud of the role that Ladder has played in reducing regional unemployment.

March 2019

Victoria's regional unemployment rate dropped to the lowest mark on record.

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

A report, *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, prepared by the Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIRES) for the Mitchell Institute shows that the annual cost of a young person disengaged from work and study is \$37,900. The Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program has successfully engaged 69 young people in education and employment. According to the report, the economic impact of keeping these 69 young people in work or study, saves the local economy more than \$2.62 million annually. Over their lifetime, this would equate to an economic saving of over \$104.6 million.

\$2.62 million

is saved annually as a result of the Ladder program re-engaging young people in work and study.

THE PROGRAM PILLARS



THE PROGRAM PILLARS CONTINUED

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Many young people enter the program reporting poor physical and mental health. A lack of physical activity can lead to an increased risk of chronic disease and mental health issues, which has been estimated to cost the Australian economy over \$13 billion each year. Not only does increasing participation in physical activity increase a young person's health outcomes but it also has broader social and economic benefits too⁶.

In the Ladder program, each young person completes a Game Plan where they set and commit to their goals, including in the domain

of health and wellbeing. Through Ladder's unique alignment with the AFL, young people participate in a range of engaging health and wellbeing activities such as AFL Club tours, sessions facilitated by players and access to AFL and AFLW games.

In addition, program participants have the opportunity to learn about mental health, how to cook nutritious meals on a budget and are provided with access to local gyms and facilities. Ladder facilitates access to other specialist services, such as mental health or alcohol and other drugs (AOD) services, for young people who require specialist support.



⁶ VicHealth, Encouraging Regular Physical Activity, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/our-work/encouraging-regular-physical-activity>

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Engagement in education, employment and training is a key indicator of the wellbeing of a young person and is a critical factor in a socially inclusive and prosperous community⁷. Strong evidence also indicates that employment can decrease the risk of depression and improves general mental health⁸.

At Ladder, we dedicate a core part of the program to job readiness and practical job tasters. This is to ensure young people are adequately prepared and ready to engage in the workforce. We take the time to work with young people to discover what their interests are and where their strengths lie. We expose young people to a range of career possibilities through industry tours where they have the opportunity to see how an organisation runs and hear from the employer about the different business functions and career pathways.

Through internal and external facilitators, we run mock-interviews where young people have an opportunity to develop their interview skills and build confidence. Each young person is also supported to develop a resume and is provided coaching around presentation and communication.

The young person's interests then dictate what industry they complete their job taster in. Across the program to date, young people have been placed in job tasters across 15 different industries.

We have also worked closely with employers to prepare them for the job taster and have provided ongoing support throughout the placement to make it a positive and rewarding experience for all involved.



⁷ Lamb, S. and Huo, S. Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Mitchell Institute report No. 02/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne

⁸ van der Noordt, M., IJzelenberg, H., Droomers, M & Proper, I.K (2014) Health effects of employment: a systematic review of prospective studies. Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Vol 17: 730-736

THE PROGRAM PILLARS CONTINUED

SELF-EFFICACY

Many young people lack confidence when they walk through the doors of Ladder. They have low self-efficacy, meaning they do not believe in their ability to accomplish their goals.

Research shows that unemployment reduces young adults' self-efficacy. There is also a societal view that low self-esteem goes hand in hand with incompetence and apathy⁹, which is a barrier to gaining and sustaining employment.

We work on young people's views of themselves and self-esteem from the start of the program, well before they engage in their education, employment and training activities. This way, they have a greater chance of gaining and sustaining employment, and in turn, through their successful employment, their self-efficacy grows.

We develop self-efficacy in program participants through framing their identity from an advantaged thinking perspective. That is, looking at everything through a filter of their strengths and talents. Treating young people with dignity, as well as fostering a culture of respect between program participants, also helps to reshape young people's views of themselves.

Providing opportunities for young people to accomplish goals throughout the program, provides important wins that contribute to a young person's self-belief. Young people also have the opportunity to work up to a number of tasks that at the beginning of the program, may have appeared out of reach. This has included speaking at graduation events, local community forums, and corporate events alongside leading AFL and AFLW players. Successfully undertaking these opportunities builds their self-esteem and opens their eyes up to a world of new possibilities.



9 <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/business/why-low-self-esteem-may-be-hurting-your-career-ncna814156>

“This program changed my life and so many others too”

Ladder program participant

JACOB

Jacob was referred to Ladder by Maxx Employment, as he was struggling to break into the workforce locally due to suffering anxiety and having recently moved back to the Latrobe Valley from Tasmania. Jacob presented as a lovely quiet young man with a desire to work in disability support services.

Jacob initially commenced in the Step Up program in August 2019 where he completed the six-week Ladder Program. When Jacob commenced the program, he was quiet, reserved, socially withdrawn and hesitant to interact with fellow participants. Jacob enjoyed every aspect of the program, maintaining 100 per cent attendance and was committed to every opportunity and experience presented to him. He found a new sense of self-confidence, as he developed friendships with other program participants and actively participated in various health and wellbeing sessions. He found the self-assurance to voice his opinions, ideas and to contribute to the group which he was previously too self-conscious to do. During the program Jacob also completed a week long bike ride from Melbourne to Adelaide raising money for mental health awareness; a true example of this young man's values.

Jacob often speaks about the increase in his confidence due to completing the Ladder program. Specifically how he now feels much more comfortable dealing with and meeting new people and putting himself into situations he previously would have avoided.

On completion of Program 7, Jacob's dedication to improving himself and securing a job was evident. He devoted himself to his pursuit of employment and further education. Each time Ladder was in communication with Jacob he had either applied for more jobs or explored another training option for 2020. Due to Jacob's passion for the disability support industry, he was invited to complete a Mental Health First Aid Course with three of the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley staff. It was impressive to watch Jacob conduct himself in this adult learning environment, as he was attentive, asked questions and fitted in to a professional environment

alongside Ladder staff. This new-found confidence, along with the skills developed while completing the Ladder program, has helped Jacob secure a number of job interviews over the past few months.

Jacob's dedication, commitment and desire to make positive changes in his life made him an easy choice for the Alumni Program. It was a real pleasure to witness his confidence continue to grow throughout the three-week intensive program beginning in November. His quick wit and humour shone through as his newfound self-certainty allowed him to show his true personality. Jacob was also matched with a Ladder mentor upon completion of the program. His mentor has come to be a fantastic support and influence on Jacob's life and has been there to celebrate all Jacob's achievements to date.

During the Alumni Program Jacob successfully obtained full time employment at Mt Baw Baw in a Customer Service/ Front of House position. It was a wonderful and heart-warming moment to share with him. The group were on the bus returning from an excursion when Jacob exclaimed that he had just received an email stating he was successful in obtaining full time work. Everyone on the bus cheered and celebrated Jacob's achievement as if it was also their own, making staff feel so proud of the wonderful young people we work with and the supportive environment that had been created. He later confided in the staff that he felt like crying as everything was just falling into place in his life.

Jacob continues to work toward his dream of being a Disability Support Worker. He has been in contact with TAFE Gippsland organising enrolment for the appropriate course for 2020 and has also applied for a Disability Support role with Thyme Out in Moe, where he recently completed two day's work experience. He was recently advised that his application was successful, and he will be contacted for an interview in the new year.

It has been truly inspiring to watch Jacob grow from a reserved, isolated young man, to a thriving individual who is engaging in both employment and education opportunities.

THE PROGRAM PILLARS CONTINUED

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Each program has completed a community project of their choosing – an important opportunity for young people to build their skills and identify a need within the community. The young people then develop, design and implement a project that will give back to their community and lend a helping hand to local businesses. Community projects have included activities such as building possum boxes for injured wildlife and cooking meals for individuals and families at the Morwell Neighbourhood House.

Another element of building young people's connections to community is through volunteering. Research shows that young people who volunteer identify considerable benefits including acknowledgement, appreciation, and a sense of being socially engaged. Further, young volunteers have been shown to develop new skills and abilities including skills that support academic success, as well as providing greater career opportunities as young people have access to potential employers and build their skill base for employability¹⁰.

Young people from the program have volunteered at Aboriginal Community Centre, The Gathering Place. The group designed, sourced a registered builder to oversee the project, constructed, painted and furnished the Cubby House, ensuring that local children had a safe, fun and welcoming space to enjoy. In addition, program participants volunteered to design and create a garden space at Parklands Kinder in Morwell. Other volunteering opportunities undertaken by young people in the program include assisting at local street games, International Day for the Disability and an R U OK Day event at Traralgon College.



¹⁰ Walsh, L., & Black, R. (2015). Youth volunteering in Australia: An evidence review. Report prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Canberra: ARACY.

“Without Ladder I don’t know where I’d be. To Fiona and the team, thank you for saving me. I now own my life and I am the one who chooses my own path”

Ladder program participant

“The social impact of the work really is significant. Not many programs can really say the work is making a difference. Ladder can confidently stand behind that statement.”



The big difference in this program is the time taken to ensure every participant builds their confidence and skills, engages in activities that they may never have tried otherwise and above all, they are valued for the wonderful people they are.

I believe the flexibility of the program for the participants is the greatest strength of the program. Ladder identifies the interest and strengths of participants and plans their program around that. They also do great work exposing the participants to local not-for-profits and allowing them the opportunity to use the skills they have to support those groups.

The social impact of the work really is significant. Not many programs can really say the work is making a difference. Ladder can confidently stand behind that statement.

I sincerely hope the program continues to receive funding and can be expanded across Gippsland. There are so many young people who could benefit from this program.”

Tracie Lund
Morwell Neighbourhood
House Manager

THE PROGRAM PILLARS CONTINUED



KATIE

Katie participated in the inaugural Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program. She was self-referred and had been experiencing high levels of anxiety. Katie was struggling to maintain any education, employment and training opportunities and also had difficulty maintaining personal friendships and relationships.

Entering the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program at the age of 20, Katie had few social connections and very low confidence. Katie initially expressed her reluctance to engage fully in program activities, but she soon found that many of her peers in the program were looking to develop social skills and test out a range of career options too. Knowing that she wasn't alone in her struggle and feeling comfortable and safe in the program, Katie

started to come out of her shell. Katie's confidence and self-belief grew rapidly as she engaged strongly, was willing to try new experiences and developed great self-awareness.

Katie has relocated to Wodonga and recently sent through a picture to Ladder staff of her in her work uniform ready to start her new job. Prior to Katie's move she had built a very clear picture of her abilities and strengths and a clear career path. Katie thanked the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley team for having a profound influence on her life.

"Without Ladder I don't know where I'd be. To Fiona and the team, thank you for saving me. I now own my life and I am the one who chooses my own path," she said.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

Upon entry into the program, many young people lack fundamental living skills that are critical to functioning independently. The likelihood of a successful job placement or return to education is greatly increased if young people have developed living skills.

Through a range of theoretical and practical activities, young people are supported to learn about cleaning, cooking, public transportation, completing forms, personal hygiene and a number of other relevant topics.

Some topics, such as financial literacy, have been greatly enhanced by our partners. As just one example, Bank Australia staff have delivered personal budgeting/financial literacy development sessions to five of the eight Step Up programs. In addition, Bank Australia has hosted four young people for work placements over the course of the program.

As young people's skills in this area increase, so does their self-efficacy, as they grow in confidence and independence.

OUR APPROACH



Treating young people
with dignity and respect

Guided by the
community

AFL industry
engagement

Inclusive space

Genuine
partnerships

OUR APPROACH CONTINUED

GUIDED BY THE COMMUNITY

From the beginning, we have been committed to genuinely listening to and learning from the community. This allowed us to gain an understanding of the local environment, what had worked, what hadn't, where the gaps were and how we could help. This enabled us to then tailor the evidence-based program model to meet the needs of the Latrobe Valley region. The community has continued to guide, inform and directly contribute to the running of the program. A Community Advisory Committee, made up of diverse representatives from the region, have been an important source of leadership and guidance and has played a key role in shaping the program on an ongoing basis.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE SPACE, FREE OF STIGMA

24 per cent of Ladder's referrals are self-referrals, meaning young people are opting into the program themselves, and not being referred by a secondary source (such as a family member). What we have seen at Ladder is young people talking to their peers

positively about the program and in turn, their peers self-referring. This reflects the high regard young people have for the program and their belief in its impact. Unlike some other welfare organisations, Ladder positions itself around positive youth development which enables young people to engage with the program without the burden of stigma.

WORKING IN GENUINE PARTNERSHIP

We are committed to working in partnership with individuals and organisations who are aligned in their mission and values. We have been privileged to work with a diverse range of stakeholders in the Latrobe Valley who have shown a deep commitment to young people in their community.

Our major partner in the region is the Latrobe Valley Authority. The LVA has facilitated important partnerships, ensuring that we are not working in isolation, but complementing and integrating with the work of existing and new organisations. LVA staff have also volunteered their time to support program delivery and have signed on to be Ladder mentors.

“This is definitely a life changing experience”

Ladder program participant

TREATING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

As part of Ladder’s *Advantaged Thinking* philosophy, Ladder’s approach to working with young people is to focus on their strengths and what they can achieve, moving away from the cycle of disadvantage and negativity they may have experienced in their lives. It is about developing self-confidence, helping young people to reclaim their identity and providing a launch pad for them to achieve their goals.

AFL INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Ladder was founded by AFL players in 2007 and remains deeply aligned to the AFL industry. Ladder is the official charity of AFL Players and a national partner of the AFL. Ladder works with AFL Clubs on a number of community projects and AFL players support the organisation financially as well as mentors and volunteers.

Through this alignment with the AFL industry, Ladder brokers unique opportunities for young people to enhance their program experience. The Ladder Step Up Latrobe

Valley participants have had VIP access to Clubs, have met a myriad of AFL and AFLW players and experienced AFL matches in Melbourne. In addition, the AFLPA has hosted group mentoring sessions for the young people, with the support of their corporate partners including Shadforth Financial Group, Lululemon and TwoPointZero. These sessions have covered financial literacy, career pathways and health and wellbeing. Young people, who have a specific interest in a career in the AFL industry, have also had the opportunity to complete job tasters with the AFL Players’ Association.



OUR APPROACH CONTINUED



“The program has changed her life and given her hope”

“The program is exceptional. It’s something that has been lacking in Latrobe Valley.

Many of the young people have grown up in an environment which they think is life. A program like this gives them an opportunity to change their direction and shows them a different reality. The program has them come out the end as better people.

Last Community Advisory Committee meeting there was a case study which clearly demonstrated the impact the program has had. The young woman obviously had no future in her own mind, and rightly so from what she had been through. It was clearly

evident that the program had changed her life and given her hope. That hope was that there was more in life for and a timely reminder of what she can achieve from the program.

I hope that the program continues to run in the valley ongoing as the reality is there are always going to be people who need it. So as long as it can run and hopefully be expanded it will be a benefit to the Latrobe Valley.”

Peter Fusinato

Acting Inspector
Latrobe Area Commander
Victoria Police

MENTORING

85%

of program participants who have a mentor have remained in education, completed their education or maintained ongoing employment.

40

mentor matches and counting

“The mentor program ensures participants feel well supported following their completion of the Ladder program and provides them with an opportunity to learn about the world from an experienced trusted local.”

I have loved sharing time with my mentee. My mentee has become more resilient through sticking it out at her job and disciplining herself with a casual work schedule. She seems more confident, has a better understanding of her self-worth as well as her contribution to the community and her family.

What makes Ladder different to other providers is the variety of skill building. The program bridges the divide between unemployment and employment through access to local employers who work closely with participants. It is not solely focussed on work readiness which ensures the participant has a variety of experiences and exposures to life skills necessary for good mental, physical and emotional

health and wellbeing. It's fantastic to see past participants volunteering within the community – giving back and becoming more socially inclusive, happier community members.

The Ladder team are an amazing, diligent and dedicated bunch! They instil resilience, confidence and strong life and work ethics in participants.

In this time of employment uncertainty for Latrobe Valley youth, I believe that the Ladder Step Up program is integral to better health and wellbeing outcomes for our local young people.”

Gabrielle Francis
Ladder mentor
Latrobe Community Health Service

The Ladder Mentoring Program has a strong evidence base and has been successfully delivered in Ladder programs nationally. Having a community-based mentor enables goal progression particularly around employment, education and training outcomes. The mentoring program allows Ladder staff to support a mentor in taking on responsibility of supporting a young person with their goal progression.

There has been great interest and engagement from the community regarding the mentoring program. To date, there have been 56 mentor applications submitted and 40 mentor matches completed. Early data indicates that young people with a mentor are more likely to remain engaged with employment, education or training, with 85 per cent of program participants who have a mentor remaining in education, completing education or maintaining ongoing employment.



WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

There have been a high number of referrals into the Ladder program from educational institutes, including from local schools and the Latrobe Valley Flexible Learning Option. Ladder works and supports young people to achieve their own self-identified education, training and employment pathways. Young people are able to complete the Ladder program without it impacting on their school attendance rate, as the placement is approved by the local school. To date, Ladder has successfully re-engaged 40 young people into school. Upon re-engaging in school, teachers have noted that students are more committed and engaged in class and more capable of succeeding in a traditional education setting.



“Ladder has been instrumental in keeping some of our kids in education and training.”



“Kurnai College – Uni campus has been very lucky to be a part of this program. Kurnai College has a large number of students that need some time out occasionally for reasons ranging from trauma, family issues, anxiety and Ladder provides a pathway for this “time out”.

Ladder has been instrumental in keeping some of our kids in education and training. Young people are able to attend a caring, supportive environment and

“reload” before re-entering into mainstream programs or TAFE. They receive employment assistance, opportunities in growth and support.

My hope for the program is that it continues, with more regular programs and ongoing support increases.”

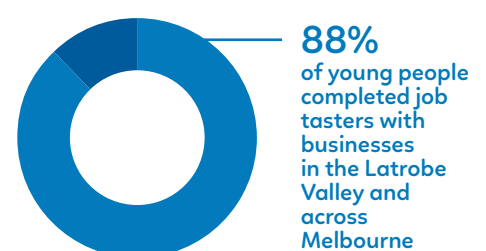
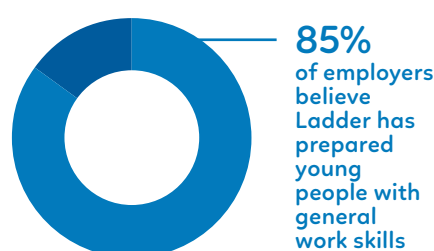
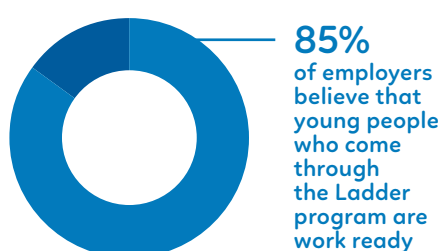
Julie Garden
VCAL Advocate
Kurnai College

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

Ladder has built strong partnerships with local business, as well as businesses located in Melbourne. We are committed to providing young people with experiences that provide them with a well-rounded understanding of what industries and careers exist. Businesses have been involved in the program in a variety of ways, from facilitating industry tours, hosting job tasters and facilitating group mentoring sessions. This flexibility has allowed businesses to engage in a way that they, and their staff, are comfortable with.

We also ensure that young people complete job tasters in areas that are of genuine interest to them. The willingness of businesses to support the Ladder program, and its young people, is commendable. We have worked diligently to ensure that businesses are well briefed on our expectations and that they are supported throughout the experience. This has been an important factor in achieving a positive outcome for all parties.

Some of these local businesses have also become employers of program alumni and we look forward to expanding on these partnerships into the future.



WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS CONTINUED



CASE STUDY – DYERS TRANSPORT

Dyers is a large distribution company that employs hundreds of people in different fields such as truck driving, mechanics, accounting, administration, logistics and business management. Due to the range of departments available in this business, Dyers was identified as a key business for Ladder to connect with as it would cater to a number of Ladder participants and their interests.

Ladder had no pre-existing relationship with Dyers, however when we contacted them and explained what we do, and who we support, they were more than willing to support.

Ladder staff organised industry tours at Dyers due to some participants having an interest in this industry and this evolved to one day job tasters for young people. Each time they provide tours, 11 different staff will speak to the young people about their areas of responsibility, which always creates interest. It is also a great professional development exercise for Dyers' staff.

From there, Dyers offered a previous program participant ongoing work experience with them on a weekly basis, however this broke down due to the young person not attending regularly. Due to the strong relationship that had already been built with Dyers, they did not hold that against Ladder, or the young person, and still continued

to offer tours and job tasters.

During program 5, Dyers offered a one-day job taster to program participant, Jordan which then turned into a three day job taster and within the week they had offered him a fulltime 6 month contract as a Trades Assistant.

In 2020, Jordan was offered and accepted a paid position as an Apprentice Diesel Mechanic. He will also complete trades school at Kangan Batman TAFE. Jordan is loving working at Dyers and has said that everyone working there has been warm, welcoming and full of knowledge. Jordan has since returned to the Ladder program to speak to current participants about his journey and encourage them to make the most of their time at Ladder.

Ladder supported Jordan by organising the industry tour, job taster, work clothes/boots and transport, therefore removing any barriers he may have had in engaging with this opportunity. Ladder also provided ongoing support to Jordan and Dyers throughout the placements to ensure any challenges could be proactively addressed, and it is a positive experience for all involved. Ladder also communicated directly with the General Manager to discuss barriers/ideas around the employment offer that would be in the best interest of Jordan and Dyers.

“I enjoyed being part of the program. Support from the staff is what made it so enjoyable”

Ladder program participant



LUCY

Lucy was 16 years old when she joined the Ladder Step Up Latrobe Valley program. She was couch surfing, disengaged from school, had no employment or education opportunities and no future direction. She found out about the program from another participant, who was a fellow school refuser and stated that they never go anywhere without each other.

Lucy's capacity to challenge herself and operate independently grew exponentially over the six-week program period, recently stating on the program camp that she felt like she could anything.

She participated in a rewarding and positive work placement with a hair and beauty provider and is only just scratching the

surface of her long list of talents. As part of the transitional support post program, Lucy has identified that she would like to go back to school to finish her year 12 and is currently working with the school around enrolment and is focused on getting herself back on track.

Lucy has become a wonderful peer leader, constantly challenging herself to get the most out of any opportunity and has engaged in every activity.


With support and encouragement, she was able to represent the group at a launch event as a participant speaker and told of the difference the program has made to her self-belief and future aspirations.

“I've got a lot more confidence, which will definitely help me in the long run”

Ladder program participant

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

A World of Beauty	Department of Justice	Intersport Traralgon
AFL	DFP Recruitment	Italian Australian Club
AGL	Dial and Occasion	Jarrold Ryan Painting
AFL Gippsland	Dyers	JSL Builders
AFL Players' Association	Embrace Health and Wellbeing	Kingy's Electrical
AKZ Reinforcing	Fitness 4U	KLO
Ambulance Victoria	Flavorite	Kurnai College
Anglicare	Furlon Constructions	Latrobe City Council
ANZ	GBS Recruitment	Latrobe Community
Auto Repair Traralgon	Gippsland- Centre Against	Health Services
Backman Plumbing	Sexual Assault (G-CASA)	Latrobe Council Pound
Bank Australia	Gippsland Community	Latrobe Leisure Centre
Barringa Special School	Leadership Program (GCLP)	Latrobe Regional Art Gallery
Baw Baw LLEN	Gippsland Disability Advocacy	Latrobe Regional Hospital
Baw Baw Shire Council	Gippsland Home Inspection	Latrobe Valley Authority
Berry Street	Gippsland FM	Latrobe Valley Bus Lines
Big 4 Traralgon	Gippsland Multi Cultural Service	Latrobe Valley Enterprises
Bunnings	Gippsland Printers	Latrobe Valley Flexible
Camp Rubicon	Gippsland Solar	Learning Option
Collingwood Football Club	Gippsport	Latrobe Valley Greyhounds
Community	GippsTafe	Lavalla Catholic College
Housing Limited	Headspace	Latrobe Valley Express
Cont Café	Homie	Lifeline
Deadly Sport Gippsland	HVP Plantations	Limna Electrical
Dear Delilah Florist	Inland Surf	Lowanna College
Department of Education	Interchange	LV Aircon and Refrigeration
Department of Health	Intersport	Mannys Market
and Human Services	Intersport Morwell	Marvel Stadium



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Morwell Central Primary School	The Vault
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Newborough Primary School	Traralgon College
North Melbourne Football Club	Tree Planting R US
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Parklands Kindergarten	Victoria Police
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Quantum	VRI
Ramahyuck	Warragul Special
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LADDER

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