FAST TRACK

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INTENSIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
2021 - 2022 EVALUATION REPORT

SAFE+EQUAL

Standing strong against family violence

Leadership in Responding to Family Violence and Primary Prevention

Safe and Equal is the peak body for specialist family violence services that provide support to victim survivors in Victoria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters, community and culture.

ABOUT SAFE AND EQUAL

Safe and Equal is the peak body for specialist family violence services that provide support to victim survivors in Victoria. The interests of people experiencing, recovering from, or at risk of, family violence is at the heart of everything we do. Our vision is a world beyond family and gender-based violence, where women, children and people from marginalised communities are safe, thriving, and respected. We recognise the gendered nature of violence in our society, and the multiple intersecting forms of power and oppression which can compound the impacts of violence and limit people's access to services, support, and safety. We work closely and collaboratively with other organisations and support the leadership of victim survivors to amplify their voices and create change.

We provide specialist expertise across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery approaches and the inter-connections between them. Our work is focused on developing and advancing specialist practice for responding to victim survivors, building the capability of specialist family violence services and allied workforces, organisations and sectors that come into contact with victim-survivors; building the capabilities of workforces focused on primary prevention; and leading and contributing to the translation of evidence and research, practice expertise, and lived experience into safe and effective policy, system design and law reform.

We develop family violence practice and support workforces to ensure that victim survivors are safe, their rights are upheld, and their needs are met. The prevalence and impact of family and gender-based violence will be reduced because we are building a strong and effective workforce responding to victim survivors that can meet the needs of the community we serve, while also having a growing and impactful workforce working to prevent violence.

We work to strengthen and connect organisations, sectors, and systems to achieve safe and just outcomes for victim survivors irrespective of entry point, jurisdiction and individual circumstances. Joining efforts across prevention, response, and recovery we work to ensure the family violence system is informed and supported by a well-resourced and sustainable specialist sector. Our contributions to primary prevention workforces, initiatives and alliances contribute to social change for a safer and more respectful community.

We are building momentum for social change that drives meaningful action across institutions, settings, and systems for a safer and more equal society. Our workforce and practice development efforts are coupled with a partnership approach that builds community awareness and commitment to change. Our expertise and efforts enable citizens across the community to recognise and respond to family and gendered violence, hold perpetrators to account and support the ongoing recovery and empowerment of victim survivors.

We are a strong peak organisation providing sustainable and influential leadership to achieve our vision. The work we do and the way we work are integrated and align with our values. This is achieved through inclusive culture, and a safe and accessible workplace supported by robust systems and processes.

THANK YOU

Safe and Equal would like to say a foremost thank you to all who have supported the Fast Track program; facilitator Sarah Johnson, participants, guest experts, mentors, and managers.

To all participants, mentors, managers, and facilitator who generously gave their time to provide feedback on the program to support this evaluation is deeply appreciated. We hope that the findings of this evaluation report can further support and enhance future Fast Track programs and the learnings can also contribute to other leadership capacity development initiatives and strengthen sector outcomes.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program and evaluation overview

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of Safe and Equal's Fast Track intensive leadership program from 2021–22, from an analysis of extensive monitoring and evaluation data collected. This report has primarily been written to inform and support Safe and Equal learning and further sector development, as well as contribute further understanding to a broader audience of what works in leadership and workforce development in the family violence sector. The evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of Fast Track in building the cohort's knowledge and skills, and also explores longer term outcomes relating to both career progression, and broader organisational and sector-level outcomes. It also provides an insight into the specialist family violence and primary prevention workforces more broadly; what practitioners' development interests and needs are; and their individual career experiences.

The Fast Track intensive leadership program was a professional development initiative that arose from implementing the recommendations following the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence of 2015. There was an urgent need to grow the pool of skilled professionals available to take up management and leadership roles within the family violence sector. Funded by Family Safety Victoria, Fast Track was first piloted in 2018 by Safe and Equal (then the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria) to 15 specialist family violence practitioners. Following successful delivery, Safe and Equal received further funding from Family Safety Victoria to scale up and deliver Fast Track over 2021 and 2022, to both specialist family violence response and primary prevention practitioners. The 2021–22 program would consist of 6 courses; 3 for the prevention stream and 3 for response, and to a total of 150 participants.

The coronavirus pandemic impacted initial plans of the program, and the delivery model was rapidly changed from face-to-face to online, while aiming to keep the course interactive and meeting all intended learning outcomes. In partnership with Reality Learning, Fast Track won a Diamond award at the 2021 LearnX learning design awards for *'Best Pandemic Response – Shift it Online'*. The pandemic also has had a significant impact on the family violence sector, with an increase in frequency and severity of family violence. This placed a great strain on practitioners, with participants in the program experiencing higher levels of burnout and reduced resourcing and capacity.

The evaluation design for this program was based around 11 key evaluation questions across four domains, these questions and domains are listed in chapter 2 of this report, and the findings are structured by evaluation question in chapter 3. The scope of this evaluation was largely focused on the 2021–2022 program; however a component of the evaluation also explores longer term outcomes, and therefore selected data collection methods were extended to try and include the 15 participants from the 2018 Fast Track pilot program. A brief summary of methods and limitations is included in chapter 2.4, and further details are included in the appendices. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods included participant a pre-course survey; weekly participant surveys; post-course surveys of participants, mentors and managers; follow-up surveys of participants and managers; mentor and participant focus groups; and program staff/facilitator interviews.

Findings overview

Design, delivery, and engagement

The Fast Track program recruited a total of 151 practitioners, with 127 graduates. An application tool was designed and implemented to promote a diverse range of organisations and regional and metropolitan participants. The program was successful in recruiting a fairly diverse cohort across age ranges and geographic location; 52% located in metropolitan Melbourne and 48% regional Victoria.

The evaluation demonstrates that overall, Fast Track was fit-for-purpose and responsive to these diverse cohorts. The mentoring model fulfilled its intended purpose; supporting participants to apply learnings to their workplace projects and nurturing supportive relationships. The mentoring program proved to be a hallmark component of Fast Track; it was valued highly by participants and provided a range of additional benefits such as engaging in reflective practice, building confidence, and supporting career planning and development. The workplace projects were a suitable way to apply new skills and knowledge and most participants intended to implement their project to completion following Fast Track. The most common barrier encountered with project implementation was workload and time constraints.

Online delivery was a strong enabler of access and reach, as evidenced by the high proportion of rural/regional participants. Some participants experienced challenges remaining present in the online workshops (particularly the response cohort due to crisis management in the context of Covid), yet overall, online delivery was effective, and the engaging delivery model was a key enabler for online participation. There were some limitations to peer connection and networking online, and participants expressed appetite for more opportunities to interact throughout the program which can be considered for future iterations of Fast Track. The program team's commitment to monitoring and their iterative approach enabled continuous improvement throughout the program which enhanced learning outcomes and participants' experience.

The evaluation shows that Fast Track was highly relevant within the sector context and generally aligned with participant expectations. 91% of participants agreed that the program content was relevant for their work context, and 90% found the information provided by the guest experts useful. Following completion of the program, surveyed participants indicated several areas of further capability development needs. Some of these – such as managements styles – are out scope for Fast Track, but others – such as public speaking and applying an intersectional lens – are areas of content delivered in the program that are well received and valued, indicating potential appetite to address in more depth in future iterations.

The evaluation suggests that the involvement of managers varied between different individuals and organisations, with most participants experiencing a lower level of engagement from managers than anticipated. While the level of ongoing manager involvement initially expected by program staff was lower than expected, findings indicate that the high level of participant engagement, skills and confidence gained, and learning outcomes were not impacted. Expectations of managers should be clarified moving forward, enabling them to more actively support participants to prioritise attendance and fully engage in the workshops, and to shape and endorse workplace projects.

Individual participant outcomes

Fast Track has been highly effective in increasing participants' capabilities and confidence across both response and prevention streams. In the post-course survey, 84% of participants reported a major or moderate increase in their confidence to apply new knowledge and skills in their workplace. Both participants and their managers commonly linked increased confidence to the ways Fast Track supported participants to apply new skills and validated their pre-existing knowledge.

Despite the slight limitations of online delivery for peer networking, the program was effective in supporting connections and relationships among participants and mentors. In the post-course survey, 94% of participants developed a supportive relationship with their mentor, and 76% of all participants were able to develop supportive relationships online. A key benefit for participants was the opportunity for communication and connection; particularly those in more isolated roles. Participants also reported increased confidence to network and engage externally which has enhanced organisational collaboration. However, a lack of opportunity for formal reconvening after the program is limiting ongoing networking after Fast Track, and there is proven appetite for a forum or a mechanism to facilitate ongoing participant connections post program. Mentors also indicated that connecting with participants through mentorship provided them with benefits such as a strong sense of reconnection to the sector, insights into current discourse, and insights into how different specialist family violence organisations and other organisations operate.

The evaluation strongly demonstrates Fast Track's positive influence on a number of participants' development and career progression following the program; with many participants taking on more responsibility in their roles or moving into a more senior role. Around 91% of participants who responded to the follow-up survey reported an increase in confidence to undertake their role since completing Fast Track. Examples include greater confidence to engage in the leadership space and lead a team, to apply for more senior roles, and having a more comprehensive toolkit to draw upon. Participants also reflected that Fast Track has enabled their career progression through the curriculum which has given them solid subject matter expertise; program logic skills which enhance strategic thinking and planning abilities; and through support from the mentorship component.

Broader organisational and sector outcomes

Evidence is also emerging that Fast Track has contributed to organisational and sector-level outcomes through improvement of services and programs, workforce retention, and partnerships. Managers reflected that the structure and focus provided by workplace projects had contributed impetus and an opportunity for change in their organisations. Some projects contributed to practice or program improvements, and some organisations benefited from participants' improved skills in project planning or general development. Managers, participants, and mentors all noted that Fast Track had led to a sense of renewal and reconnection for some participants who may have been contemplating leaving the sector. Evidence of broader outcomes relating to enhanced advocacy were less strong, and this may warrant a review of program content to strengthen focus on advocacy learning outcomes in the future.

The case studies provide in-depth examples of enhanced confidence to network, engage more broadly, and build relationships which has resulted in partnership and collaboration outcomes that benefit both participants and organisations. This is also reflected in medium to longer term feedback from participants and mentors. Mentors observed that Fast Track had encouraged participants to look beyond their current networks, to work with partners they may have not previously considered. Participants noted lack of capacity and competing organisational priorities as barriers for maintaining ongoing partnerships. The many positive outcomes derived from connections formed through Fast Track indicate substantial benefits can be gained by providing opportunities for ongoing networking after the program.

Sustainability and next steps

There is a clear continued demand for Fast Track, evidenced by a large waiting list of 88 prevention and 179 specialist family violence practitioners at time of analysis. Furthermore, at least 80% of the managers who responded to the post-course survey agreed there is further need for leadership development within their organisation, including for new leaders, at the mid-level, and senior levels. Manager feedback indicates appetite for further training in leadership development specifically for those in supervisory or team leader roles, and greater capacity for Fast Track to accept more participants. The wide range of experience within some cohorts (and applications) also supports a need for additional leadership development offerings for practitioners with greater experience.

The benefits delivered by Fast Track are likely to be more sustainable in the longer term if participants have access to ongoing networking and mentoring opportunities and clear career pathways. This can support continued strengthening of cross-sector connections, collaborations and partnerships, and participants' progression to more senior positions. Establishing a centralised knowledge bank of program logics would also be valuable for informing future participants' work and extending organisational and sector level outcomes relating to enhanced services and programs.

Conclusion

This evaluation demonstrates Fast Track is a highly effective program for building key leadership and management capabilities across the specialist family violence and primary prevention workforces. The online program has engaged a large and reasonably diverse cohort across metropolitan and regional Victoria, and has enhanced their knowledge, skills, and confidence in line with sector capability frameworks. The evaluation found many flow-on benefits for organisations and the sector through enhanced programs or services, increased collaboration and partnerships, and retention of experience and skills within organisations and the sector. Thorough monitoring and evaluation, in conjunction with an iterative approach to design and delivery, has been effective in strengthening learning outcomes and improving participant experiences throughout the program.

There is also strong evidence of opportunities to invest in strengthening the sustainability of participant, organisation, and sector level outcomes post Fast Track. Proactive efforts to sustain outcomes by continuing to support participants' ongoing connection, career progression and professional development in the leadership space are essential to maximise the sector's investment in the program and enhance its impact.

Summary of recommendations

For Fast Track:

1. **Recommendation:** Identify and use new ways to enhance diversity in recruitment, increasing representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

2. **Recommendation:** Consider the ideal mix of online, face to face, and/or hybrid delivery of Fast Track for future programs – taking into account resourcing constraints, demonstrated accessibility benefits and effective online delivery, together with challenges for sustained participant engagement and informal discussion and networking opportunities.

3. **Recommendation:** As online delivery can provide some barriers to organic discussions and networking opportunities, Safe and Equal should explore ways to enhance networking and interaction among peers online throughout the Fast Track program.

4. **Recommendation:** Review the communication strategy with managers, to convey the level and type of involvement expected of them. Program staff can also explore ways to share concise core program information with managers to help them better support workplace project implementation and participants' further development post-program.

5. **Recommendation:** Review the Fast Track program content relating to advocacy and refine the focus or content accordingly to strengthen advocacy learning outcomes.

6. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore mechanisms for networking following the completion of Fast Track to continue to strengthen partnerships and collaboration sector wide.

7. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should develop a centralised database of Fast Track workplace projects to share previous projects; reducing duplication and increasing opportunities for collaborative work to strengthen sector-wide outcomes.

8. **Recommendation:** Review Fast Track program communications to clearly identify the program's focus on the capability framework, rather than the leadership skills some expected.

9. **Recommendation:** Identify ways to improve efficiency and sustainability in program delivery and administration, including reducing the reliance on scheduling guest experts to deliver a large proportion of the content, but with care to retain valuable variety in and engagement with guest experts' contributions.

10. **Recommendation:** Review internal processes and systems to strengthen efficiency and mitigate errors in data collection.

11. **Recommendation:** Review, update and scale back the Fast Track monitoring and evaluation framework for future iterations, ensuring it is fit for purpose and efficient.

For future development:

12. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should trial a sector-wide mentoring offering to meet ongoing leadership development needs and to sustain the outcomes of Fast Track to date.

13. **Recommendation:** Family Safety Victoria should support Safe and Equal to map the pathways for career progression in primary prevention, and extend the capability frameworks to Executive or Board level for both specialist family violence response and prevention workforces.

14. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore further workshops and leadership training content to support practitioners after Fast Track.

15. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore options for providing or signposting suitable professional development offerings relating to leadership skills, budget management and grant applications

16. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore ways to encourage or facilitate post-course support for participants implementing their workplace projects, to strengthen and sustain organisational and sector-level outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAM CONTEXT

1.1 About this report

This report has been co-authored by Safe and Equal and its evaluation partner, Lirata, and summarises the findings from analysis of extensive monitoring and evaluation data collected throughout the Fast Track intensive leadership program. It has been written primarily for Safe and Equal and Family Safety Victoria (FSV) to support learning and further sector development, as well as contribute further understanding of what works in workforce development.

Safe and Equal are committed to sharing the evidence and learning from this evaluation more widely – including with sector stakeholders and program participants – to inform and support further leadership or workforce development initiatives. To suit a diverse range of audiences, this report is intentionally high level, with technical details provided in Appendices where appropriate.

This first chapter provides a program introduction and context. Chapter 2 provides further information about the evaluation, including evaluation design, approaches and methodologies. Chapter 3 sets out the findings, arranged under the key evaluation questions. Chapter 4 provides a summary response to each evaluation question, together with recommendations.

Acronyms and abbreviations

The following acronyms and abbreviations are used throughout this report:

Acronym/Abbreviation	Meaning
ACCHO	Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation
DVRCV	Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
FSV	Family Safety Victoria
MARAM	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

1.2 Fast Track program background and aims

Background

To implement the recommended reforms following the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence of 2015, there was an urgent need to substantially grow the supply of skilled professionals available to take up management and leadership roles within the sector. Fast Track was first piloted by Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) in 2018 with a cohort of around 15 specialist family violence response practitioners. Following the successful delivery of the pilot and the evaluation, Family Safety Victoria (FSV) provided funding to Safe and Equal (then DVRCV) in 2020, to deliver the Fast Track intensive leadership program over two years between 2021 and 2022. The funding for 2021–2022 was intended to support expansion of the program throughout the specialist family violence sector as well as into the primary prevention space, through:

- Delivery of 3 prevention and 3 response courses, to a total of 150 participants
- Implementing a workplace project program logic assessment component
- Recruiting a facilitator, mentors and guest experts
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive MEL framework for evaluation

Program aims

Fast Track aimed to substantially grow the supply of suitably skilled professionals available to take up management and leadership roles within primary prevention and specialist family violence response organisations. It used a practice-informed, multi-modal leadership training and mentoring program underpinned by FSV's capability frameworks. In 2021-2022 it aimed to reach a large number of experienced primary prevention and specialist family violence response practitioners over 6 rounds of delivery.

By building the management and leadership capabilities of practitioners, supporting them to build relationships with their peers and broaden their perspective across the sector, Fast Track would equip and encourage participants to take on more senior roles. This would immediately grow the pool of managers with the dual skill set required to lead highly effective organisations, which contributes to mitigating workforce retention challenges and ensuring crucial experience and feminist values are retained within the sector. Ultimately Fast Track aimed to contribute to the development of a thriving, sustainable sector.

A comprehensive program logic was developed to underpin Fast Track, setting out the key activities, outputs and intended outcomes over the short, medium and longer term. This is attached as Appendix 1.

The Evidence Base

The census[1] identified that a considerable proportion of both specialist family violence and primary prevention practitioners intended to leave the workforce, citing lack of career advancement opportunities, short-term contracts, or the role having an impact on health and wellbeing. The census also identified the sector's need for more professional development and an opportunity for greater peer networking and connection. Considering this, appendix 1 includes the Fast Track program logic with intended short term and medium to longer term outcomes that aimed to further support the sector. In this report, it is promising to see that the Fast Track program has contributed to positive outcomes relating to capability development, workforce retention, career progression, enhanced networking opportunities, and a sense of reconnection to the sector.

Safe and Equal's approach to course design and delivery is underpinned by a growing evidence base and documented best practice, including:

- the Responding to Family Violence and Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women capability frameworks;
- Change the Story;
- intersectional feminist and anti-oppressive principles; and
- additional key frameworks such as MARAM and the Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors.

The application of adult learning principles, findings from internal research into blended learning (within family violence contexts), and previous evaluations of multi-modal workforce capability projects also supported the program design.

Elements of the program

The program uses mutually reinforcing delivery methods, consisting of:

- An introductory workshop and nine scaffolded workshops containing a range of activities.
- A workplace project to be designed and implemented by participants.
- Three mentoring sessions for each participant with field experts.
- Dissemination of policy, theory, and practice resources.
- Networking with key stakeholders and other and participants.
- A participant presentation at an end of program forum.

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1   Family Safety Victoria (2021), *2019-20 Census of workforces that intersect with family violence: Summary findings report*

Program team

The program was resourced and delivered by 1.8 – 2.0 FTE staff, with additional support from a contracted program facilitator. These staff members were located within the Primary Prevention Unit and were also supported by other staff and functions within Safe and Equal, including Client Services *Operations, Quality & Governance*, Communications, and Sector Development.

COVID–19

Fast Track was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. The delivery model rapidly changed from face-to-face to online, while aiming to keep the course as interactive as possible and meet all intended learning outcomes. Safe and Equal contracted Reality Learning to build the course in Canvas (an online learning management system) and translate some activities for online delivery. With a short turnaround, the course was successfully transitioned to an online format with no impact to program delivery timelines. In partnership with Reality Learning, Fast Track won a Diamond award at the 2021 LearnX learning design awards for *'Best Pandemic Response– Shift it Online'*. The impact of online delivery is explored in further detail in section 3.2 of this report.

The pandemic also had a significant impact on the family violence sector, with practitioners reporting an increase in the frequency and severity of family violence.[2] This in particular added a great strain to specialist family violence response practitioners, reducing resourcing and capacity, and driving higher levels of burnout. These impacts were observable during Fast Track, with active engagement and presence in the workshops noticeable lower with practitioners in the response stream (discussed more in section 3.2). The increased rates and complexity of family violence also impacted prevention practitioners, with many prevention initiatives scaled down, postponed, or de–prioritised to address the crisis needs of the response sector.[3]

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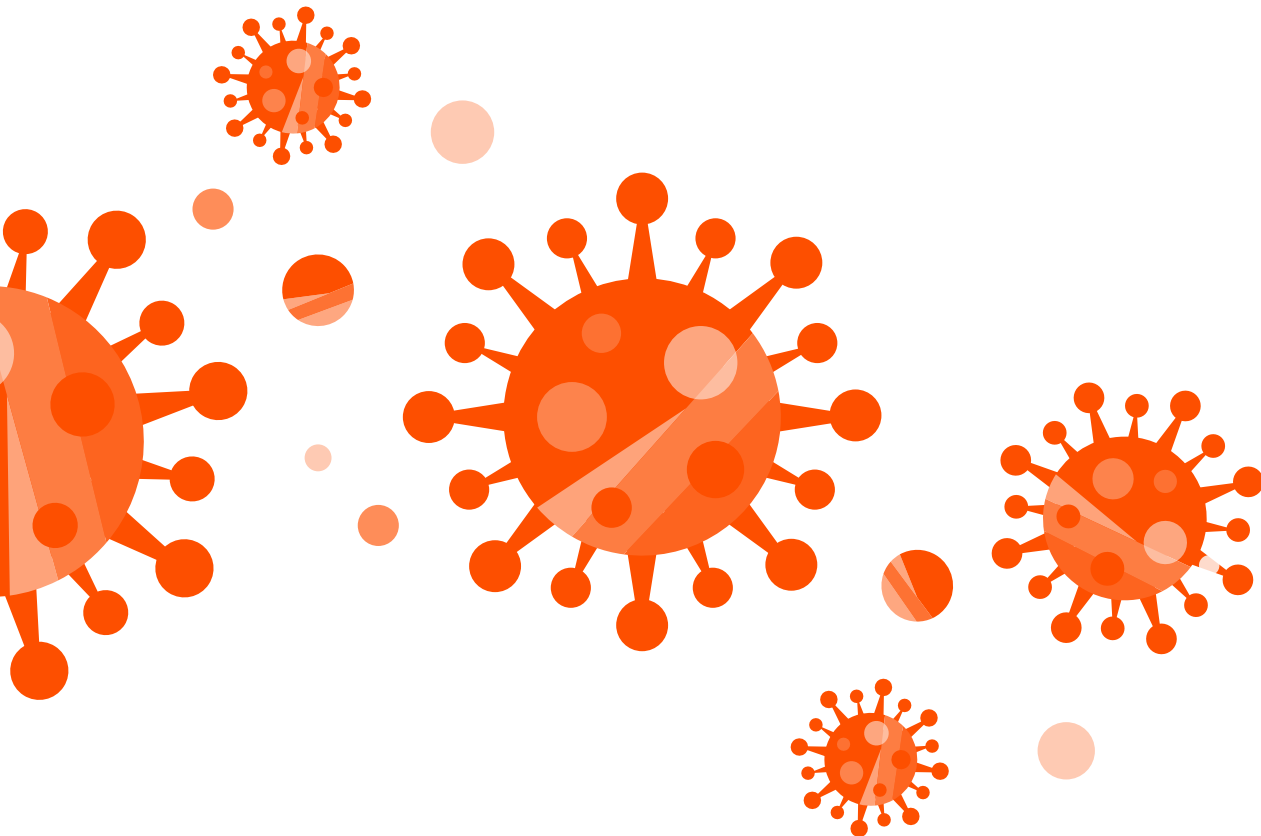
2   Pfitzner, N., Fitz–Gibbon, K. and True, J. (2020). *Responding to the 'shadow pandemic': practitioner views on the nature of and responses to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID–19 restrictions.*

3   Safe and Equal (2022). *Looking back, moving forward: Learnings from the transition to working online in primary prevention.*

1.3 Status of key activities and deliverables

The table below is a summary of key Fast Track activities and deliverables, all of which were completed on time or before deadline. It is a notable achievement that all deliverables and outputs were met given the major COVID challenges and pivots during the project's lifecycle.

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Translate existing response course and materials into an online format Produce and adapt new primary prevention courses and materials into a Fast Track stream	Delivered 6 courses (3 x response, 3 x prevention) online, each comprising of: • 10 x online workshops • 3 x mentoring sessions • 1 x end of program forum • Additional resources provided on Canvas • Tools and support provided for workplace projects	Safe and Equal and our online partner Reality Learning won a Diamond award at the 2021 LearnX learning design awards for *'Best Pandemic Response – Shift-it-online'* in recognition of the pivot to online training.
Recruit a facilitator, guest speakers and mentors	• Sarah Johnson facilitated all 6 online courses • Engaged over 40 guest speakers • Engaged 41 mentors over the Fast Track program	Connections and professional relationships formed between participants, and participants and their mentors.
Screen and recruit up to 150 participants (75 prevention, 75 response)	127 Fast Track graduates	Practitioners with new skills and strengthened capabilities, with a greater ability to think strategically and identify and design a project to implement in their workplace. Participants have gained experience developing and implementing projects within their organisations; strengthening program and service delivery, enhanced partnerships, and resulting in greater organisational and sector outcomes.
Develop a comprehensive MEL framework with partners Lirata	A MEL framework to support the quality monitoring and evaluation of the Fast Track program	A plan for evaluation that is program theory based, with a clear and cohesive focus for data collection
Develop a range of monitoring and evaluation tools and data collection	The following survey tools were developed and shared for data collection: • Pre-course participant survey • Weekly participant survey (two versions; distributed after each session) • Participant post-course survey • Mentor post-course survey • Manager post-course survey • Follow-up participant survey	A range of qualitative and quantitative data sources from various stakeholders to inform the monitoring and evaluation of Fast Track as the program progresses through different stages.

2. EVALUATION DESIGN AND CONTEXT

2.1 Evaluation approach

Safe and Equal engaged Lirata as its Fast Track evaluation partner in late 2020, building on earlier evaluation partnerships focusing on workforce development and capability building programs in the Primary Prevention Unit. A capacity building approach was taken for this evaluation, with Lirata and Safe and Equal collaborating throughout the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) lifecycle, including:

- Jointly designing a comprehensive MEL framework and suite of data collection tools, and sharing responsibility for collecting data.
- Consulting with the Fast Track program facilitator, senior managers, and other Safe and Equal teams who have some role in data collection, around MEL design and implementation, and involving them in sense-making discussions.
- Lirata provided responsive advice, coaching and mentoring for Safe and Equal staff throughout the MEL lifecycle as needed, including to develop or adapt data collection tools, collect and manage data via a range of methods, undertake routine monitoring and reporting, and analyse and synthesise quantitative and qualitative data.

This participatory evaluation capability building approach recognised and built on the substantial existing evaluation skills of Safe and Equal staff, and drew on the evaluation knowledge, tools and processes developed during the Fast Track pilot, while also further developing Safe and Equal's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) knowledge and experience.

This evaluation took a strongly utilisation-focused and action learning approach, using M&E information to continuously improve program quality. In particular, this included an interim review of the program after round 1, and developing an Excel data dashboard to support real-time monitoring and reporting of key quantitative indicators from participant feedback surveys.

2.2 Evaluation design

The Fast Track pilot was evaluated internally in 2019, demonstrating Fast Track's effectiveness in building the cohort's knowledge and skills, and providing valuable lessons and recommendations for program improvement. These recommendations were actioned in the 2021-22 program, resulting in a strengthened delivery model and adaptation of the course to suit primary prevention workforces.

The evaluation design for this iteration of Fast Track is based around 11 key Evaluation Questions across four domains, around which the findings in chapter 3 are structured:

Domains	Evaluation questions
Appropriateness	1. To what extent was the program fit-for-purpose in meeting the needs of participants?
	2. How relevant was the program's focus within the sector context?
Effectiveness and Impact	3. To what extent did participants' knowledge, skills and confidence increase as a result of the program?
	4. To what extent has the program built or enhanced connection and relationships across the sector, and what has happened as a result?
	5. How and to what extent were participants' employers involved in supporting the achievement of outcomes?
	6. How have participants' roles or careers changed as a result of the program, and what has enabled or limited their advancement?
	7. What changes could Safe and Equal make to further enhance the effectiveness of Fast Track?
	8. What, if any, emerging evidence of long-term organisational or sector-level outcomes is available at this stage?

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Domains	Evaluation questions
Efficiency and Process	9. How successful was the program in recruiting its target cohorts as defined?
Sustainability	10. What evidence exists of continued or future demand for Fast Track? 11. How can the benefits delivered by Fast Track be sustained into the longer term?

2.3 Scope

The scope of this evaluation was largely focused on the 2021–22 funded program, being 6 courses delivered across response and prevention cohorts. However, a small component of the evaluation investigated longer term outcomes, particularly relating to participants' career progression. Therefore, selected data collection methods were extended to try and include the approximately 15 participants from the 2018 Fast Track pilot.

2.4 Methods and limitations

The following methods were used to gather data from various stakeholder groups at key points throughout the project. A brief summary of the methods and participation is provided here, with further details and any limitations in Appendix 2.

Fast Track participant data collection:
- Pre-course survey (n=143 of 151 participants, 95%)
- Weekly session surveys (n=averaged between 13 and 23 per week across the 6 cohorts)
- Post-course survey (n=101 of 127 graduates, 80%)
- Follow-up survey some months after completion (n=22 of 102 participants, 22%)
- Follow-up focus groups some months after completion (n=9)
- Case study interviews with 2 participants and their managers

Managers of participants:
- Post-course survey (n=24 of 130, 18%)
- Follow-up verbal questionnaire (n=5 of 10)

Mentors:
- Post-course survey (n=34 of 75, 45%)
- Focus groups (n=8)

Program staff and facilitator:
- Interviews after round 1 and round 3 (n=3)

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presents high-level findings from the various data sources, summarised and discussed as they relate to each key Evaluation Question and Area of Focus.

Please note that EQ7: *What changes could Safe and Equal make to further enhance the effectiveness of Fast Track?* is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.1 How successful was the program in recruiting its target cohorts as defined?

Characteristics of Fast Track cohorts

The Fast Track program recruited a total of 151 practitioners, with 127 graduates as shown in table 1. There were 207 applications for 150 places across the program (details in appendix 3, table 8); to apply participants were required to fill out an application form and submit a current version of their CV. The application form collected the following information:

- General demographic information such as age range, region, program area, gender identity and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity
- Current role and responsibilities
- If they manage staff
- Qualifications and experience
- Career goals
- Challenges the applicant has identified/experienced in the sector
- What the applicant would like to achieve from the Fast Track course

The submitted information was graded against a developed application tool, to ensure a consistent lens of assessment across the course. The application tool was designed to give priority to practitioners from regional and rural Victoria and from a diverse range of organisations to ensure there is an equal opportunity to participate. To support engagement of those from diverse cultural backgrounds, relationships were developed with relevant organisations and stakeholders to ensure a targeted approach to recruitment was implemented. All this information was analysed by the program team alongside their CV showcasing their work experience and a letter of support from their manager that acknowledged their support for the applicant's commitment to the requirements of Fast Track over 10 weeks.

Table 1: Fast Track recruitment and graduates

	Stream	Recruited	Withdrawn	No program logic submitted[4]	Graduated
Prevention	Round 1	26	4	0	22
	Round 2	22	4	1	17
	Round 3	25	2	0	23
	Total	**73**	**10**	**1**	**62**
Response	Round 1	24	4	2	18
	Round 2	27	0	1	26
	Round 3	27	6	0	21
	Total	**78**	**10**	**3**	**65**
	Grand Total	**151**	**20**	**4**	**127**

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4 This is referring to participants who completed the Fast Track course, however they did not submit their program logic for assessment, which is required to graduate.

Some common reasons applications weren't accepted was due to their level of experience or knowledge of the sector; these applicants were encouraged to participate in some foundational before reapplying for Fast Track. Group cohesion was also a consideration for each round, and many were not accepted due to the limited places available, and the number of strong applications submitted.

As shown in table 1 there were a total of 20 participants who withdrew from Fast Track, evenly spread across prevention and response. The most common reasons for withdrawal were being unable to commit or catch up to the course workload and time requirements due to personal or family illness, or lack of capacity and competing priorities at work. The program staff would try and support the participant as best they could to enable them to continue their participation, however some were unable to do so. To account for attrition, following the first round of delivery, where there were suitable applicants the program staff would invite approximately 26–27 participants with a goal to retain a target cohort size of 25.

There was an even spread across regional and metropolitan practitioners for this program, 52% and 48% respectively as shown in appendix 3, table 13. The geographical spread of participants is discussed further in section 3.2 when focussing on the outcomes of online delivery.

Table 9 in appendix 3 shows the distribution of age range across Fast Track participants, which had a proportionate spread through 25-54 years, with 25-34 years the most common age bracket (36%).

The average number of workshops attended by participants across both streams was 9, however response participants were more frequently left sessions early or would take a call during the workshops due to competing work priorities.

What factors influenced recruitment, diversity and retention?

Diversity

Overall, the program seems to have attracted a reasonably diverse cohort. Program staff and facilitator perceptions were somewhat mixed in relation to the program's reach with specific cohorts, as demographic analysis was not yet available at the time of interviews. Observations include:

- Overall, there was good participation by regional and rural practitioners – a key benefit of online delivery – and from practitioners across diverse program areas/settings.
- Diversity of sexuality and gender was also evident – while demographic data was not collected, this often came out in participant introductions. Gender identity data of participants is included in table 10, appendix 3.
- The program also had 14 participants that worked in service delivery for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Participants who identified as being Aboriginal or from Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were potentially under-represented in the program, which may point to future considerations around program promotion and targeted recruitment. The 2019-20 workforce census indicates that approximately 3% of specialist family violence response, and 4% primary prevention workforce identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Fast Track had 2 participants that identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and 4 that worked in Aboriginal services, and therefore indicates potential underrepresentation in the program.

Another diversity consideration identified in the program staff/facilitator interviews was the **wide diversity of experience within some cohorts**, which at times made it hard to meet the learning needs of the whole group. This was more notable in prevention cohorts, where the workforce is much smaller than response.

An example identified in one interview was that a small number of response workers attended the prevention stream because they wanted to move into primary prevention practice, however they lacked knowledge of prevention fundamentals. At times this need to 'catch up' on key concepts of prevention practice may have been a frustrating experience for the highly experienced prevention practitioners in the cohort, and perhaps those with lived experience.

In the application screening process, program staff would assess participant's experience and knowledge, and directed many applicants to more foundational primary prevention and specialist family violence response training to build their understanding before applying again for Fast Track. Response practitioners who demonstrated an understanding of the gendered drivers of violence were considered for the prevention program. The program team would have conversations with entry level and highly experienced applicants prior to enrolling to ensure cohesion of the cohort. With diversity of experience in mind, program staff should consider supports to assist with the learning experience, which could include providing pre-reading to entry level prevention participants, or providing a check in during the course with their mentor to see if any further support can be provided.

In addition to this, applications from senior prevention practitioners were unsuccessful, as the Fast Track program content was not pitched to their level of experience. These practitioners had often applied because there was no other leadership training available to suit them in the sector, potentially signifying a future need for more professional development opportunities for more senior roles.

Retention

While the program staff and facilitator interviews found a slight perception that the prevention courses may have had somewhat better retention, recruitment and withdrawal data (table 1 above) shows that the overall level of retention was equal across the cohorts.

In later rounds up to 27 participants were invited into the course (rather than 25) to account for attrition, and there is a thought that for response this could even increase to 28. When 27 participants were accepted into response round 2, they all completed the program.

Enablers of diversity and retention

The program staff and facilitator identified some pro-active efforts that were made to recruit for and retain diversity among the cohorts. These included:

- A selection criterion tool used during the application assessment process, that promoted diversity among regional and metro location, organisations, and program areas.
- Developing a group agreement with participants.

The 'group agreement' process was seen as a key enabler of retention amongst diverse cohorts. In session 1, the facilitator would support participants to discuss what should be included in a group agreement to meet everyone's needs. The conversation would typically include considerations such as encouraging participants to use their pronouns and the First Nation's Country they were dialling in from in their Zoom name, ensuring participants 'step up and step back' to share power in the space, avoiding jargon or speaking too quickly, and being mindful of the diversity of lived experiences in the class.

Safe and Equal has an ongoing and growing partnership with Rainbow Health and have recently received Rainbow Tick accreditation. Additionally, Safe and Equal are partnering and have partnered with organisations such as Women with Disabilities Victoria, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Djirra to strengthen intersectional practice across a range of programs.

Summary: How successful was the program in recruiting its target cohorts as defined?

Overall, Fast Track recruited a fairly diverse cohort with a proportionate spread through age ranges and regional and metropolitan participants. To further accommodate the diverse range of experience in some cohorts, program staff can consider providing additional supports to assist with the learning experience such as pre-reading and check ins. For future programs, Safe and Equal can consider ways to engage other ACCHOs and organisations to strengthen representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Data collection methods to further support diversity of cohorts could also be implemented in line with newly established ethical data management processes with the intention to use this data meaningfully.
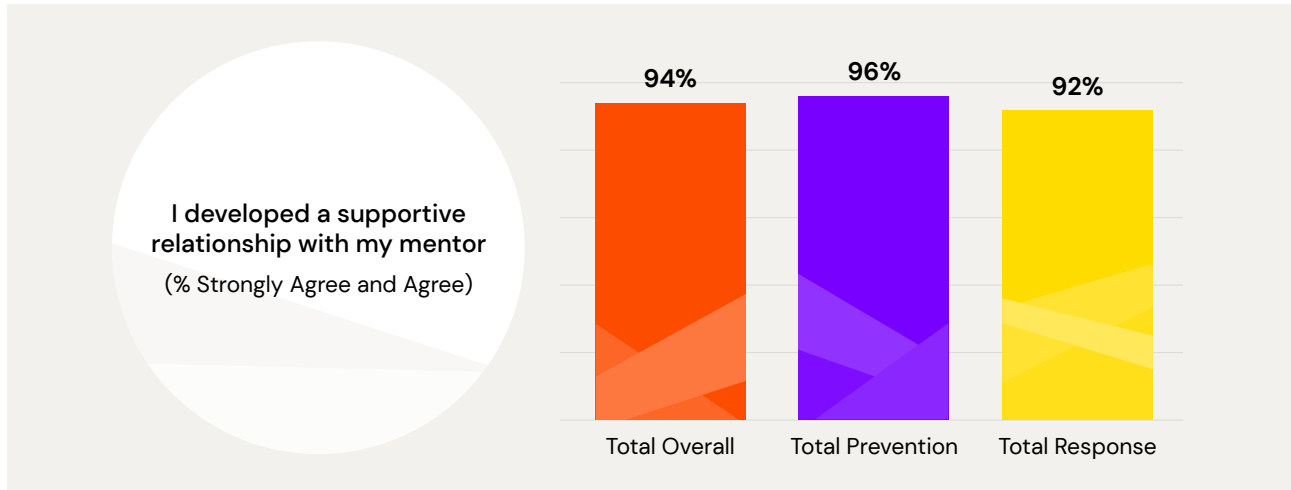
Recommendation: Identify and use new ways to enhance diversity in recruitment, increasing representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

3.2 To what extent was the program fit-for-purpose in meeting the needs of participants?

Was the design of the mentoring component appropriate in meeting participant needs and developing supportive relationships?

The mentoring component of Fast Track consisted of three one-hour sessions with a field expert, aligned as best as possible to the participant's experience and needs. The sessions were encouraged to be scheduled at approximately weeks 3, 7 and 9 to support the participant in reinforcing learnings from the workshops and to identify and design a workplace program logic.

Figure 1: post-course survey results (n=99)

I developed a supportive relationship with my mentor
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

94% Total Overall
96% Total Prevention
92% Total Response

Overall, the data supports that the **mentoring component of the program was highly valued by both participants and mentors**. It is positive to see that 94% (n=93) of all Fast Track participants felt that they developed a supportive relationship with their mentor.

> "[my mentor was] *a great sound board with amazing expertise to draw upon to add value to my own learning.*"
> – Post-course participant survey

> *"The generous sharing [and] the opportunity to ask questions and explore ideas in a safe one-on-one space was priceless."*
> – Post-course participant survey

Results of the participant post-course survey also showed that:

- 96% (n=95) agreed it was useful in progressing their workplace project
- 92% (n=91) of all participants believed the rapid mentorship component was useful in supporting their learnings in relation to course content
- When asked what the most valuable aspect of the mentoring program, participants noted "seeking in depth advice regarding the workplace project", and "it was perfect to go deep into the project and gather valuable insights to make the project saleable".

Feedback from mentors, and program staff and facilitator interviews also support that the mentoring element of the program was a major strength; with the approach working well and useful in progressing the participant's workplace project. Further analysis is included in appendix 4. These responses demonstrate that **the mentoring component is a valuable reinforcing connection between the learnings from the scaffolded weekly workshops and applying it to participant's workplace projects**.

> "It's one of the real strengths of the program. I don't know why we don't do more of it in the sector."
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Most valuable aspects of mentoring

Participants in the post-course survey were asked what they thought was the most valuable aspect of the rapid mentorship program, with strong themes emerging of:

- Showing appreciation for their mentor sharing their wealth of experience and knowledge in the sector and receiving support for their workplace project.
- Many also valued being able to test their thinking with their mentor; having deep discussions, challenging ideas, and presenting a new perspective on things to build their own knowledge.
- Participants also appreciated the general sense of support they felt from their mentor; building their confidence, engaging in reflective practice, and being able to discuss challenges they experience in the sector.
- The post-course survey comments also highlighted that many mentors provided career advice to participants, such as sharing advice on leadership, and discussing participant's career goals and pathways.

> *"[the most valuable aspect of mentoring was] the opportunity to discuss learnings over the course and applying this to the workplace project. It was an opportunity for reassurance that I was heading in the right direction with the workplace project and the opportunity to reflect on where to from here and what my hopes are going forward in the sector."*
>
> – Participant post-course survey

Mentors commented on a variety of aspects of the program that they felt had been most valuable, notably:

- The practical nature of the mentoring – oriented around tangible projects – provided a clear focus and helpful opportunities for skill development in program planning, program logic and other areas.
- The quality of content provided through Fast Track workshops and guest presentations, which enabled the mentoring to further support participants' learning through thoughtful reflection in the mentoring sessions.
- Although the program was highly structured, the responsive nature of the mentorship support was valuable. Sessions were able to focus on the needs of mentees and to provide a space to discuss a range of issues that might otherwise not be addressed, including organisational challenges that could be more freely unpacked with someone independent/external.

> *"... a useful model to support the participant's professional development, in particular using the workplace project as a jumping off point for discussions about leadership in the primary prevention space and elevating their work to take a more strategic approach."*
>
> – Mentor post-course survey

Suggested improvements to mentoring

When asked what could be improved about the rapid mentorship program, key themes in the participants' feedback were:

- Wanting more than 3 mentoring sessions
- Greater clarity on the rapid mentorship approach, with more guidelines provided on how to best utilise the sessions
- Being connected to their mentor earlier in the program (before week 3)

The most common theme in mentor comments around areas for improvement, raised in at least 14 of the responses, was in relation to the **need to allow sufficient time** for mentoring. There were a variety of aspects to this theme, some of which align with the participants' suggestions:

- Mentoring session times were too short and should be increased to 1.5 hours.
- The overall timeline for the mentoring relationship was too short, and that the final session felt premature with insufficient opportunity for project implementation to have occurred.
- Mentoring could start earlier in the program, including 1 comment that additional time was needed for goal setting and for mentor preparation between sessions.

The other theme in mentors' suggestions was some scope for **improvement in communication of expectations and information** to both mentees and mentors. Examples were cited relating to expectations of mentees' behaviour in the program – particularly around booking/cancelling/re-scheduling mentoring sessions at short notice – the level of time commitment expected, how issues might be resolved, and opportunities for mentors to 'check-in' and learn from program staff and other more experienced mentors during the program.

Mentor survey comments also indicate some improvements to the program have already been made across the different rounds.

Did the workplace project provide participants with appropriate and relevant opportunities to apply their learning in practice?

There was a total of 127 workplace program logics submitted across Fast Track.

Figure 2 shows that **92% (n=92) of participants agreed that they applied new knowledge and skills learned during Fast Track to their workplace project**. This number is lower for response round 1 (71%) as participants were initially required to submit their workplace project identification form before week 1, their workplace program logic in week 5, and a project workplan in week 10. Feedback provided after this first Fast Track cohort was this volume of work for the project detracted from the learning experience, that greater clarity was needed over the requirements and scope of the workplace project, and a dedicated session to discuss the assessment. The Fast Track project team took an iterative approach to the program and would implement changes from feedback for future courses. After response round 1, a separate workplace project Q&A session was offered to participants and cohorts were required to submit a workplace project identification form in week 5, and their program logic in week 10. This was designed to provide participants with more time to develop their project idea and test their thinking with their mentors, alongside integrating learnings from the weekly workshops.

Figure 2: Post-course survey (n=92)
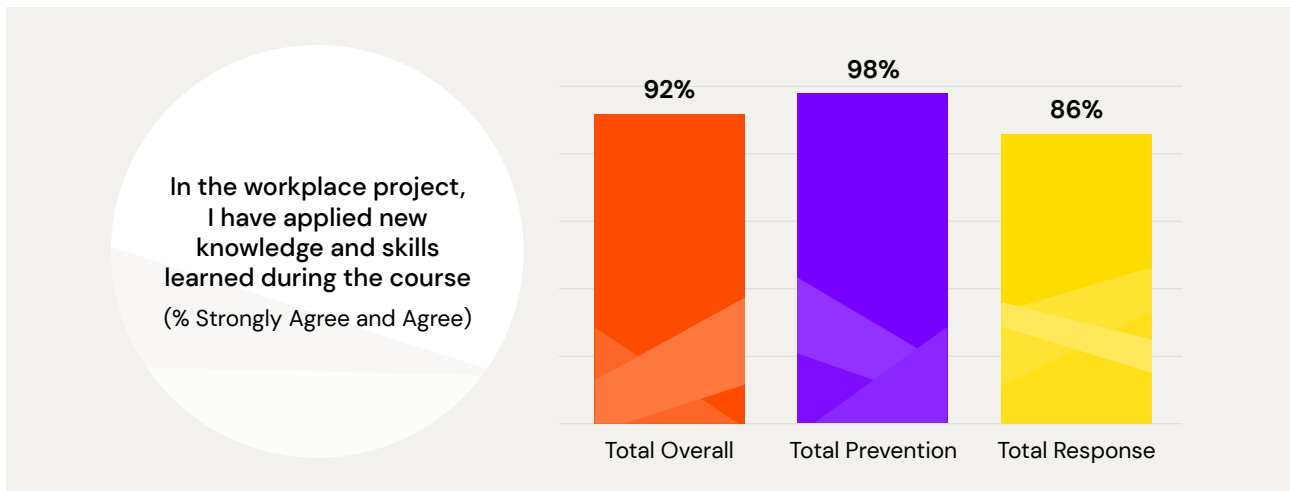
Another key theme identified in the surveys is that **participants wanted more dedicated time to discuss the workplace projects**. Following some of this feedback an optional, participant-led drop-in session was offered to allow participants to connect and discuss their workplace projects. For future Fast Track courses, it can be considered to offer multiple drop-in sessions throughout the program, which would provide support to participants and enhance collaboration and networking opportunities.

Participants managers also generally agreed the workplace project was a positive way for participants to apply their learning, as indicated in manager post-course survey results:

- All but one of the manager respondents (n=22 of 23) agreed the workplace project was an appropriate way for the participant to practice applying the knowledge and skills learned during the course. More than half (n=12) selected 'Strongly agree'.
- Most managers (n=21 of 24) expected they would be able to continue supporting the participant to complete their project after the course ends, with nearly 80% (n=19) selecting 'Strongly agree'. The other 3 responses were neutral rather than disagreeing.

In the post-course survey, **85% of all participants intended to continue implementing their workplace project to completion with 11% feeling neutral**. In total, 3 participants across the program disagreed on continuing implementation, however this could be due to some who were moving into new roles and one participant who did not get organisational approval and completed the logic as an exercise (details in appendix 3, table 11).

The majority of managers (n=13) did not indicate that the workplace projects had created or encountered significant challenges within their organisation. However, some challenges were noted, as follows:

- The most common challenge was workload and time constraints (7 responses). These often related to the participant's workload, but at times also related to the organisation's agility and/or the timeframes required to progress a more complex project.
- A less prevalent theme was that competing priorities within the organisation made it difficult for projects to realise their potential.

"Time demands given [participant's] role was already very demanding. She has completed a lot of work out of work hours."

– Manager post-course survey

"The project challenged the participant and myself to advocate internally for the organisation to have more of a focus on this area. Whilst the organisation does have a commitment to preventing violence against women, resources are currently allocated to other priorities as identified in the current strategic plan. Advocacy continues beyond the project."

– Manager post-course survey

How did online delivery affect the achievement of program outputs and outcomes?

Overall, the online delivery appears to have been a strong enabler of access and reach, particularly for rural and regional participants.

41% of participants in the pre-course survey noted that online delivery made it easier for them to participate in the program, and 37% would have replied regardless of delivery format (appendix 3, table 12). In the post-course survey, participants were asked what factors made it easier for them to participate in the program, with **over half of respondents (n=58) noting online delivery**. The feedback shows that online delivery allowed for practitioners from diverse geographical locations to participate and enhanced networking opportunities for all. Participants also noted that online delivery allowed for more content to be covered, and greater flexibility with both personal and work commitments. A summary of participants from regions across Victoria is listed in table 13, appendix 3. There was an approximately even spread of metro to regional participants, 52% and 48% respectively, which is an indication of how online delivery increased accessibility to Victorian practitioners located across the state.

While the online format has certainly helped reach more participants, the program staff and facilitator interviews found that **engagement and being present throughout the online sessions was a challenge for some participants, particularly in the response stream**. A number of response participants struggled to attend week to week and to remain engaged for the whole session, and it was acknowledged this sector is consumed was challenged by their additional crisis workload in the COVID context.

- Many people had to leave sessions early – this seemed to be a mix of managers pulling them out and participants themselves prioritising other meetings, etc.
- Even when they were in course sessions, people were often seen on screen taking phone calls with Zoom on mute (at times lengthy calls) or popping off and on camera quite often.

> *"I think if it was face to face people would have been able to focus and be more present. Respecting the leadership space, managing yourself, being present and attentive. And I think their managers would have treated it differently too."*
>
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Clear communication about expectations around participation – to both participants and their managers – and encouraging participants to remain accountable, will be important to continue and strengthen for future online delivery.

Enablers of online participation and engagement

A consideration in the design of the program was maintaining engagement through a 10-week online course. To manage this, each workshop included a range of learning methods including guest expert presentations and panel discussions, group activities and case studies, world café activities and breakout room discussions. Program staff and facilitator interviews found that this attention to variety – variety in in guest experts, modalities of activity, number of topics covered – was a major strength of the program design. It gave participants opportunities to think about what it means to move into senior roles from many different perspectives.

In the post-course survey, **participants reported that the engaging delivery model was an enabler for participation**, noting the varied interactive elements, a range of guest speakers and engaging content. In the weekly workshop surveys, 87% of participants found the session format engaging.

Figure 3: Weekly survey results (n=872)
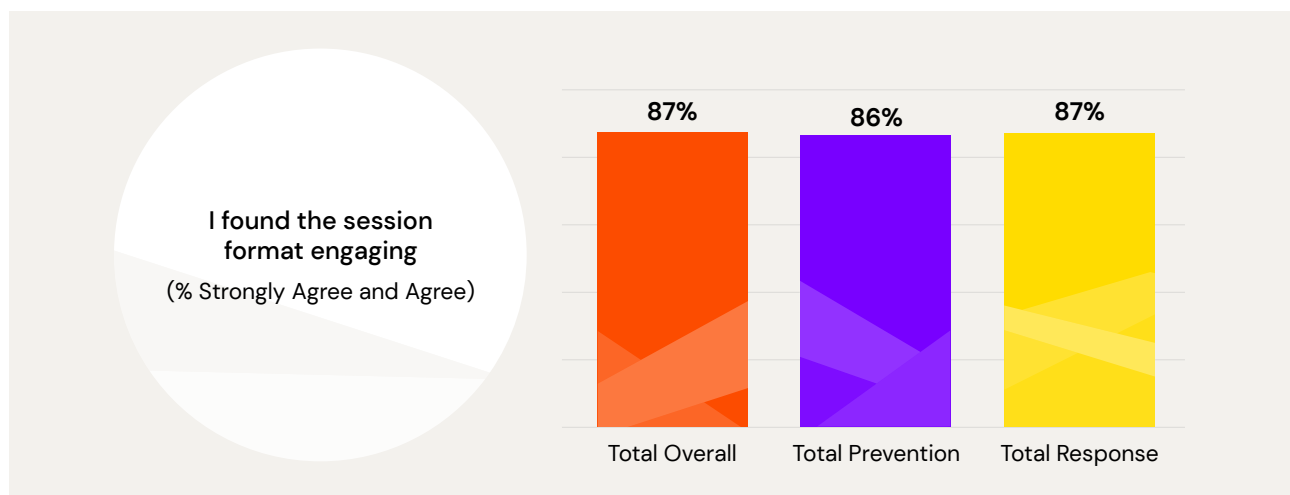
Other factors that enabled participation included (from post-course survey):

- Management and/or organisational support
- Having the workshops scheduled at the same date and time each week; with participants noting a half-day and morning time slot was most suitable
- Information provided from the outset noting the course outline and expectations
- The online learning platform (Canvas) was easy to navigate with relevant resources and information for the upcoming workshops

Program staff/facilitator interviews also found that **the team's continuous, iterative improvement approach was a key strength that resulted in improved participant experience**. The team were willing to adapt the program's style or approach along the way in response to feedback and monitoring data, or things the identified in the workshops. A key example around the online experience was introducing a short pairs check-in at the start of sessions, where participants were paired off at random in a Zoom breakout room to meet and greet each other in response to a prompt question. This would enable participants to land in the space, and further enhanced group dynamic.

Mentors also noted the **excellent management of the program** by the Safe and Equal staff and the **high-quality facilitation** of the sessions.

Barriers and improvements to online delivery

The key barrier reported by participants that made it difficult for participation was competing work commitments and priorities. When asked what could be improved for online delivery, key themes identified by participants were:

- The majority of respondents had no further improvements to be made to the Fast Track program
- A strong theme in feedback was participants' desire to connect more with each other; either in the sessions or additional networking sessions outside the workshops.
- Longer or more breaks throughout the workshops

In the post-course surveys when participants were asked *'what could be improved for online delivery?'*, a strong theme emerged for **wanting more opportunities to interact and network with peers**. To encourage connection, the program team added the pairs check-in, where participants start most workshops in pairs in breakout rooms for 10 minutes to discuss a prompt relating to the weekly module, as an opportunity to 'land in the space'. In addition, participants who consented to having their contact details shared were circulated among the group, and at the end of week 10 the facilitator encouraged participants to reach out to three people on that list to arrange a catch up. The workshops also consisted of other various breakout room learning activities to help promote interaction.

However, with the nature of online delivery **there are barriers to organic discussions and networking opportunities** that naturally arise in classrooms. In the feedback provided, some key themes were wanting the opportunity to meet again after the course concluded and wanting more opportunities to connect throughout the course, either in the workshops or through additional networking sessions. Some comments from the post-course participant survey are included below:

- "Perhaps a space to encourage developing supporting relationships with others attending, for example, incorporating maybe 2 or 3 sessions throughout the 10 weeks where participants have the opportunity to attend online to discuss how they are finding the course, their workplace project etc…"
- "It's difficult to connect and have organic conversations with peers in this type of environment"
- "Arrange a catch up after 3 months to allow face to face interaction to build better relationship with my peers"

In response to participant feedback, in round 3 Safe and Equal introduced an optional participant-led meeting in week 8 to provide the opportunity to get together, network, and discuss workplace projects. In future it could be considered to offer more of these sessions throughout the course to enhance networking and connections online.

Program staff and facilitator interviews also noted a level of continued participant feedback about not having enough time to discuss things in the sessions, and having more breaks. Length and timing is a common area in training where trade-offs need to be made between covering essential content, facilitating engaging activities and discussion, and the group's attention span and energy levels. It is also an area where individual preferences vary, so is difficult to meet every individual need. The team has reviewed the course content and parameters around breaks, and it is about right for the 3-hour sessions (in comparison with tertiary education and other industry training courses), however the current course review by a Learning Design specialist may provide further expert advice or considerations around timing.

While the majority of mentor feedback suggests online mentoring was effective, a few did note a **preference for face-to-face mentoring** where possible (5 responses), perhaps as part of a hybrid mentoring model.

Several mentors suggested that the online delivery of the mentoring, combined with the structured and intensive nature of the Fast Track program overall, had meant the mentoring experience had a stronger emphasis on **task completion and focused skill development** than on relationship building. While relationship building is also an intended outcome of Fast Track (and participant feedback shows relationship building with mentors was highly effective), this focus on progressing the workplace project is indeed consistent with the primary intended purpose of the rapid mentoring component, as informed by the Fast Track pilot evaluation findings and recommendations.

> *"[It] would have been good to meet in person for one of the meetings and also to get an understanding of the geographical/physical environment of the [participant]."*
>
> – Mentor

Online challenges were reported by a very small number of mentors, including:

- IT challenges (1 response)
- Mentoring sessions being squeezed in between other meetings (2 responses)
- Distractions within the mentee's remote environment (1 response).

Recommendation: Consider the ideal mix of online, face to face, and/or hybrid delivery of Fast Track for future programs – taking into account resourcing constraints, demonstrated accessibility benefits and effective online delivery, together with challenges for sustained participant engagement and informal discussion and networking opportunities.

Recommendation: As online delivery can provide some barriers to organic discussions and networking opportunities, Safe and Equal should explore ways to enhance networking and interaction among peers online throughout the Fast Track program.

Did the program provide an inclusive and responsive experience for diverse participants?

Figure 4: Weekly survey results (n=533)

The program staff and facilitator have been responsive to my needs
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

92% — Total Overall
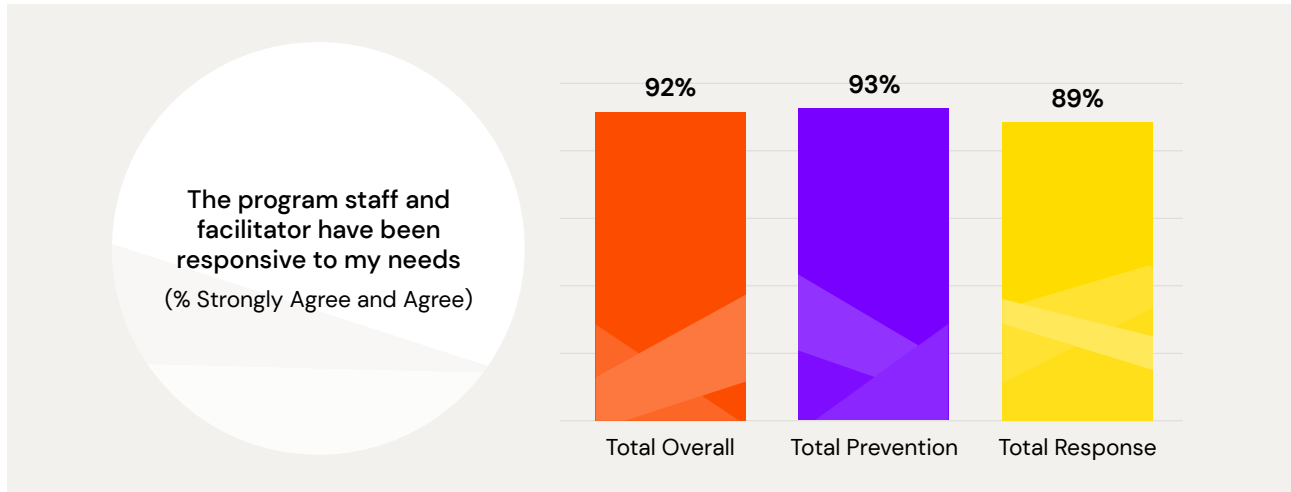93% — Total Prevention
89% — Total Response

Figure 4 above shows an overall positive rating to staff and facilitator responsiveness, with 92% of all participants agreeing they were responsive to their needs. There was 7% who felt neutral, and 1% (n=3) that disagreed.

A deliberate effort was made to create a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space for all participants. The group agreement process described in section 3.1 was a key enabler of supporting diversity and inclusion and helped the program facilitator and participants understand and respond to diverse individual needs.

Summary: To what extent was the program fit–for–purpose in meeting the needs of participants?

To summarise, **the design of Fast track was fit–for–purpose and responsive to participants needs**. Iterative improvements made to the program between rounds were key in enhancing program delivery and participants' experience.

The rapid mentoring was highly valued, nurturing supportive relationships and fulfilling its purpose of reinforcing participants' learnings and applying them to the workplace project. Participants and mentors both wanted more time for mentoring. There were also a range of other benefits mentoring provided including a way to test thinking, engage in reflective practice and receive support for career goals and progression. The mentoring element of Fast Track should remain for future iterations, with adjustments to duration considered. Safe and Equal should also consider opportunities for sector-wide mentoring following Fast Track to sustain ongoing benefits.

Online delivery of Fast Track enabled greater access and reach for rural and regional participants. Consistent engagement and being present within the online workshops were a challenge, particularly for participants in the response stream. Future programs can consider strengthening the communications to participants and managers about participation expectations, encouraging ongoing accountability. The engaging delivery model of Fast Track was a key enabler for participation and should be considered for future iterations. A key theme that emerged from participants was wanting more opportunities to network and interact with peers during and after the program, as online delivery naturally has barriers to more organic discussions and networking opportunities. Future programs should consider the optimum balance of online and face to face delivery, and consider offering more online drop–in sessions to enable further participant interaction.

3.3 How relevant was the program's focus within the sector context?

How relevant and useful was the information delivered by the program?

The weekly workshop surveys showed that **84% of response participants, and 92% of prevention participants agreed that the 'topics focused on were generally what was expected'**. A strong theme that emerged from the feedback was appreciation for the guest speakers, with **90% of all participants finding the information provided by guest experts useful**.

"I really enjoyed the information shared by the guest speakers today and it was very relevant and provided me with lots of ways in which I can implement practice in a leadership space."

– Weekly survey

"[The] Guest speaker's depth of knowledge from a broader perspective of family violence work was very useful."

– Weekly survey

Figure 5: Weekly survey results (n=903)

The information provided by the Guest Expert/s was useful
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

Total Overall	Total Prevention	Total Response
90%	91%	89%

Figure 6: Weekly survey results (n=918)

The content was relevant for my work context
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)
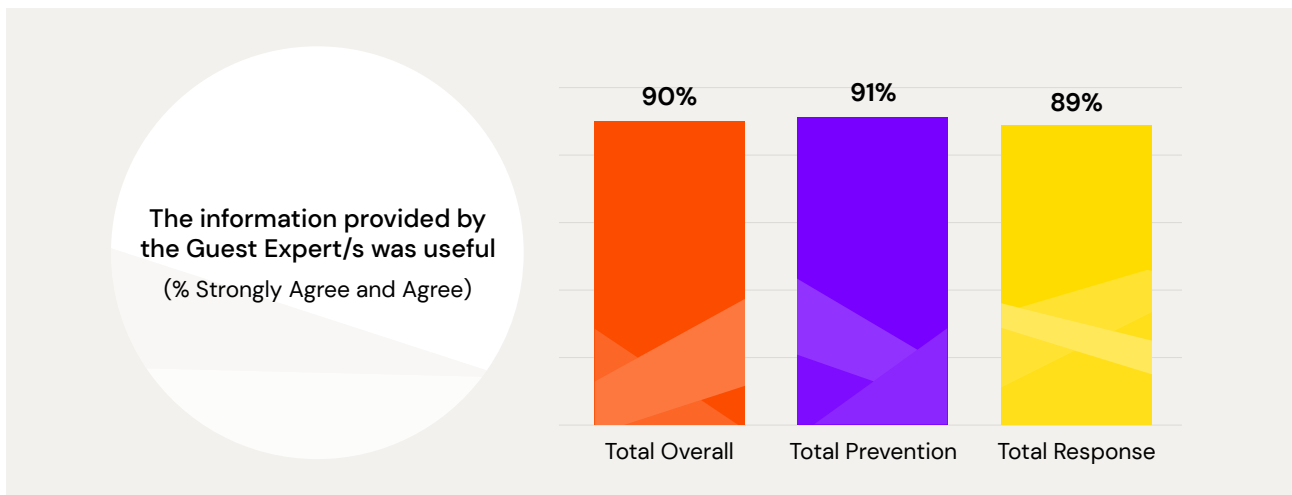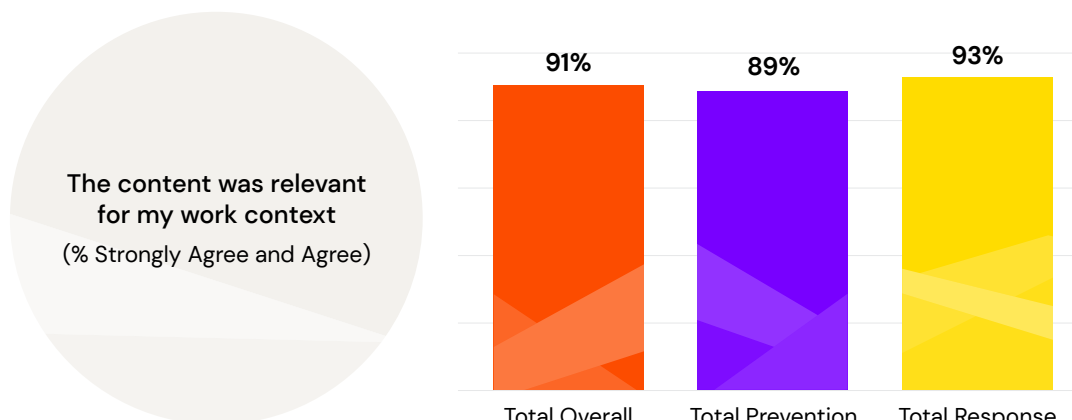
Total Overall	Total Prevention	Total Response
91%	89%	93%

In the post-course survey participants were asked if their expectation for content – level and focus were met. The below results in table 2 show a strong response, with the exception of response round 1. Through the monitoring and evaluation processes in place, the program staff adjusted course elements to respond to these initial ratings. This included revising the language describing course content from the capability frameworks, expected learning outcomes, and outward facing communications to manage expectations of course objectives. These refinements have clearly been very effective in managing and meeting participant expectations around course content, with ratings significantly improving after round 1; notably prevention achieved 100% agreement in rounds 2 and 3.

Table 2: Post-course survey results 'My expectation for content – level and focus were met'

	Stream	% Strong Agree & Agree
Prevention	Round 1	75%
	Round 2	100%
	Round 3	100%
Response	Round 1	57%
	Round 2	91%
	Round 3	92%

What evidence is available that further clarifies the sector's need for leadership capability development?

Capability areas where further development may be needed

Participants in the post-course survey were asked to identify any further leadership capability development needs; a key theme was the desire for more specific leadership training such as:

- Negotiation skills
- Emotional intelligence and conflict management
- Leading a team
- Reflecting on learnings and how to apply this to leadership
- Management styles
- Supervision

A number of responses in the post-course and follow-up survey also noted the desire for professional development that builds capabilities around financial management in senior leadership roles, such as budget management, and funding and grant applications.

During follow-up data collection with participants' managers some months after course completion, one manager also reflected on her own experience as an early Fast Track participant, prior to sponsoring her team member to join the program. Having initially thought a ten-week program was too long, she realised that she actually wanted more time on certain topics, particularly grant and funding applications.

Reflections from participants gathered in focus group discussions some months after the course also point to some areas where further capability development – potentially through additional Fast Track content – would be valuable:

- Developing and strengthening public speaking and presentation skills. Participants found it particularly useful seeing how the guest experts talk about their field.
- Developing and strengthening negotiation and facilitation skills.
- Strengthening an intersectional lens in their work. The existing intersectionality content in Fast Track was consistently found to be both valuable and engaging by participants.
- Receiving more feedback about their work or activities during the course (e.g. program logic), and/or a check-in to support implementation of their workplace project.

Participants' managers were asked in their post-course survey whether there were any areas of capability they had expected the participants to be applying more than they were. There were very few comments here, with only one minor theme around data and evaluation that may possibly be useful for further refinement or positioning of Fast Track content:

- Gathering and using data – particularly qualitative consultation methods, evaluation, and summary project reporting
- Supervision of staff – including supporting new staff, performance management and dealing with conflict or difficult conversations

The latest workforce census notes that approximately 40% of specialist family violence response and primary prevention practitioners were planning on leaving the sector, with 25% of this cohort citing lack of career advancement opportunities. Discussed in further detail in section 3.8, Fast Track has contributed to enhanced workforce retention, and therefore more opportunities for leadership development in the sector could further strengthen this. Also discussed in further detail in section 4.1, pathways for prevention career progression are not always clear across the sector, and there is a need for further mapping and clarification of what roles are in existence. There is also a need to identify the trajectory and capabilities required to progress to Executive or Board level to support long-term leadership progression for both workforces.

The census also shows that 81% of specialist family violence response workers would consider taking on a role in primary prevention, and 53% of prevention practitioners would be open to a role in the specialist family violence response workforce. There was also a fair amount of interest from specialist family violence practitioners to enter the Fast Track prevention stream. This evidence supports the pilot program to be launched in 2024 (discussed further in section 4.3). This pilot program explores a mode of delivery where both prevention and specialist family violence response practitioners come together as a combined cohort for core content delivery and then branch off into areas aligned with their specialisation. This pilot program offers an opportunity to bring practitioners together across the continuum and build a greater shared understanding and language for participants.

Summary: How relevant was the program's focus within the sector context?

The evaluation data shows that overall, the content of Fast Track was relevant within sector context; the topics focussed on were generally what was expected; and the information provided by the guest experts was useful. Some participants expressed further capability development needs in more specific leadership skills such as management styles and supervision, and managing budget and funding and grant applications. As Fast Track is mapped to the capability frameworks, offering development in these areas could be considered by Family Safety Victoria and Safe and Equal in addition to Fast Track to support the sector. Safe and Equal can also further review external communications to clarify expectations and what the program covers in terms of leadership development. Public speaking and applying an intersectional lens were areas of the program that were well received and valued, and further capability development in these areas could be considered by Safe and Equal within Fast Track, or as a development offering to alumni.
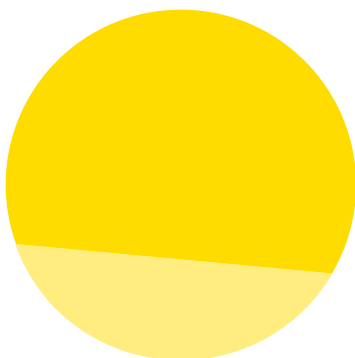
3.4 To what extent did participants' knowledge, skills and confidence increase as a result of the program?

Effects on knowledge

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which their knowledge and skills had changed after completing Fast Track, across all capability topics mapped from the capability frameworks.

Table 3 below, shows response round 1 capabilities in which a majority of participants noted a major or moderate increase. Upon analysing the data, there was no clear trend across the cohort for capabilities rated 'no change' by participants, suggesting there are no major gaps in program content or effectiveness. (The list of these capabilities is included in appendix 3, table 14, with only n=3 rating 'no change' per capability.)

Table 3: Post-course survey, response round 1

Capability – Most reported major or moderate increase	Response round 1
Recognise and apply component elements of advocacy activity	71% (n=10)
Monitor, document and evaluate direct service activity for continuous services improvement and internal advocacy	71% (n=10)
Developing and updating internal policies and procedures for management and practice	71% (n=10)
Analyse and select management policies and procedures for healthy workplaces	71% (n=10)

As noted earlier in the '2.4 Methods and Limitations' section, capability rating data for response round 2 was omitted from analysis as it was not valid. Response round 3 capability rating data was collected in the post-course survey in a slightly different format, so could not be aggregated with response round 1 ratings (data collection issues are discussed further in section 3.10 with a recommendation for improvement). However, a brief review of the response round 3 capability ratings from pre-course surveys and post-course surveys is presented here.

Response round 3 capability analysis:

A high-level review of pre-course ratings (n=25 respondents) suggested response round 3 participants' knowledge and skills were **lowest** in the following topics:

- Most rated as 'Low' or 'Very low' (n=between 12 and 14 of 25 respondents)
- Apply and analyse partnership theory and tools.
- Collating and analysing data for policy and systems advocacy.
- Developing and updating internal policies and procedures for management and practice.
- Least rated as 'High' or 'Very High' (n=between 0 and 2 of 25 respondents)
- Construct program logic models to link the aims and objective of advocacy activity to desired outcomes.
- Recognise and apply management functions styles.
- Analyse and select management policies and procedures for healthy workplaces.
- Establish methods and systems within the workplace to foster reflective and culturally safe practice.
- Developing and updating internal policies and procedures for management and practice.

Post-course ratings (n=14 respondents) showed these participants felt their knowledge and skills had increased substantially, with no participants giving a rating of 'low' or 'very low' in any capability. The 5 capabilities where a vast majority of participants (n=11 or 12 of 14) rated their knowledge/skills as 'high' or 'very high' post-course were:

- Identify and analyse of theoretical frameworks underpinning direct service delivery – including feminist, social justice, intersectional and psycho-social approaches
- Construct program logic models to link the aims and objective of advocacy activity to desired outcomes
- Establish methods and systems within the workplace to foster reflective and culturally safe practice.

- Identify partnerships and multidisciplinary practice and explore working at a multi- agency, multidisciplinary level.
- Apply an intersectional lens at a practice and organisational level.

Two of these five capabilities were among the least-rated as being 'high' or 'very high' prior to the course – *Construct program logic models* and *Establish methods and systems within the workplace to foster reflective and culturally safe practice.* This suggests the gains made here are particularly widespread and/or large.

Another two of these capabilities were rated as being 'high' or 'very high' by a narrow majority of participants in the pre-course survey – *Identify and analyse theoretical frameworks* (n=13 of 25), and *Apply an intersectional lens* (n=15 of 25). Therefore the gains made in these areas, while still beneficial, are likely to be somewhat smaller or less widespread across the response round 3 cohort. For *Apply an intersectional* lens this was consistent with response round 1 results, where smaller capability gains were reported in this topic.

It is interesting to note that all five of these capabilities are different from the response round 1 top 4 capabilities with a 'major increase' or 'moderate increase' in knowledge or skills (as shown in table 3 above). Different evaluation metrics notwithstanding, this suggests Fast Track has been effective in lifting capability across a broad range of topics covered, in line with the *Responding to Family Violence Capability Framework*.

The overall average pre-course capability ratings across all response round 3 respondents and capabilities ranged between 2.4 and 3.7 (with 2 being 'Low' and 3 being 'Medium'). Post-course averages ranged between 3.6 and 4.4 (with 4 being 'High'). This suggests that, while many of the key capabilities where change was most evident were different from response round 1, overall, capabilities increased notably for this cohort.

Prevention capability analysis

Table 4 below shows the capabilities prevention participants rated the highest major or moderate increase in the post-course survey following Fast Track. The most notable trend is the variation in ratings between round 1 and rounds 2 and 3, with capabilities increasing a considerable amount. This is due to the iterative approach the program team took throughout Fast Track, making changes to delivery as required to enhance outcomes, which was evidently successful. As mentioned above, changes included a tweak in language for the capabilities, a revision of external communications, clearly demonstrating where the capabilities linked to the workshop, and adjusting session activities.

Table 5 also shows the capability areas where prevention participants felt there was no change after completing Fast Track. The capabilities with 'no change' had low numbers and it is positive to see that these areas decline in percentage after round 1, further indicating that changes made to the program influenced capabilities and strengthened learning outcomes.

Table 4: Post-course survey prevention capabilities – highest reported 'major or moderate' increase

Prevention capabilities: Highest reported major or moderate increase	Prevention Round 1	Prevention Round 2	Prevention Round 3	Total
Communicating initiatives to engage partners, secure resources, and guide implementation	69%	94%	88%	**84%** (n=41)
Understanding of theoretical frameworks relevant to establishing and maintaining of partnerships	60%	94%	94%	**83%** (n=40)
Building coalitions, alliances, and partnerships for Prevention advocacy	56%	94%	94%	**82%** (n=40)
Understanding and developing program logic frameworks to underpin Prevention of Violence Against Women activity	63%	88%	94%	**82%** (n=40)
Understanding theoretical frameworks underpinning violence against women feminist, social justice, intersectional and psychological approaches	56%	94%	94%	**82%** (n=40)

Table 5: Post–course survey prevention capabilities – highest reported 'no change'

Prevention capabilities: Reported no change	Prevention Round 1	Prevention Round 2	Prevention Round 3	Total
Building government support and creating an authorising environment for the Prevention of Violence Against Women	31% (n=5)	18% (n=3)	0	**16%**
Developing work plans to guide implementation of Prevention of Violence Against Women activities	31% (n=5)	0	13% (n=2)	**14%**
Evaluating, analysing and documenting key outcomes and learnings of initiatives, and formulate recommendations	25% (n=4)	0	6% (n=1)	**10%**
Using evidence–informed advocacy to achieve policy and program reform (including providing advice to Government)	19% (n=3)	6% (n=1)	6% (n=1)	**10%**
Planning for the sustainability of Prevention of Violence Against Women initiatives	25% (n=5)	0	6% (n=1)	**10%**

Effects on skills and confidence

87% of participants agreed that the workshops deepened their knowledge of the topics discussed, with 84% of participants stating that their confidence had increased when applying knew knowledge and skills in the workplace.

Figure 7: Post–course survey (n=84)

My confidence has increased in applying new knowledge and skills in my roles/workplace

(% Major and Moderate increase)

84% Total Overall
90% Total Prevention
86%

Figure 8: Weekly survey results (n=881)

The session has deepened my understanding of the topic/s discussed
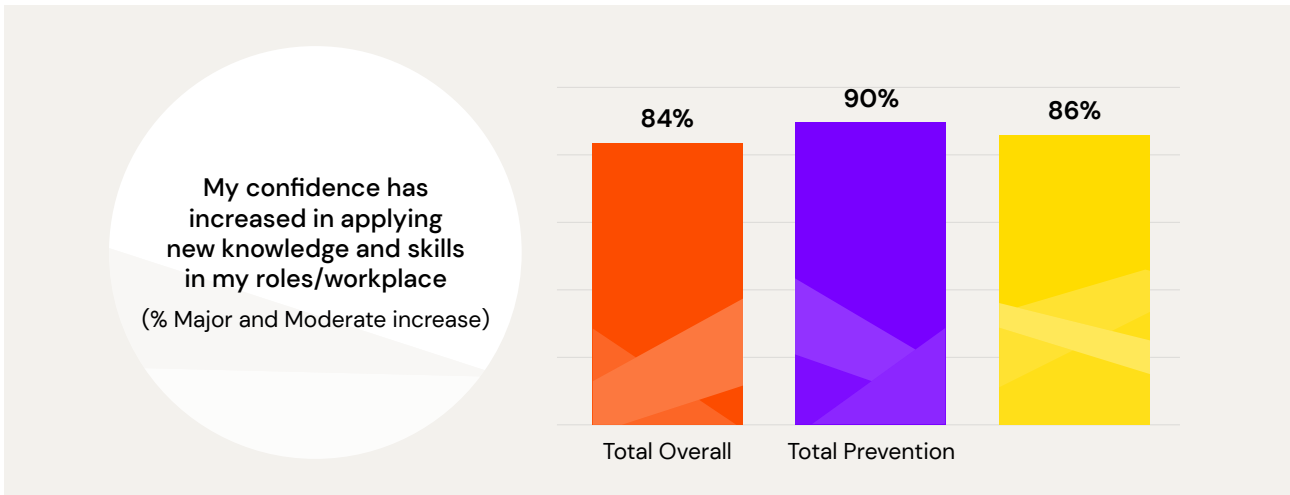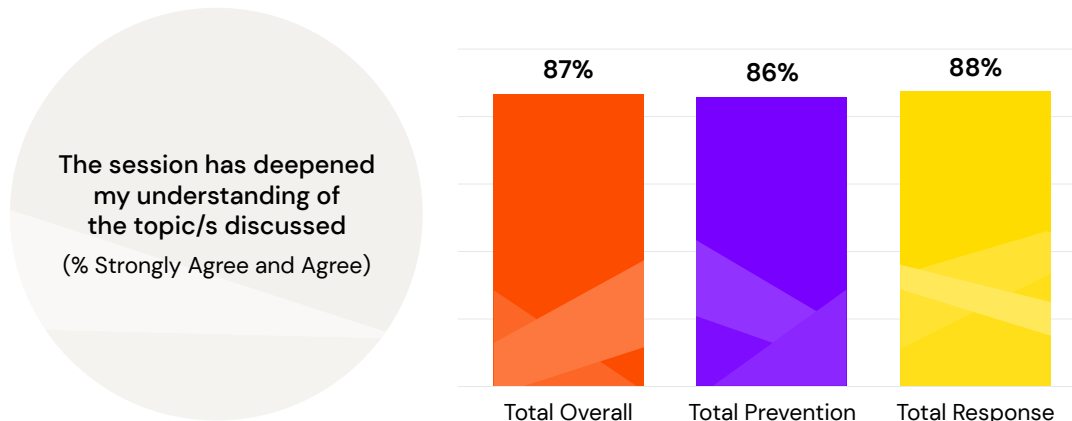
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

87% Total Overall
86% Total Prevention
88% Total Response

A theme identified throughout the qualitative data is participant's enhanced sense of confidence after completing Fast Track, either through application of new skills and learnings or validating their pre-existing knowledge. Some comments from the post-course survey are included below:

- "[the workplace project] helped to retain the information gained during workshops and developed confidence to move forward in career journey and take prevention sector roles"
- "I really did get so much from the course; it mostly reiterated my existing knowledge and made me feel more confident moving forward."
- "The Fast Track Training program has provided me a great platform to revisit all the prevention work that I have delivered, identify the strength and opportunities of the previous works, and generate more opportunities and confidence to build on for more effective prevention initiatives."
- "I feel much more confident about my work and project as a result of going through this process."

This confidence boost was also observed by participants' managers upon program completion, as indicated by at least a dozen comments across the post-course survey of managers.

> "More confident in her leadership ability and in her supervision of her team."
> – Manager post-course survey

> "Consolidation of current FV prevention strategies and knowledge which strengthens confidence."
> – Manager post-course survey

The vast majority of manager respondents also reported highly positive effects, with post-course surveys demonstrating they had seen participants apply increased knowledge and skills in:

- **The workplace project** – with 23 of 24 respondents agreeing (including 14 strongly, more than half), and 1 neutral response
- **Their role/workplace generally** – 22 of 24 respondents agreeing (including 15 strongly, nearly two-thirds), and 2 neutral responses.

Managers also observed participants applying a range of skills and knowledge upon completing the program, most commonly:

- **Partnerships, collaboration and networking** (4 respondents) – with comments suggesting this was occurring internally for some and at the inter-agency level for others
- Project/program design and planning, including Program Logic (4 respondents)
- Team leadership and supervision skills (3 respondents)
- Sector knowledge (3 respondents)

A majority (91% n=20) of respondents of the follow-up survey **reported an increase in confidence since completing Fast Track**, as discussed in section 3.7. Participants from the pilot and rounds 1 and 2 were surveyed as sufficient time had passed to measure medium-longer term outcomes. This result is a positive indication of the longer-term effects on participants' confidence post-program.

Summary: To what extent did participants' knowledge, skills and confidence increase as a result of the program?

The analysis of available data demonstrates that Fast Track has effectively increased the skills and knowledge of a majority of participants in a range of capabilities, across prevention and response in alignment with the frameworks. There were no capabilities that appear to be an area of concern, and it was positive to see strengthening in capabilities over all rounds. Participant and manager feedback indicates that graduates have substantially increased confidence, and this appears to be a significant benefit of Fast Track.

3.5 To what extent has the program built or enhanced connection and relationships across the sector, and what has happened as a result?

Participants' individual relationships

The post-course results in figure 9, show that 86% of prevention participants, and 67% of response participants developed supportive relationships online. As noted in section 3.2, a challenge encountered with online training was the reduced opportunity for networking to occur organically and enhance a feeling of connection between participants.

Figure 9: Post-course survey results (n=100)

I was able to develop supportive relationships online
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

76% Total Overall
86% Total Prevention
67% Total Response
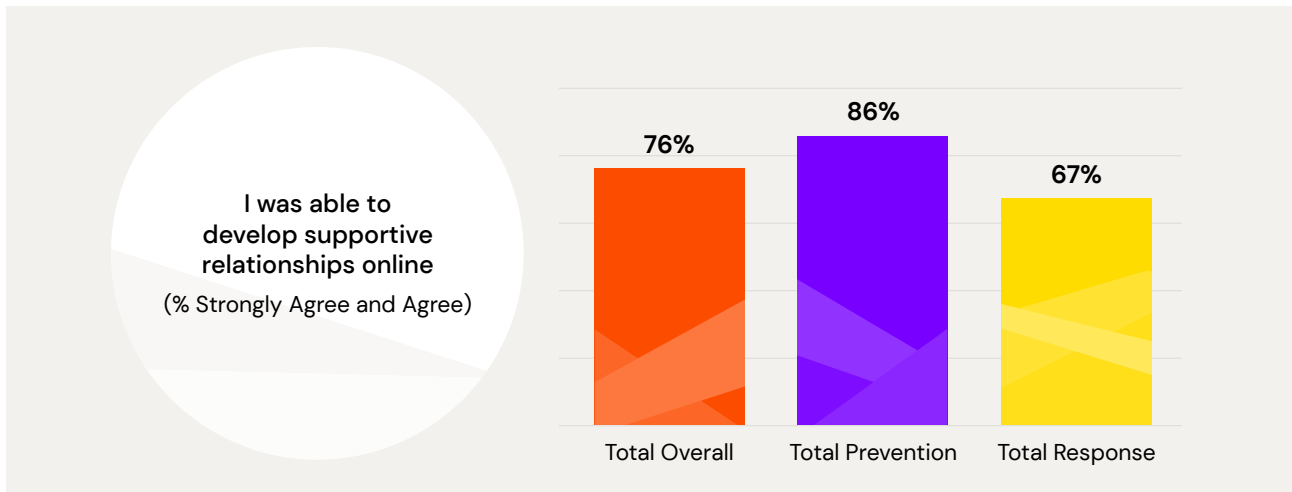
Program staff and facilitator had also observed many participants developing relationships and connections through the program across both cohorts. The team were somewhat surprised at this success, given the program was delivered entirely online.

"It worked a lot better than we thought it would online! The participants talked about it … at the last session forum, invariably people would talk about the opportunity to network, that they would stay in touch."

– Program staff/facilitator interview

"In sessions we'd often see people sharing professional resources and knowledge, making connections – "Oh you wrote that report? I use it all the time!" Or "I'll share it with my colleague, she would love this!"

– Program staff/facilitator interview

Interestingly, figure 10 shows that of this smaller response cohort that made supportive relationships, more of these practitioners expected these connections to be ongoing.

Figure 10: Post-course survey results (n=100)

I expect these relationships to become an ongoing professional connections post-course
(% Strongly Agree and Agree)

75% Total Overall
69% Total Prevention
80% Total Response

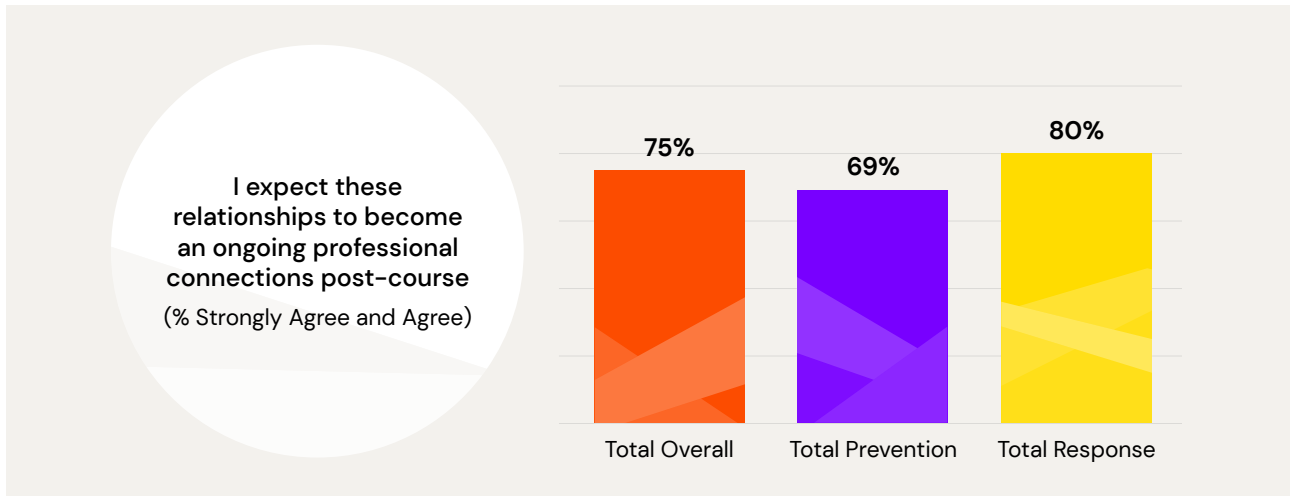One team interview noted that prevention workers are often the sole workers in their organisation, so they may have had more reason or motivation to actively connect and build relationships with other participants than the response workers – this may explain some of the difference in prevention and response results shown in figure 9. The difference in engagement during sessions between response and prevention streams may also have contributed to this variation. As noted earlier in section 3.2, participants in the response stream were more frequently pulled out of workshops for meetings or had to step away to manage crisis situations which would likely impact their ability to connect in sessions.

As mentioned in chapter 3.2, figure 1 also indicates that 94% of participants developed a supportive relationship with their mentor.

Medium to longer-term perspectives on connections and relationships

Participants from the pilot and rounds 1 and 2 were invited to complete a follow-up survey to measure medium-longer term outcomes some months or years after completing the program. Results in table 6 show that **majority of respondents did not continue professional connections formed during the Fast Track course**. The number of responses to the follow-up survey (n=22) is not large enough to be representative of these cohorts, however it is notable that the majority of these prevention respondents had maintained their connections, while most response respondents had not. This provides an interesting contrast to the post-course perspectives shown in figure 10.

Table 6: Follow-up survey – 'the professional connections I developed during Fast Track continued after the Program'

Stream	Yes	No
Pilot	1	1
Prevention Rounds 1 & 2	4	2
Response Rounds 1 & 2	2	14
Total	**7** (29%)	**17** (71%)

In the follow-up survey, participants cited a number of barriers to maintaining professional connections after Fast Track including:

• Limited capacity and time
• Lack of structured opportunities for further networking
• Harder to build genuine connections in an online program.

Participants were also asked in the follow-up survey what further support Fast Track could provide to assist building professional connections. **Most feedback suggested providing a formal follow-up session after the course, and extending the mentorship program to support ongoing connections**.
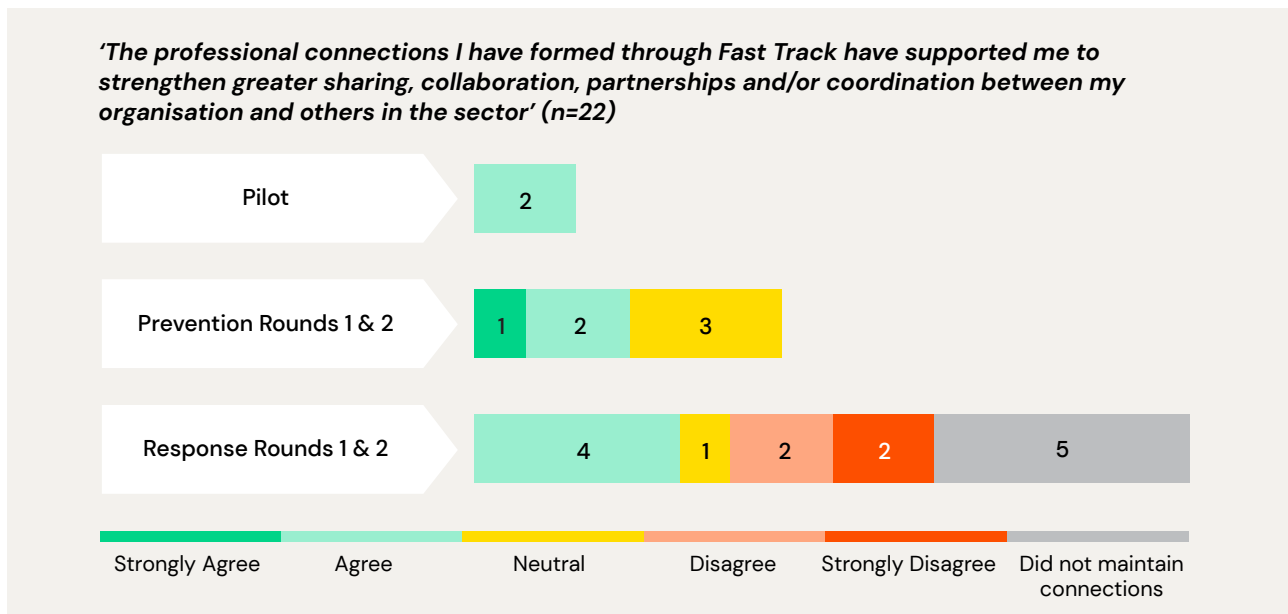
Medium to longer term maintenance of relationships and connections was also explored in participant focus groups, with key themes emerging:

- For many of these participants (n=9), their sustained connection with others had been an enduring benefit of Fast Track.
- They also expressed enjoyment and appreciation of the opportunity to re-connect with each other through the evaluation focus group, and some sharing/exchange of professional knowledge or resources was also observed during the discussion.
- A need for ongoing mechanisms to help maintain connectivity was endorsed by participants, with several expressing concern about their capacity to maintain formalised professional relationships without facilitation support in the busyness of their roles and workloads.

This feedback from participants suggests that, while some have maintained their professional connections and relationships beyond the program, in general this seems difficult to maintain at the cohort or sector-wide level. It may become more difficult as participants progress into more senior roles with increased responsibility and work pressures. **There is clear appetite for a forum or mechanism to nurture ongoing connection among Fast Track graduates**, and potentially good value to be gained by both participants and the sector as a whole in doing so.

Organisational sharing and collaboration

Figure 11: Follow-up survey results (n=22)

'The professional connections I have formed through Fast Track have supported me to strengthen greater sharing, collaboration, partnerships and/or coordination between my organisation and others in the sector' (n=22)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Did not maintain connections
Pilot		2				
Prevention Rounds 1 & 2	1	2	3			
Response Rounds 1 & 2		4	1	2	2	5

Focus group participants also reflected on how Fast Track had contributed to organisational connection or sharing in the months since completing the program. For a number of participants, communication and connection were key takeaways, especially for those who held more isolated roles. **Building new connections, and greater confidence to seek out new connections**, was a strong positive outcome and many saw this relationship building as a key ongoing benefit for their organisations. Some practical examples shared include:

- Engaging one of the Fast Track speakers to conduct a professional development session in their regional area.
- Presenting themselves more confidently outside their own workplace, for example, on committees, "*introducing myself as someone of value*".
- Adapting a toolkit that was previously not so user-friendly, to enhance its utility across their own organisation, and then sharing it with other like organisations.

A strong theme identified in the focus groups was that **participants' increased confidence to network and engage externally had helped optimise organisational partnerships**. Illustrated examples included:

- Having a framework for building community awareness as a foundation for action
- Negotiating roles and responsibilities within Orange Door relationships
- Re-establishing/reinvigorating relationships that had been compromised during the pandemic
- Enhancing peer support for those with similar roles, especially for those in isolated roles in organisations.

While follow-up contact with participants' managers was quite limited, there was a notable theme in managers' reflections around how **participants had applied their collaboration skills and used networks since completing the program**. A mmajority of the 5 respondents spoke of enhanced networks, including with other Fast Track participants, the facilitator and guest experts, mentors, and improved engagement with others in purposeful ways.

- One manager noted how the participant was "leading in a combined, integrated way including family violence (with child and family services)".
- A flow-on noted for one participant was deeper thinking about how she can influence others in her organisation
- "Having that connection with other organisations and mentoring helped … who are we linking with".

Mentor relationships/connections and outcomes

The Safe and Equal team recognised over the course of the program how engaged and enthusiastic the mentors were with Fast Track as a whole. They had heard from mentors about some of the benefits they experienced around learning and networking, and noted that many mentors had returned for more than one round of Fast Track; the team saw an opportunity to further explore the value or potential benefits this group received from participating in Fast Track. A number of mentors also referred in applicants to the course, an additional indicator of their engagement with, and support of the program. An additional data collection method was incorporated into the Evaluation Framework in mid-2022 to specifically investigate the views of, and any outcomes for, the mentors.

The focus groups held with 8 mentors identified that for some, professional relationships and connections was a valuable outcome for them.

- One spoke of maintaining a connection with one of their mentees.
- Another spoke of how mentoring gave them new and different insights into how people work in the sector currently.

While more than half of the mentor focus group participants didn't report any substantial changes to their own professional relationships, many still reported some broader benefits relating to greater connection – such as a strong sense of reconnection to the sector, insights into the current discourse, and insights into how different specialist family violence organisations and other organisations operate.

One of the most common reflections from mentors was about the benefits to the mentees, including their ability to connect mentees with resources and networks according to their individual needs, and *"giving mentees a sense of how they fit into the bigger reform process"*.

> *"In the first round, deep in the start of COVID, the opportunity to provide mentoring was something unique … the immense value of this during lockdown, a human connection that was flexible and responsive at that time."*
>
> – Mentor focus group

No other clear outcomes or benefits for the mentees themselves were identified in the focus groups, however the mentors generally acknowledged how much they had valued participating in the mentoring component of the program. Together with their continued enthusiasm and engagement, as well as a range of thoughtful strategic development insights they shared about Fast Track and its role in the sector (discussed in section 3.10), this suggests that the mentors may have primarily participated in Fast Track as a way to contribute or 'give back'.

Summary: To what extent has the program built or enhanced connection and relationships across the sector, and what has happened as a result?

The evaluation shows that the majority of participants developed supportive relationships during Fast Track, and this was more notable in the prevention stream. As noted in section 3.2, online delivery presented challenges in networking and connection that would happen more organically face to face. Of the small number of participants who completed the follow-up survey, a majority had not continued the professional connections developed during the program, with most citing limited capacity and time. However, feedback in participant focus groups and manager feedback identified that there had been an increase in confidence to network and engage externally, which had helped optimise organisational partnerships. There is a strong theme emerging that Fast Track is contributing to networking and partnerships, and there is great potential for this to be enhanced for stronger sector outcomes by offering a formal mechanism after the course for participants to maintain connections and strengthen collaboration.

3.6 How and to what extent were participants' employers involved in supporting the achievement of outcomes?

How were participants' managers involved in the program?

Both participants and managers were asked to rate the extent to which managers were involved or engaged at different points during the program. The results shown in figures 12 and 13 show that **overall, the proportion of managers who agreed they were actively engaged at various stages of the program is notably higher than the proportion of participants who agreed.** In particular:

- Participant respondents reported their managers were most involved at the application stage (47%), and least after the course (31%), whereas the managers reported they were most involved after the course (69%, n=16).
- A substantially higher proportion of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed their managers were engaged at various stages, compared with manager responses.
- Slightly more than half of the participant respondents agreed their managers' involvement matched their expectations (53%), while more than three quarters of managers agreed here (77%, n=17).

Figure 12: Post-course survey results (n=84)

Participants' view on manager involvement

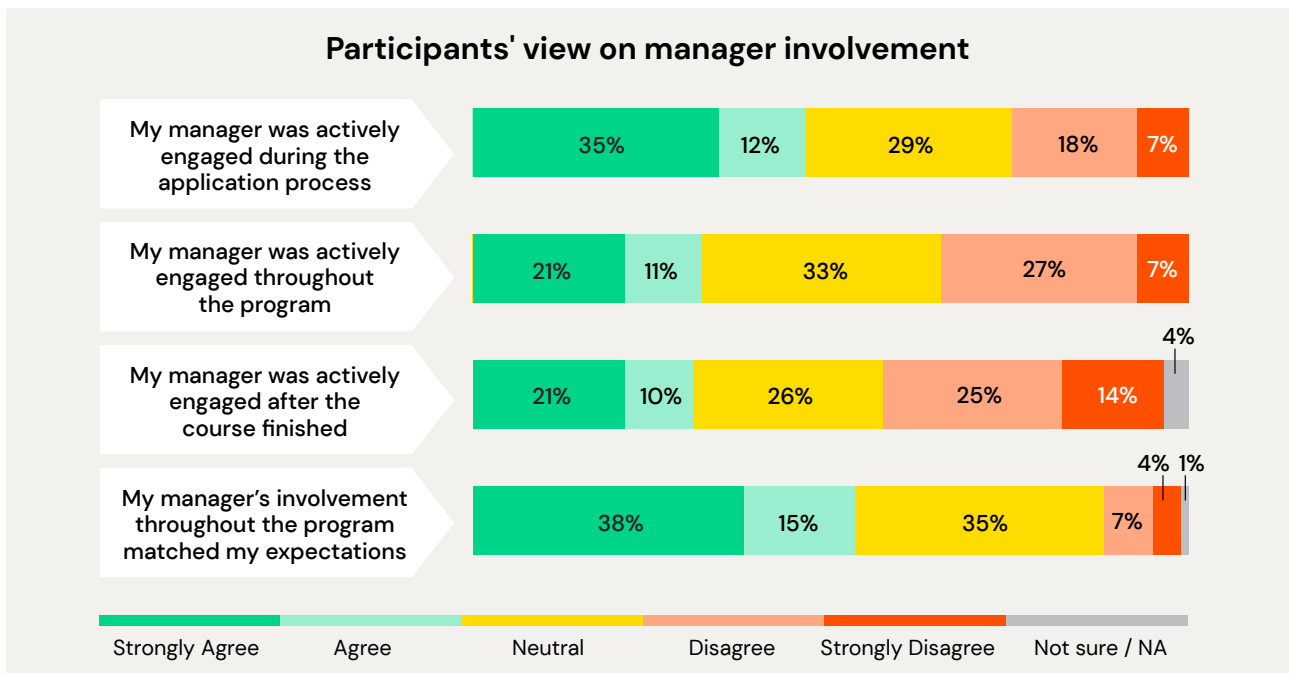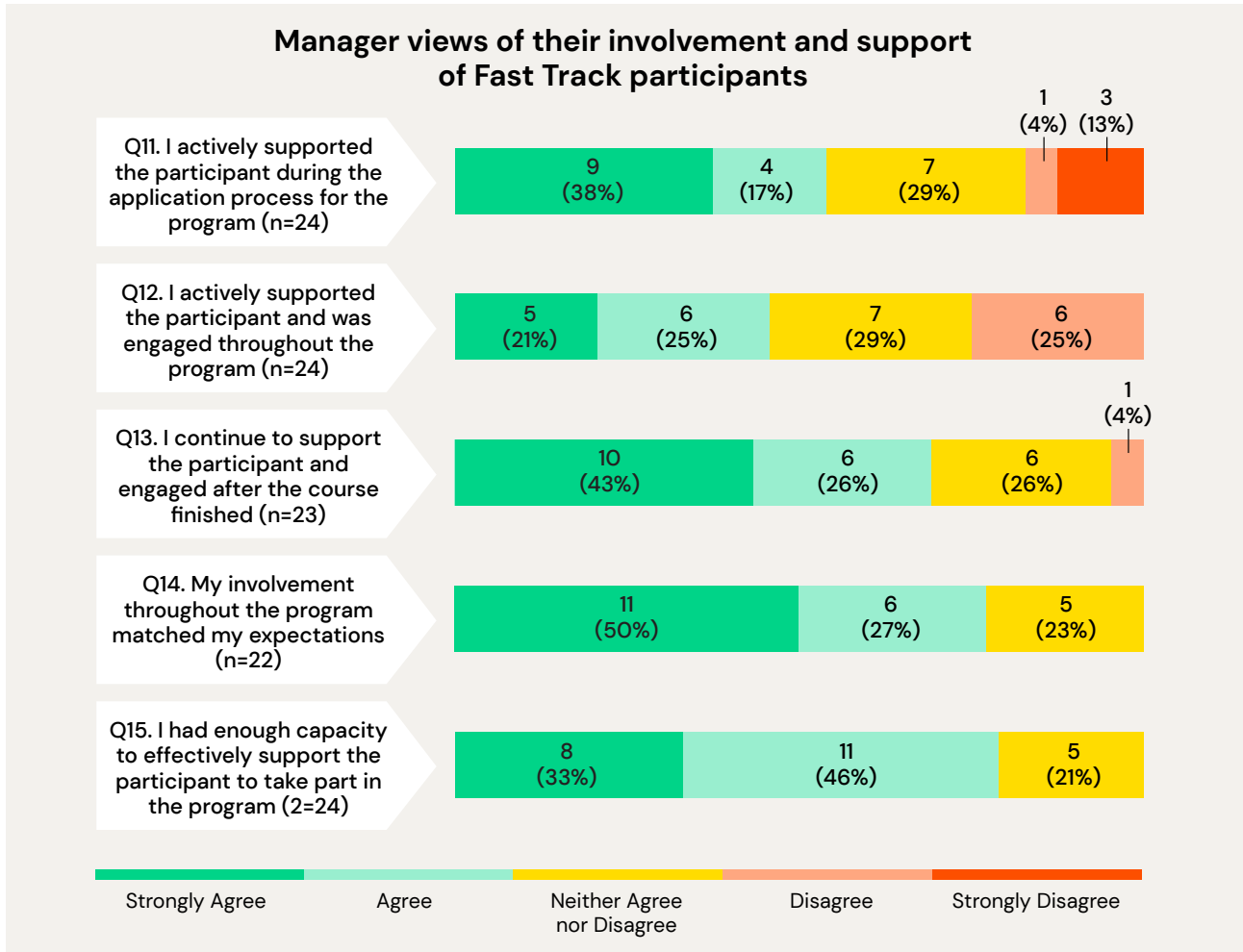|	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure / NA
My manager was actively engaged during the application process	35%	12%	29%	18%	7%	
My manager was actively engaged throughout the program	21%	11%	33%	27%	7%	
My manager was actively engaged after the course finished	21%	10%	26%	25%	14%	4%
My manager's involvement throughout the program matched my expectations	38%	15%	35%	7%	4%	1%

Figure 13: Post–course manager survey: Overview of responses to quantitative items relating to manager support and engagement (n=22–24)

Manager views of their involvement and support of Fast Track participants

Q11. I actively supported the participant during the application process for the program (n=24)
- 9 (38%) — Strongly Agree
- 4 (17%) — Agree
- 7 (29%) — Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 1 (4%) — Disagree
- 3 (13%) — Strongly Disagree

Q12. I actively supported the participant and was engaged throughout the program (n=24)
- 5 (21%) — Strongly Agree
- 6 (25%) — Agree
- 7 (29%) — Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 6 (25%) — Disagree

Q13. I continue to support the participant and engaged after the course finished (n=23)
- 10 (43%) — Strongly Agree
- 6 (26%) — Agree
- 6 (26%) — Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 1 (4%) — Disagree

Q14. My involvement throughout the program matched my expectations (n=22)
- 11 (50%) — Strongly Agree
- 6 (27%) — Agree
- 5 (23%) — Neither Agree nor Disagree

Q15. I had enough capacity to effectively support the participant to take part in the program (2=24)
- 8 (33%) — Strongly Agree
- 11 (46%) — Agree
- 5 (21%) — Neither Agree nor Disagree

Legend: Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

The proportion of neutral responses from managers is similarly high to the participant data, which perhaps suggests that many respondents were uncertain as to the level or type of involvement expected of managers. The majority of managers (79%, n=19) agreed they had enough capacity to effectively support the participants to take part in Fast Track but considering that managers' involvement met only 53% of participants' expectations, this may perhaps point to some differences between the expectations of these two groups. It is also important to note that the number of manager responses is relatively low and it is quite likely that the managers who were more positively engaged with Fast Track were more willing to take the time to respond to the post–course survey, so a level of self–selection bias may be at play in this data.

Managers were asked in the follow-up survey to describe up to 2 ways they had supported participants during the program, with comments centering around the following key themes:

- Reflection, discussion and feedback – including through supervision, reflective practice, and specific meetings regarding the workplace project (12 comments)
- Project planning and implementation – including feedback on program logic, supporting workplace project proposals, and assisting with implementation (11 comments)
- Ensuring the participant had time to attend, and assisting with workload management to support their participation (10 comments)
- Some managers also noted providing assistance with internal organisational navigation and advocacy for the workplace projects (5 comments)

> *"Supervision and reflection regarding the workplace project and review of the proposal documents. Providing support to the project's implementation within the organisation."*
>
> – Manager post-course survey

> *"Managing workloads to ensure [participant] engaged with [the] program. Extending deadlines to match the workplace support component of the program, so they could have more time to bring in learnings."*
>
> – Manager post-course survey

A minority of other comments point to managers also having assisted with encouragement, practical support, advocacy and internal navigation, access to resources and information, and supporting participants' applications (which actually occurred before the program).

Further to this feedback from managers at the time of course completion, 5 managers also responded to a follow-up questionnaire some months after their employee had completed Fast Track. All 5 of these managers agreed that the level of support and involvement required of them during the course was reasonable.

Program staff/facilitator perspectives on manager engagement

Interviews with the program staff and facilitator after round 1 and again after round 3 found that **overall, managers' involvement was not to the level that the team originally expected**. This included:

- Engagement with the workplace projects,
- Involvement with the mentoring process and graduation forums, and
- Providing feedback for M&E.

In the initial phase of Fast Track, program staff believed manager support of participants during the program was essential to realise learning outcomes. While manager engagement is important to a degree, the program team experienced a low level of engagement and still achieved strong learning outcomes. Program staff also predicted that managers would be a good source of data and reflection on the impact of Fast Track in the sector. However, with the low manager engagement, these insights came from Guest experts and mentors; both stakeholder groups also referred practitioners to the program which was an indicator of sector recognition of Fast Track.

Despite various efforts by the program team this lower than expected level of manager engagement did not improve over the rounds. It appeared broadly consistent across response and prevention cohorts, although perhaps for different reasons (while response is in crisis mode, managers of prevention practitioners are working on a range of different issues and may not fully engage with primary prevention work).

As noted earlier, it was apparent that response participants found it more difficult to attend consistently and be fully present in the program sessions. At times it was evident that interruptions or other priorities were coming from their managers, or that participants felt so needed at work that they could not prioritise attendance at Fast Track. This suggests **there is room for improvement in managers' understanding of the importance of consistent and focused attendance**, and/or their commitment to helping the participant carve out uninterrupted time.

> *"It's hard to know all the reasons why you have a great level of engagement from certain participants. I'm sure some of it has to do with organisational culture and the support they receive from their manager, but it's hard to untangle that … Despite all the messiness of COVID in family violence response at that time, I did wonder why more wasn't being done to help that person make space to participate."*
>
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Other than supporting participant attendance, there were also areas where the program design assumed a higher level of manager engagement or involvement than actually eventuated. Examples include:

- The program team originally planned to have a check-in call with managers half-way through the course, but didn't have many contact details so was unable to do much of this. Where the team did have phone or email contact details, they received minimal responses.
- Getting managers sign-off on participants' workplace project approval forms is a continual challenge.
- As noted above, managers at times pull participants out of course sessions to deal with crises (largely the response cohort).
- Manager post-course survey responses were consistently low. This does not appear to be a survey completion rate issue, just that very few are doing the survey, no doubt because of time and workload pressures.

Together the feedback from the program team, managers, and participants suggests there is a need to review and clarify the expectations of participants' managers for the next phase of Fast Track. Before and during the course, managers' time and input is necessary in a small number of key ways – e.g. the initial letter of support for participants' applications, endorsement of the workplace project, and actively helping participants to prioritise their uninterrupted attendance in sessions. These requirements should be clearly set out in the initial letter of support that managers sign and agree to.

> "Maybe [managers' ongoing involvement during the program] is not as needed as we thought it might be. We thought it was really key for good learning outcomes, as well as sector recognition of the program, but we've seen engaged participants and the guest experts and mentors demonstrate that sector support."
>
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Manager involvement/engagement after course completion

Participants were asked in the follow-up survey to rate the extent to which their manager has supported their career development since completing the course. Most participants agreed (n=17 of 22, see figure 20 in Appendix 3). They were also asked 'how has your manager supported further development in the workplace (if at all)?'. Themes identified in their comments included the provision of further professional development opportunities; supporting the participant to apply for more senior roles within the organisation; providing them with new projects or initiatives to take leadership of, such as grant application; and providing ongoing feedback or mentoring support.

When asked 'how can managers further support Fast Track participants' development in the workplace?' responses indicated the need for managers to have a greater understanding of Fast Track content, to help managers better identify and facilitate opportunities to apply new skills or knowledge and further develop in the workplace. Some participants also commented on encouraging attendance, including sending more employees on the program; facilitating dissemination of Fast Track learnings with the broader team; and developing their own senior leadership skills in order to better support employees' growth.

What factors relating to manager involvement or organisational context enabled or limited the delivery of outputs?

Table 7: Follow-up survey results (n=22)

'How has your workplace project progressed since you initiated it during Fast Track?'	Prevention Rounds 1 & 2	Response Rounds 1 & 2	Total
Did not begin implementation	2	3	**25%** n=5
Began implementation but I don't expect to complete it	1	2	**15%** n=3
In progress and expect to complete it	2	4	**30%** n=6
Completed	1	5	**30%** n=6

Table 7 shows that, at the time of the follow-up survey, around 60% of respondents (n=20) were either progressing implementation of their workplace project, or had completed it. Between half and two-thirds felt supported by their managers to implement the project, although 2 strongly disagreed here. This, together with the provision of ongoing development and career progression opportunities, is a crucial role for managers, and the evaluation indicates that expectations and communication with managers could be strengthened in this area. Outcomes relating to participants' career progression are further discussed in section 3.7, and outcomes from workplace projects are discussed below.

Figure 14: Follow-up survey results (n=20)

I have felt supported by my manager/employer to implement my workplace project

Prevention Rounds 1 & 2	2	2	2
Response Rounds 1 & 2	5	3	4	2

Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
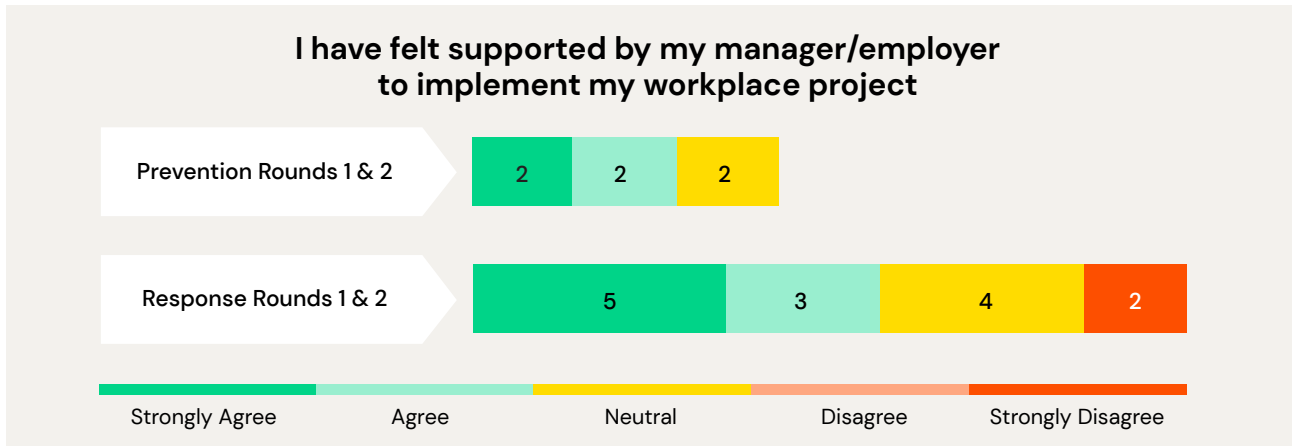
Managers were asked to comment in their post-course survey about any barriers they experienced when providing support to participants during the program. The strongest theme was around **limited time or capacity** (9 responses).

"We are a very small service, and would have liked to have been more involved if time permitted."
— Manager post-course survey

"Support over remote working environment meant that we didn't have a lot of face-to-face opportunities. The 10 weeks went by so quickly that we didn't always have a lot of dedicated time to talk about the project one-on-one specifically – but this wasn't always necessary though as the participant is very self-driven and motivated."
— Manager post-course survey

The other key theme identified was that **some managers felt they needed to know more about the program** (5 responses), **or what was expected of them** in relation to support or involvement (3 responses). This theme also came up in the follow-up manager questionnaires. There were a few aspects to this theme, such as:

- Not knowing much about the program content/topics or the aims of the workplace project
- Not being clear on the role or expectations of managers in providing support or being involved
- In one case, the manager was relatively new and had not been on the Fast Track application or commencement journey

"Understanding the topics which were covered – I could have probed more to understand levels of skills/knowledge post program if I knew what was actually covered. The workplace project, understanding the purpose and what actual support was offered, and what the expectation was for me as the direct supervisor."
— Manager post-course survey

"As manager, it was not clear what my role was in involvement with the project, therefore I was not aware if I was not providing enough support or what additional involvement I could have."
— Manager post-course survey

The majority of managers (13 responses) indicated that there had been no significant challenges relating to workplace projects within their organisation. However, a number of managers commented again about workloads and time constraints – including the participant's workload and the broader organisation's agility and/or the timeframes required to progress a more complex project. The other challenge mentioned by a small minority of managers was that competing priorities within the organisation challenged the projects' ability to realise their potential.
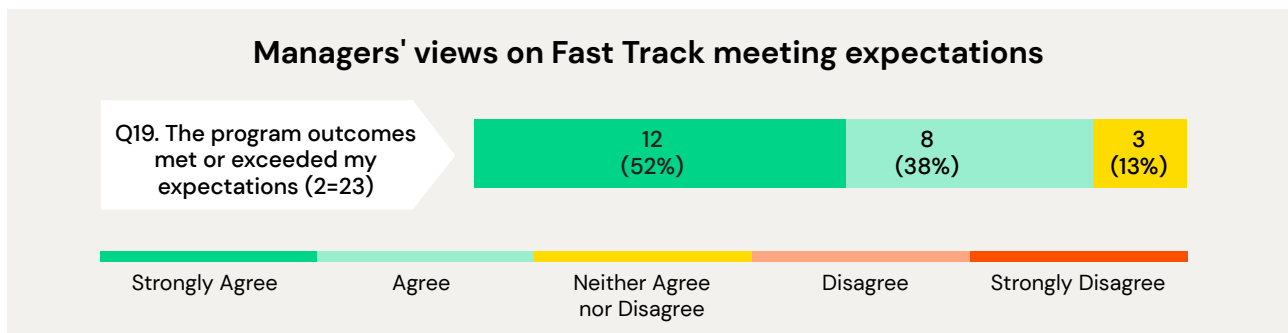
The barriers around limited time and capacity and competing priorities are naturally to be expected, and somewhat outside of Fast Track's span of influence. Commencement of the workplace project may be a key point at which clearer or more information for managers may be useful, and particularly for participants whose roles or managers change during the program.

> **Recommendation:** *Review the communication strategy with managers, to convey the level and type of involvement expected of them. Program staff can also explore ways to share concise core program information with managers to help them better support workplace project implementation and participants' further development post-program.*

To what extent did the program deliver outcomes that met managers' expectations?

Feedback from participants' managers shows these respondents viewed the program's outcomes positively, with **87% agreeing the program outcomes met their expectations** (n=20). More than half of these respondents agreed strongly, and the other 3 were neutral rather than disagreeing (figure 15).

Figure 15: Post-course manager survey – Overview of responses to quantitative item relating to whether program outcomes met overall expectations (n=23)

Managers' views on Fast Track meeting expectations

Q19. The program outcomes met or exceeded my expectations (2=23)

| 12 (52%) | 8 (38%) | 3 (13%) |

Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Managers reported a diverse range of benefits and opportunities that had arisen from workplace projects (and in some cases Fast Track more broadly), with the types of outcomes reported tending to be unique to each project and its context.

- The most consistent theme in responses was that the **structure and focus provided by projects had contributed impetus and an opportunity for change** (7 response), sometimes on an issue that had needed attention for some time
- For some organisations, projects had **contributed strongly to practice improvement** (5 responses)
- Some organisations had also benefitted through **improving practice in project planning** (5 responses), and through the development of the participating staff member (5 responses)
- In a few cases, projects had contributed to a significant development in strategic thinking within an organisation (2 responses)

"Prompted work to commence on a project that needed some attention and helped to frame up the thinking around it."
– Manager post-course survey

"It will be of a great benefit to the organisation … we would use the [tool] to develop programs and also get the workers to use it in their current role."
– Manager post-course survey

"[The participant] was able to identify a gap in one of our key thematic areas and come up with a way that we might move towards filling that gap... [the] project gives us a great starting point in an area where there hasn't yet been much work undertaken, by us or others in the sector."

– Manager post-course survey

One manager reported that a project had **developed a new approach to prevention practice in a particular setting**, which had contributed to the evidence base as well as to community outcomes
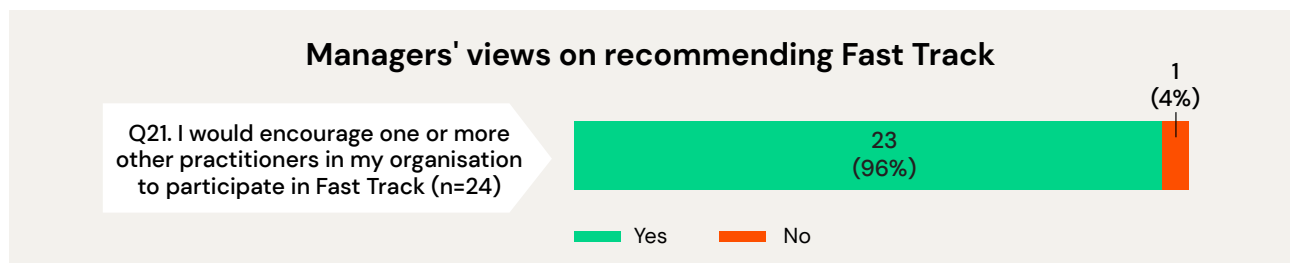
The few managers who gave feedback in the follow-up questionnaire also reported some positive outcomes for their organisations over the medium to longer term.

- **Expanded networks** featured strongly, both in terms of connections and deeper interaction with other organisations and with community.
- Others spoke of the benefit of new ideas emerging, and improved community advocacy.
- One manager gave an example of concrete workforce development and career progression for the participant, which had also benefited the broader organisation by **keeping valuable expertise in-house.**

Another example illustrated the value of the Fast Track workplace project to the organisation, as well as outcomes relating to enhanced services or programs and reduced duplication. This manager spoke about **a pilot project that was developed as a Fast Track workplace project, which the organisation was now seeking funding to expand, believing it will help shape the sector.** The project fosters better relationships between specialist family violence services, child protection and police, and seeks to avoid duplication and reduce over-servicing.

Several managers in the follow-up questionnaire also spoke of their intention to send other team members to future Fast Track programs, based on perceived benefit to date. This was also reflected in the post-course surveys, where **all but one of the manager respondents said they would encourage others in their organisation to participate in Fast Track** (figure 16).

Figure 16: Post-course manager survey – Overview of responses to quantitative item relating to encouragement for others to participate in Fast Track (n=24)

Managers' views on recommending Fast Track

Q21. I would encourage one or more other practitioners in my organisation to participate in Fast Track (n=24)

23 (96%) — Yes

1 (4%) — No

Survey comments provide a little more context for these responses:

"I would encourage practitioners to participate in Fast Track because I believe it increases valuable skills needed for improving service delivery and programs. For practitioners wanting to move into leadership, it provides an opportunity to apply knowledge from direct practice, including client experiences and working within the service system, to identify gaps, explore solutions and apply a project proposal and action plan. Fast Track provides an opportunity to work in the operational space and look at systems and be involved in decision making."

– Manager post-course survey

The single respondent who did not agree they would encourage others to participate in Fast Track noted that their organisation needed to do a bit more work to *"build on their commitment to make the workplace project more meaningful for participants."*

Summary: How and to what extent were participants' employers involved in supporting the achievement of outcomes?

This evaluation suggests a number of lessons about manager involvement and support that can inform future sector workforce development activities. The findings show that the involvement of managers in development programs can vary widely across organisations and individuals, and the expected role of managers may not always be well understood by managers or participants. Communicating clear expectations about what is required of managers before, during, and after the program is vital, and these expectations should be minimal and well-focused on the areas of greatest value, given the time pressures and competing priorities of busy managers. Effective manager involvement is enhanced by managers having a reasonable understanding of the program's focus and core content, so programs should find ways to convey this quickly and easily. Program facilitators, guest speakers and mentors may provide the necessary senior sector leadership expertise that participants need during development programs, but ongoing support post-program to apply learnings through practical further development opportunities in the workplace is a key role for managers.

3.7 How have participants' roles or careers changed as a result of the program, and what has enabled or limited their advancement?

Two in-depth case studies were developed through interviews with a prevention participant and a response participant and their managers. These case studies illustrate how Fast Track contributed to some tangible role and career changes in specific organisational contexts.

Case Study 1: Response

About Kerry

When Kerry joined Fast Track, she had been in a senior specialist supervisory family violence practitioner role with Berry Street, the Northern Specialist Family Violence Service in Melbourne, for about two years. Before this she had worked for many years as a specialist family violence practitioner for various organisations, in pilot projects, and in integrated family services and residential care, after completing a Diploma in Community Welfare.

Prior to completing Fast Track, Kerry progressed into a new role at Berry Street as Family Violence and Disability Practice Leader for the North Eastern Melbourne Area (NEMA). In this role she works with the specialist family violence and sexual assault sector to help them tailor responses to the needs of people with disabilities. It includes capacity and capability building of practitioners regarding the intersect between family violence and disability, and supporting the development and implementation of Disability Action Plans. Kerry highlights this new role has provided the "opportunity to position myself in way that I can provide a disability lens" in the family violence sector, "ensuring I represent the voice of victim survivors with disability" in a variety of forums.

Planning strategically and building connections for positive change

Kerry credits some of the skills and knowledge she learned at Fast Track with helping her obtain her new role and succeed in it. "When you work as a specialist family violence practitioner, you are dealing with risk and safety and client facing work. You don't have the opportunity to get involved in things like submitting a tender, developing programs etc. So, when I applied for this role, I was able explain what I would implement into the program, as I had just learned about them!", she explains. Attending Fast Track and talking with other participants and mentors also gave her confidence to apply for this new opportunity. The course "helped me realise that actually I have a lot of experience that is valuable in this field. Not just family violence specific skills, but partnerships, all other transferrable skills that we spoke about in Fast Track", she observes.

Kerry is using a variety of learnings from Fast Track in her new role. She found Fast Track helped her to reach out to a wide range of people proactively and build connections between the family

violence and disability sectors. "That's something I got from Fast Track. Marketing my role and the initiative, reaching out to people proactively", she explains, "And It's been successful because other professionals will say 'Oh you're Kerry!' and now people are reaching out to me – from the disability sector. So that is really positive".

Kerry is finding her new role is "a role where you can really see some changes happening – in both sectors … It's program level and organisational level, so the changes that are being implemented are long lasting changes". For example, she has been able to collect and co-ordinate resources which integrate a family violence and disability lens that weren't readily available before, and share these widely through monthly bulletins. She's excited to see that her bulletins are being forwarded onto additional stakeholders who are then reaching out to her to discuss the content: "It's really getting out there beyond what I'm doing. It's reaching a lot of people in the sector, it's just fantastic". She has seen organisations taking steps to implement Disability Action Plans because of the resources and support she has provided, and she has created new networks in the family violence and disability sectors. "The feedback is that some organisations did not know each other has existed, and they are now in touch".

Kerry's manager, Kelly, agrees that her work is having a broader impact. "Kerry's drive and advocacy around the inclusion of people with disabilities and about the intersection of disability and family violence has raised a lot of awareness within our leadership and broader team". Kelly also highlighted that Kerry is very proactive in creating opportunities for the family violence and sexual assault workforces to continue to improve their frameworks relating to disability, access and inclusion. Kerry takes multiple approaches in this way, including holding events for the staffing group, and generating highly relevant information about intersections with disability.

Kerry's new role involved developing a project plan to guide her work, which she says "was a totally new concept for me, I would have had no idea! But I could use the template from Fast Track to guide me in developing mine". She used what she learnt at Fast Track to create a program logic model to help her think about: "What do I want to achieve short-term, medium-term, what are my long-term goals and how am I going to reach them? I've never had a role like that, but doing the task for Fast Track as my final assessment meant I knew how to go about that."

Manager Kelly has also noticed Kerry's increased knowledge about how to advance ideas, projects or plans, and greater confidence to progress things that can benefit her team or the sector. Kelly has seen Fast Track strengthen Kerry's strategic thinking, helping her shape initiatives in ways that make them more likely to be accepted at higher levels of the organisation. For example, Kerry is supporting the Family Violence Leadership Team to create an Access and Inclusion Action Plan for people with disability, including Berry Street staff and clients "She is a real driver, which is what we need in this role – but she's also very collaborative and seeks to invite participation from the workforce and consider the sustainability of this work. It's a fantastic combination".

Fast Track also highlighted for Kerry the importance of data and evidence around unmet needs, for example, when making a case for funding. This meant she could see in her new role that data about disability wasn't being adequately captured by many family violence services – feedback she has been able to provide to working groups she is involved in.

Kerry found the mentoring through Fast Track to be a great opportunity. She was paired at her request with a mentor from her own workplace. She found this beneficial as it meant she had one-on-one time with a senior person from her organisation who, ordinarily, she would not have asked to spend this time with. It also meant her mentor could help her develop work more likely to be adopted by her organisation: "So this gave me the opportunity to book 3 hours of [the mentor's] time and sit with her and work on this. That opportunity is precious, you just don't get that".

Continuing to grow

Whilst Kerry still loves case management work, she appreciates how Fast Track and this new role have given her the opportunity to think more strategically and develop new ideas she wouldn't have had time to do while focused on case management. "I can utilise time for reflection and to think about developing new ideas to support my work. Because the work is not crisis driven, it's given me the opportunity to think differently, I appreciate that."

Fast Track has helped Kerry have the confidence and motivation to seek out further learning opportunities: "I feel like I've had so much growth … I want to keep developing and growing like this". She was successful in a scholarship application to attend a three-day conference and she is currently attending a series of leadership workshops. She is considering doing an Advanced Diploma in Community Sector Management. Kerry explained that Fast Track and her subsequent work experience gave her "the confidence to put myself out there", to apply for new opportunities and introduce herself to new contacts.

Overall, Kerry is strongly supportive of more people in her sector being able to attend Fast Track: "It is a hugely beneficial program. I hope funding is continued, to allow others the opportunity to participate". Her manager, Kelly, agrees Fast Track is valuable for developing emerging leaders in the family violence sector: "Fast Track is a really important growth and retention opportunity to support emerging leaders, a critical tier of our expanding workforce. Yes it's benefited Kerry, but it's also benefited our service and other services within the North East Metropolitan region".

Case study 2: Prevention

About Shweta

Shweta is a Team Leader for Health Outreach with GenWest, a family violence support service helping people in Melbourne's west. She works specifically with migrant and refugee communities. Her main role is leading a team that provides bi-lingual health education, with a focus on gender equity, women's health promotion and primary prevention of violence.

Family violence prevention is a newer area of work for Shweta. She notes: "I had zero previous experience in this industry! I was born in India, and my professional qualifications are marketing/communications. All my working life there I was in film and television." After migrating from India, Shweta worked in arts marketing in Australia and communications in Indonesia.

While in Indonesia Shweta worked closely with refugees, including fundraising and education work for refugee-led organisations, and setting up a community centre for refugee women. Shweta's experience working with refugees, and her experience of migrating to Australia, inspired her to apply for a role with GenWest supporting migrant and refugee communities. She was particularly excited to see a role seeking people who spoke her language, Hindi.

Shweta saw Fast Track advertised and asked GenWest if she could take part. She explains: "I had the lived experience, and the leadership experience, but the gap was knowledge of family and gender-based violence. The opportunity to work at GenWest opened a whole new career pathway, and the training I received as part of my role armed me with critical sector insight and a feminist and intersectional approach to prevention. The Fast Track program came at a very opportune time for me to accelerate and augment my understanding and knowledge of this work."

Sector knowledge and program planning for inclusive prevention

Fast Track helped Shweta gain an inside understanding of the family violence sector, including primary prevention. She found that the academic language and acronyms the sector use can be a major barrier for people who are new, particularly for people not from Australia. She explains: "First, understanding the language – that was really helpful. I also really loved understanding the frameworks, the drivers of violence and the framework that sits under that here in Australia, and the historical perspective". She noted: "It gave me a huge sense of confidence in terms of industry knowledge".

Shweta chose a male Fast Track mentor, which helped her learn about what's happening in the sector around engaging with men. She found this very interesting and useful to complement her work with women from diverse cultures. "We had some really interesting conversations, as I come from a very patriarchal society … learning about the work being done in the sector around engaging with men was especially important for me", she explains. "My mentor was extremely accessible and I will call on him again in the future."

Shweta's manager, Rosie, also observed how Fast Track helped Shweta build her confidence and understand how she can use her existing skills in her work to address the gendered drivers of violence in multicultural communities. She notes Shweta now has: "A greater ability to have a clear vision for her own work. She is very ambitious – both for her own career, but also what she can envision doing for the community".

Fast Track helped Shweta significantly improve her understanding of project management. She enjoyed learning about program logic models particularly: "I had no idea what this is!" she explains, "It's not really used in the industry I came from. That was really helpful, that structure … I'm really using what I started developing there". Shweta was on a one-year contract initially, but her role has now been extended for two further years due to additional funding. She is using what she learnt at Fast Track with her manager, Rosie, to help plan the next stages of the project. Rosie is finding Shweta's enhanced confidence in relation to project management and planning really valuable as they create a new program together, as Shweta can now take on activities like drafting project plans and logic models.

Expanding her impact

Shweta's manager Rosie highlights that Shweta's enhanced confidence and capabilities after doing Fast Track are having a positive impact more widely at GenWest: "We are benefitting from her new energy and drive, especially post-lockdowns. I have benefited from her doing that course so much, she's so enthused and confident and capable".

Rosie noticed that Shweta is also sharing what she learned by supporting her own team to build their project management skills. Rosie explained: "So she's savvy with her efforts, and the team is purposeful about how they are investing their resources and efforts, why they are doing things a certain way. And I am sure that has directly benefitted the community".

Rosie also describes how Shweta has been able to apply what she learnt at Fast Track about primary prevention frameworks to help culturally and linguistically diverse communities: "She has really taken those, and translated those in ways that she needed to, to apply in communities that are not Western … It's a reminder of the opportunity that comes from something like Fast Track – this is exactly what we want to see, she is a real powerhouse!"

Shweta now describes logic models as "a great framework for my thinking", which have helped her plan the next two years of her work at GenWest more strategically. "The learnings from Fast Track have provided me with the language and structure to map out the direction in which we will expand the health promotion work at GenWest for migrant and refugee women".

A future in prevention

Shweta is now working on a leadership development plan for herself and her team. Regarding her own career, she says: "Longer term, I see myself still working in prevention, definitely with migrant and refugee women". After her current health outreach project, she would love to set up a project to help educate culturally and linguistically diverse women about gender and sexuality, topics she notes are rarely discussed in some cultures.

Overall, Shweta describes Fast Track as "an invaluable exercise" for increasing her knowledge about the family violence sector in Australia. "I feel like an insider and not an imposter anymore!" she exclaims. She observes that "the language we use in this industry is really hard. It's such a barrier, it's so academic … Some people who were on the course with me who are not as familiar with the space, for them it was great. And even some people who do work in the sector, there was still language they weren't familiar with too!". She found the facilitator was inspiring, the mentoring was excellent, and she enjoyed networking with the other participants on the course. Rosie also agrees that Fast Track is a valuable program for the sector, and hopes that GenWest can put forward other staff members to participate in future.

What medium to longer–term changes have occurred in participants' roles?

The case studies included above illustrate a number of key ways Fast Track has influenced participants careers. Both participants have expanded their scope of responsibility, including through securing a new more senior role and successfully extending and expanding an existing project. In particular, Fast Track's focus on program logic, strategic thinking, and enhanced sector knowledge and connections has helped these achievements. Kerry notes that working in crisis and client facing work can inhibit the opportunity to engage in tender submissions and program development, whereas Fast Track provided the opportunity to dedicate time and space each week to learn new skills and uplift thinking in project implementation. Shweta highlights the importance of sector specific knowledge, frameworks and language gained from Fast Track in helping her to better apply existing skills and experience. The case studies also strongly illustrate the benefits of enhanced confidence, both for individual career progression and in taking the lead on new initiatives or program planning. Both case studies also illustrate retention outcomes for the participants' organisations.

Many of these outcomes and benefits were also reported by other participants and managers, as set out in the following.

Of the 9 participants in evaluation focus group discussions some months after completing Fast Track, **8 had stepped up into more senior roles or roles which involved leadership growth**. Around two-thirds of follow-up survey respondents had applied for more senior roles, and none had left the sector (figure 17).
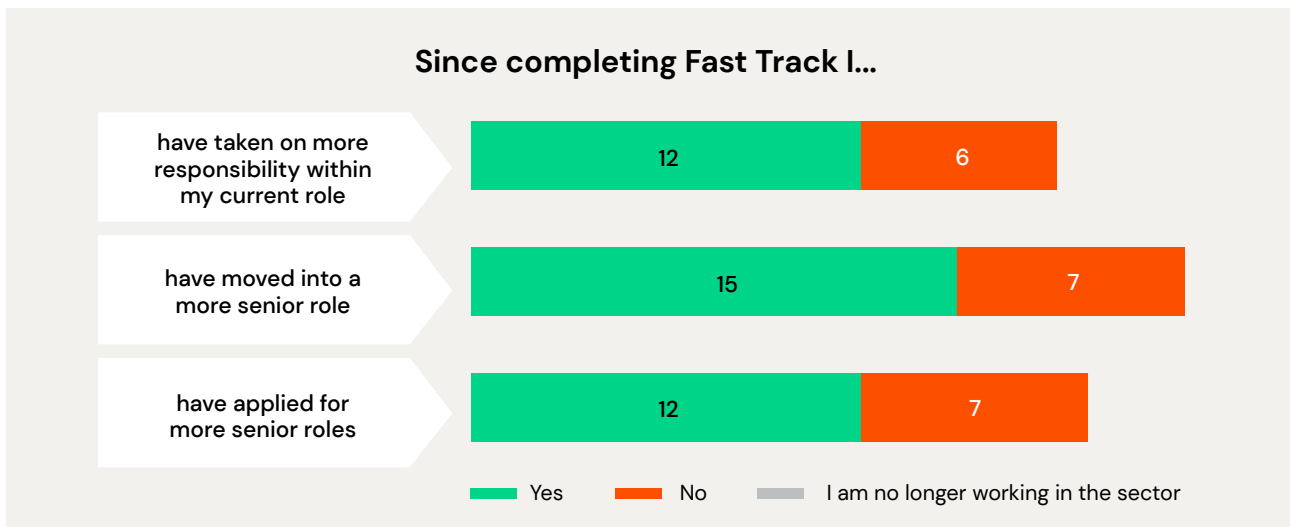
> *"[Fast Track] helped overcome imposter syndrome."*
> – Focus group participant

> *"When I went to apply for this role I was able to answer some of the questions because I had just learned about them [in Fast Track]!"*
> – Case study interview

Figure 17: Participant follow-up survey results

Since completing Fast Track I...

	Yes	No
have taken on more responsibility within my current role	12	6
have moved into a more senior role	15	7
have applied for more senior roles	12	7

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No ■ I am no longer working in the sector

> *"Fast Track taught me a lot about the different roles and directions my career could take, which was very valuable. It was nice to be in an atmosphere of people who are working to progress their career in the same way I am. Since completing Fast Track, I went from a Family Violence Officer role to a Family Violence Practice Leader role for a large region in Victoria, which I was able to achieve a few years ahead of when I thought I could, I think due in part to the confidence the course gave me. Further, it equipped me to be able to discuss projects in a high-level way during interview which I'm sure contributed to my success."*
> – Participant follow-up survey

What medium to longer–term changes have occurred in participants' capability?

In the follow–up survey, 91% of respondents (n=20) agreed their confidence to undertake their role had increased following Fast Track. A key theme identified in their reflections was participants' feeling more confident to engage in the leadership space and lead a team.

> *"I feel more confident as I have some theory background re management, and I enjoyed working and presenting my project. Having project logic helped me establish my ability to 'sell' the project to my board."*
>
> – Participant follow-up survey

> *"I feel more confident in my knowledge and ability to lead and manage a team when required. The course allowed me to recognise the skills that I already have and further develop these skills on the ground."*
>
> – Participant follow-up survey

> *"I feel better equipped to engage in higher level discussions about current and future projects, more conscious of need to value add to organisation in line with their goals."*
>
> – Participant follow-up survey

Several participants spoke of having a more comprehensive toolkit to draw upon in their new roles; examples included:

- Using position descriptions and policy better as tools for onboarding and managing staff
- Using program logic to communicate activity, goals and outcomes more clearly to stakeholders
- Using partnership analysis tools in developing and maintaining relationships, and in fostering collaboration
- Developing a deeper understanding of concepts and frameworks with which they were already familiar (e.g. Theory of change in prevention)

Focus group participants also reported substantial effects on their confidence – in their own expertise, abilities, knowledge and capacity, and confidence to apply for more senior roles. Examples included:

- An improved ability to **present themselves confidently beyond their workplace**, for example, on committees, "introducing myself as someone of value".
- **Greater capacity to advocate for their team and/or their work**, to a more diverse range of stakeholders and potential partners, especially to those in more senior positions.
- Building new connections, and the confidence to seek out new connections.

> *"[Fast Track] gave me a license to back myself in this space."*
>
> – Focus group participant

Participants also felt that since completing Fast Track they had a **much better understanding of what good leadership and management looks like**, and that their new skills and relational approaches had **created an environment where staff were able to engage more positively** with them. Some noted they were better able to manage the work of their teams and/or themselves, and to **be better role models** for others. Participants also spoke of having a **better understanding of the broad scope of roles within the sector**.

Examples of skills they had applied the most since completing the course included:

- **Program logic** skills, which in at least one case had resulted in more formal processes across the organisation.
- **Communicating and managing change effectively in a period of significant transition** had led to improved workforce retention, and for some in their team, advancement to leadership roles.
- Participants noted using these skills more broadly across their organisations, in turn **developing their own workforces**.
- **Reviewing and adapting practice guidelines and toolkits** to be more accessible and user-friendly, which strengthened program and service delivery.
- Being able to **conceptualise and communicate gender transformative practices** across a range of settings, to build staff knowledge and awareness as a foundation for improving programs and services.
- Networking and engaging in new relationships or organisational partnerships which translated into a range of ongoing organisational benefits.

The 5 managers who responded to follow-up questionnaire some months after their employee had completed Fast Track also reflected some of these key themes around confidence, networks, and more considered or purposeful engagement with a range of stakeholders. Examples shared by managers included:

- One participant had **been demonstrating deeper thinking about how she can influence others** in her organisation.
- Another had a **greater sense of inquiry**.
- Increased **confidence,** notable in that the participant had been a team leader for many years, and Fast Track had given her greater confidence in taking on a role that was broader in scope.
- A number of managers noted particular areas where the participant was **applying knowledge** gained through Fast Track – about the sector, leadership, funding, the topic of their workplace project, and capabilities relating to developing, implementing and managing projects.

What factors enabled or limited career progression?

Enablers to career progression

Focus group participants identified a number of enablers, almost all of which were attributed to Fast Track. The key themes were:

- Fast Track had given them much greater confidence to apply for more senior roles, with this **confidence underpinned by solid subject matter expertise** that was built from the program curriculum.
- Some participants spoke of using their newly developed knowledge or skills immediately in the recruitment process.
- The power of **the mentoring aspect of the program** was seen as a key enabler for some, and how mentor input had assisted when applying for new and more senior positions.
- Passion for the work, and a strong alignment with personal values are also seen as enablers for career progression.

One participant also noted that **Fast Track's work on program logic had improved their ability to think strategically and plan for goal achievement**, skills that could then be applied in other roles and projects.

Barriers to career progression

In the follow-up survey participants were asked to comment on any barriers or enablers to their career progression, some of the reflections are included below:

- "**Limited opportunities for career progression** within small organisation, more senior role opportunities tend to come up less often."
- "I have been able to transition following Fast Track into team leader and management roles and the main barriers for me in career progression have been in balancing this with caring responsibilities … I found having the mentor that I was assigned through Fast Track to be extremely valuable to supporting my development in my career."

Focus group participants also reflected on barriers to career progression. A key theme was a **perceived lack of opportunity for career progression**. Particularly for those working as sole practitioners in an organisation – for example, a primary prevention role in a broader government service – the capacity to advance was seen to be very limited, unless leaders are prepared to take on roles leading multiple project areas.

Other barriers noted by focus group participants were:

- For some, career progression may mean **a step down in terms of salary and/or employment conditions** from present roles, which may be unattractive in the current economic environment.
- The **bureaucracy associated with more senior roles** in larger organisations was a barrier for many, as it limited people's capacity to do 'real work'.
- On a similar theme, dealing with the **politics of management** was off-putting for some, and may lead some workers with management and leadership potential choosing to stay in direct practice positions.

Burnout was also seen as a key barrier.

"I think, working in this field, a lot of people come into it feeling so passionate and wanting to make a difference, and if not supported well around their wellbeing, will absolutely burn out."
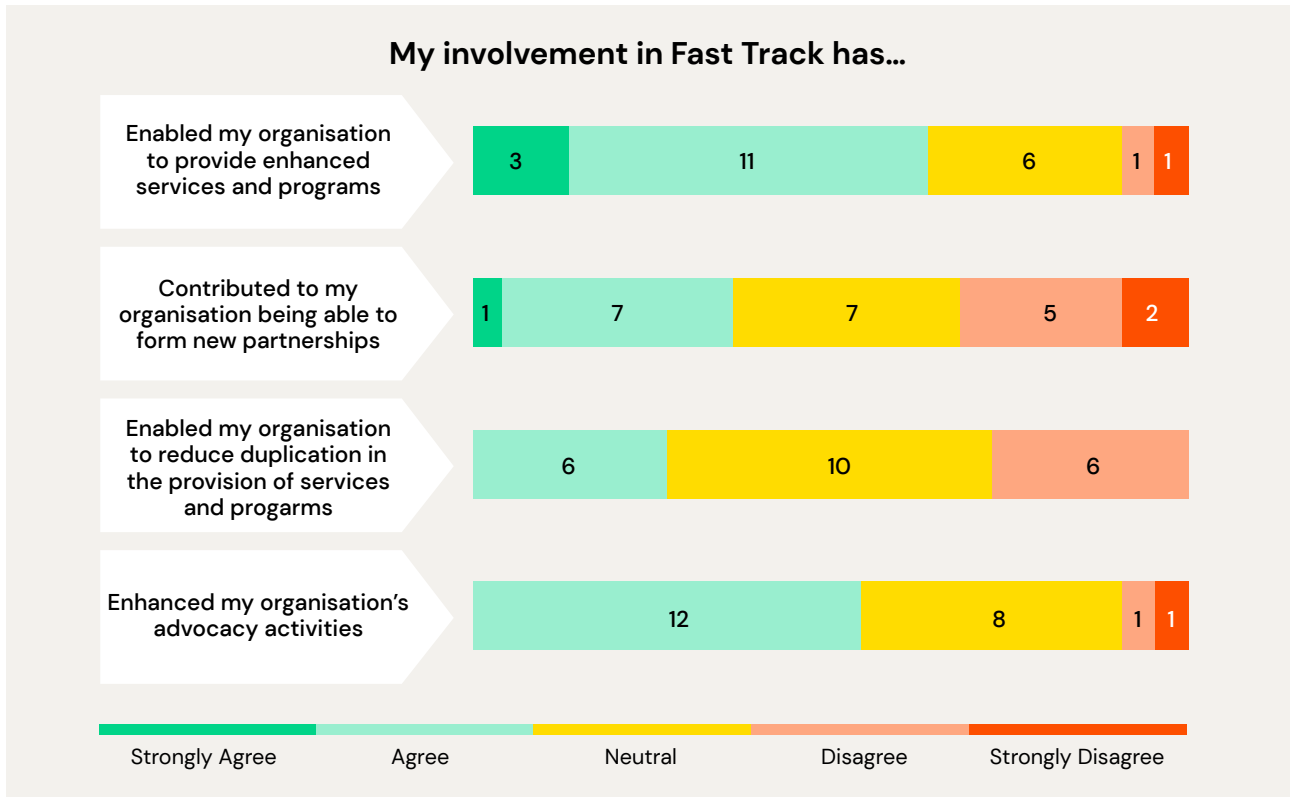
– Focus group participant

Summary: How have participants' roles or careers changed as a result of the program, and what has enabled or limited their advancement?

A range of evaluation data illustrates how Fast Track has positively influenced participant's roles and careers following the program. The case studies demonstrate that participants have been able to advance in their careers through promotion or have taken on more responsibilities within their roles as they apply learnings and think strategically with project implementation. A key theme is participants increased knowledge following Fast Track giving them a sense of validation in the leadership space and confidence to engage in higher level discussions or drive improvements. Working on program logics and having increased confidence as a result of strengthened capabilities and expertise were seen as key enablers to career progression for participants. These outcomes indicate that the content delivered in Fast Track and the program logic are leading to positive changes in careers and roles for participants. The mentoring aspect of the program also supported some participants with applying for new and more senior positions. The goal setting and career support the mentorship component offered is an additional outcome that emerged through the evaluation process. Barriers to career progression was mostly due to limited opportunities; the need for further capability mapping of senior roles and clarifying career trajectories in the sector is discussed in section 3.9.

3.8 What, if any, emerging evidence of long-term organisational or sector-level outcomes is available at this stage?

Figure 18: Participant follow-up survey results (n=22)

My involvement in Fast Track has…

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Enabled my organisation to provide enhanced services and programs	3	11	6	1	1
Contributed to my organisation being able to form new partnerships	1	7	7	5	2
Enabled my organisation to reduce duplication in the provision of services and progarms		6	10	6	
Enhanced my organisation's advocacy activities		12	8	1	1

Outcomes relating to enhanced services and programs

The follow-up survey results in figure 18 show that 64% (n=14) participants agreed that Fast Track has contributed to organisations providing enhanced programs or services. 27% (n=6) felt neutral and 2 respondents disagreed.

Fast Track's workplace program logic assessment has had positive outcomes for participants, enabling them to critically think about what is required to implement a program. Kerry notes in her case study: "When I applied for this role, I was able to explain what I would implement into the program". In Shweta's case study, manager Rosie states that her strengthened skillset and way of working, and her sharing that with her own team "has directly benefitted the community". Shweta feels that she can plan her work at GenWest more strategically, with the learnings from Fast Track providing "the language and structure to map out the direction in which we will expand the health promotion work at GenWest for migrant and refugee women". Shweta has been able to apply her new knowledge about primary prevention frameworks to further help culturally and linguistically diverse communities and is able to "translate [them] in ways that she needed to, to apply in communities that are not Western."

In participant Kerry's case study, her manager notes Kerry's increased knowledge about how to advance ideas, projects or plans, and has greater confidence to progress things that would benefit her team or sector. The Fast Track program has been attributed to strengthening Kerry's strategic thinking, that helps her shape initiatives in ways that will most likely get accepted at higher levels of the organisation.

Majority of participants (63%) in the follow-up survey agreed that Fast Track helped strengthen services and programs. Participants shared some examples for the above outcomes:

- "I learned about partnership brokering during the program and have taken on board the tips to ensure partnership success, and have contributed to an excellent network in my field/region, identifying crossover and joint goals and connecting organisations to share resources."
- "My organisation implemented my program logic, and we enhanced our specialist family violence program."
- "I don't think the scope of my role at the time of attending FastTrack (the pilot) allowed me to have a greater/broader impact on overall organisational partnerships, [however] I was able to use my learnings/knowledge to impact on our services/programs/practice within my teams."

Some barriers to enhanced programs and services included workload capacity, and shifting priorities to respond to COVID rather than primary prevention initiatives.

Participants shared some concrete examples in the focus groups about how their involvement in Fast Track had helped enhance services and programs. Much of this was linked to their workplace projects, with examples including:

- Reviewing and refining practitioner guidelines to make them more accessible to staff, especially at onboarding.
- Adapting a toolkit that was not seen as being user-friendly, to enhance its utility across their own organisation; this was then shared with other like organisations.
- Communicating gender transformative practices across a range of settings, to build staff knowledge and awareness as a foundation for improving programs and services.
- Using program logic skills to enhance workforce retention and development processes and outcomes across the organisation.
- Communicating and managing change during a period of significant transition which led to improved workforce retention, and for some in the participant's team, advancement to leadership roles.

Manager feedback in their post-course surveys highlighted that a number of organisations had valued service and practice changes that had been able to occur through Fast Track workplace projects, including improvements in broader organisational systems or processes beyond direct practice:

"It's a great project and the implementation has begun. It was able to have our team leader focus on an area of need, and look within the service in ways to support the client need."
— Manager post-course survey

"Supporting new staff and management to have clarity around new staff expectations in relation to training."
— Manager post-course survey

While mentors often did not have continued engagement with their participants after graduating from Fast Track, nevertheless the mentor focus groups were able to identify a number of outcomes they felt were likely to contribute to enhanced services and programs at the organisational level. These focused largely around the **skills that support effective leadership** in project management or service development, including:

- Developing a value proposition and gaining buy-in from senior leaders in their organisation.
- **Considering their sphere of influence within their organisation**, to understand what might be practicable in terms of program enhancement, given the structural and other constraints faced.
- A real growth in confidence in **being able to communicate a need for change**, backed by a more integrated approach to then managing and embedding change.

"(My) mentees quickly identified the shortfalls in the work, then realised 'how do I whet the appetite of my agency to allocate resources to this project' was the tricker bit. It was a central theme of a lot of my mentoring work. 'What will Managers want of you? How often do you need to be making contact?"
— Mentor focus group

Mentors also noted that, while some participants might have felt constrained by the technicality of the project management approach, all valued understanding that this is now an expectation of government and funders.

They also felt participants had developed a better sense of the service system, including one mentor who observed response workers having less knowledge about gender equality and applying the gendered drivers of violence against women as a framework to deliver prevention initiatives than they had expected to see. This mentor believed response workers got a lot out of learning about gender equality and prevention work, and that this would have a positive effect on services and programs.

One of the managers who completed the follow-up questionnaire shared an example of a Fast Track workplace project that had been valuable for the organisation by enhancing a particular program and reducing duplication. The organisation was now seeking funding to expand the workplace project, which was conducted as a pilot and believed it would help shape the sector by fostering better relationships between specialist family violence services, child protection and police, avoiding duplication and reducing over-servicing.

The surveys and focus groups to measure medium-longer term outcomes show that Fast Track has enabled participants to engage in more strategic thinking to enhance programs and services. The program logic assessment has contributed to **workplace project implementation that has directly influenced services and programs and strengthens sector outcomes**. These results are demonstrating the value of the Fast Track program and that the content and assessment are purposeful in strengthening capability.

Outcomes relating to workforce retention and development

The five managers who participated in follow-up questionnaires noted much **stronger outcomes for their organisations in relation to workforce retention and development**, than enhanced services or programs.

- While 2 respondents agreed, the majority (n=3) were neutral about Fast Track's contribution to enhanced services or programs in their organisation in the medium to longer term.
- However, all 5 respondents agreed that Fast Track had contributed to workforce development or retention outcomes at the organisational level, with 4 of them agreeing strongly.

Some managers noted that managers and/or participants may have move to different roles during or soon after Fast Track, and in some cases this limited the manager's ability to comment on various medium to longer term outcomes.

One manager gave an example of concrete workforce development and career progression for the participant, which had also benefited the broader organisation.

> *"[The participant] was in a practitioner role, her participation in Fast Track directly influenced her work at our organisation. Very concrete outcome for us … we keep her expertise in-house. [Other frontline staff] observe their colleague attended the program and has a leadership position now."*
>
> – Manager follow-up questionnaire

Several managers spoke of their intention to send other team members to future Fast Track programs, based on perceived benefit to date.

One focus group participant also shared a tangible example of how her **experience with Fast Track had helped her stay in the sector**, rather than seeking other work closer to home, which she had originally planned to do. When she raised this with her manager and asked for a change in her role, she was offered a promotion the very next day. The participant felt her manager better recognised her knowledge and skills, and their relationship had improved as a result. Furthermore, in her new role she had also been able to introduce two initiatives to strengthen workforce retention across the organisation.

> *"It's given me a renewed sense that I can make a difference in this space."*
>
> – Focus group participant

Shweta's case study above also highlights the positive outcomes Fast Track can have on reconnecting participants to the sector. Shweta's manager stated that her increased confidence and capabilities are having a positive impact more widely at her organisation "We are benefitting from her new energy and drive, especially post-lockdowns". In Kerry's case study, her manager also agrees that "Fast Track is a really important growth and retention opportunity to support emerging leaders, a critical tier of our expanding workforce."

One of the mentor focus groups also identified this theme around **a sense of renewal and reconnection for some participants who may have been contemplating leaving the sector**, feeling they had done all they could. One mentor noted that some participants returning from parental or other extended leave had a stronger sense of what was possible for them, through Fast Track. For these participants there was a **growing sense of a career pathway for them**.

> *"People have a bit of a sense of other ways to contribute, for example, in policy development. This has helped with sector retention. Also, a sense of other organisations that might provide renewal … different approaches, and that there is somewhere to go."*
>
> – Mentor focus group

The evaluation demonstrates **Fast Track has also contributed to workforce retention** and a sense of rejuvenation for some participants. It shows that this program has various sector benefits alongside achieving learning outcomes.

Outcomes relating to new partnerships and reduced duplication

In the follow-up survey, a few examples of outcomes relating to new partnerships and reduced duplication were noted and are included below:

- "As part of my project, we have made new connections in the local community and are better placed at supporting our local Aboriginal Community due to this"
- "Further collaboration and connection across our alliance… identifying gaps for improvement."
- "I learned about partnership brokering during the program and have taken on board the tips to ensure partnership success, and have contributed to an excellent network in my field/region, identifying crossover and joint goals and connecting organisations to share resources."

While around one-third of the follow-up survey respondents agreed their involvement in Fast Track had contributed to partnership or collaboration outcomes for their organisations, the participant focus groups uncovered stronger evidence of outcomes in this area. The focus groups identified a number of examples of partnership and collaboration outcomes that had benefited organisations, with participants noting their confidence to network, engage more broadly and build relationships as one of the key ongoing benefits for their organisations. Examples cited include:

- Having a framework for building community awareness as a foundation for action
- Negotiating roles and responsibilities within Orange Door relationships
- Re-establishing/reinvigorating relationships compromised during the pandemic
- Enhancing peer support for those with similar roles, especially for those in isolated roles in organisations.

The mentor focus groups commented on how Fast Track had **encouraged participants to look beyond their current networks, to work with partners they have not previously considered**. Some mentors suggested participants could benefit from applying a more critical lens to their thinking about relationship opportunities.

Manager follow-up questionnaires identified that **expanded networks** resulting from Fast Track had contributed to valued outcomes at the organisational level, both in terms of connections and deeper interaction **with other organisations and with community**.

Participants noted some key factors that limited organisational sharing, collaboration and partnerships included no formal opportunity after the course for participants to reconnect, lack of capacity, and competing organisational priorities and resistant work culture.

> *"Not having an established formal structure to meet again [meant there was no] opportunity to meet once participants potentially moved into new roles … [This may give] more scope to develop these meaningful relationships and have more decision making within the organisation."*
>
> – follow-up participant survey

This was also reflected in the participant focus groups, where it was noted that *"the ending of the course was very abrupt"*. Participants thought a 'reconnection course' or session would be of benefit to help them consolidate their capabilities and develop new or different connections as they move into more senior roles. This could further strengthen longer term organisational outcomes relating to connection, partnership and collaboration, and reduced duplication of services or effort.

It is evident in participant feedback that the opportunities for participants to network with other practitioners in the sector, particularly across the state with online delivery, has led to positive outcomes. In Kerry's case study, she found that **Fast Track helped her reach out to a wide range of people proactively and build connections between the family violence and disability sectors**.

It is evident that **connections formed in Fast Track can enhance collaboration across the sector and therefore strengthen program outcomes**. There is an importance and a need there to provide opportunities for ongoing networking for graduates post the program.

Outcomes relating to enhanced advocacy

Participants in the follow-up survey shared some examples of outcomes relating to enhanced advocacy, shared below:

- "We met with the Shadow Minister Jenny McAlister a few months back and all that I learned assisted me in communicating effectively in this meeting."
- "I feel like my skills in sector wide advocacy and improvement to program delivery has increased, which has benefited my organisation."

36% of respondents in the follow-up survey felt neutral about Fast Track contributing to enhanced advocacy. There were 2 participants who rated 'disagree', one respondent left an example of barriers encountered to enhanced advocacy, which was attributed to poor workplace culture particularly in upper management.

While a majority of participants who responded to the follow-up survey identified organisational advocacy outcomes as an area where Fast Tack had contributed (n=12, 55%), feedback from managers and mentors was less strong.

Three of the 5 managers who participated in follow-up questionnaires agreed that Fast Track had contributed to medium to longer term outcomes relating to advocacy, and the other 2 were neutral rather than disagreeing. While no clear examples of outcomes in this area were provided, one manager mentioned *'improved community advocacy'*.

- Mentors in their focus groups briefly noted advocacy about issues affecting practice and practice change, as an outcome.

The evidence for outcomes relating to enhanced advocacy are not as strong as the other sector-level indicators. Safe and Equal should consider the intended outcomes of the Fast Track program and the relative importance of gaining results relating to enhanced advocacy.

> **Recommendation:** *Review the Fast Track program content relating to advocacy and refine the focus or content accordingly to strengthen advocacy outcomes.*

Summary: What, if any, emerging evidence of long-term organisational or sector-level outcomes is available at this stage?

The evaluation found evidence and multiple examples of longer term organisational and sector-level outcomes, particularly relating to enhanced programs and services – often arising from Fast Track workplace projects – workforce retention, and partnerships and collaboration. While some advocacy outcomes were reported, these were somewhat less clearly demonstrated than other outcomes.

3.9 How can the benefits delivered by Fast Track be sustained into the longer term?

What needs to be considered or implemented in order to ensure participant outcomes are sustainable beyond course completion?

As noted earlier, participant focus group feedback pointed to **a strong appetite for ongoing connection amongst Fast Track graduates**. In addition to supporting continued peer learning and sharing to help embed capabilities, participants also thought this would provide opportunities to continue networking and building organisational relationships and nurture collaboration in the context of participants' more senior managerial roles.

- Several participants expressed concern about their capacity to maintain formalised relationships without facilitation support, in the busyness of their roles and workloads.
- Some participants suggested that being able to maintain contact with their mentor for up to six months post-program would add value to consolidating new learning, providing mentors had capacity to do so.
- One suggestion was that Safe and Equal consider having an annual Fast Track network conference with participants, guest speakers and mentors.

> *"Mentoring in this area is really important because it's where that shift in culture comes from."*
>
> – Participant focus group

The mentors in their focus groups also encouraged graduates to seek out ongoing mentoring to support them in their building their leadership knowledge and skills, and challenging their thinking.

In practical terms, participants suggested that Fast Track could have provided them with **more feedback on the program logic** they developed for their workplace project, and/or a **check-in during implementation of their workplace project**.

A **helpdesk or knowledge bank** was endorsed by some, to facilitate continued connection and knowledge building as participants applied their skills and knowledge after graduation. Other suggestions for program development included:

- More content around public speaking and presentation skills, negotiation skills, facilitation skills
- Additional content around strengthening an intersectional lens in their work

For some participants whose managers had little engagement with the course content or their progress since graduation, ongoing **support from senior managers was an area of need** that participants felt would help them sustain the benefits and achievements, and realise their leadership potential.

- It was suggested that, if employers were able to access a platform which contained some of the program resources, this would assist them to engage better.
- This reflects feedback from a number of managers in the post-course survey, who identified a lack of information about Fast Track content or the expectations of them, as a barrier to their support and involvement during the course.
- One participant commented that better senior engagement with Fast Track might have assisted her in implementing some of changes she had planned as a result of her participation, to overcome some of the organisational barriers that had hampered progress.

Prevention focus group participants commented that **the siloing of primary prevention work within broader organisational settings** can often see this work sitting with one person, where managers or colleagues have no real involvement or knowledge about these issues. They expressed concern that in these often quite isolated roles, practitioners are continually pressured to align to the priorities of other areas in the organisation, without reciprocity, and this may limit the embedding or sustaining of gains made through Fast Track.

> *"I end up sucked into the other priorities all the time. No one ends up sucked into mine!"*
>
> – Prevention focus group participant

3

FINDINGS

Interviews with the program staff and facilitator also point to some opportunities to further strengthen and sustain participant outcomes. A key theme identified here was the **'what next' for graduates in terms of progressing their careers**. How to continue integrating their learning and bridge the gap between lifting capability in line with the framework, and the 'how' of actually doing and leading. Observations included:

- Participants need opportunities to implement what they learn in Fast Track, but **pathways for career progression are not always clear across the sector**. This makes it hard for some participants to know what may be expected of them, and what they can reasonably expect in terms of roles. E.g. there are practice lead roles, coordinator roles – but as you start to advance within an organisation there are fewer roles available.

- While Practice Leader and Senior Leader roles are mapped in the Capability Framework, it does not yet go higher to the Executive or Board level. **Clarifying this trajectory and the capabilities required to progress to Executive or Board level** would be helpful for supporting long-term leadership progression. E.g. managing major organisational change, sector reform or legislation, legal requirements and working Boards, etc.

> *"Some participants already manage staff, so they could straight away take learnings 'back to the ranch'. It was clear that some were already involved in strategic partnerships, project design, etc. And some quite clearly weren't. So I think it comes back to organisations' commitment to building in career progression opportunities – across the sector – after a course like Fast Track. It's really important."*
>
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Opportunities to continue supporting and sustaining participant outcomes and career progression could include:

- A structural piece, mapping and clarifying the kinds of roles that are in existence in the sector.
- Developing a tip sheet or similar resource for Fast Track participants' employers, giving them some practical ideas of things they can do internally to provide useful opportunities for participants to apply their learning and practice different aspects of leadership.
- Extending the Capability Framework to more cohesively map the capabilities required for Executive and Board level leadership in the family violence sector. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) intensive leadership program winding up.
- Exploring potential Fast Track alumni offerings which provide ongoing support to participants throughout their leadership journey, both in applying leadership skills within their current roles, and to progress into more senior roles. This could include ongoing mentoring, continued regular networking/discussion events or one-off capability workshops, involving participants and more senior people in the sector.

What needs to be considered or implemented in order to strengthen and sustain organisational and sector outcomes?

Given the significant investment in Fast Track by government and the organisations supporting their staff to participate in the program, mentors agreed it is critical to consider how to support the participants in their skill development post-program and to investigate how the program builds the capacity of the sector. They suggested some areas for consideration to help strengthen and sustain outcomes at the organisational and sector levels:

- A need to engage emerging sector leaders in the **political origins and ongoing discourse** of the gendered violence movement. While the family violence system worked well for some people, it did not work so well for others, and some were in fact excluded; new leaders needed to be cognisant of this and committed to finding ways to ameliorate this.

- The content of the program was at a very high, sometimes state-wide, level and new leaders may require some level of ongoing support or guidance to translate that to effecting change at a local level.

To strengthen the outcomes of workplace projects, mentors suggested that the projects could be documented, themed and shared. This would help participants identify where existing work had been done (e.g. program logics) that they could build upon or adapt, and at graduation form to increase the opportunities for collaborative work.

Program staff and facilitator interviews also highlighted that some of these new projects are very promising – if they were implemented, they could be of great benefit to the sector as practice-informed improvement initiatives with potential for wider application across organisations and/or state-wide. The program logics are robust and supported by organisations, and many of them have great potential. But currently there is little to no centralised or shareable knowledge about whether they are actually implemented. This presents valuable opportunities for Fast Track to explore, potentially including:

- Providing a level of follow-up or 'light touch' ongoing support for workplace project implementation;
- Acting as a central repository or 'clearing-house' of service improvement or development initiatives that can be tailored or applied elsewhere, for much broader sector benefit.

Participants' managers also noted some suggestions that could assist in maintaining or further strengthening the organisational and sector benefits of Fast Track:

- Mentoring was seen as a critical success factor by one manager – 'because the exposure to different leadership and management styles and knowledge can go beyond what we can offer – for example, in policy or campaigning'.
- Ensuring participants have **ongoing professional development opportunities** suitable to their role/level, such as communities of practice, regular discussion forums or similar initiatives, to facilitate continued knowledge sharing and building the evidence base.

> *"There is a lot of good work in small organisations on the ground that they do not have platform or opportunity to share more broadly."*
>
> – Manager follow-up questionnaire

Recommendation: Safe and Equal should explore mechanisms for networking following the completion of Fast Track to continue to strengthen partnerships and collaboration sector wide.

Recommendation: Safe and Equal should trial a sector-wide mentoring offering to meet ongoing leadership development needs and to sustain the outcomes of Fast Track to date.

Recommendation: Safe and Equal should develop a centralised database of Fast Track workplace projects to share previous projects; reducing duplication and increasing opportunities for collaborative work to strengthen sector-wide outcomes.

Recommendation: Family Safety Victoria should support Safe and Equal to map the pathways for career progression in primary prevention, and extend the capability frameworks to Executive or Board level for both specialist family violence response and prevention workforces.

Recommendation: Safe and Equal should explore further workshops and leadership training content to support practitioners after Fast Track.

Recommendation: Safe and Equal should explore ways to encourage or facilitate post-course support for participants implementing their workplace projects, to strengthen and sustain organisational and sector-level outcomes.

# 3.10 What evidence exists of continued or future demand for Fast Track?

Opportunities for further development and/or delivery of Fast Track

Across the six courses, Fast Track received a total of 207 applications for 150 places. There is also 88 prevention and 179 specialist family violence response practitioners on the waitlists, indicating a demand for future leadership professional development in the sector. The differential across waitlists is representative of the varying sizes of the prevention and response workforces.

Managers were asked in their post-course survey to indicate what kind, if any, leadership development needs were evident in their organisations. Figure 19 shows that at least 80% of respondents agreed there was further need for leadership development across the board, including:

- Around 90% (n=20) agreeing there is a need for leadership development opportunities for new leaders
- Around 86% (n=19) agreeing there is a need for mid-level leadership development opportunities
- Around 81% (n=19) agreeing there is a need for senior level leadership development opportunities.
- Across all of these statements, 45% of respondents agreed strongly, and no more than 1 respondent disagreed.

Figure 19: Post-course manager survey: Overview of responses to quantitative items relating to need for leadership development programs and opportunities (n=20-22)
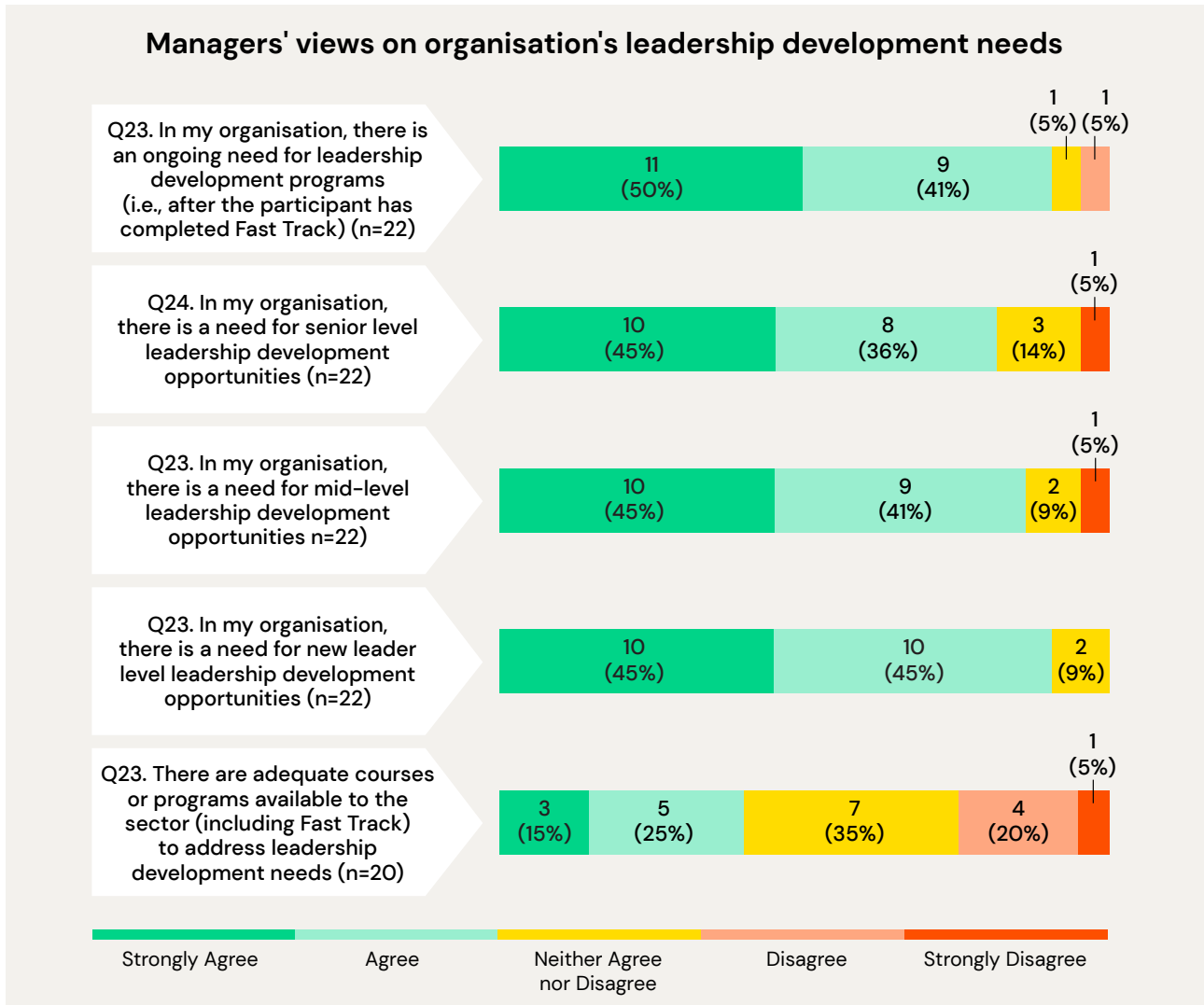
When asked about leadership development programs specifically:

- Around 91% of managers (n=20) reported that there is an ongoing need for leadership development programs; while
- Less than half of respondents agreed there are adequate courses or programs available to the sector (including Fast Track). A quarter of respondents disagreed, while around one third were neutral.

Comments from managers, while not extensive, point to some areas of need:

- Training in supervision, coaching, or leadership development specifically for those in supervisory or team leader roles
- New leader training

There is some appetite among participants and mentors for Fast Track to extend its coverage beyond the core capability framework content, to also include some of the 'soft skills' that are often more traditionally associated with leadership programs.

- Participant feedback suggests a range of communication skills including negotiation, presentations, and facilitation
- Mentors talked about a more considered approach to the components of good leadership and management, as they saw a greater emphasis in the current program on providing the content to which leadership skill is applied. Mentors would like to see more about the structures and language of leadership in the sector, how to influence others and bring them along on the journey, providing empathetic leadership.

> *"Although the course is marketed as a leadership program it has a strong focus on content knowledge and is lacking sessions on the soft skills and interpersonal skills that are required in leadership positions. For example, how to deal with staff management and supervision, ethical dilemmas …"*
>
> – Mentor focus group

For some in the mentor focus groups, there was concern that **prevention and response work appeared more siloed now**, and that this may contribute to a greater focus on the 'how' of doing the work, and less on the 'why'. They suggested that improvements in **situating the work within the broader socio-political context** may in the longer-term lead to increased effort and improved advocacy, although this was not yet observed as an outcome.

Mentors went further to suggest that if Fast Track is to continue, and to fulfil its purpose, it needs to **better define its role, create opportunities that are more sophisticated than simply prevention and response, and develop organisational and sector leaders, effective managers and creators of sector strategy to enable the sector to continue to evolve.** They suggest a considered focus on three domains: **personal leadership development, management development, and strategic development.**

> *"Safe and Equal might need to think more about what it is achieving and for whom. Not to become a bit of everything and not enough of anything to be really useful."*
>
> – Mentor focus group

> **Recommendation:** *Review Fast Track program communications to clearly identify the program's focus on the capability framework, rather than the leadership skills some expected.*

> **Recommendation:** *Safe and Equal should explore options for providing or signposting suitable professional development offerings relating to leadership skills, budget management and grant applications.*

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Opportunities for improvement

The following discussion recognises that substantial improvement has already been made to the Fast Track program design and delivery, through iterative monitoring and refinement across the rounds by the Safe and Equal team in consultation with the program facilitator. This has been a key strength of Safe and Equal's approach to implementation, resulting in more positive experiences for participants. Therefore, only minor opportunities have been suggested to refine and strengthen Fast track for the next phase of delivery, rather than pointing to a need for major improvements to the program. There are also a number of larger opportunities to explore new strategic developments or additional initiatives, relating to workforce leadership and capability development for the sector.

Implementation efficiency opportunities

Interviews with program staff and facilitators identified a couple of areas where efficiency could be enhanced in future phases of the program. These are discussed briefly as follows.

Engaging/coordinating many guest experts was hugely time consuming, and often challenging – with around 20 or more guests per course.

- Budget limitations meant reimbursement was only available if requested, rather that offered up front to all potential guest speakers (except for survivor advocates who were all offered reimbursement up front). This often felt like 'asking favours' and is not sustainable for repeated engagements – a budgetary consideration for future programs.
- There was lots of scheduling/program session outline changes to suit guest speakers' availability. Constant re-jigging is very inefficient, and then in the event that a speaker can't make it at last minute, there is a scramble.
- Since the variety of guest experts have been identified as an important element of the program's success, there is a need to explore ways to retain the guest experts' input but make the coordination process less intensive and more efficient.

Potential inefficiencies from **'over-responsiveness' or making changes to the program week to week which may not actually have been needed**. This was particularly identified as occurring after weekly de-briefing discussions between S&E staff and facilitator, with response round 3 and prevention round 2 particularly mentioned.

- Much commonality was noted across response and prevention courses, where opportunities for learning and improvement are 'doubled down' – so some elements have now been delivered 6 times (potentially 7 including the pilot).
- There are important considerations for future about how often the team debriefs and collects feedback, what is in and out of scope, and where further action/response is and is not warranted. After extensive delivery, testing, and refinement of the program materials and structure, Safe and Equal can now be confident to take more of a 'set and forget' approach to design – with appropriate level of monitoring built in – to avoid inefficiency or 'over-responsiveness' in future as the program moves into a new 'business as usual' phase.
- Investing time early in the next phase to review and scale back the existing monitoring and evaluation framework will be prudent. The framework should be fit for purpose to support ongoing monitoring of the program's effectiveness, as well as a 'light touch' evaluation on any new elements that have not yet been tested, and seek to collect a manageable level of data with consideration of the time and level of engagement to date of key stakeholder groups, particularly managers.

> *"We did lots of tweaking at times, but then the weekly survey feedback often came back as 10/10 on that item. So we should have left it. Or at least waited to see what the feedback said from the next round … The labour wasn't worth it."*
>
> – Program staff/facilitator interview

Safe and Equal internal organisational processes and systems have presented some barriers.
Feedback given in the spirit of continuous improvement cited examples relating to participant registration, distribution of materials/communications, and monitoring and evaluation, including:

- Incorrect or invalid evaluation data and tools – e.g. rating scale responses being 'flipped', surveys built incorrectly, and common survey questions asked across each round being structured differently and therefore responses cannot be collated and aggregated.
- A complex application process with 9 different steps or points where people could disengage – resulting in incomplete applications, issues in quality, and a high level of manual intervention to compile applications for review.
- Manual management of learning management system Canvas, leading to errors, delayed updates, etc.

This has resulted in inefficiencies through re-work and manual 'fixes', increased levels of stress, and limited the usefulness of some evaluation data (e.g. demonstrating the effects on skills and knowledge for 2 out of 3 response cohorts, as noted in the 2.4 'Methods and limitations' section). As well as the limitations on this evaluation, this organisational infrastructure issue also has implications for the future sustainability of Fast Track as it moves towards a phase of less resource-intensive 'business as usual' delivery.

The Fast Track team has proposed some process improvements with shared benefits across both teams, but unfortunately this has not been successful to date.

- This is an ongoing issue and has notably impacted other recent evaluation work of the Primary Prevention Unit (e.g. survey consistency/rating scale issues with the most recent PPU evaluation).
- While the focus has been on managing/resolving each separate issue, the ongoing nature of this issue points to a need for a broader process and systems review – at least at the PPU level and possibly at the organisational level. While such a review involves an investment of time (as does actioning any resulting process or capacity building improvements identified), there is much to be gained, including benefits for the Client Services team through reduced troubleshooting, fixes/re-work, and stress.

Recommendation: Identify ways to improve efficiency and sustainability in program delivery and administration, including reducing the reliance on scheduling guest experts to deliver a large proportion of the content, but with care to retain valuable variety in and engagement with guest experts' contributions.

Recommendation: Review internal processes and systems to strengthen efficiency and mitigate errors in data collection.

Recommendation: Review, update and scale back the Fast Track monitoring and evaluation framework for future iterations, ensuring it is fit for purpose and efficient.

Opportunities for refining program design or communications

A small number of areas were identified in the range of data analysed in chapter 3 of this report as potentially benefiting from some further consideration or refinement. In summary, these are as follows.

Mentoring – increasing the time available for the rapid mentoring, either:

- Adding a 4th session, with feedback suggesting this could be valuable either early or late in the program, or
- Allowing 1.5 hours for mentoring sessions rather than just 1 hour

Workplace projects – creating a 'project bank' of existing program logics that new Fast Track participants can look through:

- To give them ideas for projects that may be valuable, and
- To strengthen the sector-level impact of positive projects by making them available to more organisations, and allowing earlier work to be further developed and built upon.

Workplace projects – providing written feedback on participants' program logics as submitted at their graduation, to help them further reflect on their work and improve in future.

Content – consider whether there is a need for Fast Track to include some additional material around 'soft skills' and traditional leadership/emotional intelligence capabilities, as suggested by participants – or if there are suitable offering available to the sector already, that could be signposted.

Online engagement – strengthening communication about expectations of sustained, uninterrupted participation during weekly sessions, and potentially the accountability mechanisms around attendance and engagement:

- With participants, particularly in the response cohorts, and
- With their managers, as part of the 'letter of support' upon acceptance into the program.

Manager engagement – explore opportunities to provide managers with more, or clearer, information about:

- The program content, and
- Ways managers have (or could) support the participant during the program, particularly with their workplace project, and after the program to continue developing and applying their skills.

Opportunities for new development

A small number of areas were also identified in the range of data analysed in chapter 3 of this report as potentially being promising areas to explore for further development or expansion of Fast Track, notably:

Establishing an ongoing forum or platform for continued connection among participants, that could:

- Provide continued peer exchange, learning, and relationship building as graduates step into more senior roles
- Provide a level of support for implementation of the workplace projects
- Support new and strengthened cross-sector networks and connections that can nurture partnerships or collaboration between organisations.

Exploring and implementing ways to support graduates to identify and progress along their career pathway into more senior roles over time, potentially including:

- Mapping common roles/career pathways and key capabilities through to the Executive and Board level
- Developing a more senior level development program or capability building activities, to address the gap left by the discontinued WIDI executive family violence leadership program
- Providing high level resources to participants and their managers outlining practical examples of ways that organisations can support Fast Track graduates to take on more responsibility and support their application of new capabilities.

4.2 Summary response to Evaluation Questions

Efficiency and Process	**Evaluation Questions**	9. How successful was the program in recruiting its target cohorts as defined?
	Summary	

Overall, Fast Track recruited a fairly diverse cohort across age ranges and geographic location. For future programs Safe and Equal can explore ways to improve recruitment of individuals who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, as this cohort were potentially underrepresented in this program.

The Fast Track program recruited a total of 151 practitioners, with 127 graduates. An application tool was designed and implemented to promote a diverse range of organisations and regional and metropolitan participants. The program recruited an even spread of metro and regional participants, 52% and 48% respectively. The vast majority (95%) of participants identified as female and there was a spread of participants across 25-54 years.

For future iterations of Fast Track, Safe and Equal should explore ways to further enhance diversity in recruitment, engaging more ACCHOs and increasing representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Data collection methods to further support diversity of cohorts could also be implemented in line with newly established ethical data management processes with the intention to use this data meaningfully.

Another diversity consideration identified was the wide range of experience within some cohorts, particularly within prevention due to the smaller workforce. This at times posed challenges for meeting the learning needs of the whole group. For cohorts with a diverse range of experience, program staff can consider providing additional supports to assist with the learning experience such as pre-reading and check ins.

Appropriateness	**Evaluation Questions**	1. To what extent was the program fit-for-purpose in meeting the needs of participants?
	Summary	

The evaluation demonstrates that the Fast Track program was fit-for-purpose and responsive to the diverse cohorts. The mentoring component was extremely well received; it fulfilled its intended purpose of nurturing supportive relationships and supporting participants to apply their learnings. The evaluation shows that the mentoring program also provided a range of other benefits alongside this such as an opportunity for reflective practice, confidence building, and support with career goals and planning.

The workplace projects were a suitable way to apply new skills and knowledge, and most participants intended to implement their project to completion following Fast Track. The program team's commitment to monitoring and responsiveness enabled a number of improvements to be made during the program to enhance the appropriateness of activities and participants' experience.

Evaluation data shows that the mentoring component of Fast Track was highly valued, with participants developing a supportive relationship with their mentors. Participants also agreed that the mentorship supported their learnings in relation to course content and helped progress their workplace project. The feedback from mentors was similar and positive, demonstrating that this component is a valuable aspect of Fast Track. Suggested improvements for mentoring included wanting additional and longer mentoring sessions.

Findings indicate that the workplace project was a suitable way for participants to apply their learning, as reflected by participants and managers. The participant post-course survey indicated that 85% of all participants intended to continue implementing their workplace project to completion with 11% feeling neutral; the most common barrier encountered with project implementation was workload and time constraints. In total, 3 participants across the program disagreed on continuing implementation, however this could be due to some who were moving into new roles and one participant who did not get organisational approval and completed the logic as an exercise.

Appropriateness

Online delivery was a strong enabler of access and reach, with nearly a 50% spread of regional Victorian and metro Melbourne participants across the program. While some participants had difficulty maintaining engagement online throughout the sessions (particularly the response cohort due to crisis management) overall the online delivery was effective. Participants noted some limitations in connection and networking and expressed appetite for more opportunities to interact and network throughout the program. Future programs should consider the optimum balance of online and face to face delivery, and consider offering more online drop-in sessions to enable further participant interaction.

Evaluation Questions	2. How relevant was the program's focus within the sector context?

Summary

Results show that the program was highly relevant within the sector context and generally aligned with participant expectations. Some participants wanted more specific leadership training which is not mapped to the capability frameworks, and could be explored by Safe and Equal as additional program offerings. The success of the program's focus within the sector context is especially evident when evaluating the medium-longer term outcomes of participants, discussed in EQ 6 and 8.

84% of response participants and 92% of prevention participants agreed that the topics focussed on were generally what was expected. 91% of participants also agreed the content was relevant for their work context. Participants feedback showed a great appreciation for the information provided by guest experts. Focus group discussions with participants identified areas for further capability development in Fast Track; including strengthening public speaking and presentation skills and applying an intersectional lens in practice. These areas of content in the Fast Track program are well received and valued, indicating potential appetite for further coverage on these topics. Respondents of the follow-up survey noted a desire for more specific leadership training such as focussing on management styles, conflict management and leading a team.

Effectiveness and Impact

Evaluation Questions	3. To what extent did participants' knowledge, skills and confidence increase as a result of the program?

Summary

The evaluation demonstrates that Fast Track is highly effective in increasing participants' capabilities and confidence across both response and prevention streams.

Overall, 87% of participants agreed the sessions deepened their understanding of the topics discussed, and participants reported major or moderate increases across a broad range of prevention and response capabilities. More participants reported a major or moderate increase in their capabilities as the program progressed, and fewer reported 'no change'. This suggests that the iterative approach the program staff took to Fast Track was successful in strengthening learning outcomes. A strong theme identified from Fast Track graduates and managers was their increased sense of confidence through application of new skills and validation of their pre-existing knowledge.

Evaluation Questions	4. To what extent has the program built or enhanced connection and relationships across the sector, and what has happened as a result?

Summary

While online delivery constrained opportunities for networking and connections to occur organically between participants, overall Fast Track has been effective in supporting connections and relationships among participants and with their mentors. Although some participants formed professional connections during Fast Track, a lack of opportunity for formal reconvening after the program has been a barrier to ongoing networking.

76% of participants agreed they were able to develop supportive relationships online, with this result being a lot higher among prevention. Interestingly, a greater number of response participants felt that these relationships would be ongoing post-course.

Effectiveness and Impact

In the follow-up survey, participants from the pilot and rounds 1 and 2 noted that the majority (71% n=17) had not continued professional connections following Fast Track. Barriers listed to ongoing connections included limited capacity and time, lack of structured opportunities for further networking, and harder to build genuine connections online. An appetite for a forum or a mechanism to facilitate ongoing connection among Fast Track graduates was also echoed in the participant focus groups. Focus group participants noted that a benefit of Fast Track was communication and connection; particularly for those who held more isolated roles. Participants reported an increased confidence to network and engage externally which has enhanced organisational collaboration.

Focus groups held with mentors also indicated that connecting with participants in the mentorship program provided some benefits such as a strong sense of reconnection to the sector, insights into the current discourse, and insights into how different specialist family violence organisations and other organisations operate.

Evaluation Questions	5. How and to what extent were participants' employers involved in supporting the achievement of outcomes?

Summary

The evaluation suggests that the involvement of managers varied between different individuals and organisations, and that managers and participants could benefit from clearer guidance about managers' involvement or support. Safe and Equal should explore ways to strengthen communications with management to clarify expectations and inform them of the program's content.

Interviews with program staff and facilitator found that overall, managers' involvement was not to the level that the team originally expected. There was a reported lack of engagement with workplace projects, involvement in the mentoring process and end-of-program forums, and providing feedback for evaluation.

A large number of participants in the post-course survey felt neutral about their manager's involvement in the Fast Track program during the application process, through Fast Track, and after the course finished. When asked if their manager's involvement throughout the program matched their expectations, majority rated agree or neutral. This suggests that participants were not expecting high levels of involvement from their managers.

87% (n=20) managers agreed the program outcomes met their expectations. The manager post-course surveys show that overall, managers agreed they were actively engaged at various stages of the program. While there may be an element of self-selection response bias at play, the variation in feedback suggests that perhaps participants, staff and managers had different understandings or expectations about what was required of managers during Fast Track.

While staff learned that the ongoing manager involvement initially expected was not essential for successful Fast Track delivery, there are touch points that remain important. Expectations of managers should be clarified moving forward, ensuring that they fully understand the requirements of Fast Track; supporting participants to prioritise time to attend and fully engage in the workshops and in endorsing their workplace project. Managers also have an important role in continuing to support participants' application of leadership skills in the workplace, and their career progression, after completing Fast Track.

Evaluation Questions	6. How have participants' roles or careers changed as a result of the program, and what has enabled or limited their advancement?

Summary

The evaluation shows that Fast Track has had a strong positive influence on participant's development and career progression following the program.

Since completing Fast Track, two-thirds of respondents (n=12 to15) had taken on more responsibility within their current role, moved into a more senior role, or had applied for more senior roles. Of the 9 participants in evaluation focus group discussions some months after completing Fast Track, 8 had stepped up into more senior roles or roles which involved leadership growth. 91% (n=20) of participants from the follow-up survey reported an increase in confidence to undertake their role since completing Fast Track. Examples include greater confidence to engage in the leadership space and lead a team, to apply for more senior roles, having a more comprehensive toolkit to draw upon, and improved confidence in their own expertise, abilities, knowledge, and capacity.

Effectiveness and Impact

The case studies demonstrated how Fast Track positively influenced two participants' roles. During Fast Track, Kerry advanced into a new role at Berry Street and attributes some of the skills and knowledge learned in the program further supported her to obtain her new role. In Shweta's case study, her role has been extended due to funding grants and can now work with her manager plan the next phases of the project by drafting project plans and logic models.

In addition to greater confidence to apply for more senior roles, participants reflected that Fast Track has enabled their career progression through the curriculum which has given them solid subject matter expertise; program logic skills which enhance strategic thinking and planning abilities; and through support from the mentorship component. Managers had also observed participants' confidence, networks and a more considered or purposeful engagement with a range of stakeholders since completing the program.

Barriers noted by participants to career progression included limited opportunities within a small organisation, and bureaucracy associated with more senior roles. Burn out was also another factor noted; where if participants are not well supported around their wellbeing, they will burnout within their roles and the sector.

Evaluation Questions	7. What changes could Safe and Equal make to further enhance the effectiveness of Fast Track?

Summary

This evaluation report has identified a range of recommendations that Safe and Equal can explore to enhance the effectiveness of Fast Track.

During the recruitment process, program staff can identify and use news ways to continue to increase diversity among applicants and strengthen representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. A mix of online, face to face and/or hybrid delivery of Fast Track can also be considered for future programs. The demonstrated accessibility benefits and effective online delivery can be considered with the challenges for sustained participant engagement and limitations to organic discussion and networking opportunities. For future online delivery, program staff can explore ways to enhance networking and interaction among peers throughout the program. To further strengthen and sustain partnerships and collaboration sector-wide post Fast Track, Safe and Equal should explore mechanisms to facilitate ongoing networking for graduates.

The report highlighted that evidence for medium-longer term outcomes relating to enhanced advocacy was less strong than other indicators, and Safe and Equal can review the program content relating to advocacy to refine the focus or content if needed to strengthen related outcomes. Feedback also showed participants desire for further specific leadership training such as conflict management and leading a team, which is not in the capability frameworks and therefore out of scope for Fast Track. The program team should review the external communications to clearly identify the program's focus on the capability framework rather than the specific leadership skills anticipated by some. Safe and Equal should also review the communication strategy with participant's managers, to convey the level and type of involvement expected of them throughout the program. Program staff can also explore ways to share some of the program information with managers to garner engagement and support of workplace project implementation and participants' further development post Fast Track.

Safe and Equal should also explore ways to improve efficiency and sustainability in program delivery and administration to reduce reliance on scheduling guest experts to deliver a large proportion of the course content, while retaining variety in program delivery and guest experts' contributions. Safe and Equal should also review internal processes and systems to strengthen efficiency and mitigate errors in data collection methods. To further enhance efficiency, Safe and Equal should scale back the monitoring and evaluation framework for future iterations of Fast Track to ensure it is fit for purpose moving forward.

Effectiveness and Impact

Evaluation Questions	8. What, if any, emerging evidence of long-term organisational or sector-level outcomes is available at this stage?

Summary

Evidence is emerging that Fast Track has contributed to organisational and sector-level outcomes through improvement of services and programs, workforce retention and partnerships.

Managers reflected that the structure and focus provided by workplace projects had contributed impetus and an opportunity for change in their organisations. Some projects contributed to practice or program improvements, and some organisations benefited from improved skills in project planning or the general development of the participating staff member. All five managers who engaged in the follow-up questionnaire agreed that Fast Track had contributed to workforce development or retention outcomes at the organisational level.

The two case studies demonstrate how participants used their program logic to uplift their thinking and be more strategic in project planning and implementation. Both case studies also note participant's enhanced confidence to extend the scope of their roles and apply existing skills to achieve desired outcomes. For both organisations this enhanced services or programs in ways that benefit the sector more broadly – and a number of other participants reported similar outcomes from their workplace projects.

Kerry's case study also notes that Fast Track helped her reach out to a wide range of people proactively to build connections between the family violence and disability sectors. This was echoed by other participants and mentors, with examples of enhanced confidence to network, engage more broadly and build relationships, resulting in partnership and collaboration outcomes that had benefitted participants organisations. The mentor focus groups also reflected that Fast Track had encouraged participants to look beyond their current networks, to work with partners they have not previously considered. It is evident in the positive outcomes derived from connections formed through Fast Track that there is substantial benefit to be gained from providing further opportunities for ongoing networking after the program.

Participants also identified that the lack of formal opportunities to reconnect after the course is limiting further or continued organisational sharing, collaboration, and partnerships. Lack of capacity, competing organisational priorities and a resistant work culture were also noted as barriers.

While a majority of participants who responded to the follow-up survey identified organisational advocacy outcomes as an area where Fast Tack had contributed (n=12, 55%), feedback from managers and mentors was less strong in this area, and this may be an area for further consideration or strengthening in program content.

Sustainability

Evaluation Questions	10. What evidence exists of continued or future demand for Fast Track?

Summary

There is clear continued demand for Fast Track, as evidenced by a large waiting list and managers' feedback regarding organisational leadership development needs.

Across the six courses, Fast Track received a total of 207 applications for 150 places. There is also 88 prevention and 179 specialist family violence response practitioners on the waitlists. The differential across waitlists is representative of the varying sizes of the prevention and response workforces.

In the post-course manager surveys, data shows that at least 80% of respondents (n=19-20) agreed there was further need for leadership development across the board; including for new leaders, mid-level, and senior level leadership opportunities. Comments left from managers also indicated a need for further training in leadership development specifically for those in supervisory or team leader roles, and greater capacity for Fast Track to accept more participants were areas of need.

As noted in section 3.1, there was a wide range of experience within some cohorts and applications, potentially indicating a need for more diverse leadership offerings for practitioners with greater experience.

Continued over page

Sustainability

Focus group discussions with participants and mentors indicated that there is appetite for Fast Track to extend its coverage beyond the core capability framework content, to also include some skills that are traditionally associated with leadership programs. Areas include training in supervision, negotiation skills, emotional intelligence and conflict management, management styles and leading a team. Mentor focus groups also noted a concern that prevention and response work appeared more siloed now and that improvements in situating the work within the broader socio-political context may lead to increased effort and improved advocacy longer-term.

Evaluation Questions	11. How can the benefits delivered by Fast Track be sustained into the longer term?

Summary

The benefits delivered by Fast Track are likely to be more sustainable in the longer term if participants have access to ongoing networking and mentoring opportunities and, clear career pathways. This can support continued strengthening of cross-sector connections, collaborations and partnerships, and participants' progression to more senior positions. Establishing a centralised knowledge bank of program logics would also be valuable for informing future participants' work and extending organisational and sector level outcomes relating to enhanced services and programs.

The evaluation findings indicate there is a strong appetite from participants for an ongoing connection amongst Fast Track graduates. A structured, facilitated space will be most effective in enabling busy participants to maintain these connections in the context of high workloads and increasing responsibilities. This ongoing networking opportunity would support continued peer learning and resource sharing to help embed capabilities, build organisational relationships and nurture continued collaboration between participants in more senior roles. Mentors, participants, and managers also support the need for ongoing mentoring to further develop participants' leadership capacity, challenge their thinking, and support their career progression.

Participants suggest that Fast Track could provide more feedback on program logics and check in during implementation of their workplace project. They also reflected that some senior managers had little engagement with Fast Track and garnering their interest and support would help sustain benefits and achievements after the program. Safe and Equal can explore ways to strengthen communication touchpoints with managers, to convey the level and type of involvement expected of them. Program staff can also explore ways to share concise core program information with managers to help them better support workplace project implementation and participants' further development post-program.

Following up on the status of workplace projects and offering ongoing support for implementation, alongside housing a central repository of program initiatives that could be applied to other areas would strengthen sector outcomes.

Participants also need opportunities to implement their learnings from Fast Track, however career pathways are not often clearly mapped across the sector. To support long-term leadership progression, there is a need to clearly map the pathways for career progression in primary prevention, and extend the capability frameworks to Executive or Board level for both specialist family violence response and prevention workforces.

4.3 Looking forward

The following recommendations have been identified after consideration of all the above evidence and feedback. They address the impact-focussed evaluation question *What changes could Safe and Equal make to further enhance the effectiveness of Fast Track? (EQ7)*, and highlight some opportunities and considerations to support greater sustainability of the outcomes achieved to date, and the program itself.

Family Safety Victoria have granted funding for Safe and Equal to build on and deliver Fast Track across 2022-2024. This will include 5 rounds of the current core program (3 response and 2 prevention) to a total of 145 participants. The distribution of response and prevention programs has been considered with the variation in waitlist numbers and sizes of workforces. In September 2022 the core program is going under review by a learning design consultant with a goal to support the future sustainability and delivery efficiency of Fast Track in years to come. The review will explore ways to reduce reliance on guest experts to deliver content and bringing the facilitation model in-house while meeting all learning outcomes.

In 2024 Safe and Equal will also deliver a pilot program to test a new approach to leadership development. The pilot program seeks to use Fast Track evaluation data and learnings to develop a new program for professionals across the continuum of responding to and preventing family and gendered violence. The proposed model would deliver some content to a combined cohort of response and prevention professionals and then offer branches of development aligned to specialisation. To design the pilot, existing content from both streams would be mapped to identify both shared and specialised areas against the Capability Frameworks. This innovative and bespoke Victorian leadership development program offers an opportunity to bring practitioners across the continuum together to support networking and a greater shared understanding of each workforce.

Recommendations

For Fast Track:

1. **Recommendation:** Identify and use new ways to enhance diversity in recruitment, increasing representation of those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

2. **Recommendation:** Consider the ideal mix of online, face to face, and/or hybrid delivery of Fast Track for future programs – taking into account resourcing constraints, demonstrated accessibility benefits and effective online delivery, together with challenges for sustained participant engagement and informal discussion and networking opportunities.

3. **Recommendation:** As online delivery can provide some barriers to organic discussions and networking opportunities, Safe and Equal should explore ways to enhance networking and interaction among peers online throughout the Fast Track program.

4. **Recommendation:** Review the communication strategy with managers, to convey the level and type of involvement expected of them. Program staff can also explore ways to share concise core program information with managers to help them better support workplace project implementation and participants' further development post-program.

5. **Recommendation:** Review the Fast Track program content relating to advocacy and refine the focus or content accordingly to strengthen advocacy learning outcomes.

6. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore mechanisms for networking following the completion of Fast Track to continue to strengthen partnerships and collaboration sector wide.

7. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should develop a centralised database of Fast Track workplace projects to share previous projects; reducing duplication and increasing opportunities for collaborative work to strengthen sector-wide outcomes.

8. **Recommendation:** Review Fast Track program communications to clearly identify the program's focus on the capability framework, rather than the leadership skills some expected.

9. **Recommendation:** Identify ways to improve efficiency and sustainability in program delivery and administration, including reducing the reliance on scheduling guest experts to deliver a large proportion of the content, but with care to retain valuable variety in and engagement with guest experts' contributions.

10. **Recommendation:** Review internal processes and systems to strengthen efficiency and mitigate errors in data collection.

11. **Recommendation:** Review, update and scale back the Fast Track monitoring and evaluation framework for future iterations, ensuring it is fit for purpose and efficient.

For future development:

12. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should trial a sector-wide mentoring offering to meet ongoing leadership development needs and to sustain the outcomes of Fast Track to date.

13. **Recommendation:** Family Safety Victoria should support Safe and Equal to map the pathways for career progression in primary prevention, and extend the capability frameworks to Executive or Board level for both specialist family violence response and prevention workforces.

14. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore further workshops and leadership training content to support practitioners after Fast Track.

15. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore options for providing or signposting suitable professional development offerings relating to leadership skills, budget management and grant applications

16. **Recommendation:** Safe and Equal should explore ways to encourage or facilitate post-course support for participants implementing their workplace projects, to strengthen and sustain organisational and sector-level outcomes.

Final words

This evaluation demonstrates that Fast Track is highly effective in building key leadership and management capabilities across the specialist family violence and primary prevention workforce. It has engaged a large and reasonably diverse cohort of participants from across metropolitan and regional Victoria, and has substantially enhanced their knowledge, skills and confidence in line with sector capability frameworks. Participants' increased capability, confidence and connections are directly contributing to their career development, both through progression to more senior roles and through extending their responsibilities. Consistent with the underlying program logic, this evaluation found evidence and numerous examples of flow-on benefits for organisations and the broader sector through enhanced programs or services, increased collaboration and partnership activity, and retention of experience and skills within organisations and the sector.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation, together with a flexible approach to design and delivery, has enabled continuous improvement throughout the 6 rounds of delivery. This has resulted in strengthened learning outcomes and enhanced participant experience and has also enabled Safe and Equal to work through some of the challenges associated with wholly online delivery during Covid restrictions.

The evaluation has identified a number of refinements that could be explored or implemented in the next phase of Fast Track, together with improvements to data collection processes or systems and a more streamlined monitoring and evaluation approach. There are also opportunities to invest in strengthening the sustainability of participant and organisation or sector level outcomes post-program. Given clear continued demand for Fast Track and five more courses confirmed for delivery over the next two years, proactive efforts to sustain outcomes and continue supporting participants' career progression and retention will be vital to maximise the sector's investment in the program and enhance its impact.

Appendix 1: Fast Track Program Logic

29/04/2021

PROBLEM/ NEED

In order to lead highly effective organisations and shape a sustainable sector, Specialist Family Violence (SFV) response and Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) leaders need both sector-specific expertise, and management, leadership and technical capabilities. Workforce retention is a known challenge across the sector, and is further compounded by increasing demand for services, recent and rapid sector growth, and the changing nature of family violence leadership in a context of major sector reform. Furthermore, where some skilled SFV and PVAW practitioners choose to remain in the sector and advance their careers, there are insufficient opportunities for sector-specific management and leadership training that would support them to take on mid-level or senior roles, and fulfil them effectively and with confidence.

Therefore, the SFV and PVAW sector is significantly constrained by an under-supply of suitably skilled and capable practitioners available to take up mid-level prevention and senior-level response leadership roles. This need is hampering recruitment and limiting organisational capacity, and is likely contributing further to retention challenges through practitioner burn-out.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Fast Track aims to substantially grow the supply of suitably skilled professionals available to take up management and leadership roles within primary PVAW and response organisations. This will be achieved by developing a practice-informed, multi-modal leadership training and mentoring program underpinned by Family Safety Victoria's (FSV) workforce capability frameworks, and delivering it to a large number of experienced PVAW and SFV response practitioners.

By building the management and leadership capabilities of current practitioners, supporting them to build relationships with their peers and broadening their perspective across the sector, Fast Track equips and encourages participants to take on more senior roles. This will immediately grow the pool of managers with the dual skill-set required to lead highly effective organisations, mitigate workforce retention challenges and ensure crucial experience and feminist values are retained within the sector, and ultimately contribute to the development of a thriving, sustainable sector.

INPUTS	
People: • DVRCV project staff • Program facilitator, mentors & guest experts • SFV practitioners – transitioning to/new in senior management • Primary PVAW practitioners – transitioning to/new in mid-level management	**Funding** from Family Safety Victoria **Knowledge, resources & materials:** • *Responding to Family Violence and Preventing Family Violence and Violence against Women* Capability Frameworks • Fast Track pilot and evaluation findings

Continued from previous

ACTIVITIES

Course development:
- Translating existing Response course/materials into online format
- Producing & adapting new PVAW courses/materials in online format

Communications & engagement:
- Sector engagement & promotions – broad and targeted
- Engaging with participants' organisations – before & during the course

Recruitment:
- Recruit facilitator, guest speakers, mentors
- Screen & recruit up to 75 x suitable participants for the Response courses
- Screen & recruit up to 75 x suitable participants for the PVAW courses

Course delivery – 6 x courses each comprising:
- 10 x workshops
- 3 x mentoring sessions
- 1 x end of course forum
- Tools & support for workplace projects

Management & evaluation activities:
- Develop MEL Framework
- Collect feedback & data
- Monitoring & management for continuous improvement

OUTPUTS

6 x courses delivered

Up to 150 engaged, upskilled and connected graduates, with certificates to demonstrate expertise & course completion

Various outputs from participants' workplace projects within their organisations

New connections and relationships between:
- Participants from different organisations
- Participants and mentors
- A tested and refined professional development package for the sector
- Feedback & other M&E data
- Progress, monitoring & evaluation reports

OUTCOMES

Participant outcomes:

Short-term changes:
- Increased skills, knowledge & confidence in line with the Capability Frameworks
- Greater capability & effectiveness in their roles
- A supportive network of peers
- Experienced practitioners remain in the sector (retention)

Medium- to longer-term changes:
- Increased confidence through practical application of skills & knowledge in their roles
- Progression to more senior roles
- Reduced isolation & burn-out, feeling more engaged & empowered in their roles
- Actively advocating for & influencing strategic improvements – at organisation and sector levels

Organisational & sector outcomes:

Short-term changes:
- Substantially increased supply of skilled professionals available to take up leadership & management roles
- Trusting relationships between participants enhances sharing and collaboration between organisations
- The sector understands the value of the program and holds it in high regard = further demand & participation

Medium- to longer term changes:
- Increased organisational efficiency, capacity, diversity, innovation & values alignment = enhanced services & programs
- Increased understanding & coordination across sectors = new partnerships, reduced duplication
- Enhanced advocacy influences funding & system improvements

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IMPACT		
SFV organisations are strengthened and have greater capacity to provide people with the services they need. **People have access to more timely, appropriate and effective SFV services when needed.**	PVAW programs have greater capacity to: • reach more people • respond to unique community needs • become embedded within organisations and communities.	**Communities better understand VAW and its causes, and are skilled & engaged in preventing it & responding appropriately.** **The family violence response & primary PVAW systems are stronger, more sustainable & highly valued in the community.**

CONTEXT

This program is being delivered in the context of very high demand for SFV response services, which has increased in recent years as a result of recommendations, funding and action arising from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The current COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated demand for family violence services and enhanced community awareness of the need – as well as rapidly changing the way SFV and PVAW programs are being delivered, redirecting PVAW staff, and, in many cases, impacting the health and wellbeing of practitioners. These sector and workforce contextual factors are likely to affect some practitioners' ability to participate in the program, and, while associated COVIDSafe working requirements mean that (at least) the first Fast Track course will be delivered entirely online, this also enhances program accessibility for rural and regional practitioners.

Fast Track is an initiative of the Victorian Government's *Building from Strength* 10-year Industry Plan, and therefore likely to have a strong degree of interest and expectation from sector stakeholders – which will ideally be leveraged for buy-in and participation by key organisations. DVRCV is cognisant of the Future Social Services Institute's (FSSI) Leadership Intensive Program for executive-level SFV response leaders, in partnership with FSV, which will also be delivered online in 2021 and could be perceived to have some similar aims – therefore clear positioning or differentiation will be important in program communications.

DVRCV brings substantial organisational infrastructure, networks and reputation, which – together with its recent Fast Track pilot experience – will strengthen the program's success. It is also possible, however, that the current organisational merger with Domestic Violence Victoria may at times pose competing demands on the capacity of the project team and senior management.

EVIDENCE BASE

The need for Fast Track is well documented in Family Safety Victoria's recent workforce census, which illustrates workforce retention and turn-over issues, the need for training and professional development across the sector, the absence of peer networking and connection, and gives an indication of practitioners' intentions to remain within or move on from the sector.

DVRCV's approach to course design and delivery is underpinned by a growing evidence base and documented best practice. This includes the *Responding to Family Violence and Preventing Family Violence* and *Violence against Women* capability frameworks which detail the knowledge and skills required to respond to and prevent family violence, *Change the Story*, and intersectional feminist and anti-oppressive principles. The extensive body of knowledge around adult learning principles also informs DVRCV's approach, ensuring training participants' individual experiences are recognised and drawn out in discussion, and employing a range of learning modes and activities which enable nuanced application to participants' own roles and contexts. DVRCV also draws on internal research into blended learning within family violence contexts, and previous evaluation of multi-modal workforce capability building projects which provide valuable evidence of what works well, and what can be effectively scaled or extended.

ASSUMPTIONS

While the need for the program is well-evidenced, it is assumed that the current quantum of need for new leaders and mix of capabilities required has not changed significantly since Fast Track's 2018 pilot, and that there will be a sufficient level of demand from suitable practitioners for whom the program is intended. This may be a particular challenge for the prevention courses, as many PVAW practitioners don't strongly identify as being part of the sector – therefore may not see the program as being relevant for them, or may not even hear about it. Successful recruitment also relies upon participants' employers seeing the benefits of the program – and it is assumed that individual practitioners will have their employer's support not only to enrol and fulfil participation requirements, but also to undertake a meaningful workplace project, and ultimately have opportunities to extend beyond the scope of their current role and/or advance to a more senior position. All of these recruitment, participation and career progression assumptions will be addressed through a robust communications strategy designed to create clear expectations and nurture buy-in throughout each course and beyond.

Program design and implementation has been refined from the Fast Track pilot, and it is assumed that changes to recruitment processes, course design and facilitation will enable a greater focus on strategic topics and discussions by a more targeted cohort. The mentoring component is of shorter duration than most other professional mentoring programs, and as such, it is possible the mentoring outcomes or benefits may not be as clearly evident. Enabling participants to build relationships outside their own organisations is an important aim of the program – with each other, their mentors, and guest speakers – and it is assumed that this can be achieved in an online program with careful facilitation and adequate time and attention.

Appendix 2: Detailed methods and participants

Method/ data source	Participation			Comments/limitations
Pre-course survey	**Prevention**	Round 1	24 (of 26)	Surveys built in Evaluation Kit and distributed via Canvas before participants started workshop 1. Participants were asked to rate their current level of skill or knowledge for a list of capabilities mapped from the capability framework, and if online delivery was an important factor to applying for the program. The ratings of capabilities were intended to inform the level for the course to be pitched at for each particular cohort. This pre-course level assessment was not implemented: the timing the data was received did not allow enough time for content tweaks, and the application data provided gave sufficient general information about the cohort level. It was agreed that this would become potentially repetitive and resource intensive work that was not necessary for successful program delivery.
		Round 2	21 (of 22)	
		Round 3	23 (of 25)	
	Response	Round 1	24 (of 24)	
		Round 2	26 (of 27)	
		Round 3	25 (of 27)	
		Total	**143 (of 151)**	
Weekly workshop surveys	**Prevention**	Round 1	Average 21, Range 23–19	Weekly surveys were built in Evaluation Kit and distributed via Canvas. Participants would be prompted every time they opened Canvas until they completed the survey. This had led some participants to complete the survey despite not attending the sessions, and rating things as 'neutral'. This was amended for round 3, participants were asked if they attended the workshop, and can then exit the survey if they were not in attendance.
		Round 2	Average 13, Range 20–11	
		Round 3	Average 17, Range 23–10	
	Response	Round 1	Average 17, Range 17–9	
		Round 2	Average 23, Range 26–19	
		Round 3	Average 20, Range 23–16	
Post-course participant surveys	**Prevention**	Round 1	16 (of 22)	These surveys were built in Evaluation Kit and distributed via Canvas. There were some survey structure issues in response round 2 and response round 3, which limited the useability of certain data collected[5] – particularly the extent to which participants' skills or knowledge had increased across each capability.
		Round 2	17 (of 18)	
		Round 3	17 (of 22)	• This 'change in capability data' from response round 2 was discarded as invalid, because the questions were incorrectly formatted in a way that lost meaning for respondents.
	Response	Round 1	14 (of 20)	• The 'change in capability' data from response round 3 (RRd3) was measured using a 'low to high' scale rather than the 'degree of change' scale which was used for the other rounds. RRd3 ratings are therefore also excluded from the aggregated quantitative analysis presented in section 3.4 and instead a high-level review of RRd3 ratings has been conducted, compared with the ratings given by participants in their pre-course survey.
		Round 2	23 (of 27)	
		Round 3	14 (of 21)	
		Total	**101 (of 130)**	

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5 Further to these specific limitations of the 'change in capability' data, another structural issue was belatedly identified in this and a couple of other surveys that were distributed by Safe and Equal via Evaluation Kit in Canvas. This broader issue meant that quantitative rating data was 'flipped' for some questions – i.e. Strongly Agree responses were presented as Strongly Disagree, Agree as Disagree, and vice versa and etc. This data was carefully manually fixed by Safe and Equal where identified, and other survey data sets checked carefully to ensure incorrect ratings were not inadvertently included in the analysis.

Method/ data source	Participation			Comments/limitations
Post-course mentor surveys	**Prevention**	Round 1	6 (of 15)	Fast Track mentors were surveyed by Safe and Equal shortly after each round of the course completed. Surveys were distributed via Survey Monkey. Some mentors participated in multiple rounds of program delivery, and from qualitative responses it is clear that some mentors responded to the survey in more than one round of the program, however responses are anonymous so it is unclear how many individual mentors are included in the survey data. Therefore, number of responses relates to the number of instances rather than the number of mentors.
		Round 2	6 (of 12)	
		Round 3	4 (of 13)	
	Response	Round 1	5 (of 10)	
		Round 2	7 (of 12)	
		Round 3	6 (of 13)	
	Total		**34 (of 75)**	
Post-course manager surveys	**Prevention**	Round 1	6 (of 22)	The survey was sent out by Safe and Equal via Survey Monkey to participants' managers shortly after each course ended. Contact details for many managers were not available, or were out of date by the time the post-course survey was distributed. Despite reminder requests, response rates were generally quite low. Responses varied widely across the 6 rounds, with between 1 and 9 managers completing the survey. 24 responses were received in total.
		Round 2	2 (of 18)	
		Round 3	2 (of 22)	
	Response	Round 1	1 (of 20)	
		Round 2	9 (of 27)	
		Round 3	4 (of 21)	
	Total		**24 (of 130[6])**	
Follow-up participant survey	Pilot		2 (of 15)	A follow-up survey was sent via Survey Monkey to pilot, and round 1 and 2 participants to measure medium–longer term outcomes following Fast Track. This survey was sent in July 2022; 6-9 months after completing round 2 of the program, over a year for round 1 participants, and approximately 4 years for the pilot cohort. There was a tweak in language of the capabilities between response round 1 and 2, and these participants were therefore sent a slightly different survey to account for this. Prevention round 1 and 2 participants were sent the same survey.
	Prevention Rounds 1 & 2		6 (of 40)	
	Response Round 1		7 (of 20)	
	Response Round 2		7 (of 27)	
	Total		**22 (of 102)**	

6   Post-course surveys were sent to participants who did not withdraw, however did not submit their program logic and therefore graduate. Therefore, this number is different from the total number of Fast Track graduates.

Method/ data source	Participation	Comments/limitations
Follow-up manager questionnaire	5 participants: • 2 from Prevention • 3 from Response	The evaluation framework planned to conduct a follow-up survey or focus groups with participants' managers, to explore medium to longer term outcomes. However, in light of low levels of manager engagement with M&E surveys throughout the program, a different, more personalised approach was identified to try and gather follow-up data from this group. A very short survey was developed for verbal administration, including a blend of quantitative and qualitative questions. Lirata invited a random sample of managers from Rounds 1 and 2 of both the response and prevention courses. A number of the 23 managers invited could not be reached or were on leave. Five managers agreed and participated in short phone/zoom interviews conducted by Lirata during July 2022. • Because the focus of the questions was on medium to longer term outcomes for organisations, the more recent rounds were excluded from the sample. • Given the low number of responses, only high-level thematic analysis is presented in this report. Quantitative results should not be considered generalisable across the program.
Follow-up participant focus groups	Response round 1 & 2: 5 participants Prevention round 1: 4 participants	Lirata invited a random sample of participants from these cohorts to join in a focus group discussion. A small number of Safe and Equal employees (current and former) were excluded from the sample to avoid any conflict of interest. Of the 31 participants invited, 11 agreed and 9 participated. Two focus group sessions were facilitated by Lirata in late June 2022, one for the prevention participants and one for the response participants. • Because the focus of the questions was on medium to longer term outcomes for participants, the more recent rounds were excluded from the sample. • The Fast Track pilot cohort was also invited to participate. All but one of these people could either not be reached, did not respond, or were not available – so a pilot focus group did not proceed.
Mentor focus groups	8 participants	Lirata invited all mentors from across the 6 rounds to join in a focus group discussion, with the exception of a small number of Safe and Equal employees and board members (current and former) who were excluded from the sample to avoid any conflict of interest. Of the 32 mentors invited, 8 agreed and participated. Two focus group sessions were facilitated by Lirata in July 2022, with mentors involved in either the response, prevention or both cohorts able to select which session suited them best.
Program staff and facilitator interviews	3 participants	Lirata interviewed the 2 x Safe and Equal program staff and the Fast Track Facilitator twice during the project: • In June 2021, to gather reflections and lessons learned from the first round of response and prevention. The notes from this small group interview informed the team's interim review and refinement of the program before rolling out round 2. • In July 2022, to gather end of program reflections and lessons learned. At this point the Facilitator was interviewed separately from the Safe and Equal staff, and the notes from both interviews were combined to inform the final evaluation.

Appendix 3: Detailed data tables and graphs

Table 8: Fast Track application numbers

Application Numbers	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total	Grand total
Prevention	36	25	34	95	207
Response	27	40	45	115	

Table 9: Age range of Fast Track participants

Age range	Prevention	Response	Total
18–24	1% (n=1)	3% (n=2)	2% (n=3)
25 – 34	40% (n=28)	34% (n=26)	36% (n=54)
35 – 44	37% (n=26)	25% (n=19)	30% (n=45)
45 – 54	20% (n=14)	25% (n=19)	22% (n=33)
55 – 64	1% (n=1)	13% (n=10)	7% (n=11)
(blank)			3% (n=5)
Grand Total	100% (n=70)	100% (n=76)	100% (n=151)

Table 10: Gender identity of Fast Track participants

Gender Identity	Prevention	Response	Grand Total
F	69	75	144
M	3	2	5
X	1	1	2
Grand Total	73	78	151

Table 11: Post-course survey (n=96) 'After the course ends, I intend to continue implementing the project to completion'

Fast Track round	% Strongly agree & agree	% Neutral	% Strongly disagree & disagree
Response round 1	67% (n=8)	33% (n=4)	0%
Response round 2	87% (n=20)	13% (n=3)	0%
Response round 3	100% (n=13)	0%	0%
Prevention round 1	94% (n=15)	6% (n=1)	0%
Prevention round 2	75% (n=12)	13% (n=2)	13% (n=2)
Prevention round 3	88% (n=14)	6% (n=1)	6% (n=1)
Grand Total	**85%**	**11%**	**3%**

Table 12: Pre-course survey results (n=143)

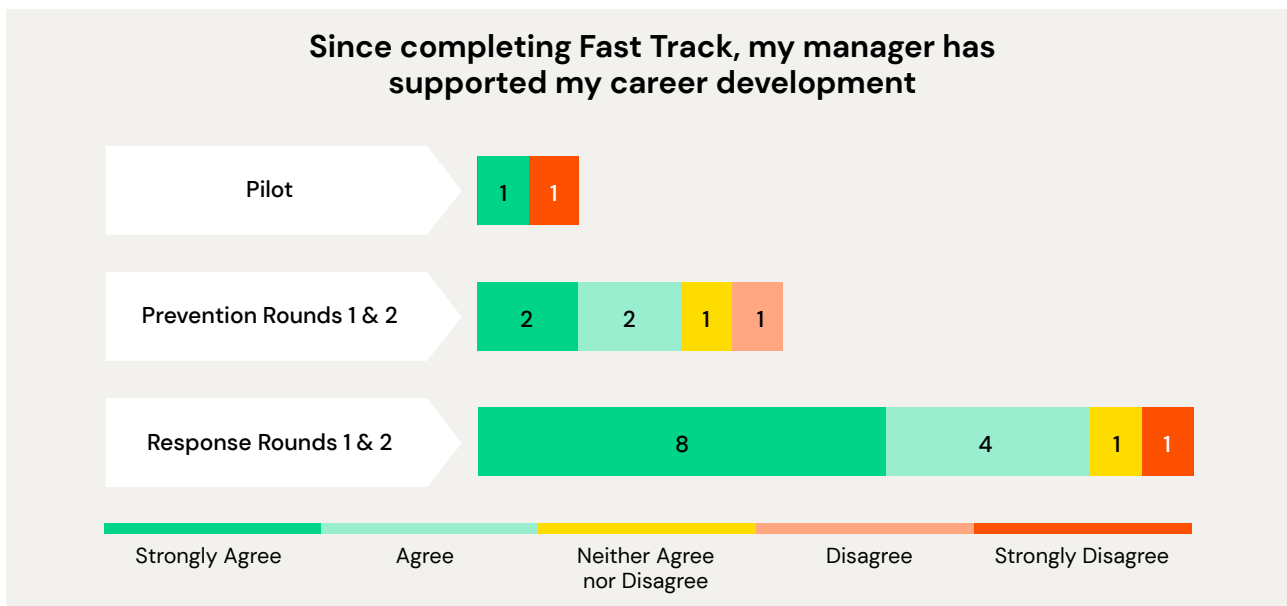| Was the online format of this program an important factor in your decision to apply?	Grand Total
Yes – it is easier for me to participate online than a face-to-face program	41% (n=59)
No – I would have applied regardless of delivery format	37% (n=54)
I usually prefer face to face training, but am still keen to participate in this program	17% (n=24)
Not sure	4% (n=6)

Table 13: Fast Track registrations by DHHS region

DHHS Area	Prevention	Response	Grand Total
Metro			
Inner Eastern Melbourne	7	7	14
Metro Melbourne	4	1	5
North–Eastern Melbourne	12	12	24
Outer Eastern Melbourne	5	5	10
Southern Melbourne	9	3	12
Western Melbourne	8	6	14
Total Metro participants	**62% (n=45)**	**44% (n=34)**	**52% (n=79)**
Regional			
Barwon	2	5	7
Bayside Peninsula	5	8	13
Brimbank Melton	2	3	5
Central Highlands	1	6	7
Goulburn	5	2	7
Hume Moreland	4	8	12
Inner Gippsland	2	2	4
Loddon	4	3	7
Mallee	0	1	1
Outer Gippsland	1	1	2
Ovens Murray	1	2	3
Western District	1	3	4
Total Regional participants	**38% (n=28)**	**56% (n=44)**	**48% (n=72)**
Grand Total	**73**	**78**	**151**

Table 14: Response Round 1 capabilities with no change reported by participants

Capability – reported no change	RRd1
Analyse and respond to staff and team supervision, support and capability development	**21%** N=3
Collating and analysing data for policy and systems advocacy	**21%** N=3
Developing and updating internal policies and procedures for management and practice	**21%** N=3
Engage in networks and coalitions to collaborate for system improvement and advocacy	**21%** N=3
Establish methods and systems within the workplace to foster reflective and culturally safe practice	**21%** N=3
Identify and analyse theoretical frameworks underpinning direct service delivery – including feminist, social justice, intersectional and psych-social approaches	**21%** N=3
Identify partnerships and multidisciplinary practice and explore working at a multi-agency, multidisciplinary level	**21%** N=3
Identify systemic gaps and frame advocacy recommendations based on direct service provision	**21%** N=3
Understand governance structures overseeing the family violence service system, the policy-making process and how to advocate within these structures	**21%** N=3

Figure 20: Participant follow-up survey results (n=22)

Since completing Fast Track, my manager has supported my career development

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pilot				1	1
Prevention Rounds 1 & 2	2	2	1	1	
Response Rounds 1 & 2	8	4	1		1

Appendix 4: Further analysis of the Fast Track mentoring component

Mentors in their post–course surveys support that the rapid mentorship component was a highly valuable element of Fast Track. Their feedback included:

All but one of the mentor respondents (n=32 of 33, around 97%) agreed that the rapid Mentors in their post–course surveys support that the rapid mentorship component was a highly valuable element of Fast Track. Their feedback included:

- All but one of the mentor respondents (n=32 of 33, around 97%) agreed that the rapid mentorship approach worked well and they had developed a supportive relationship with their mentee

- Around 81% (n=26 of 33) of mentor respondents agreed that the **length of the rapid mentorship worked well.** Of the 6 responses that did not agree, 4 were neutral and 2 disagreed.

- Around 85% (n=29 of 34) felt the rapid mentorship was **useful in progressing the participant's workplace project.** Of the 5 responses that did not agree, again 4 were neutral and only 1 disagreed. A more mixed response to this question is not surprising as there are likely a range of factors which affected participants' projects, limiting the gains from mentorship in some cases. Some mentors may also not have had sufficient information to assess the contribution of their mentorship to these projects.

The program staff and facilitator interviews also found that the mentoring component was a major strength, with the mentors adding even more value to the program than initially expected. Observations include:

- Often hearing participants talking about their mentors, and highlighting the mentoring as something they really appreciated about the course. This included discussing and clarify their workplace project, as well as how to deal with particular situations or challenges – the benefit of external perspective and experience.

- Many mentors attending the graduation forum to listen to their mentees talk about their workplace project, and provided lots of encouraging comments, sharing experience and advice, and their hopes for the participants.

- mentorship approach worked well and they had developed a supportive relationship with their mentee

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