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Synergy Automotive Repairs Program

Process Evaluation Report

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The Synergy Automotive Repairs Program (Synergy Program) is a diversionary social enterprise aimed at positively impacting the lives of young people involved in motor vehicle offending (e.g. theft, vandalism, hooning). The program was developed in order to capitalize on the interest in cars held by these young offenders as a means of developing pathways to sustainable and on-going meaningful employment in a field that matches their interests. It is suggested that, among other things, this approach would result in a reduction in the risk of further motor vehicle offending. In addition, it has also been suggested that this is a recognized skill shortage area within the automotive industry offering genuine employment opportunities for graduates of the Program.

The Synergy Program runs from a social enterprise framework. The Program became operational in June 2014 by Mission Australia, in partnership with Suncorp Insurance and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council. Therefore, it is a relatively new initiative. In order to assess the impact of the program, Dr. Monica Thielking was asked to provide a process evaluation of the initiative. Key recommendations and findings are presented below:

Key Recommendations:

1. Continue to nurture and develop the integrated partnership between Mission Australia, Suncorp and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council in order to achieve the program goal of achieving a reduction in further motor vehicle offending in participants' who have been convicted of a motor vehicle offence. While the program is valued by the participants and provides an avenue to future employment, this cross-sector approach is essential to its success.
2. That the Synergy Program develops a Program Logic Model in order to guide work, enable more targeted interventions and to inform future evaluations of youth outcomes.
3. That any future outcome evaluation of the Synergy Program includes a cost-effectiveness analysis. The uniqueness of the model due to the complex nature of the client group and the emphasis on operating as a social enterprise needs to be considered in this analysis.
4. Inputs and activities in the Synergy Program Logic Model should link with the literature on best practice program interventions to reduce recidivism and increase employability, health and wellbeing in juvenile offenders.
5. The Synergy Program Logic Model should include opportunities for pro-social recreational pursuits for Synergy participants in order to engage young people in meaningful social activities; provide a richer social and positive community experience; and reduce their contact with peers who continue to participate in criminal activity.
6. Improve access to psychological support for young people participating in the Synergy program.
7. The Synergy Model should incorporate the development of social participation skills into program training and include indicators of social participation skill competency in outcome measures.

8. In order to maintain a sustainable social enterprise, careful recruitment of program staff needs to be employed. Work competency should be balanced with the ability to teach and guide vulnerable youth, and an awareness and sensitivity to issues that marginalised young people bring to such a program.
9. The Synergy Program Logic Model should be informed by the literature on additional activities or interventions that young people could participate in that have been shown to effectively reduce recidivism, increase employability, health and wellbeing in juvenile offenders.
10. The Synergy Program Logic Model should align with the NMVTRC Best Practice Model (Sharley, 2002)
11. The Synergy Program Logic Model should prioritise the development of positive mentoring relationships between Synergy staff and participants.
12. Mechanisms should be in place to screen all young people for current homelessness and risk of homelessness; and have procedures in place to ensure all participants have access to safe and secure accommodation.
13. Mission Australia must ensure that Synergy staff has access to professional development and supervision opportunities, particularly in regard to self-care and mentoring vulnerable youth.

Key Findings

1. The Synergy program is innovative and has the opportunity to offer long-term positive outcomes to young people.
2. The program is valued by the participants as a way into employment and to get young people 'back on track'.
3. Young people value the mentoring relationships with trainers and the opportunity to participate in an adult 'work' environment where they are able to pursue their passion for cars in a productive manner.
4. Those working in the program, as well as those participating, felt that Synergy provided a good work experience which allowed skills beyond panel beating to be gained, such as time management, an improvement in self confidence and communication skills, and an increase in general social participation skills needed for every day living.
5. Those working in the program, as well as those participating, spoke about the 'transformative' effect that the Synergy program had on participants, particularly around shifting unhelpful youth attitudes about participation in crime and young people socialising less with peers who continue to engage in criminal activity.
6. There is a high degree of self-reported mental health problems in this cohort of young people as well as housing issues, which need to be addressed in programming. Low education attainment levels also need to be taken into account when designing training modules for this group.

Introduction

The Synergy Program officially commenced in February 2014 and became operational in June 2014 by Mission Australia in partnership with Suncorp Insurance (Australia's largest general insurer by Gross Written Premium, with a dedicated strategy to support community programs and initiatives) and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (a joint initiative between Australian governments and the insurance industry, to reduce the prevalence of motor vehicle theft). Mission Australia is a non-denominational Christian organisation that offers a wide range of social services. These include services for homelessness and social housing, families and children; youth; mental wellbeing and disability support; alcohol, drugs and other dependencies; and employment skills. The Synergy partnership between the three stakeholders (social service, industry and government) combines three overarching goals:

- 1. Reducing car-related crimes;*
- 2. Social justice and support for young people involved in car-related crimes; and*
- 3. Customer satisfaction and sustainable business development related to the car repair industry.*

Synergy is a bold and state-of-the art response to responding holistically and innovatively to a social and community problem that combines the needs and resources of a number of stakeholders who are either impacted by motor vehicle offending or who support and seek to change those who commit them.

Synergy has been developed as a social enterprise with the intention of achieving independent commercial viability and while Synergy is intended to operate as a juvenile justice diversionary initiative, the program does not currently receive justice funding. Synergy was established with initial funding of \$750,000 from the NMVTRC¹, as well as significant contributions from Mission Australia. Data is not yet available for the ongoing costs of running the program, however in 2012, Equino conducted an evaluation of the estimated costs and revenue of the program, to support the decision making process on the viability of establishing a Smash Repair Enterprising Program (SREP). This report concluded that there would be positive cash flow covering the operating costs of Synergy in Year One, with estimated revenue being \$1,071,250 in Year One, compared to an operating budget of \$925,350. Furthermore, the estimated savings for Mission Australia Victoria Fleet Vehicles was expected to be \$20,407. This positive cash flow was expected to continue in Year Two and Year Three.

Program Description

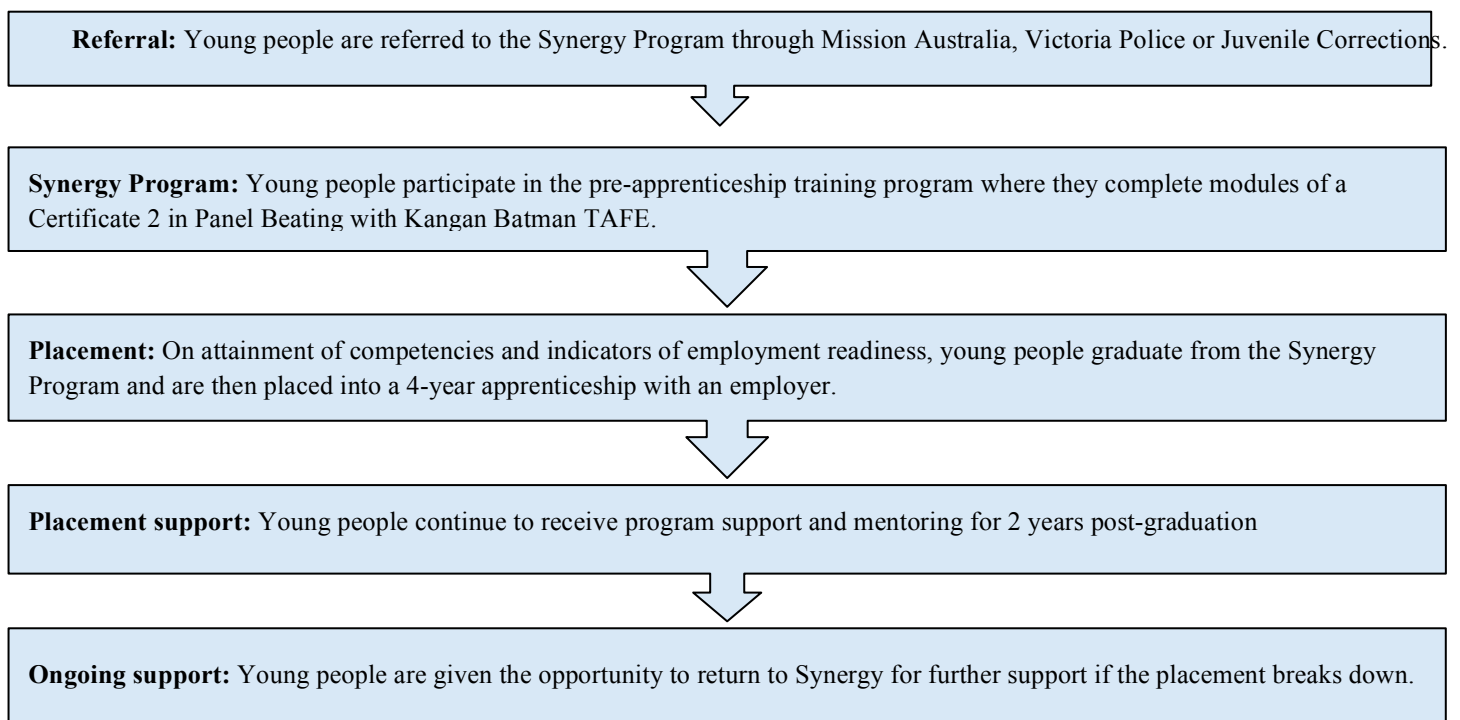
The Synergy Program is based in North Melbourne and operates as a fully commercial panel shop, offering a full suite of smash repair services carried out by Synergy staff trainers, who are assisted by young people in the program. In addition to gaining the practical experience and employability skills needed to commence a panel beating or spray-painting apprenticeship, participants may also work toward a relevant qualification. Participants complete a Certificate II in Paint and Panel delivered by educators from Kangan Technical and Further Education (TAFE) one day per week on site. Young people

¹ The NMVTRC is funded on the basis of 50/50 shares between state and territory governments (collectively) and the insurance industry. State and territory contributions are based on vehicle population.

also gain on-the-job training and work experience alongside qualified and experienced auto industry professionals and are supported by a team of training and employment specialists. Synergy, through its relationship with Suncorp, has access to 91 repairers in their network, most of which have made a commitment to take on apprentices after graduating from the program. It is the aim of Synergy that these graduates will be placed in apprenticeships within their area of residence.

The pre-apprenticeship training was initially intended to take six months to complete, after which participants would be assisted by Synergy employment workers to find a relevant apprenticeship opportunity. However, in light of the significant disadvantage faced by participants, the program now operates with a more tailored approach to suit individual participants' skills and ability (i.e., a combination of required skills and readiness to join the main stream labour market). Program completion is now based on satisfactory attainment of required skills (e.g., completion of the pre-apprenticeship training program and placement in a suitable apprenticeship) rather than according to the length of time the participant has been in the program. At this stage there is no upper limit to how long an individual can take to complete the Synergy program, and young people are able to continue to receive program support and mentoring for 2 years post-graduation from the Synergy Program.

Program Components



In addition to the formal education and training components, the Synergy Program also focuses on building participant life skills and personal development, setting it apart from other juvenile offending diversion programs. Employment and Training Officers provide participants with practical support for issues that range from calling young people to remind them to attend the workshop, providing housing assistance or court support, and talking with them about problematic drug and alcohol use. The Employment and Training Officer is also responsible for ensuring that participants are also able to meet

their mandated justice obligations and attend appointments related to their mental health, drug and alcohol and/or housing support needs.

The program currently is able to take on eight participants at a time and generally runs at full capacity with good levels of participant attendance. By mid-2015, 20 participants had commenced the program, nine participants had been placed in panel shops and four had returned to school. There are plans to expand the programs offered in 2016 to include a shorter 12-week Certificate I course accompanied by intensive job placement support from program staff.

The 'Synergy' Social Enterprise – Challenges and Opportunities

Non-profit agencies have begun embracing the social enterprise model as a way to achieve financial stability without being reliant on insecure external funding (Liacos, 2015). Ferguson (2007) describes setting up a social enterprise intervention for young homeless people in Los Angeles, combining services for employment, homelessness, and mental health. A key component of the program was a focus on personal and professional mentoring for participants. A feasibility study indicated that the social enterprise approach was able to successfully integrate outreach intervention services for homelessness and mental health needs with job training (Ferguson & Xie, 2008). Participants showed improvements in life satisfaction, family contact, peer support and depressive symptoms at follow up nine months after completing the intervention (Ferguson & Xie, 2008).

Similar to the Ferguson and Xie (2008) study, Synergy operates with a strong focus on personal and professional mentoring for participants. The participants present with a wide range of issues and needs, including learning disabilities, low educational attainment, mental health issues, substance use issues, unstable housing or homelessness, financial problems and a criminal history. Whilst the intended social and personal client outcomes from participation in Synergy is an important and worthwhile aim to strive for, there still remains a challenge of operating the Synergy Program as a social enterprise, whilst sustaining a financially viable business.

The additional supports required by participants contribute to far higher staff overheads compared to a purely commercial operation (Boothby, 2015). This means that it would be difficult for Synergy to run as a purely independent commercial business at its current scale, while also keeping prices competitive with those of non-socially oriented businesses. Some individual and corporate consumers may be willing to pay higher rates to support Synergy's social goals; however these consumers are unlikely to contribute to the necessary volume of business to the workshop to ensure financial sustainability (Boothby, 2015; Gray, Healy & Crofts, 2003). To drive more business to ethically driven consumers, there needs to be a greater focus on growing public awareness of the program (Barraket, 2015).

Given that program participants are at differing skill levels, there may be necessary productivity deficit costs to the business for quality control, including additional time and cost for trainees to complete work to the required standard and for program staff to oversee and correct young people's work if needed (Social Traders, 2011). However, feedback from staff indicates that this issue is managed well. There may also be times when the workshop is inactive or not running at full capacity (e.g., when young people do

not turn up to the workshop, or when they are completing TAFE work), and whilst this productivity loss is absorbed by Synergy, the staff recognise that intermittent unreliability of trainee workers is part and parcel of running a social enterprise with vulnerable youth, and adjust accordingly, realising that an important part of their role is to train young people to become work ready.

The most successful employment-motivated social enterprises are those where the business is labour intensive, skill acquisition is quick, and there are skill shortages and clear pathways to employment (Social Traders, 2011). While the Synergy Program is well-positioned according to these indicators, the additional running costs associated with also being a workplace integration social enterprise for disadvantaged young people can create additional financial strains (Social Traders, 2011). This strain is offset at Synergy by having skilled and qualified staff who do the majority of the work to a high industry standard, with young people assisting on tasks by following a graduated competency approach to skill acquisition and application.

The challenge remains, however, that without recurrent external funding, Mission Australia has responsibility for the ongoing economic risk of Synergy, with the financial viability of the business dependent on the workshop operation (Spear & Bidet, 2005). There are several factors that may negatively affect both the running costs and the commercial operation of Synergy. With profitability in the auto industry based on productivity, variable workflows lead to potential unreliable income. The partnership with Suncorp has positively addressed this issue, and the continued flow of vehicles from Suncorp and its subsidiaries (along with any external referrals), resulting from positive customer feedback is an indication of the high quality of the work completed by Synergy staff and youth trainee participants. Furthermore, whilst the smash repair industry itself is showing very gradual decline in forecasted employment rates, the industry is going through an adjustment due to consolidation and partnerships with Insurance providers (Deloitte Access Economics, 2014).

Recommendation 1: Continue to nurture and develop the integrated partnership between Mission Australia, Suncorp and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council in order to achieve the program goal of achieving a reduction in further motor vehicle offending in participants' who have been convicted of a motor vehicle offence. While the program is valued by the participants and provides an avenue to future employment, this cross-sector approach is essential to its success.

Given the above, it is suggested that additional discussion and planning be put into how the basic social enterprise model may be adapted to meet the needs of participants as well as the challenges experienced to date. A review of the above literature, as well as examination of other programs from around the world (i.e., grey literature) may provide additional insight into how the program may better operate within a social enterprise model. It is suggested that any subsequent review also be guided by a process that investigates programs involving individuals experiencing similar challenges. For example, there is a significant literature on the use of a social enterprise model for working with individuals experiencing learning disabilities, low educational achievement and mental health issues.

Evaluation Framework and Methodology

The Synergy program is still relatively new and given this, a number of unexpected obstacles were met by the evaluators in gaining informative program impact data as originally intended. Major obstacles to the planned outcome evaluation included limited agency record data and insufficient time available to conduct a post-program assessment with participants, particularly in relation to sustained employment and reduced participation in crime (in a twelve month evaluation project, with a recently enrolled cohort of youth). We therefore suggested that a process evaluation was the most suitable framework for this report, focusing on participants' and staff perceptions on program effectiveness via a series of interviews with participants and Synergy staff; and an analysis of participant needs and experiences via a quantitative survey.

Prior to conducting the process evaluation, two meetings were held with Synergy staff (3 November 2014 and 11 November 2014). The information gathered at these meetings was informative and provided detail on staff perspectives of the target group needs and the program itself. The information also served to inform the process evaluation framework. Staff had a strong opinion of the positive benefits Synergy had on the young people involved, as well as on broader society. All agreed that some of the youth outcomes that they had witnessed included: improved relationships with significant others; a reduction in recidivism; an increase in employability; a return to education; a reduction in drug use; and increased self-esteem and sense of purpose, dignity and personal meaning. A further summary of these pre-evaluation discussions with staff are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Synergy staff pre-evaluation interviews on youth needs and factors impacting positive outcomes

Youth needs upon entering the Synergy program
<p>Staff spoke about the complexity of needs that young people entering the Synergy program have. According to the input provided, it was suggested that the needs of young people include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complex or significant mental health issues.• Dual diagnosis (mental health and drug and alcohol) issues.• Numeracy and literacy problems.• Disjointed service integration to manage needs.• Lack of access to appropriate (male) role-models.• An unhelpful and unproductive mindset resulting from intergenerational disadvantage, an unstable family background and inappropriate and/or harmful social connections.
Client-level factors that impact success in the Program
<p>Despite the complex and often longstanding needs of young people entering the program, staff also spoke about the strengths that this particular cohort of young people bring to the panel-beating</p>

industry and the factors that contribute to their motivations to succeed. Suggested strengths of young people included:

- A strong personal interest and good knowledge about the machinations of cars and a desire to work with cars.
- Motivation to gain the financial opportunities that being a qualified smash repairer will provide, including having the financial autonomy to have their own car, their own place to live and the resources to support social and personal relationships.

Program-level factors that contribute to client outcomes

Prior to the evaluation, staff also reflected on the specific factors of the program that may contribute to successful outcomes - as well as ideas for improvement. It was unclear whether or not these practices were already in place, however, they were deemed to be essential ingredients for program success by those at the coalface and are worth mentioning. These included:

- Adequate pre-program screening of young people to ensure the right young people are included and matched with each other in particular intakes.
- Good screening and identification of mental health support needs of young people upon entry and referral to appropriate mental health services.
- Flexibility afforded to young people to meet their various court ordered commitments, mental health and health support services.
- The belief that young people should attend 5 days a week (rather than the current 3 day program), so that their time is occupied and to fully immerse them in a work (rather than crime) culture.
- Whilst being mindful of the support needs of the young people involved, there was the belief that the program should be run like a real workplace and participants treated as employed workers, creating a feeling of ownership, trust and autonomy with responsibility (i.e., money is not locked away as participants need to be trusted to not take valuables that customers may leave in their car). Staff indicated that this level of trust had positive results, with the experience being that trainees valued the opportunity to show that they could be trusted in the work environment.
- A view that young people should always be given a second-chance (i.e., after re-offending; if an employment placement breaks down; after non-attendance).
- A belief that the synergy program should remain a single-purpose entity (i.e., as a commercial smash repair service, while providing on-the-job training and work experience for marginalised youth who have a history of motor vehicle related offences).
- A view that the synergy program should receive adequate resources to fulfil its purpose.

Staff-level factors that contribute to client outcomes

According to the perspective of staff, the following factors related to program training and support staff were deemed important for successful outcomes:

- Pride in work and best-practice standards are always maintained and faithful to the purpose of Synergy as providing a commercial smash repair service.

- Assessment of quality of work is measured by 100% customer satisfaction and adherence to highest industry standards (including environmental practices) and that this is taught to and expected of all program participants.
- Positive role-modelling and ability to enforce strong boundaries and structure.
- Understand needs of participants and believe in their success.
- A flexible and non-judgemental attitude toward young people meeting their various mental health, health and youth corrections obligations during the working week.

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this section is to identify the overarching program goal as well as the specific objectives. It is important to note that the enunciation of these components of the program are often very closely tied to the important subsequent aspects of the program such as the flow-through model (i.e., selection and exit processes), intervention elements, impact assessment tools, and sustainability.

Overarching Program Goal

According to the materials provided, it appears that the overarching program goal is to positively impact the lives of young people who have been involved with automotive-related crimes by having them participate in a formalised apprenticeship program.

Specific Program Objectives

According to the documentation provided as well as interviews with key informants, the overall objectives of the Synergy Program are:

- To prevent participants re-offending (particularly motor-vehicle related offences, excluding traffic infringements);
- To bring about a shift in the lives of young offenders and other program participants through behavioural change and the development of life skills; and
- To provide effective pathways to employment or further vocational training (young people may be referred to Synergy by Mission Australia, Victoria Police, or Corrections Victoria. In some cases, participation in the program may enable young people to avoid or reduce a criminal sentence).

Assessment of the program goal and objectives may be best accomplished through a condensed logic model framework that provides for a succinct presentation of the information related to the outputs and outcomes for each goal within an objective.

Specifically, it is suggested that, due to the fact that this is a process evaluation, the assessment should be based on identifying:

1. The focus of each initiative within an objective;
2. The specific goals identified for each of the foci; and
3. The intended impact of the goals on end-users (e.g., staff, clients, other agencies).

As such, it is suggested that consideration in future work be given to re-framing the goal and objectives within the Program Logic Model framework in order to maximise the possibility of demonstrating impact in any subsequent outcome evaluation:



An application of the above model with regard to the Synergy Program suggests that although documentation identifies a goal and objectives (short to long term outcomes), the components are phrased in such a way as to make it difficult to quantify and measure the success of the initiative. Emphasis is placed on the issue of recidivism and actual employment as two objectives of the program. In addition, however, the success of programs may also be measured through empirical demonstration of impact on attitudes, cognition and behaviours linked to criminal behaviour, employment and general wellbeing (social and emotional) rather than on purely recidivism or sustained employment per se. Documentation around evidence-based inputs, activities and outputs, the key ingredients to produce those outcomes, also need to be included in a Synergy program framework, with related record keeping attached to these activities to ensure fidelity to the Synergy model and the ability to evaluate process and impact.

The current evaluation therefore, asked young people to reflect on how their participation in the Synergy program has impacted on their attitudes, values and behaviours in relation to auto theft and about their confidence in performing important life skills related to employment and social participation.

Recommendation 2: That the Synergy Program develops a Program Logic Model in order to guide work, enable more targeted interventions and to inform future evaluations of youth outcomes.

It is imperative that any successful intervention be framed around a clear, concise and consistent goal, and as stated above this may be accomplished through the development of a Program Logic Model. It appears there are currently a number of goals relating to the program which have been put forward at

various times and this may lead to a modicum of confusion with regard to the overarching direction of the initiative. It is suggested that consideration be given to putting forward a clear and concise goal statement and that the development of the statement may be informed by the service gap analysis discussed below.

Consideration should be given to identifying a clear, concise and consistent set of objectives to guide the implementation of the program goal as well as any potential expansion. As indicated above, there appears to be a wide variety of objectives presented across the documentation under a diversity of labels (e.g., goals, objectives, key performance indicators). Although this is a fairly common situation with relatively young programs, it is suggested that a review of these objectives be conducted and combined with the data/information gleaned from the program to date in order to produce a standardized set of objectives. The importance of this review is underscored by the fact that objectives traditionally form the core of any subsequent data collection processes and as such should be stated in a fashion that may be empirically tested. It is suggested that each stated objective be developed with an eye to ensuring it lends itself to empirical verification, thus indicating program impact. It is also suggested that objectives be identified which are able to be achieved with pre/post testing within a set timeframe and which provide empirical evidence that the program is positively impacting criminogenic needs (i.e., indirectly impacting recidivism) or employability, rather than attempting to impact recidivism or actual employment directly (although these could be included as important outcome long-term objectives of a longitudinal evaluation design).

Literature Review and Gap Analysis

This section of the report provides a comprehensive review of the scientific and grey literature (e.g., program evaluations, agency reports, government papers), which may be employed by the Synergy Program to inform the continued development of this initiative.

Motor Vehicle Offending in Victoria and Australia

Motor vehicle offending may include road traffic offences (e.g., speeding, dangerous driving, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs), in addition to theft from motor vehicles, and theft of motor vehicles. There were 48,506 thefts from motor vehicle offences recorded by Victoria Police in the 2013/14 year, an increase of 12.9% from the previous year (Victoria Police, 2014). There is a wealth of data on motor vehicle theft (MVT) offences as insurance agencies usually require a police report to process claims. Victoria Police data is based on criminal offences, alleged offender incidents, and victim reports based on crime reported to or detected by Victoria Police (CSA, 2015). According to the latest statistics published by the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC), while there has been an overall decrease in MVT Australia-wide in the four years to November 2015, MVT's increased by 10.8% in Victoria in the same period (NMVTRC, 2015b). Victoria Police recorded 16,320 MVT offences in the 2013/14 year, an 11.3% increase from the previous year (Victoria Police, 2014). MVT may be either short term (vehicle used for joyriding or commission of another crime, usually recovered but often damaged), or profit motivated (vehicles stolen and sold in whole or by parts, usually not recovered). In

the 2014/15 year, the majority of MVT's reported in Victoria were short term (9,350), rather than profit motivated (4,167) (NMVTRC, 2015b). Data from Operation Vehicle Watch, a Victoria Police initiative to reduce motor vehicle offending commencing in 2002, suggests that juvenile offenders are more likely to commit short term thefts (e.g. joyriding), while older adults are more likely to commit profit motivated vehicle theft (Rao & Darragh, 2005).

Demographics of Juvenile Motor Vehicle Offenders

Australian research indicates that individual characteristics may differentiate motor vehicle offenders from other types of offenders, as well as delineate juvenile from adult motor vehicle offenders. It should be noted however that juvenile motor vehicle offenders are not a homogenous group, with research suggesting that there are multiple and differing risk and protective factors associated with the onset and cessation of motor vehicle offending. The below information summarizes the characteristics of MVT offenders only, as there is comparatively little data relating to those offenders that have committed non-theft related motor vehicle offences.

MVT offending is primarily committed by young males, consistent with data suggesting this group makes up the largest proportion of offenders (Victoria Police, 2014). In 2014, 54% of all MVT offenders proceeded against by Victoria Police were young people aged 15-24, and of these, 83% were male (CSA, 2015). The most common age group of offenders was 15-19 years for both males (40%) and females (30%) (CSA, 2015). This offending profile appears to be consistent over time and around Australia. For example, in the 2003/04 year, 54% of MVT offenders apprehended by Victoria Police were under age 21 and 89% were male (Rao & Darragh, 2005). Analysis of South Australian police apprehension data from between 1995 and 2002 year indicated that juvenile offenders (aged 10-17 years) accounted for around 40% of MVT-related police apprehensions (Ziersch, 2005). However it is important to note that these statistics represent only those individuals whose offending has been detected and investigated by police. For example, Victoria Police statistics represent offenders proceeded against by police (i.e., offenders that have been investigated and charged) (CSA, 2015). South Australian data represents the police apprehension records of individuals born in 1985, for the commission of MVT offences as juveniles (Ziersch, 2005). There may be differences in the demographic characteristics of those offenders that remain undetected, or those that were cautioned or investigated but were not arrested or charged by police.

It appears that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders may also be disproportionately represented in the population of juveniles apprehended by police for MVT offences. For example, analysis of South Australian data where Indigenous status was recorded by police indicates that Indigenous young people comprised 30% of juvenile apprehensions for MVT in the 2003/04 year, while comprising only 4.2% of the total Australian population (ABS, 2010). Unfortunately there is a paucity of literature exploring causes and motivations for motor vehicle offending from an Indigenous perspective (Casey, 2007). Interestingly, race or Indigenous status is not always recorded by police, and where recorded may be based on the apprehending officers assessment rather than the offender's self-identified race or Indigenous status (Ziersch, 2005). It is important to note that higher rates of apprehension of Indigenous young people do not necessarily indicate disproportionate engagement in offending, but may be

indicative of systematic biases. It is suggested that the most effective interventions will be those that target the specific characteristics of juvenile motor vehicle offenders, including age, gender, and other demographic aspects (Ziersch, 2005).

Drug and Alcohol Use and Motor Vehicle Offenders

Research exploring the relationship between substance use and motor vehicle offending has yielded mixed results. Research with adult MVT offenders suggests a strong link between substance use and offending, but the relationship does not appear to be so clearly defined in research with juvenile MVT offenders. South Australian research with a sample of adult offenders found that MVT offending was associated with a high incidence of substance use. Specifically, compared to those who had not committed MVT offences, MVT offenders were more likely to test positive for at least one drug, and more likely to test positive to two or more drug types (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). The most frequent drugs detected were cannabis, amphetamines, and benzodiazepines (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). In addition, MVT offenders were more likely to report that most or all of the offences they committed in the past 12 months were drug related (42% cf 24%) (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). On the basis of these findings, it is suggested that MVT interventions would benefit from incorporation of a drug and alcohol counselling component (Ziersch & Turner, 2005).

However, research with juvenile offenders suggests that while young people involved in MVT offending also report heavy substance use, it is not strongly linked to their offending (Casey, 2007). For example, participants in a pilot MVT recidivism reduction program in Tasmania reported high rates of drug and alcohol use, but also indicated that this behaviour was normal and even desirable in their social circles (Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies [TILES], 2005). Given the police data indicating that adults are more likely than juveniles to commit profit-motivated MVT, it is possible that adult offenders may engage in MVT offending to financially support substance use or dependence. The heavy substance use reported by young people may progress to substance dependence, and contribute to the likelihood of continued and more serious MVT offending. While treatment or interventions for substance use by juvenile MVT offenders may not appear to be of immediate benefit in reducing MVT offending, it may serve as a protective factor against future offending.

Motor Vehicle Offending History and 'Career Trajectory'

Research comparing youth who had committed MVT's with those that had committed other non-vehicle related theft offences suggests that there are differences in the onset and pattern of the different types of offending. MVT tends to be characterised by early onset and a longer or more prolific offending career, and is often preceded by and associated with other non-vehicle related offending. Research with adult offenders also indicates that MVT offending is associated with limited educational attainment and unemployment. Juvenile MVT offenders are likely to have begun offending at an earlier age, to have recorded more offences as juveniles, and to record further contact with the criminal justice system, compared to those that commit non-vehicle related theft offences (Ziersch, 2005). Similar results have been found with adult offenders with MVT offenders were found to have had nearly twice the number of recorded offences, to have been younger at the time of first arrest, and to be twice as likely to have been imprisoned in the past 12 months, compared to adults that had committed non-vehicle related offences

(Ziersch & Turner, 2005). MVT is typically preceded by an escalation of offending, with juveniles progressing from non-vehicle-related offending through to non-theft motor vehicle offences, with first MVT being committed on average one year after the first non-theft motor vehicle offence (Ziersch, 2005). Young people typically commit MVT offences more frequently and with less time between offences compared to other juvenile offenders (Ziersch, 2005). MVT was found to be proportionately related to other offending, with the majority of those that had been charged with at least one MVT offence also having recorded one or more other serious offences prior to first MVT offences (Ziersch, 2005). MVT offending tends to be associated with social deprivation and low engagement with social institutions, including low income, low levels of education, and high unemployment rates (Casey, 2007). For example, adult MVT offenders were more likely to report Year 10 or earlier as their highest level of education (56%) compared to other offenders (48%) (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). MVT offenders were less likely to report working full time and more likely to be receiving a government benefit compared to other offenders (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). MVT offenders were also more likely to report receiving income from a crime related source in the past 30 days (47% cf 23%) (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). These findings suggest that targeting juvenile offenders, particularly prolific offenders, is likely to reduce both overall and repeat MVT offending (Ziersch, 2005). Given the relationship between MVT and other types of offending, targeting juveniles involved in MVT is also likely to reduce offending in general, and may be able to limit individual's ongoing involvement with the criminal justice system. Given the low rate of education attainment and high unemployment among MVT offenders, interventions that provide educational or employment opportunities may be effective in reducing repeat offending in this group. The NMVTRC best practice model also suggests that targeting young people at-risk of MVT involvement should be prioritised, in order to divert them from initially offending (Sharley, 2002).

Motivations for Commencing, Continuing, and Ceasing Offending

Research has identified several reasons that young people may become involved in MVT offending. The literature indicates that there is less variation in the reasons for continuing and ceasing offending cited by juvenile and adult MVT offenders. There is something of a consensus in the literature that 'joyriding' is the major motivation behind juvenile MVT. In interviews, young people have suggested that their major motivation was to alleviate boredom or out of a desire for excitement (Casey, 2007; TILES, 2005). There is some evidence that MVT offending may include a dependency component similar to substance addiction, which includes little consideration of the risks involved or remorse for the victims of their offending, and may contribute to continued offending (Casey, 2007). Young people have also reported that their involvement in MVT offending was a way to overcome overwhelming feelings of despondency and hopelessness for the future (TILES, 2005). Juvenile MVT offenders have also reported that they were motivated by a desire to drive (Casey, 2007; TILES, 2005). The NMVTRC suggests that juvenile MVT offending is linked to a lack of adequate public transport, with particularly high rates of MVT reported in socioeconomically deprived suburbs and towns with poor transport links (NMVTRC, 2004). Juvenile offenders may also be too young to gain legal driving experience, may not have family support to learn to drive, and in low-income families may not have access to a vehicle (Casey, 2007). The desire to drive may be linked to a strong 'car culture' among young males in Australia, which is thought to contribute to high rates of juvenile MVT (NMVTRC, 2004). Young people reported that their interest in driving and vehicles was influenced by their family, particularly their father or another significant male family member

(TILES, 2005). This interest may translate into offending, with young people reporting that they began offending in the presence of friends or relatives that are already involved in vehicle crime (Casey, 2007).

Gaining acceptance or status among peers may also be a motivating factor, with “earning” a custodial sentence for this offending seen as a rite of passage or a measure of status within a peer group (Casey, 2007). Consistent with police and NMVTRC data that indicates young people are more likely to commit short term rather than profit-motivated MVT, offenders’ report that their motivation for MVT offending changes as they age. Adult offenders identify MVT offending as a way of maintaining an otherwise unaffordable lifestyle (Casey, 2007), consistent with the findings that adult MVT offenders report high rates of unemployment and substance use (Ziersch & Turner, 2005). While some young people have reported that they began MVT offending for money or to support substance use (TILES, 2005), financial gain appears to be primarily a maintaining rather than precipitating factor in the majority of juvenile MVT offending (Casey, 2007).

Individuals who have ceased MVT offending generally report having outgrown the behaviour or moving on to a more adult and responsible lifestyle (Casey, 2007). This finding is in line with the juvenile justice literature indicating that the majority of young people tend to age out of offending, with only a minority of individuals engaging in persistent offending across the life course (AIHW, 2015b; Ziersch, 2005). Participants in a South Australian vocational training program for recidivist juvenile motor vehicle offenders reported that turning 18 was a motivation for desisting as they did not want to go an adult prison (West & Miller, 2000). Protective factors associated with desistance include appropriate employment and being in a stable intimate relationship (Casey, 2007). MVT offenders suggested that earlier intervention and assistance could have halted the progression of their offending, and in some cases may have prevented them from offending at all (Casey 2007). Participants in an MVT recidivism reduction pilot program identified that their involvement in the course improved their problem solving skills and ability to take personal responsibility for their behaviour, motivating them to reduce substance use, develop better relationships with their family and friends, spend less time “on the streets” and in the company of criminal peers, drive safely and reduce their involvement in both MVT and other offending (TILES, 2005). Research into offender motivation and desistance suggests that there are multiple and varied reasons that young people begin MVT offending and somewhat fewer reasons for desisting (Casey, 2007), although it must be noted that research has tended to revolve around male and non-Indigenous samples so may not be representative of some groups of motor vehicle offenders. Interventions that address reasons for offending at the individual level may be more effective than those that promote a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Sharley, 2002). Furthermore, given that the research indicates that motivation to desist occurs fairly naturally as a result of increased maturity and lifestyle stability, interventions that promote and facilitate this development may be most effective. Early intervention with young people may reduce the likelihood of repeat offending, as well as limit the length of their offending “career”.

Economic and Social Costs of Juvenile Motor Vehicle Offending

Australia has one of the highest rates of MVT in the world, which has been estimated to cost the community \$1 billion annually (AIC, 2015). Juvenile offenders are thought to be responsible for three out of every four car thefts in Australia (AIC, 2015). This estimate includes the direct costs of repairing or replacing vehicles and items stolen from vehicles (NMVTRC, 2004). Police investigation and processing of offenders for MVT poses an additional economic burden to the community. There are further costs to consumers for vehicle security measures and increased insurance costs as a result of being victimised (NMVTRC, 2004). Where a vehicle has been stolen for use in commission of other crimes (e.g. home burglary, drug related offending), there may be further indirect costs associated with MVT (NMVTRC, 2004).

Joyriding, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and any other type of unsafe driving places offenders, passengers, and other road users at risk of injury or death (Casey, 2007; NMVTRC, 2004). Police and coronial records reveal that between 2000-11 there have been 185 crashes and 218 deaths associated with police pursuits around Australia, an average of 15 crashes and 18 deaths per year (Lyneham & Hewitt-Rau, 2013). This figure includes drivers (50%), passengers (29%), and other road users including bystanders, pedestrians, and police officers (21%), who died during or within 10 minutes of termination of a pursuit (Lyneham & Hewitt-Rau, 2013). Young people aged 15-19 years accounted for the majority of pursuit related fatalities (27%), followed by those aged 20-24 (20%). Drivers involved in fatal pursuits were most commonly young males under the age of 25, and in 90% of cases had consumed alcohol or drugs, or a combination thereof (Lyneham & Hewitt-Rau, 2013). The most prevalent offences committed prior to a fatal pursuit were traffic related, including speeding, dangerous driving, or registration and roadworthy offences (38%), motor vehicle theft (31%), and drunk driving (19%) (Lyneham & Hewitt-Rau, 2013). Data from the NMVTRC suggests that between 2010 and 2015, there have been 40 documented MVT-related fatalities, 16 of these being young people aged between 10-19 (NMVTRC, 2015). Data is not available for MVT-related injuries sustained by drivers, passengers, other road users, or police. Death or injury related to MVT offending also incurs substantial economic cost to the community, including the costs of emergency and ongoing medical treatment, and the costs of agencies such as the TAC and victims of crime compensation funds.

Economic and Social Costs of Juvenile Offender Detention and Supervision

Depending on age, criminal history, risk, need and capacity, juvenile offenders may be processed through the juvenile or adult justice system. The costs of juvenile justice are not known for all states, and estimates from different sources vary. Data submitted to the Senate inquiry into justice reinvestment, reveals that for the 2010-11 year in NSW, the cost of detaining one juvenile offender was \$237,980 annually, significantly higher than the \$91,000 annual cost of detaining an adult (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Juvenile justice supervision is more resource intensive than adult incarceration, with higher costs relating to higher ratios of staff to offenders and provision of educational services in detention (Richards, 2011). More recently released data indicates that the cost of detaining one juvenile offender was more than \$440,000, nationally, in the 2013-14 year (Productivity Commission, 2015), and in the same year there were 951 young people in detention on average on any given day (AIHW, 2015a). The cost of community supervision is substantially lower than the cost of detention, for both juvenile and

adult offenders. Nationally, the cost per person for community-based supervision has been estimated at \$39,760 annually for the 2013-14 year, a fraction of the cost of detention (Productivity Commission, 2015). Costs may be even lower in some jurisdictions, with the NSW data indicating that community-based supervision cost \$6,100 annually for juvenile offenders and \$10,700 for adult offenders in the 2010-11 year (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). In the 2013-14 year, there were 5,191 juvenile offenders supervised in the community on any given day (AIHW, 2015a).

There are also substantial indirect economic costs associated with incarceration. These include the cost to the individual and community of loss of employment income and opportunities during and post-incarceration, and the cost to the government of providing unemployment welfare services (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Unemployment and poor employment prospects are related to higher likelihood of future offending, particularly for juvenile offenders who are at a critical period for engagement in education and development of employability skills (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

There is evidence to suggest that current justice sentencing options may not reduce offending, particularly for juvenile MVT offenders. Data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that young people have high rates of return to sentenced supervision or detention early after being released (AIHW, 2015b). For example, in the 2012-13 year, of the juvenile offenders (aged 10-16) who were released from sentenced detention, 50% returned to sentenced supervision within 6 months of release, and 76% returned to sentenced supervision within 12 months of release (AIHW, 2015b). Those that were placed into community-based supervision were less likely to reoffend. Of those juvenile offenders (aged 10-16) released from sentenced supervision in 2012-13, 20% returned to sentenced supervision within 6 months, and 44% within 12 months (AIHW, 2015b). A recent Victorian study of recidivism found that young offenders and Indigenous offenders were two of the groups at greatest risk of reoffending within two years of release (Holland, Pointon, & Ross, 2007). These findings were further confirmed by Smith and Jones (2008), and Zhang and Webster (2010). Casey (2007) also found that motor vehicle offenders had a higher risk of recidivism compared to other offenders.

These high rates of recidivism among juvenile MVT offenders suggest that detention may not be the most effective method of reducing this type of offending. It is suggested that incarceration does not effectively address the underlying issues that contributed to MVT offending, resulting in young people being released back into the community without the support, education and training, and basic living skills necessary to desist from offending (Sharley, 2002). Community based sentences may enable young people to continue engaging in education, and enable them to engage in pro-social behaviour and attitudes and develop more functional interpersonal relationships within their social network (Sharley, 2002).

In addition to the economic costs of detention, there are further social costs for the individual, including impacts on wellbeing, mental health, and quality of life. The rate of mental illness in the prison population is 2.5 times higher than in the general population, and incarceration is associated with poor physical health outcomes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). Young people in detention are also highly vulnerable to poor psychological health including depression and anxiety (AIHW, 2015a). This may be

related to the disruption and loss of positive family and community bonds associated with incarceration, and this may have a particularly profound negative impact on Indigenous people (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Recommendation 3: That any future outcome evaluation of the Synergy Program includes a cost-effectiveness analysis. The uniqueness of the model due to the complex nature of the client group and the emphasis on operating as a social enterprise needs to be considered in this analysis.

The above literature review provides a comprehensive and detailed summary of the academic and grey literature related to the issue of youth motor vehicle offending. Among other things, the literature identifies a variety of precipitating, maintenance and cessation information relating to why young people engage in this crime and when they are likely to stop. The literature review also provides detailed insight into numerous criminogenic factors related to these offenders including education, substance use/abuse, peers and associates, and criminal history. Given that the literature review is rife with information, a two recommendations are put forward:

Recommendation 4: Inputs and activities in the Synergy Program Logic Model should link with the literature on best practice program interventions to reduce recidivism and increase employability, health and wellbeing in juvenile offenders.

It is suggested that an effort should be made to clearly link the literature to the specific aspects of the program. In addition to providing for a more empirically-based intervention, this would also allow stakeholders to identify the specific impacts they wish to make with regard to the program (i.e., education, substance use/abuse, peers and associates).

Recommendation 5: The Synergy Program Logic Model should be informed by the literature on additional activities or interventions that young people could participate in that have been shown to effectively reduce recidivism, increase employability, health and wellbeing in juvenile offenders.

It is suggested that the above literature also be reviewed in order to identify aspects of the program that may not directly relate to youth motor vehicle offending but can be linked to the issue through the literature. For example, the literature appears to indicate that offending is sometimes related to one's associates and as such the program may include some aspect related to positive peer relationships as a non-direct approach to positively impacting behaviours.

Best Practice Review

The purpose of this section of the report is to summarize and assess the best practice review, which was conducted for the evaluation. The completion of a best practice review is a vital aspect of any intervention for a number of reasons, including identifying similar programs and their effectiveness, identifying lessons learned, and identifying potential implementation challenges.

Diversion Programs for Juvenile Motor Vehicle Offenders

In Australia, young people who have been found guilty of an offence may be given an unsupervised community-based sentence, or a supervised sentence (either community-based or in detention) (AIHW, 2015b). Young people given a supervised sentence are also provided with services designed to reduce the frequency and seriousness of any future offending (AIHW, 2015b). However, community-based supervision orders often include fairly onerous requirements such as curfews and non-association with identified peers, that can lead to young people breaching the orders' conditions and being subject to further penalties (AIHW, 2015b). For non-violent juvenile offenders, such as those involved in MVT, sentencing is focused on diversion from the criminal justice system and rehabilitation, as it has been recognised that incarceration can lead to further offending or other negative consequences for young people (AIHW, 2015b).

Court ordered diversion plans have become a more popular option to deal with low-level offending (Fisher, 2008). Police may refer suitable applicants and if it is considered appropriate by a magistrate and agreed to by the offender, the offender may be court-ordered to complete a diversion plan of up to 12 months duration (Fisher, 2008). The plan may require offenders to complete a program such as the Synergy Program, treatment for substance use, or complete two or more conditions based on restorative justice principles, including writing a letter of apology or providing compensation to the victim(s) of their offending (Fisher, 2008). On successful completion of a diversion plan, the outcome is recorded similarly to a caution so as not to be available in a criminal record check and does not need to be disclosed to employers as a prior offence (Fisher, 2008). Diversion plans may carry fewer negative impacts for young people.

The first specific diversionary programs for motor vehicle offenders were originally developed by the UK probation service in the 1970's (Sharley, 2002). These initial programs aimed to reduce recidivism by using offenders' interest in cars to engage them in related legal and pro-social activities including car racing and maintenance (Sharley, 2002). In addition to promoting behaviour and attitude change, more recently developed programs focus on vocational education and training, and developing participant's life skills (Sharley, 2002; Goodwin, 2005).

A number of diversion plans for young motor vehicle offenders have been developed and implemented across Australia, including the following:

Hand Brake Turn

Established in 1994, Hand Brake Turn (HBT) is an initiative of Concern Australia. Primarily funded through the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program and donations or in-kind support, it now operates in four locations across Victoria and NSW (KPMG, 2008). It is a combined vocational training and crime prevention scheme that targets young people at risk of MVT offending (KPMG, 2008). The aims are to provide practical training, personal support and employment and training pathways for participants, as well as to break the offending and unemployment cycle for participants with criminal histories by preventing them from initial or further entry into the criminal justice system (Sharley, 2002). Participants complete a Certificate II in Automotive Body Repair Technology and gain workshop experience and further education, as well as practical support from program staff. The program can be completed in nine weeks, but the structure of delivery is flexible to suit participants' needs.

An independent evaluation identified a high success rate for HBT participants, with 74% of the 2,127 young people that participated between 1998 and 2008 completing the training and job search component of the program (KPMG, 2008). Non-completion was often attributed to external events, although some staff identified that they were unable to achieve the outcome goals of the program while providing the intensive support needed by some participants with more complex issues (KPMG, 2008). Participants reported that they had been disengaged from school or the workforce prior to joining HBT, but at the time of evaluation two thirds of past participants surveyed were working or studying, and 42% were completing or had completed an apprenticeship (KPMG, 2008). In addition to developing job readiness and practical skills, participants also reported increased motivation and self-worth, better time management, greater personal responsibility, and being able to work effectively in a team (KPMG, 2008). Program strengths identified by participants, program staff, and organisation management were the flexibility of the training delivery and provision of long-term support where required, opportunity to gain work experience, and staff taking a positive attitude toward participants and identifying their strengths (KPMG, 2008).

The evaluation also revealed considerable cost savings to the community. KPMG (2008) found that the cost of providing the program to one participant was approximately \$5,400, inclusive of the costs of the training course, and the provision of a high degree of support for participants with multiple and sometimes complex issues. The cost per participant may differ for Synergy, however this provides an indication that the cost of providing an intensive program to one participant is roughly comparable to (and perhaps more cost effective than) the annual cost of keeping one juvenile offender in detention or under community-based supervision (for example one source of data indicates that the cost of detaining one juvenile offender was more than \$440,000, nationally, in the 2013-14 year, Productivity Commission, 2015).

Street Legal

Established in South Australia in 1989, Street Legal was a program targeting recidivist juvenile offenders with a history of motor vehicle-related offending (West & Miller, 2000). The aim in targeting recidivist offenders was to reduce overall juvenile offending, based on the association that has been found between vehicle-related offending and other forms of offending (West & Miller, 2000). The program was based on

characteristics of effective intervention programs for juvenile motor vehicle offenders identified by the National Motor Vehicle Theft Task Force (West & Miller, 2000). These include components such as personal development, behaviour change, targeted training and employment programs, and programs to develop pro-social peer relationships and recreational activities, tailored with a case management approach to the vulnerabilities and the multiple and complex needs of participants (West & Miller, 2000). Participants were able to complete pre-apprenticeship training TAFE modules and gain practical workshop training experience (West & Miller, 2000). A program evaluation was conducted via interviews with 12 past and present participants and four current staff members (West & Miller, 2000). Staff reported that the workshop was a drawcard for participants, attracting them initially and motivating them to continue attending. Staff also reported that participants responded well to the trainee label and uniform, as it allowed them to take on a different identity to being an offender or juvenile delinquent (West & Miller, 2000).

Participants reported that attending the workshop alleviated their boredom, and in some cases lead to a reduction in substance use and associated offending (West & Miller, 2000). Participants also reported that they were able to develop positive relationships with program staff and other participants in the workshop, and identified these interpersonal skills as being important to their future success (West & Miller, 2000). The pro-social recreational activities offered to participants were primarily legal motor vehicle related activities, such as go-karting, and participants reported that these were a highlight of the program (West & Miller, 2000). In terms of impact on offending, the program appeared to be successful, with only one current participant reporting engaging in motor vehicle-related offending while completing the program, and past participants reporting no motor vehicle-related reoffending since completing the program (West & Miller, 2000). Of the 62 young people that participated in the program over the course of the evaluation, 14 dropped out before the course concluded (West & Miller, 2000). Drop outs were attributed to participant's unresolved personal issues rather than issues with the program, and it was suggested that additional casework support might boost successful completion numbers (West & Miller, 2000). However there were also low attendance rates during the course, with only 25 participants attending 50% of the course and the highest attendance rates being on workshop and recreational activity days (West & Miller, 2000). It was suggested that the lengthy waiting list for the program may have impacted attendance, with participants losing interest and motivation by the time a place was available for them in the program (West & Miller, 2000). Attendance motivation may also be increased by providing incentives to participants (West & Miller, 2000). Although considered methodologically sound and successful, the program was reported to suffer from funding difficulties (Sharley, 2002). An internet search could not identify any indication that the Street Legal program was currently, or had recently been, operational.

U-Turn

A Mission Australia program which ran from 2003-2015, U-Turn was funded by the NMVTRC and Tasmanian Government, and based on the NMVTRC best practice model. The program was for young people aged 15-20 who were at risk, or had a history of, MVT involvement (Goodwin, 2005). U-Turn was also piloted in New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland but was only adopted in Tasmania (Goodwin, 2005). More than 500 young people were involved in the program and outcome analysis

indicates that young people involved in the program significantly reduced their offending. The core component of the program was that participants completed a structured 10 week training course in car maintenance and body work, while also receiving case management support, links to employment and further education, a range of recreational activities focused on legal, safe, and fun motorsports (e.g. go-karting), and post-course support for up to 2 years after completing the program to reduce recidivism (Goodwin, 2005). The U-Turn program included two key features that were not included in the NMVTRC best practice model. First, the program was underpinned by the principle of restorative justice, with participants completing vehicle maintenance and repair work to benefit community organisations and victims of crime. Rather than focusing on punishment, restorative justice is an approach that focuses on supporting the offender to take responsibility for their behaviour, make amends, and avoid further offending (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012). There is support in the literature for the efficacy of restorative justice approaches in reducing recidivism, although at present these interventions are primarily used in Indigenous communities worldwide (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012). The restorative justice component was thought to contribute to participant empowerment, contributing to positive youth development and community integration by involving participants as partners in the program (TILES, 2005).

Second, the U-Turn program included a dedicated supported accommodation service to enable young people located outside of the main program catchment area (Hobart) to attend the course. Participants reflected positively that the availability of this accommodation enabled them to take part in U-Turn, although some participants did feel isolated from their family and peers and others reported that the rules of the accommodation service left them feeling they were being punished when they felt they had done nothing wrong (TILES, 2005). Participants reported that the mentoring from program staff and the experience of positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect contributed to their personal development in the program (TILES, 2005). This included positive changes in anti-social behaviour, life and personal skills, job readiness including practical skill development and industry experience, self-esteem, confidence, social skills, self-awareness and awareness of others and the broader community (TILES, 2005). However, it was noted that participants may require some assistance or preparation in order to successfully move on from these positive relationships once they have completed the program (TILES, 2005). There were initial concerns that mixing clients of different ages and offending histories may have resulted in negative outcomes for the younger and less criminally “experienced” participants, and this does seem to have occurred for a very small minority of at-risk participants. However, mixing participants of different ages was found to be a strength of the program, as partnering older and younger participants resulted in low levels of vandalism and antisocial behaviour at the site. The effectiveness of the program with a mixed-gender cohort has not yet been evaluated (TILES, 2005).

A key success of the U-Turn program was that it harnessed participants’ interests in vehicles and ‘car culture’ (TILES, 2005). Having a shared interest between participants and staff enhances rapport building and enables participants to view program staff as positive role models that demonstrate pro-social attitudes and behaviour in the context of car culture (TILES, 2005). Using participants’ interest in cars to engage participants in the education and training aspects of the program may be particularly helpful for participants that have had negative experiences or become disengaged from formal education settings

(Sharley, 2002). Challenges of the U-Turn program included securing funding and stakeholder support, determining the best form of post-course support for participants and providing this to participants that lived outside of the main catchment area, defining and measuring recidivism and success outside of a narrow definition of motor vehicle theft reduction (i.e. recognising positive impact on participants health, motivation, self-esteem and relationships, recognising continued but reduced offending as a success) and recruiting and retaining the right staff for the program team (Goodwin, 2005). Final program evaluation data is not available, however the pilot evaluation found that of 83 participants, 52 obtained a Certificate of Completion (TILES, 2005). Some of the participants that had dropped out ended up returning to work toward gaining their automotive certificate. A 2005 analysis of further offending of participants that completed the course in 2003-04 (excluding road traffic offences such as speeding and driving licence offences) indicated very low rates of MVT offending and other offending for both the at-risk participants and those with a prior history of MVT offences (TILES, 2005). Two of the participants surveyed reported they had committed non-motor vehicle related offending after completing the course (TILES, 2005).

The NMVTRC Best Practice Model

The NMVTRC has developed a best practice model for effective diversionary programs for juvenile MVT offenders, based on review and evaluation of various motor vehicle theft reduction projects in the UK and Australia, including Hand Brake Turn and Street Legal (Sharley, 2002). The model defines a range of factors that have been identified in the literature as contributing to the success of diversionary programs for juvenile MVT offenders. These relate to both internal and operational aspects of the program, as well as individual participant needs that may influence program effectiveness. Specific program and participant recommendations are enunciated in the Table 2.

Table 2

The NMVTRC Best Practice Model

Program factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be well defined aims and objectives, and a well-structured course curriculum delivered through responsive, flexible teaching methods • There should be management accountability for program operation but this should remain separate from the day-to-day running of the program • The program should be adequately resourced and have multiple funding sources • There should be adequate training and support for program staff, with an appropriate staff-participant ratio maintained • There should be a system of monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of activities and the program • Programs should be based in locations participants are likely to be drawn from as community based programs generally show more positive results • The program should reflect multi-agency involvement, and agencies should partner with business and local community networks to support the initiative • External agencies, including police and juvenile justice, should provide adequate participant referrals to the program, based on the positive reputation and/or demonstrated success of program
Participant factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants should be accepted to the program if there is evidence of their interest, readiness to make a new start, and voluntary commitment to the program

- Participants should be kept motivated and engaged with recreational opportunities and incentives that meet their needs and reflect their interests
- The program should reflect the participants' criminogenic needs and risks, including any specific factors in their lifestyle or attitudes that might contribute to offending or desistance
- The program content and approach should demonstrate cultural sensitivity for ATSI and CALD clients
- A multi-modal delivery framework should be used, with participants taking part in individual and group work, and where possible the program should engage with participants' families. Program components should include CBT or other therapeutic treatment/training to address participants' attitudes and offending behaviour, practical vocational training, training to improving literacy and numeracy, and training to develop basic life skills.
- Participants should have access to developmental opportunities within the program (e.g. interpersonal skills, team work, communication techniques, self-confidence), as well as outside the program (e.g. learner driver training, access to apprenticeships and employment)
- Program support should continue for 12-24 months after participants have completed the formal requirements of the program, to promote sustained change. This should include support to link into community networks, and ongoing monitoring/follow up of any issues or risks identified during the program (e.g. housing instability, family instability).

In consideration of the recommendations of the NMVTRC Best Practice Model, at the time of starting the evaluation, Synergy participants were initially expected to have completed the formal program requirements within six months, despite entering the program at different skill and maturity levels, with multiple and varying needs, requiring a more flexible program delivery approach to be taken. It is reassuring that through the course of the evaluation, project completion time was modified to become a flexible component of the program, and dependent on the staff and young person's assessment that they are ready (competently and confidently) to 'graduate'. This is in line with the literature that suggests the most effective diversionary programs are those that extend over 12 months (TILE, 2005). It is also in line with findings from an early evaluation of U-Turn, which recommended that the program be extended to give participants time to settle in, essentially allowing participants some time to get used to the structure and requirements, and make necessary lifestyle changes to support their participation (TILE, 2005).

Recommendation 6: The Synergy Program Logic Model should align with the NMVTRC Best Practice Model (Sharley. 2002).

Recommendation 7: The Synergy Program Logic Model should prioritise the development of positive mentoring relationships between Synergy staff and participants.

Extending the program length also facilitates the building of trusting and respectful relationships between clients and program staff, and to allow the program staff to identify and address participants' specific needs and skill deficits to support positive outcomes (TILE, 2005). In the evaluation of Hand Brake Turn, it emerged that staff felt there was too strong a focus on outcomes such as program completion, which inhibited their ability to provide the intensive support required by some participants and the end result was that particularly vulnerable participants dropped out of the program (KPMG, 2008). By taking a more flexible approach to program delivery, Synergy staff members are better able to

support participant's individual needs, which may lead to a high rate of successful program completion. Participants also require staff flexibility and support to meet their various corrections, mental health, and health service appointments in addition to program commitments, as nonattendance could have significant negative impacts for young people, both personally and legally.

Many participants in similar programs have reported a history of family conflict and abuse, and otherwise dysfunctional relationships with family and peers (KPMG, 2008; TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000). Synergy participants are therefore likely to seek advice from program staff, which requires building a relationship of mutual trust and respect. This positive mentoring relationship which has been identified as a key factor in the success of similar programs (KPMG, 2008; TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000), although it is not mentioned in the best practice model, perhaps because it is difficult to define and operationalize (Sharley, 2002).

Participants in similar programs reported that they had not previously experienced respectful treatment from authority figures, and participating in the program enabled them to build positive relationships and leave behind a negative identity associated with delinquency or offending (KMPG, 2008; West & Miller, 2000). By prioritising the development of a positive relationship between staff and participants, Synergy meets participants' need for a trustworthy adult role model that they feel comfortable seeking help from. Synergy program staff have identified that working together with participants in the workshop is a key contributor to building this positive relationship, as participants seem to feel more comfortable opening up to staff in this informal environment compared to their typical experience of talking to a caseworker behind a desk.

Participants in previous programs reported negative experiences of education, including difficulties with other students, teachers or dealing with authority, school suspension and exclusion from traditional education (KPMG, 2008; TILES, 2005). They had been disengaged from formal education and the workforce, and identified that their offending or substance use was related to boredom or a sense of hopelessness for the future (TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000). Their participation in the program provided them with something to do and something look forward to, with practical workshop experience reported to be a particular attraction and rewarding experience for participants (KPMG, 2008; TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, participants reported that the work undertaken in the program provided them with a concrete sense of achievement, for example by fixing a car, passing an exam, or attaining a certificate (TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000). The practical skills gained were identified as one of the major benefits of program participation and a factor in successfully obtaining employment after completing the program (KPMG, 2008; West & Miller, 20005).

On completion of the Synergy Program, participants will have attained a TAFE qualification and gained practical experience in the workshop, which should provide them with a significant sense of achievement and personal pride. As a result of early consultation with Synergy Program staff and participants, successful completion of the course is now formally recognised in an "award ceremony". Participants' families are encouraged to attend, and this may be a motivation for participants as they are able to demonstrate their success in a positive and prosocial activity.

Data Collection And Analysis

This section identifies and reviews the quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2015 for the purpose of the current process evaluation.

Quantitative Results

Throughout 2015, all program participants were asked to complete a survey exploring their background, offending history, job-readiness, and well-being. All participants surveyed had commenced the program between April 2014 and September 2015. As stated previously, it was not possible to obtain post-program follow-up data from participants after they had completed or left the program as, for the most part, the period of time following the initial survey was too variable to get an indication of post-program effects. Therefore, the data provides a quantitative assessment of the specific needs, issues, and strengths of participants at different stages of the program. It is important to note that, as a post-program evaluation was originally attended, post-program evaluation measures have been developed, so the following analysis can be used as a baseline for conducting quantitative evaluation of program impact in the future.

The analyses cover a broad range of themes, including:

- Demographics
- Hopes and Concerns
- Parenting and Guardianship Circumstances
- Living Arrangements
- Education, Training and Employment
- Criminal Behaviour and Exposure to Criminal Peers
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Basic Life Skills
- Relationships and Role Models

Demographics

In total, the survey was completed by 19 young people (18 male, 1 female), aged 16-24 years ($M_{age} = 18.47$). The majority of participants were Australian-born (74%), and of these, one participant self-identified as Aboriginal. Four participants reported being born overseas (21%), two in New Zealand, one in Samoa, and one in Myanmar. The majority of participants reported that they spoke English very well (79%) or well (16%), with only one participant reporting that they did not speak English well (5%).

Hopes and Concerns

We asked participants to describe how they felt when starting the program, their hopes and concerns about participating in the program, and their hopes and goals for the future. The majority of participants reported positive feelings, such as being happy and excited about starting the program, although several also reported feeling nervous about the challenges ahead. Most participants hoped to gain a qualification and an apprenticeship or employment as an outcome of participation in the program, with some reporting they hoped to gain skills and industry experience. One participant revealed a desire to not only

work in an area that they like, but to “*get my life back on track*” and “*get a stable home and a stable job*”. No participants expressed an aversion to participating in the program (those who expressed concerns predominantly mentioned issues related to pay rates desiring a higher daily wage whilst in the program). Participants’ hopes and goals for the future ranged from gaining experience and employment in the auto industry, through to financial goals such as having money or nice cars, to gaining stability in their home life and employment to support a family.

Young People’s Parent and Guardianship Circumstances

The majority of participants reported that their primary male and female guardians were their biological parents, but that their parents were not currently living together. “Other” female guardians identified included fathers girlfriend and sister, and “other” male guardians included brother-in-law and step dad. One participant reported that their parents were separated or divorced and that they were living in a residential home. One participant reported that their parents were living together but that they were couch surfing. Results of parenting and guardianship circumstances are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Parenting and guardianship circumstances

Are your parents...	Frequency
Living together	3 (16%)
Separated or divorced	11 (58%)
Never lived together	3 (16%)
One or both parents have died	2 (10%)
Please indicate who your female guardian is or was...	Frequency
Biological mother	11 (58%)
Aunty	2 (11%)
Other	5 (26%)
Please indicate who your male guardian is or was...	Frequency
Biological father	11 (58%)
Uncle	1 (5%)
Other	5 (26%)

Living Arrangements

Participants were asked about their current and previous living arrangements, including the type, cost, and safety of their accommodation, and their experiences of out of home care or homelessness. The most common living arrangement reported was living fee-free with relatives, with “other” living arrangements including staffed residential home and living with a relative paying fees. Several participants detailed fairly insecure living arrangement, and 26% of participants reported that their accommodation was not safe or secure, while the majority (63%) felt that their accommodation was safe and secure.

Table 4

Current living arrangements

Living Arrangement	Frequency (%)
Rental with own name on lease	3 (16%)
Rental with own name not on lease	1 (5%)
Couch surfer with short-term stays at friends, relatives, and others	2 (11%)
Boarder - renting a single room in a house with shared facilities	1 (5%)
Living with relative(s) fee free	5 (26%)
Other	3 (16%)
Don't know	4 (21%)

Most participants (63%) reported that they did not pay anything for their accommodation. For those that did pay, weekly costs ranged from \$50 to \$300 (Median = \$100), which represent a significant proportion of their weekly earnings from employment or government benefits. For example, a recent survey of homeless and unemployed young people identified that the most common sources of income among this group are Youth Allowance or Newstart Allowance (Flatau, Thielking, MacKenzie, & Steen, 2015). Depending on eligibility requirements including age, living arrangements, marital and parenting status, young people may earn as little as \$237.10 per fortnight on Youth Allowance, or \$523.40 on Newstart Allowance.

Participants were asked to indicate if they had experienced homelessness or out-of-home care prior to turning 18. Results revealed that several participants reported that they had been placed in out of home care or experienced a form of homelessness. Of the participants that reported homelessness, the majority indicated that their experience was of primary (e.g. sleeping rough) or secondary homelessness (e.g. couch surfing). Although information was not collected about the duration or frequency of homelessness experiences, participants that had previous homelessness experiences were also more likely to report

paying for their current accommodation. One participant reported an episode of primary homelessness (sleeping rough), but amended the question to read “*because my family didn’t want me*”, rather than “because my family didn’t have anywhere else to live”, an indication of the difficult circumstances some Synergy participants have experienced.

Table 5

Experiences of homelessness and out of home care prior to turning 18

Accommodation History	Frequency*	
	Yes	No
Placed in out of home care (foster, kinship, or residential care)	7 (37%)	6 (32%)
Ran away because did not want to be at home	3 (16%)	10 (53%)
Slept on the street, in the open, in a car, in a cave or in some form of makeshift dwelling because family did not have anywhere else to live	5 (26%)	8 (42%)
Stayed with family or friends because had nowhere else to go	8 (42%)	5 (26%)
Stayed in a hotel or motel because had nowhere else to go	2 (11%)	11 (58%)
Stayed in a crisis or temporary accommodation service for those who might otherwise be homelessness	2 (11%)	11 (58%)
Stayed in boarding house or rooming house / hostel (i.e. own room but shared facilities)	2 (11%)	11 (58%)

*Percentages do not equal 100% as some participants did not respond to these questions

Recommendation 8: Mechanisms should be in place to screen all young people for current homelessness and risk of homelessness; and have procedures in place to ensure all participants have access to safe and secure accommodation.

It is revealing that 23% of young people currently participating in the program reported that they did not consider their accommodation as being safe or secure. There is also a high number who reported previous experiences of homelessness individually and within their family of origin. This level of marginalisation is known to be characterised by a set of complex interactions with other factors such as poor mental health, experience of trauma, drug and alcohol usage, suicide risk, involvement in crime and poor outcomes in relation to employment.

Education, Training, and Employment

Educational attainment was generally low, with none of the participants reporting having completed Year 12 or an equivalent level of education. One overseas born participant reported their highest level of education as “language school”, which may have been the only schooling they attended in Australia. Several participants had not completed Year 10 and were below the legal school leaving age in Victoria (17 years). The Synergy Program is likely to meet the requirements to be considered an acceptable alternative to formal schooling for participants below the legal school leaving age. Data related to highest level of education is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Highest Level of education in order of frequency of attainment

Highest Level of Education Achieved	Frequency (%)
Year 10 or equivalent	6 (32%)
Year 11 or equivalent	5 (26%)
Year 9 or equivalent	4 (21%)
Year 7 or equivalent	3 (16%)

(One participant did not complete these items).

Eight participants (42%) reported that they had completed a trade or other vocational certificate, although it is possible that some participants were referring to the Certificate II that they were currently completing at Synergy. One participant reported completing a Certificate II through the similar Hand Brake Turn program prior to coming to Synergy. One participant indicated that they had worked for a meat-processing company rather than achieving any formal educational or vocational qualification.

The majority of participants (80%) were not currently employed, with only two participants reporting part time paid work (type/industry not specified), and two participants reported unpaid work in a family business or farm. A limited history of previous paid employment was common, with those participants reporting three or more previous jobs held tending to be older and to have completed at least Year 10 or a vocational qualification, see Table 7.

Table 7

Employment history and number of paid jobs

Employment History	Frequency (%)
Last time worked 35 hours per week for two or more weeks at a time	
Less than two years ago	7 (37%)
Two years to less than five years ago	3 (16%)
Never worked in a job of 35 hours or more	7 (37%)
Not sure	2 (11%)
Number of paid jobs previously held	
None	5 (26%)
1-2	6 (32%)
3-4	3 (16%)
5-6	4 (21%)
7-8	1 (5%)

Participants completed eight items assessing their attitude toward work, drawn from the “Attitudes Toward Employment - Work Opinion Questionnaire” (Johnson, Messe & Crano, 1984), with scoring adjusted for the current survey. Participants rated their level of agreement with items related to work readiness, such as “I have enough skills to do a job well”. Higher scores indicate a greater degree of employment related self-confidence and motivation for work, with a possible score range from 7 to 56. Two participants did not complete these items. For the 17 participants that did, the average total score was 40.71 (SD = 5.90, range 31 to 52). This result indicates that participants were quite self-confident that they had appropriate skills and were job-ready, and had positive attitudes toward employment.

Criminal Behaviour and Exposure to Criminal Peers

The majority of participants (84%) reported that they had previously been convicted of a criminal offence, with only three reporting no prior criminal convictions. Most convictions were for motor vehicle related offences, with non-vehicle related convictions reported for drug possession, fighting, firearms related offences and various assault charges, and two unspecified offences. Participants offending history was mostly recent, with 10 participants (53%) reporting that their conviction’s had occurred in the past 12 months, see Table 8.

Table 8

Participants' offending history

Convictions Reported	Frequency (%)*
Motor vehicle theft**	11 (58%)
Taking a part of a motor vehicle without the permission of the owner	7 (37%)
Breaking in and taking items or money from inside a motor vehicle without the permission of the owner	4 (21%)
Damage or vandalism to a motor vehicle	3 (16%)
Speeding or hooning	8 (42%)
Drink or drug driving	2 (11%)
Other road traffic offences (not otherwise specified)	2 (11%)
Other offences not related to motor vehicles	5 (26%)

*Column total adds to more than 100% as some participants reported more than one offence resulting in a criminal conviction

**Motor vehicle includes motorbikes

Participants were also asked about the level of social interaction they had with peers who were involved in auto theft and crime. Six participants (32%) reported they were currently friends with people who steal or damage cars, with two participants describing their level of friendship as “best friends” and one as “close friends”. The remainder stated that they were not close friends with people who stole or damaged cars.

Recommendation 9: The Synergy Program Logic Model should include opportunities for pro-social recreational pursuits for Synergy participants in order to engage young people in meaningful social activities; provide a richer social and positive community experience; and reduce their contact with peers who continue to participate in criminal activity.

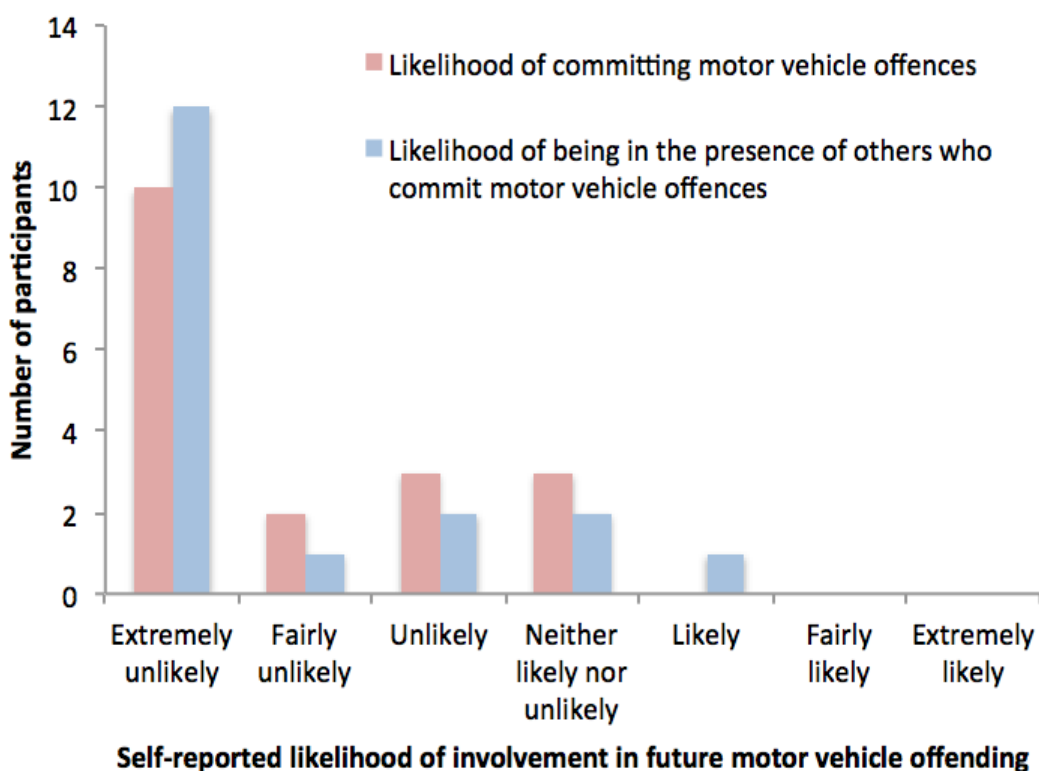
Casey (2007) reported that young people often began offending in the presence of friends or relatives that are already involved in vehicle crime. Gaining acceptance or status among peers may also be a motivating factor, with “earning” a custodial sentence for this offending seen as a rite of passage or a measure of status within a peer group. In the pre-valuation interviews with staff, ‘occupying’ young people and taking them away from negative social influences was seen as an important strategy for keeping young people from committing further crimes.

To assess intergenerational criminal activity, participants were asked to report any family history of criminal convictions. Eight participants (42%) reported that one or both of their parents had previously been convicted of a criminal offence, and four participants (21%) reported that one or both of their parents had been to prison, one of these for motor vehicle related crime. One participant reported that their parent or parents had conviction(s) for every offence type listed including unspecified “other” offences, one participant reported parental conviction(s) relating to drink/drug driving, and one reported parental convictions for drugs and driving fines. Other parental offences resulting in convictions were unspecified.

Participants were asked whether they were likely to commit motor vehicle offences or be in the presence of other people that were committing motor vehicle offences in future. Results revealed generally low likelihood of recidivism, see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Participant likelihood of committing or being in the presence of someone else committing a motor vehicle offence



Police and juvenile justice data on participant reoffending was not available at the time of this evaluation; however this should be obtained 12-24 months after participants complete to evaluate the longevity of

the program's impact on offending. Given that the mean age for participants was around 18 years and the literature suggests that young people age out of offending around this time, these results may indicate that Synergy participants have begun the process of desistance.

Whilst all care was taken to ensure honest responses, it should be noted that self-report can give a biased response toward the affirmative. Perhaps participants were wary about the potential consequences of honestly answering these questions, or may consider themselves unlikely to offend or be in contact with peers that offend while they are engaged in the program as it takes up a great deal of their time. However, without the support of the program, participants may find themselves associating with the same peers or engaging in the same lifestyle that contributed to their earlier offending. Nonetheless, the results indicating that Synergy participants have positive attitudes toward work and a strong motivation to work, as well as a low likelihood of offending or associating with criminal peers in future, should be considered a positive aspect of the program.

Participants' attitudes toward general criminal behaviour were assessed using eight items drawn from the "Attitudes Toward Delinquency - Pittsburgh Youth Study" survey (Loeber, Farrington, Southamer-Loeber & Van Kammen, 1998), with items and scoring adjusted to be more relevant to the current survey. Participants indicated whether or not they thought various delinquent or criminal behaviours were wrong (e.g. "take a car or motorcycle for a ride without the owner's permission"). The possible score range was 8-64, with high scores indicating greater acceptance of criminal behaviour (i.e. it is not at all wrong to take a car ... without permission). For the 16 participants that provided full data, the group mean was 14.67 (SD = 9.01), with 15 participants scoring between 8 and 17 and one participant scoring 48. There was a general tendency among participants to show non-permissive or negative attitudes toward criminal behaviour. One participant provided responses in their own words to three closed-ended items relating to committing physical violence and property damage. This participant wrote that if the intended victim "deserved it" they would commit an offense. This suggests that some young people may be motivated to commit offences for revenge or retribution, and may believe that in some cases offending is justified. The participant with the highest score (most permissive attitude toward criminality) was a young male living in residential care, with a very low level of high school or equivalent education and no previous employment experience. The participant had reported a prolific criminal history, including motor vehicle related and other offending, as well as very close friendships with criminal peers, and parental criminal history, reporting that both parents had been imprisoned. However, they did have a positive attitude toward work, and reported a low likelihood of future criminal involvement, indicating potential for success in the program.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Participants mental health and wellbeing were assessed with a range of positive and negative indicators, including diagnosed mental illness, depression and anxiety symptoms, self-esteem and self-efficacy, hope for the future, and gratitude.

Mental Health Diagnosis.

Eight participants (42%) reported that they had been diagnosed with a mental health problem by a medical practitioner (GP, psychiatrist, psychologist). Of these, six had been prescribed medication for a mental health problem. Four of the participants that had been diagnosed with a mental health problem reported that they were currently receiving support from a counsellor for personal and emotional issues. Three participants reported that they were currently receiving support for drug and/or alcohol related issues, and these participants had also reported currently receiving counselling support. It is not known whether these participants are receiving separate or combined AOD and other counselling support.

Psychological Distress

Participants completed the K10 (Kessler et al., 2002), a widely used 10-item measure of recently-experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Total scores can range from 10 to 50, and can be classified into four levels of psychological distress (see below table for category ranges). Scores of 20 or above are considered to indicate serious psychological distress and the possible presence of mental disorder (ABS, 2012b). Participants scores ranged broadly between 10 (very low distress) and 44 (very high distress), with a group mean of 23.95 (SD = 9.18). These results indicate that the majority of program participants were currently, or recently, experiencing anxiety and depression symptoms at a level that reflects significant psychological distress and has been strongly linked to mental illness, see Table 9.

Table 9

Participant K10 scores

K10 score categories	Frequency (%)
Very low distress (10 - 15)	4 (21%)
Moderate distress (16 - 21)	4 (21%)
High distress (22 - 29)	5 (26%)
Very high distress (30 - 50)	6 (31%)

Recommendation 10: Improve access to psychological support for young people participating in the Synergy program

The K10 scores are particularly concerning given that so few participants were currently receiving counselling support or taking medication for diagnosed mental health disorders. While the literature indicates that young males are unlikely to seek mental health support, there is a very high suicide rate associated with this group. Linking participants with mental health support services, or adding a mental health support worker to the program team may be of benefit to participants. Workers should be mindful that within the program environment, young people may be masking their underlying depression or anxiety in order to appear competent or to fit in.

Self-Esteem

Previous evaluations of similar programs and pre-evaluation interviews with Synergy program staff indicate that many young people start out with low self-esteem, and their self-esteem and confidence increases as they continue through the program. This may be linked to their successful achievement of milestones in the program, including completing the TAFE certificate, gaining workshop experience, and being successfully placed in an apprenticeship. This may also be related to the development of positive relationships with the program staff, who view participants positively and show them a level of trust and respect that the young people may not previously have experienced. Participants completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965), indicating their level of agreement with statements such as *“on the whole, I am satisfied with myself”*. The possible score range was from 10-40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. One participant did not complete these items. Of the 18 participants that did, responses ranged broadly from 13-34 ($M = 26.83$, $SD = 6.26$), although the majority of responses were skewed toward the higher end of the scale.

Self-Efficacy

Self-esteem describes a sense of personal worth, while self-efficacy describes confidence in your own ability to achieve desired goals and outcomes and avoid negative outcomes. Program staff reported that participant confidence grows as they develop practical job-related skills and basic life skills over the course of the program. Four questions were drawn from the Self-Efficacy Scale (Prothrow-Stith, 1987) and modified to reflect participant sense of self-efficacy in their ability to successfully complete the Synergy program, finish an apprenticeship, and find relevant employment. High scores indicate a higher level of self-efficacy. All participants completed these items, with scores broadly spread across the possible score range of 4-28 ($M = 22.21$, $SD = 7.49$). Three participants had extremely low self-efficacy scores (4, 6, and 8), while the rest of the participants' scores ranged between 21 and 28, indicating quite high levels of self-efficacy.

Positive Outlook

Previous research reveals that many young people involved in motor vehicle offending have indicated that they did not have any hope for the future, and that their offending and antisocial behaviour was

related to this feeling (TILES, 2005; West & Miller, 2000). A positive outlook may therefore be a protective factor against future offending, with young people that are looking forward to something or working towards achieving a goal potentially being less inclined to engage in criminal behaviour that may prevent them from achieving this goal. Participants completed five items from the “Positive Outlook - Individual Protective Factors” scale (Phillips & Springer, 1992), with scoring adjusted for purposes of this evaluation. The scale measures whether individuals have generally positive or negative feelings for the future, with items like *“I am afraid my life will be unhappy”*. The possible score range is 5 to 35, with high scores indicating a more positive outlook. Eighteen participants completed these items, with total scores ranging from 16-35 ($M = 26.44$, $SD = 5.71$). This is a very positive finding when considered alongside the otherwise concerning mental health results, suggesting that young people have developed concrete goals and positive expectations for the future that they may not have had without the benefit of participating in the program.

Gratitude

Gratitude and thankfulness have been linked with positive emotions, life satisfaction, optimism, empathy, and perspective taking (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Participants completed the Gratitude Questionnaire - Six Item Form (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002), a short measure of their general appreciation for people and the world around them. High scores indicate higher levels of gratitude, with a possible range of 6 to 42. All participants completed the items, and total scores ranged from 18 to 41 ($M = 29.21$, $SD = 6.69$). Interestingly, the two participants that reported the lowest gratitude scores also reported a more negative outlook for the future, despite having few similarities in background and criminal history.

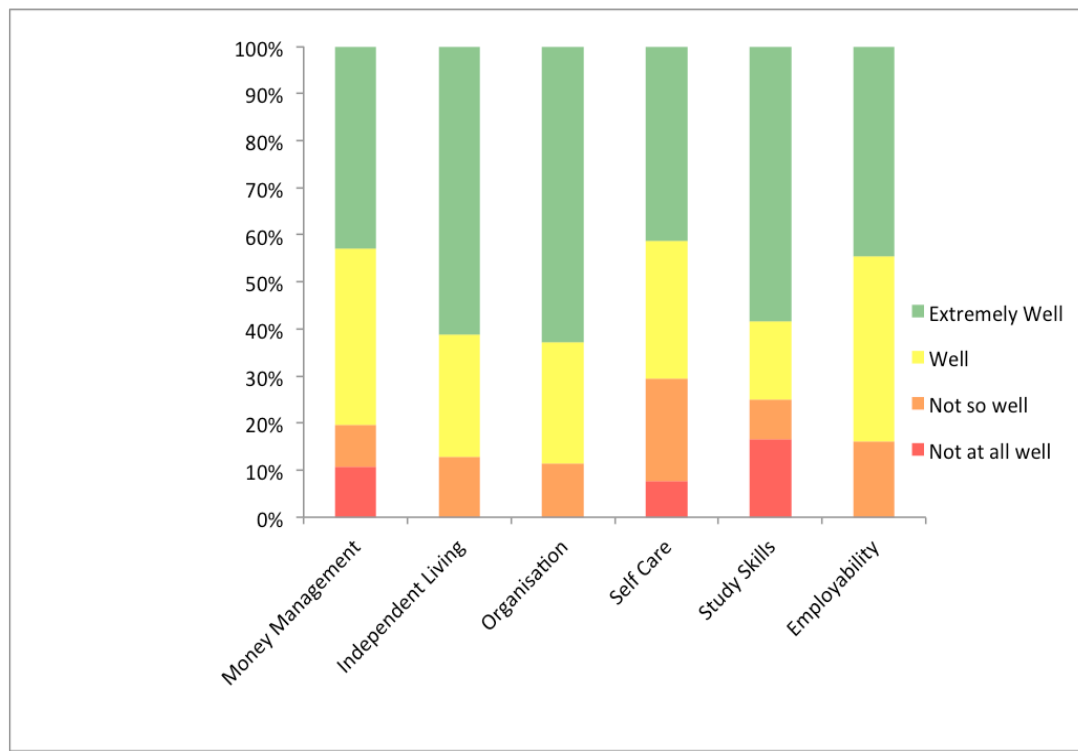
Acquisition of Social Participation Skills

One of the key aims of the Synergy Program is to help participants develop their basic living and social participation skills to support their success in the program, comply with justice conditions and other requirements, and to enable their successful transition out of the program and into the workforce. Young people filled in the Social Participation Skills Survey (Thielking, unpublished), which asks them to indicate how well they can complete a range of tasks, including money management, independent living skills, organisation skills, self care, study skills and employability.

Participants were very confident about their ability to complete tasks associated with basic living skills, in particular: independent living skills such as grocery shopping, organisation skills such as getting to appointments on time, and employability skills such as writing a resume. A larger proportion of participants were somewhat less confident about their ability to complete money management tasks including paying rent and bills on time, self-care skills including getting enough exercise and sleep, and study skills including doing homework. Figure 2 indicates how well participants felt they were able to complete tasks associated with different living skills, with the valid percentage of participant responses in each category displayed.

Figure 2

Participants' responses to how well they felt they were able to complete tasks associated with various social participation skills



Recommendation 11: The Synergy Program Logic Model should incorporate the development of social participation skills into program training and include indicators of social participation skill competency in outcome measures.

Relationships and Role Models

The mentoring relationship between program staff and participants, and the participants' view of program staff as positive role models, is thought to be a key factor in participant engagement and the overall success of the Synergy Program. Previous evaluations of similar programs have indicated that young people who participate in auto related crime often do not have close, trusting, and respectful relationships with pro-social friends or family members.

Population surveys reveal that young people tend to seek advice from adult role models in their family or at school (Mission Australia, 2015), however when these are unavailable due to family conflict or disengagement from formal education, Synergy Program staff may be able to meet this need. Many young offenders have friends or family members that are involved in criminal activity, and often their first offending occurs in the presence of these friends and family members. Having exposure to pro-social role

models at Synergy or in other areas of life may therefore be a protective factor, reducing the risk of further offending.

Participants completed the Rutgers Teenage Risk and Prevention Questionnaire (Nakkula et. al., 1990), modified to include adult role models specific to the Synergy Program. These questions identify whether the young person has adults in their home or community that they admire and go to for guidance. Just over half of the participants (53%) reported that there were adults in their family or community that they admired and wanted to be like. Interestingly, almost one third of participants (27%) reported that there were no adults in their family or community that they admired and wanted to be like. In light of this apparent lack of role models in their own family or community, it is a positive finding that some participants indicated they look to Synergy workers for this function. Fortunately, a larger proportion of participants (84%) reported that they had someone to talk to if they needed information or advice, and the large proportion of participants indicating they could seek advice from a Synergy worker or case worker being a very positive result for the program. The majority of participants (84%) reported that they had someone to talk to if they were having trouble at home, with only two participants (11%) indicating they did not have a trusted adult to talk to. Almost four fifths of participants (79%) were able to identify someone they would tell if they got an award or did something well. However one participant indicated they did not have any adults in their family or community to act as role models, to seek guidance from, and to talk to about issues they were experiencing or share good news with. This participant also scored low on measures of gratitude and positive outlook, and had a prolific offending history, giving an indication of the multiple and complex needs that some Synergy participants have, see Table 10.

Table 10

Participants' indications of adult role models and support people in their lives

Adult(s) that you admire and want to be like	Frequency (%)*
Parent(s) or guardian(s)	6 (32%)
Sibling or other relative	5 (27%)
Another adult in the community	1 (5%)
Sports or entertainment star	1 (5%)
Synergy worker or other caseworker	3 (16%)
Friends or partner	3 (16%)
Adult(s) that you could talk to if you needed information or advice	
Parent(s) or guardian(s)	10 (53%)
Sibling or other relative	9 (47%)
Another adult in the community	6 (32%)
Synergy worker or other caseworker	9 (47%)
Friends or partner	2 (11%)
Adults that you could talk to if you had trouble at home	
Parent(s) or guardian(s)	11 (59%)
Sibling or other relative	13 (69%)
Another adult in the community	3 (16%)
Synergy worker or other caseworker	9 (47%)
Friends or partner	1 (5%)
Adults that you would tell if you won an award or did well at something	
Parent(s) or guardian(s)	15 (79%)
Sibling or other relative	15 (79%)
Another adult in the community	10 (53%)
Sports or entertainment star	2 (11%)
Synergy worker or other caseworker	10 (53%)
Friends or partner	3 (16%)

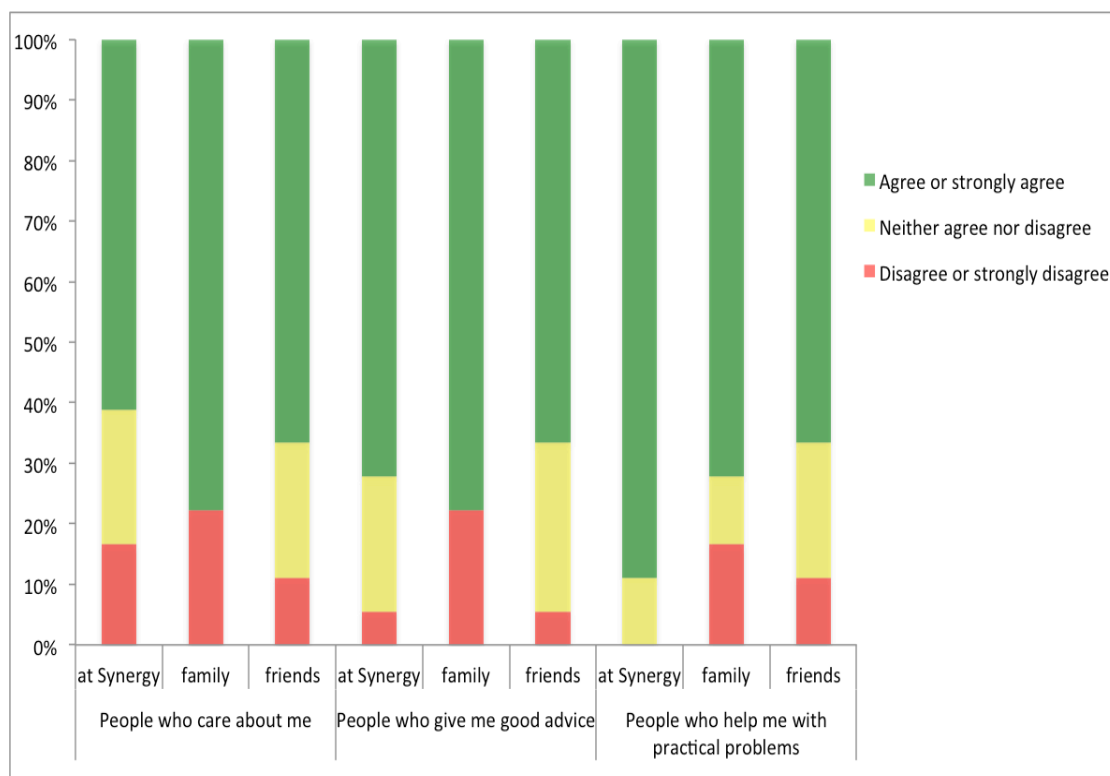
*Column totals may add to more than 100% as participants nominated more than one role model in each category

Participants also completed the “Vaux Social Support Record” (Vaux, 1988), a nine-item measure of satisfaction with the emotional advice, guidance, and practical social support that young people receive from family, friends, and school. Items relating to school were modified to be relevant to Synergy (e.g. “*at Synergy, there are adults I can talk to, who care about my feelings and what happens to me*”), and scoring was modified to suit the current study.

Participants indicated that they received quite good social support from their family, their friends, and at Synergy. Figure 3 displays the proportion of participants that agreed or disagreed with statements about the level and type of social support they received from their friends, family, and Synergy program staff. It is a very positive result to see that participants rated the level of care and good advice received from Synergy program staff as approximately on par with that received from their family and friends. Significantly, more participants reported receiving support for practical problems from Synergy staff than their family or friends.

Figure 3

Proportion of participants that agreed or disagreed with statements about the level and type of social support they received from their friends, family, and Synergy program staff



Qualitative Results

Qualitative information was collected from youth participants and Synergy staff between June and November 2015. Two focus groups were conducted with a total of 8 youth participants (4 in each group). The purpose of the participant focus groups were to ascertain from young people what impact the Synergy Program has had on their life and their future aspirations and involvement in crime.

Employability Outcome

All young people expressed a single theme around employability, in regard to the impact Synergy has on their life. All agreed that Synergy has given them the skills and attitudes needed to make them employable in the panel beating and spray painting industry and that they had all experienced attitude change regarding their hopes for the future, and that they all looked forward to graduating and becoming employed:

“To get job that you're doing here - spray painting or panel beating - just get ready for experience so that when we get an actual job, at least we know what we're doing by being involved, what we're learning, what they're teaching us”

“To get a job. I believe I will get a job or a certificate, whichever one I want. It just puts you out there in the public instead of just sitting around at home, just doing the same thing every day”

“Get's you into a routine. Feel job ready. Skills...”

“I guess that coming here is like working my best and showing that I can work and when I get a job I can have a good reference. Like they can call them up, and they'll say he's been working well. And my hope is to learn more experience and work hard so when I get the next job, I'll know what to do”

Many spoke about the practical changes in their life that contribute to this sense of work ethic and having increased motivation to just get up and go to work each day. This motivation may represent a lift in mood from having a sense of meaning and purpose in their life at Synergy, as well as experiencing success and pride (some for the first time) of learning new skills and participating in a trade that they enjoy.

“It has on my working life – getting up early, getting to work on time, stuff like that. Used to just sleep in a lot... (Now) not being lazy and that, doing something constructive”

“I can't say Synergy has changed my lifestyle but Synergy has improved my work ethic. Coming on time, waking up, coming to work. Knowing what work life is about”

“Well, I was pretty bad before with getting to places on time, getting up in the morning and finding the confidence...”

Improved Mental Health and Emotional Regulation

All agreed that their mood and mental health had improved since starting the Synergy Program. Some talked about feeling physically better, sleeping more, reducing alcohol intake and 'staying out of trouble'. Others spoke about being able to manage their anger better. Many attributed their improved mental health to being more active during the day:

"Yeah - but it's because you come into work and do stuff, not just sitting around at home all day, watching TV and stuff"

When asked about other ways that Synergy has changed them, many spoke about feeling respected and gaining confidence through the positive relationships they had with Synergy workers. One young man said that he felt 'looked after' and that 'Synergy workers had helped him a lot' with a recent high-grief incident. The theme of developing confidence in themselves and their own ability was strong and some said that this change in self-confidence was having an impact on their relationships outside of Synergy as well:

"before I used to just talk to friends and family. When you first come, it's a bit nerve-wracking but you get along with the workers here. You talk to them in a professional manner, which gets you used to it, and you start to talk to others, like employers, that come in and you know you're not talking shit and you know what you're talking about"

Respectful and Trusting Relationships

The respect young people felt toward Synergy staff was very evident. Themes of respect, trust and equality in relationships emerged. All young people agreed that it was the 'personality' of the workers that they admired. Many compared the trainers to teachers they had known in school and with whom they had generally had poor relationships. For these young people, the Synergy approach to education and training, and the way they treated them as workers in an actual workplace was a much better alternative to school:

"They teach us what they know about life. They want to pass all their skills onto us"

"The best way to say that is their personality. You can tell by a good fruit, a good tree. So if it's a bad tree, it won't have leaf it would be barren. A good tree is with leaf - and when you look at them, their personality is good"

"Yeah - like how you're doing and how's your weekend and that? They're not like teachers, they [teachers] are all ass and shit. They genuinely care"

"The best I can say is that it's better than school"

Support Towards Increased Social Participation

Young people also mentioned the practical support that Synergy staff provided to them, by way of linking them with a range of services (i.e., one mentioned a doctor for a health complaint); or assisting them with daily living tasks, including setting up bank or 'MyGov' accounts. One young person spoke about how helpful it was when Synergy bought him clothes and work tools, to prepare him for his apprenticeship.

Young people spoke about the positive impact that Synergy had on reducing or eliminating their criminal behaviour altogether. For many it was about the development of confidence and of being diverted from a pathway of auto crime into a pathway of productive skill-based and meaningful activity related to cars that gave them a new identity and was the conduit to this behaviour change:

"I was a pretty bad kid before this. Yeah. You know now that if you put in good work, you're going to get rewarded a job. Job means money and that's life. Before I came to this program, I thought f*** it, didn't have the mentality to do anything"

"A little bit. Learning about cars and that instead of going out and doing crime. Yes, I'll say it has, a little bit"

Ideas for Improvement to The Program

Young people could not think of any changes they would make to the program to make it better. They were generally satisfied with the daily payment they receive (i.e., "*\$15 a day pay helps with transport and lunch money*"). It was evident that young people valued the program immensely, the way they were treated as workers by program staff and felt a sense of pride and personal satisfaction to be able to go to 'work' each day (e.g., "*Well I call it work. I don't say, 'Oh I'm going to do my course'*").

Staff Perceptions of the Synergy Program

One focus group interview was conducted with four Mission Australia Synergy staff. The purpose of the staff interview was to ascertain staff perspectives of the impact of Synergy on young people and to gather information about their experiences of working with young people who had been involved in motor vehicle crime within a panel beating training / social enterprise setting. The interview lasted an hour and all staff readily contributed to the discussion. The interview was taped and then later transcribed. Data was then coded using a thematic analysis approach.

Staff Sensitivity to Youth Training and Wellbeing Needs

Training staff demonstrated overwhelming dedication toward the development and wellbeing of young people enrolled in the program, in addition to developing their employability skills in panel beating. They all showed a deep understanding and sense of compassion toward the disrupted and traumatic backgrounds that many of the young people in the program have experienced and a commitment to understand each participant as an individual. It is important to note that while training staff were all professionally qualified and experienced panel beaters - they were not youth workers. However, they very much acted as mentors and positive male role models for the young people (who were more often than not male) in the program. This suggests that there has been a careful recruitment process employed

by Mission Australia to choose training staff that are able to work compassionately and effectively with vulnerable youth attending the Synergy program. That said, their role was predominantly to teach young people the competencies of panel beating and ensure young people have the skills necessary to begin an apprenticeship in a commercial workshop. The Employment and Training Officer, on the other hand, is employed to provide personal support to the young people to ensure a successful placement and transition to work settings.

"I believe that each kid out there is an individual – all different – but somewhere along their youth, they faced some dramatic trouble and they all sort of fell into the same basket. But when they come here, within about a couple of weeks we can get to understand which ones are really more serious than others"

Staff spoke about the balancing act that occurred between providing a supportive and gentle approach to working with vulnerable youth, with ensuring participants experience the opportunity of a real-world work environment, where trust and responsibility and a positive work-ethic was paramount - including the ability to provide and receive constructive criticism. They spoke about the challenges that they sometimes face in working with young people who have never worked before, who may have unrealistic expectations of work and the duties they should perform or who have not yet reached the maturity necessary to take direction from an authority figure:

"I had one student last week, he was sort of new, so I'd give him the basics, sweep up, learn how to hold the broom, wash a car...and his response was, 'I don't want to do that, I'm here to work on cars'"

"I did it when I was a kid and 30-years later I'm still doing it. Because they don't want to do it, they want to work on cars and so to make them happy and so that they come back tomorrow, I let them do what they want to do. Because tomorrow, you're going to do what I want you to do"

"So you have to explain it to them. This is how we gotta go about it, this is when you go into a real workshop, you're not going to be doing the things that you're doing here. You're going to be sweeping up, washing cars, sweeping up, washing cars, and maybe making the boss a coffee. 'cause that's what I did and that's what some people think that way. So that's what you're going to be doing, so let's quickly sweep up and then we're going to work on a car"

Recommendation 12: In order to maintain a sustainable social enterprise, careful recruitment of program staff needs to be employed. Work competency should be balanced with the ability to teach and guide vulnerable youth, and an awareness and sensitivity to issues that marginalised young people bring to such a program.

Transformative Impact of Program

Staff spoke about the transformative effect of the Synergy Program. From their experience of working with the youth in the program they have seen young people's communication skills improve, confidence increase, work ethic develop, and personal goals and life autonomy take shape. Even if young people try the program and decide that panel beating is not for them, staff saw this as an important step towards their personal journey toward reaching their life goals (e.g., *"well done, you're not a failure, you've achieved something in your life, you know you don't want to be a panel beater, 'actually I really want to do mechanics'; ok great, so let's start the process of getting you there"*).

All staff expressed enormous personal satisfaction in being conduits to young people's improvements in wellbeing.

"In saying that, I have seen a big difference in some of the kids. A big difference in their attitude, their timing – they used to come in at 11 o'clock and they're starting to roll in on time, so they're starting to get it into their heads – yeah that it's working for them and they're enjoying it. I can see the difference in that, but like I said, these kids can go on for some time"

"There's one kid out there now that you would've thought no hope in the world but now he's probably the best one around out of the lot of them. He really wants to make it and if you knew his background, you think wow, we've done this, we've made this change. You feel good about yourself, you know. That first time I saw our first group, when they graduated, I sort of got goose bumps. I'm getting a tear in my eye just talking about it. You know, it's giving something back to the trade or the community or the...I've never been down that path, but to do something good for someone's life, you know you feel a bit special. We were all standing there together at the time and he started to get a bit teary too but he wouldn't admit it! One of the other person from the insurance company and he says you've gone soft but we're human. You don't like to see another human struggle, which is probably why we're here. Well it's the reason why I'm here. And I think I speak for the other two guys that they're on the same boat"

Facilitating a Desire To Change

Young people taking personal responsibility to use the opportunity that Synergy provided them was also a strong theme, as was making the decision to change their life and not be involved in crime. Staff expressed the importance of a *"desire to change"*. They spoke about young people entering the program without this desire and then as time went on, showing significant improvement in many aspects of their life. However, if this desire was not there, staff spoke about how difficult it was to help them. It was evident that staff did not give up on any participant, and that it was their belief in each young person's ability to change that was often the key ingredient in igniting that desire in participants (e.g., *"Everybody is able to change. You've just got to commit yourself or face something that scares the shit out of you and you'll soon change"*).

Diverting Young People Away From Crime

From the perspective of Synergy staff, one of the significant factors that needed to occur for young people to change their life and lifestyles was to remove themselves from destructive social connections, such as

friends who participate in crime and other damaging influences and to occupy their days with meaningful activity (i.e., “*I think one of the other main things is that we’re keeping them off the roads, off the streets for eight hours*”). In addition to this, they commented that the Synergy program was an effective means to replace boredom in young people who have a love of cars with positive role models who also share a love of cars:

“I think we all play a different role and one commonality that we have is a love of cars. The two things I ask any young person who comes into this program is to value their love of cars and to celebrate that love of cars with everyone here. It’s one of our values of our business – a celebration. And the other one is, you’ve come here for change. So if you need to, leave that other stuff at the door. Because everyone else is here for change and if you bring the resentment, the anger to this workplace, then it puts everyone at jeopardy. So you need to be able to come here for change. And working in a work environment ...because it’s a work environment and we’re working together, we’re all contributing to an outcome. They see the hard work that these guys do...”

A Sense of Community and Shared Interest in Cars

Synergy also provides a new set of social connections, and an opportunity to trust others, especially those who previously they would not have trusted before, such as authority figures and teachers. The panel beating industry itself was said to be particularly close-knit and supportive:

“The panel beating and painting industry is a bit of a family. Everyone knows everyone else’s business. There’s brothers that don’t talk but there are some really close relationships in there as well. It’s an attraction for young people too because it’s being part of a community”

Boundaries and Self-Care

As one staff member said, Synergy is “*a model that is more a work expectations, a trade skills and a personal development program*”. Such a program requires those that are working in this capacity to be able to also look after themselves to ensure they continue to have the capability to give in all three domains. Staff spoke about the need for self-care, to be able to know when to support and when to step-back, to understand boundaries and to take time out (i.e., ‘*Is it correct protocol to take them out fishing or do you try to keep yourselves separate so you don’t get too involved?*’). Sometimes managing boundaries can be tricky, as staff recognised that for many young people, they were very much in need of a ‘father’ figure, or just the stability of a loving family:

“these kids have no guidance. They’re lost. So that’s why when they see someone trying to do the right thing by them, they sort of at the same time appreciate it and show a bit of a change”

“for a lot of them, as it gets along, they look at you as bit of a father figure. I’ve noticed that for a couple of them I think, they sort of treat you like a father. I’m always going fishing and he goes, ‘I’d love to come one day’. And I said, ‘haven’t you ever been fishing?’. Where my kids all grew up fishing. So there’s a lot of things that they miss out on in life”

Recommendation 13: Mission Australia must ensure that Synergy staff have access to professional development and supervision opportunities, particularly in regard to self-care and mentoring vulnerable youth.

Synergy Is Also A Commercial Enterprise

All staff were well aware that Synergy is a social enterprise that needs to be commercially viable in order to survive. Similarly, jobs are required to be done at an exceptional standard in order to receive the star rating required for insurance company referrals. It is not an even playing field however, as for Synergy Auto Repairs, they are constantly faced with the prospect of letting go of skilled workers once they become competent (for good reasons), and replacing them with untrained workers again:

“So what happens is we get to here. When he becomes productive we get to here and just when he becomes productive, we lose them. It makes it hard for us to teach the kids and be productive at the same time”

This, on top of the social issues faced by the group, creates challenges for Synergy staff trying to maintain a productive panel beating business. They spoke about their ideas to slightly counteract this, such as allowing skilled graduates to return to the workshop to train new young people in order to increase the level of productivity on site, and to act as mentors for new participants.

Conclusion

The Synergy Automotive Repairs Program (Synergy Program) is a diversionary social enterprise aimed at positively impacting the lives of young people involved in motor vehicle offending (e.g., theft, vandalism, hooning). The program was developed in order to capitalize on young offender's interest in cars as a means of developing pathways to sustainable and meaningful employment in a field that matches their interests, resulting in a reduction further motor vehicle offending. It is clear that the Synergy Program has identified a significant and important service gap with regard to the issue of reducing youth motor vehicle theft in Victoria.

According to participant feedback, the Program is both valued and welcomed by young people in this cohort and provides a training opportunity to 'pathway' into future employment. For example, the fact that one participant reported that prior to attending Synergy they had completed a Certificate II through the similar Hand Brake Turn program suggests that, combined with a program such as Synergy, there are now solid stepping stones into apprenticeships and employment for young people interested in 'getting back on track'. The information and evidence gathered within the context of the literature and best practice reviews clearly indicates that there is a need for an effective cross-sector approach to positively impacting this issue. The partnership between Mission Australia, Suncorp and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council is innovative and fulfils a number of organisational and community objectives.

The current evaluation revealed positive attitudes regarding the benefits of the program, held by trainers and participants alike. Young people value the mentoring relationships with trainers and the opportunity to participate in an adult 'work' environment where they are able to work with cars. A great sense of personal pride was evident amongst this group. Most spoke about a strong desire to graduate and to enter employment, and were motivated by the financial gains and security this would provide. The vast majority of young people surveyed indicated that it was extremely unlikely that they would commit another motor vehicle offence in the future or socialise with other people who do. Although a comprehensive post-test evaluation is required, these initial findings suggest that Synergy is on the way to achieving their intended outcomes and is already having a positive impact on attitudes and behaviours of program participants. The presence of these indicators is informative and suggests that, even in its programmatic infancy, the initiative has begun to successfully demonstrate its potential.

The evaluation also revealed some contradicting, but also concerning findings particularly in relation to the presence of mental health problems in young people. For example, even though youth reported in interviews (and in the presence of other young people) that their mental health had improved, when given the opportunity to fill in a confidential survey, 57% of respondents scored high to very high psychological distress. Furthermore, 26% of participants reported that their accommodation was not safe or secure. The fact that this was also not discussed by staff as a presenting issue in trainees may mean that young people could be appearing resilient, whilst hiding problematic mental health or accommodation issues, which they are experiencing outside of the program setting. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the program is attracting a vulnerable cohort of youth, many of who have experienced childhood trauma (i.e., 37% had been placed in out of home care prior to turning 18). It is

suggested that staff training, and the provision of or links to trainee support services (psychological and homelessness services for example) need to be incorporated in any future Program Logic Model for Synergy.

It is important to recognize the issues and challenges, which traditionally accompany a program moving into the next phase of its evolution and that which Synergy now faces. For example, there is a significant cost associated with youth motor vehicle offending in Victoria and it is less clear what impact the Synergy Program will have on this cost. There is also a modicum of non-clarity regarding the cost-effectiveness of the program itself (i.e., is the effectiveness demonstrably higher than the cost of the program). Furthermore, it is important to state that in addition to its overarching goal, the Synergy Program also wishes to build capacity (i.e., expand and run efficiently) and, as such, the program should be evaluated within a framework that reflects this purpose. Given this situation it is suggested that the Synergy Program must now turn its attention to a number of issues related to ensuring that the preliminary impacts are empirically verified within a conceptual framework and that a future outcome evaluation includes not only a programmatic client-outcome component, but also a cost-effectiveness analysis.

As indicated above, it is suggested that in order to accomplish this a number of recommendations should be considered regarding the specification of components (e.g., purpose, objectives), the collection of data, and the development of a Program Logic Model to guide the progression of the initiative. In going forward it would be helpful to include the design of a formal data collection manual for the Synergy Program. A formal data collection manual, if developed and implemented, would guide the gathering of program and agency information in a standardised fashion. The manual would also ensure staff are aware of issues such as timelines, consent, etc. It is suggested that the implementation of these recommendations would greatly assist with the success of an outcome evaluation in approximately 24-36 months.

In conclusion, the evaluation revealed an innovative and worthwhile program that Mission Australia, Suncorp and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council can be proud to be partnering on. It is highly recommended that this partnership and the overarching goals that this partnership strives for: reducing car-related crimes; social justice and support for young people involved in car-related crimes; and customer satisfaction and sustainable business development related to the car repair industry be maintained. The intended outcomes will have valuable lifelong impacts on youth participants in relation to social participation, wellbeing, employment and a life diverted away from crime. These outcomes will result in positive benefits to the wider community and juvenile justice system, reducing the overall burden of juvenile motor vehicle offending and the related impacts on society.

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