



## **'GETTING AHEAD' PROJECT (East Reservoir) 2012**

### **STAGE ONE REPORT - May 2012**

*"I felt like I was in a room with only one window. I had a narrow view of what was left for me. I'm 46 and I have an eight year old son. I thought that's it for me, for the next 20 years. Now I realise there is more, there are other options."* -

'Getting Ahead' participant (East Reservoir) 2012

#### **BACKGROUND**

In mid-2011, ERNR (East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal) met with PRACE (Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education) to discuss a proposed project – 'Getting Ahead'. The project's target group was local residents experiencing generational poverty and the aim of the project was to assist them to address both vocational and non-vocational barriers that may prevent them from getting into work or training. The first phase of the project would be based on a model and resources that have been used to successfully deliver the program for a number of years in the United States. The second phase (Stage Two) would focus on vocational preparation utilising nationally accredited or locally designed pre-accredited training.

A model was devised where PRACE would take on a lead agency/project management role with ERNR providing support, in particular, during the recruitment phase. Support would also be sought from relevant local organisations including disability employment services which, it was anticipated, would provide the main source of participant recruitment. The project would be funded by the Department of Human Services with ACFE (Adult Community and Further Education) providing funding for the component of training that would address work preparation.

Stage One of the project, ten weeks of facilitated sessions to explore the content of the participant workbook (*'Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World'*), has now been completed. Those participants continuing on in the project will now enter Stage Two – a five week pre-accredited training and work placement program (*'Industry Placement Program'*) designed and delivered by PRACE.

Below is an overview and evaluation of the project to date.

#### **PROGRAM DESIGN AND DELIVERY**

Prior to delivery of the 'Getting Ahead' program (Stage One) the following actions were undertaken:

- A Bridges Out of Poverty workshop, hosted by E.R.N.R and facilitated by Marie McLeod (*Manager Neighbourhood Renewal, Dept. of Human Services*), was held at Reservoir Neighbourhood House on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The program was well attended by community and employment organisations, including several PRACE staff, with very positive feedback.
- Five people attended 'Getting Ahead' facilitator training (two day workshop) delivered by Marie McLeod. The participants were from PRACE and NorthStar Specialist Employment Services. The intention was for two of the participants (one PRACE, one NorthStar) to facilitate the East Reservoir program, with support from other workshop participants as deemed necessary.

- An Information Session was held at Reservoir Neighbourhood House on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2012. The session followed extensive promotion of the program through both East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal and PRACE networks (*see attachment 1*).
- The PRACE Community Programs Coordinator (*'Getting Ahead' project manager*) met with the facilitators of the program several times prior to program commencement to discuss plans for delivery, support, evaluation and feedback.

### **Participants:**

Seven people enrolled in the program with an additional participant enrolling in Week Two (Session 4). The ages (20 – 50) and work and family history of participants was quite diverse and while some identified as having a mental or other health condition, all were considered stable enough to participate in the program at the time of commencement:

- 4 males, 4 females
- 4 Public Housing, 1 Community Housing, 1 family home, 1 private rental, 1 not disclosed
- 1 Youth Allowance, 4 Newstart, 3 DSP

The outcomes for the eight participants at the conclusion of Stage One are as follows:

- One participant, who had signed on to the program at the Information Session, found work (labourer) prior to course commencement and was unable to complete the program.
- One participant was called to Jury Duty in Week Three (Session 6). He was required to go into 'lockdown' for nine weeks and was unable to complete the program.
- One participant (who commenced the program in Week Two/Session 4) found the content difficult and felt that she was not keeping up with the other participants. The project manager met with the participant who identified mental health issues/anxiety as the cause of her concerns. She was encouraged to continue, with support, and three catch-up sessions were arranged but she did not attend any of them. Several attempts to contact her by phone were unsuccessful.
- One participant did not return after the school holidays. Both the program facilitator and project manager made contact with the participant to discuss her situation and develop strategies that would allow her to continue, however, she felt she had too many family/personal issues to keep going with the program.
- Four participants completed the program and have joined with three NorthStar clients (*2 males, 1 female; 2 Newstart, 1 Youth Allowance; all currently residing in family homes*) to complete Stage Two (*'Industry Placement Program'*).
- All participants will complete work placements during the Industry Placement Program and will be supported by PRACE (facilitator and project manager) and NorthStar (Business Development Coordinator and individual case managers, where applicable).

### **Facilitation:**

One of the main facilitators withdrew from the project prior to commencement, leaving Chris Hawkins from NorthStar Specialist Employment Services as the key facilitator of the program. Chris is an experienced employment consultant with NorthStar and brought a depth of knowledge and understanding of both the client group and current Australian work and living conditions to the

program. She successfully replaced the American content, where essential, with more relevant local information. Her suggestions and comments are noted in the 'feedback' section of this document (*'Feedback and Recommendations' pg. 9*).

**Stage One of the project was delivered over 10 weeks and included:**

- 17 facilitated 2.5 hour workshops
- Two social gatherings over the school holidays to maintain motivation and connection within the group. On both occasions the participants were encouraged to bring family members/friends. The get-togethers were also used as a means of gathering informal feedback from the group.

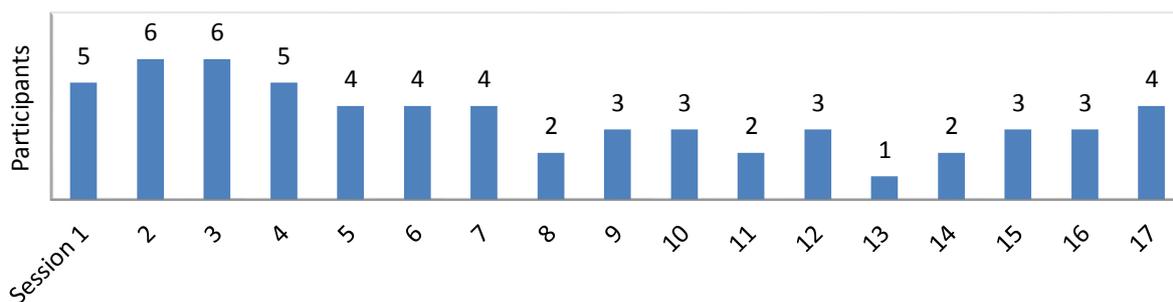
**Participant Support:**

- Initially, food was provided for participants in the form of 'breakfast items/morning tea'; fruit, juice, bread, spreads, cheese, biscuits. The food remained virtually untouched, prompting the facilitator to change the approach to encouraging the group to share a morning tea of cakes/muffins – this was well received.
- Travel cards were made available to any participants who required transport assistance.
- Participants were provided with stationery packs including folders to store their work, calculators and USBs.
- Allowance was made in the budget to assist participants with any clothing or other presentation needs (e.g. haircuts) for employment interviews/practical placements (Stage Two). Free services provided by organisations offering this type of assistance (e.g. 'Dressed for Success') were also utilised.
- The facilitator and project manager both contacted absent students or those that appeared to be struggling with the program. The facilitator also sent a text to all members of the program with reminders about social gatherings, start back dates etc.
- An Advisory Group consisting of representatives of five organisations that had attended the Bridges Out of Poverty workshop (*Sue Silk ELC, ERNR; Zina Miceli Industry Development and Employment, Darebin City Council; David Wilson Business Development Coordinator, NorthStar Specialist Employment Service; Karen Scott Community Building & Participation, Public Tenant Employment Program; Fiona Muscat Community Programs Coordinator, PRACE*) was established. The group provided general suggestions and feedback as well as industry contacts for guest speakers and work placements for Stage Two of the program.

**Attendance:**

Attendance initially was very strong but was impacted by personal and health issues as time went on (*see graph below*).

## Attendance



### Feedback and Evaluation:

Participant progress and satisfaction during Stage One of the project was monitored in a number of ways:

- Informal observation and discussion during sessions and social gatherings
- Informal conversations with facilitator and project manager
- Written evaluations completed by participants each fortnight
- Written reflection by facilitator following sessions
- Self-Assessment by participants using the 'Outcomes Star' (Recovery)

### Outcomes Star:

***"When I completed the first outcome star I just did it – but with further stars I gave it more thought and used it as a self-assessment. This was confronting for me."***

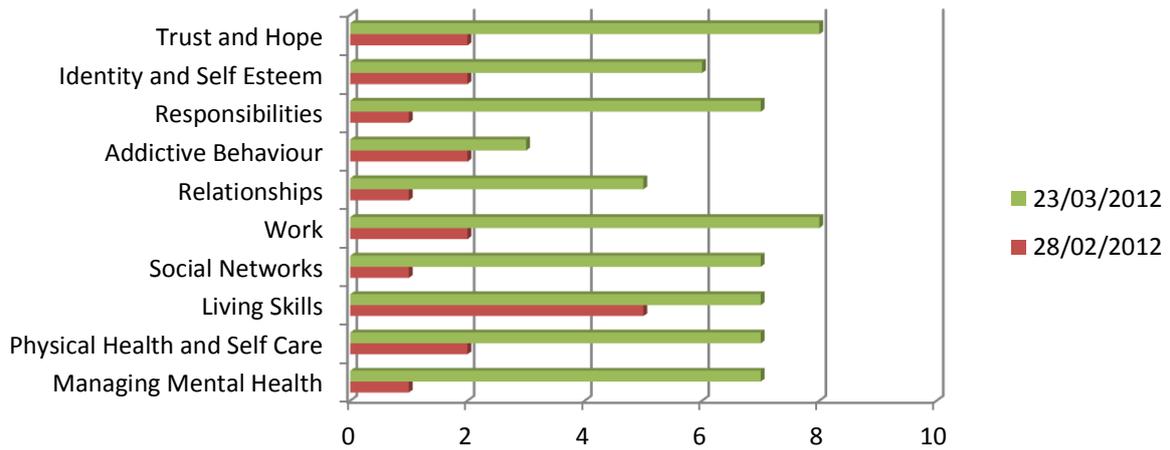
– 'Getting Ahead' participant (East Reservoir) 2012

The 'Outcomes Star' is an assessment tool developed by Triangle Consulting, London that enables users to assess where they are now and measure change over a period of time. It allows users to identify areas that need action and support to achieve their goals and provides visual reinforcement of their progress (*see attachment 2*).

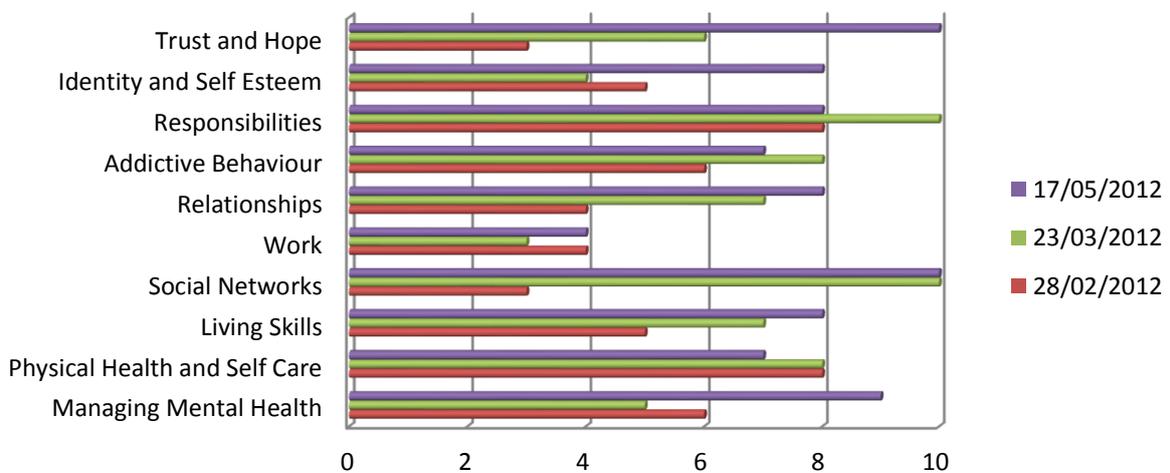
On recommendation from Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, who used the 'Outcome Star' to measure change in participants during their delivery of Getting Ahead in 2011, research into the various models of the 'Star' was undertaken with the 'Recovery Star' being determined as the one most appropriate for use during the East Reservoir project. The Recovery Star has since been adopted for use by other Neighbourhood Renewal Projects delivering 'Getting Ahead'.

The Recovery Star focuses on ten core areas (*see graph below*). Led by the facilitator and support resources, participants were asked to document their responses (***'1' equating to 'being stuck' and '10' reflecting a stage of 'self-reliance'***) at the beginning, middle and end of the ten week program. Results were encouraging with all participants recording a steady (and sometimes extreme) progress in the areas identified. Results from participants who completed the 'star' on more than one occasion are detailed below:

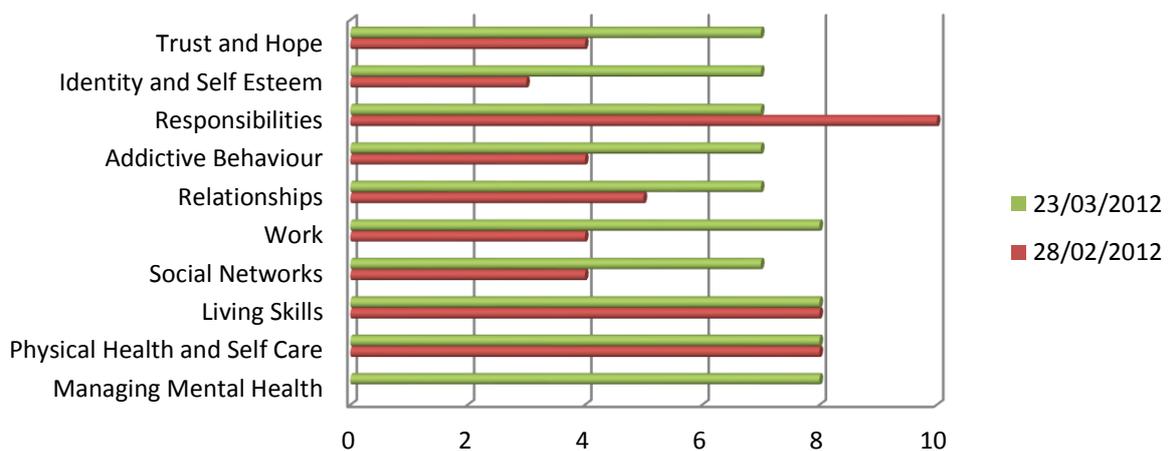
### Recovery Star: Participant 1



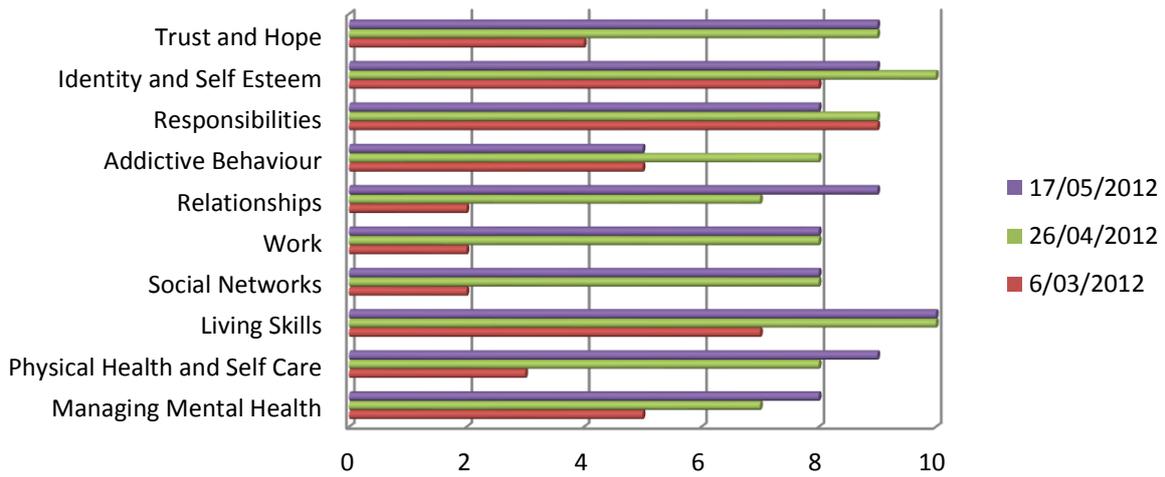
### Recovery Star: Participant 2



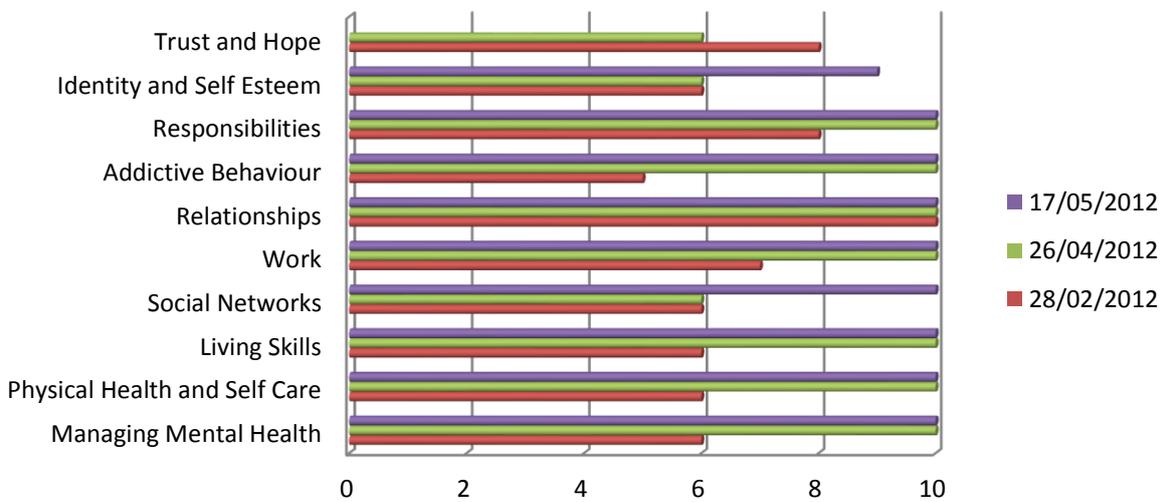
### Recovery Star: Participant 3



### Recovery Star: Participant 4



### Recovery Star: Participant 5



**Written Feedback (participants) collected throughout the program:**

***What information did you find most helpful?***

- Information that was discussed within the group
- How/where to get help
- When information was gathered through discussion and related to real life situations
- Talking about predators and what they do to get you in
- The 'pie' chart
- Discussing community groups and agents available
- The 'Hidden Rules' as it related to the real world which is what we live in
- Family structure
- Hidden rules
- Low income

- Social emphasis
- Language
- Open to different resources
- Setting goals for future
- The resources part
- Information was wide and varied and most helpful
- Open discussion was good
- The group was diverse and not closed in

***What did you find most helpful about the group during these sessions?***

- Open discussions
- Being able to change/alter the course content to fit
- Including everyone in discussion
- Working together as a group is important
- Discussion with the group is helpful
- That the group was able to share their personal experiences and allow them to learn that skill
- The understanding of different aspects and people's own opinions
- Very clear, modified to understand
- The group was caring

***What did you find least helpful about the group?***

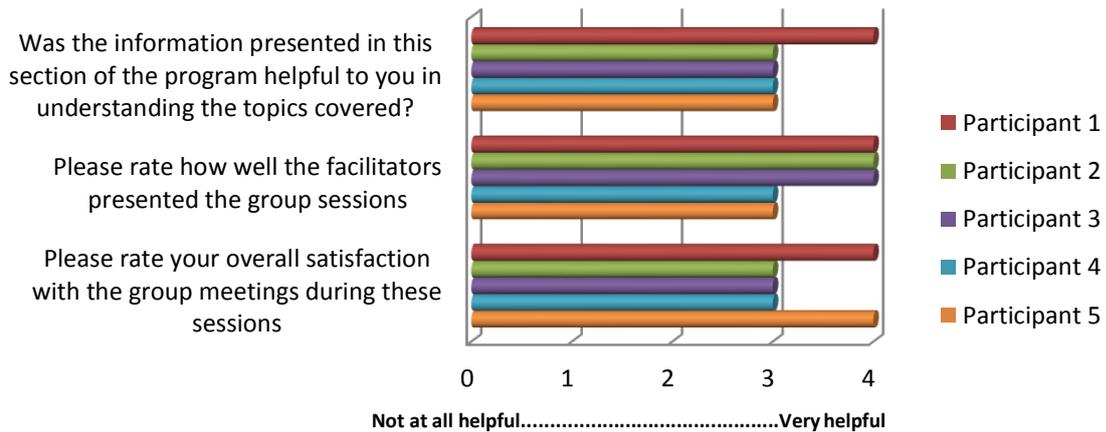
- Understanding the American terms
- The 'Jane' part
- The book was different (*different versions*) and American

***General Comments (written):***

- Open discussions; awareness within group; good people
- Difficult as course is American based so report needs to address how to change for the next group
- It's good to express to each other their experiences
- My teacher was good but some modules were confusing

**Satisfaction ratings:**

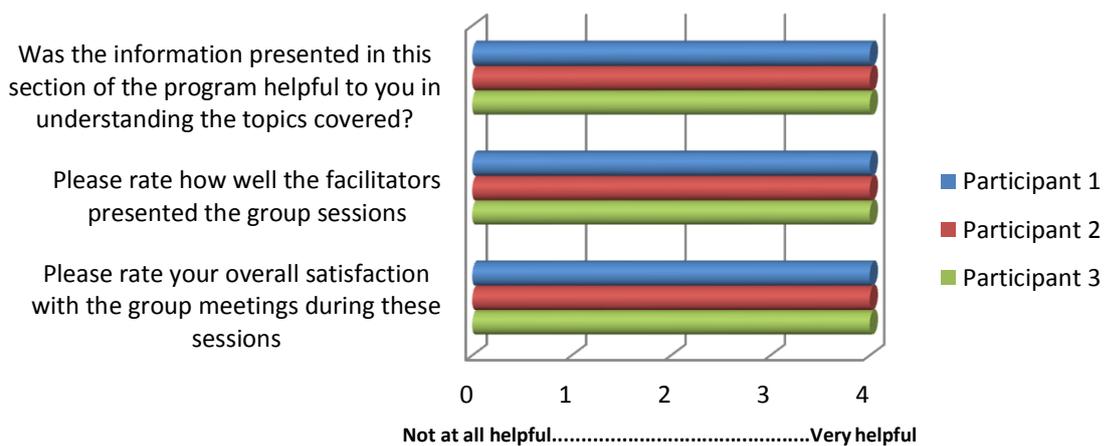
**Completed after session 4/module 4**



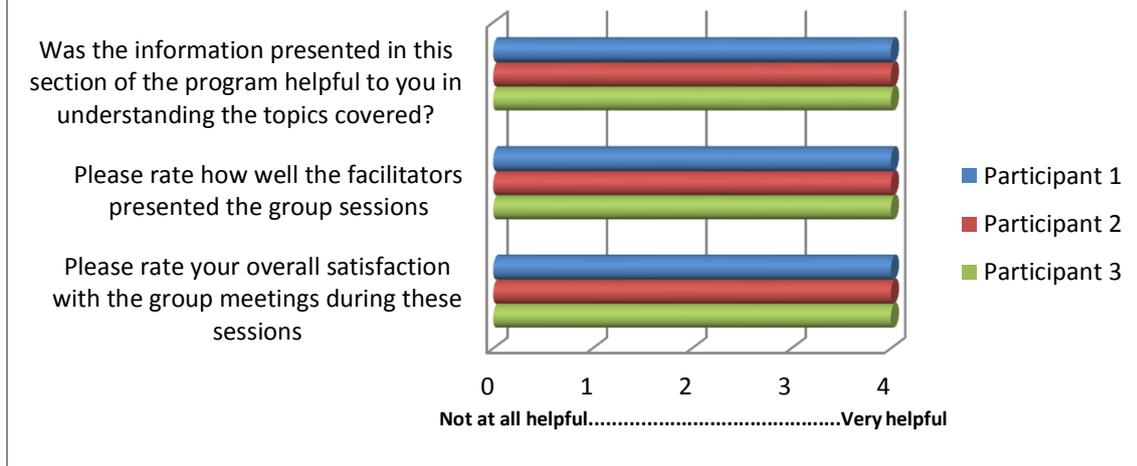
**Completed after session 6/module 5**



**Completed after session 14/module 11**



## Completed after final module



### A selection of oral feedback gathered from participants:

*“Coming to this program gives me a push to get up. It gets me eager to get up in the morning and go to the program. I’m not stuck in the dull routine. I’m thinking about work.”*

*“As the sessions have gone on, I have realised that I want to get into work.”*

*“I was in that much of a rut, but now I realised that if I do things a little bit differently, slowly things will happen. My thinking has shifted.”*

*“I live at home but I have found the program good to work out what the future would be like if I leave. I am starting to make changes and now I know what I need to work on and what I don’t.”*

*“I think you should start doing the program with young people – make them think ahead and plan for the future. I didn’t know that stuff.”*

*“I’m not going backwards now, no way. I will wait for the next brick wall but I know that I will get through that, too.”*

**A summary of the group’s reflection on ‘Community Issues’ is attached to this document (see attachment 3).** The information will be passed on to the East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal Steering Committee.

### Feedback and Recommendations (Program Facilitator):

- Participants quickly developed confidence and willingness to share information including personal details. Enthusiastic about moving forward and getting information and strategies to improve their lives.
- A decision was made by the group to replace the word ‘poverty’ with ‘low-income’.
- Budget – individuals completed income and expenditure budget with surprising results. Two participants were significantly in the red after paying bills. All participants recognised need to change the way they use their money.
- ‘Unloading’ was very useful as some participants are going through difficult situations.

- All members of the group stated that they were getting a lot out of the course and felt confident that they could make changes in their current situation. – (*week 7/session 12*)
- Male participant felt that Module 11 (*'Your Plan Getting from Poverty to Prosperity'*) brought the whole program together and would enable him to move forward in many areas of his life.
- Motivation and enthusiasm was high regarding returning to the program after the school holiday break (*social gatherings were held during the break period*).
- Group supported each other while developing personal plans and offered suggestions and constructive criticism/feedback.
- Important to have support systems in place to 'catch up' participants who have missed information.
- 'Morning tea' works very well and is a social time for group members. Participants advised they would like to have a turn to bring food for morning tea.
- A folder of available resources from Darebin, Reservoir and surrounding areas was provided to participants.

A review of specific modules and resources by facilitator and participants is attached (*see attachment 4*)

### **Final Review and Recommendations for Stage One (Project Manager)**

Feedback from Stage One of the project has been positive from both facilitator and participants. Ten weeks appears to be a suitable time frame to run the program, however, for future projects we would consider delivering over ten consecutive weeks as it was observed that some participants, in particular those that did not attend the social gatherings held during the two week school holidays, either did not return or struggled with attendance after the break. This appeared to be more a reflection of 'life getting in the way' than any response to program content or delivery. Without the twice weekly connection to the group some participants seemed to find it harder to stay focused on the program and became immersed again in personal and health issues.

Participants on this project were in much greater need of (and responded more to) emotional and social support than to material support. It is also essential to budget and provide for support/back-up for the program facilitator/s to accommodate facilitator absence and catch up sessions for absent or late starters. While the 'Getting Ahead' guidelines did not recommend taking late starters, the group did not see a problem with this and were happy to support any newcomers.

The need to adapt the resources to Australian content has been well discussed and documented throughout the project to date. While it would have obviously been beneficial to have had more local content for the pilot program, I believe that the intention of the modules was not lost and suitable and relevant adaptation of material by the facilitator, where possible, enabled the program to be delivered successfully.

The 'Outcomes Star' was a valuable addition to the program resources that was well received by participants and provided a clear visual record of progress and change over a period of time. The group chose to use this type of assessment as a record of their journey but for future projects it would be worthwhile encouraging other options (e.g. filmed journals) to help participants celebrate their incredible progress.

Those who completed Stage One remained motivated and enthusiastic until the end. A social connection had also formed between remaining participants. The last session of the program was used to transition the participants into the next stage (*Industry Placement Program*) as well as acquaint them with a new facilitator and participants. This worked well and those completing Stage One entered the next phase with confidence and positive expectations of their ability to secure employment.

**Acknowledgements:**

PRACE would like to thank the following people who supported and contributed to Stage One of the 'Getting Ahead' project:

Participants (and their families)

Ruby Payne and Philip DeVol (Resources: Framework for Understanding Poverty, Bridges Out of Poverty, Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' by World)

Marie McLeod - Manager Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Building & Economic Participation, DHS

Sue Silk – Employment and Learning Coordinator, East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal

Chris Hawkins – Employment Consultant, NorthStar Specialist Employment Service

David Wilson – Business Development Coordinator, NorthStar Specialist Employment Service

Karen Scott – Community Building & Participation, Public Tenant Employment Program

Zina Miceli - Industry Development and Employment, Darebin City Council

Barb Matthews – PRACE

Debra Vallely – PRACE

Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal (Evaluation of Maryborough Getting Ahead Project 2011)

Mental Health Providers Forum and Triangle Consulting, United Kingdom ('Recovery' Outcomes Star)

**Report Compiled by:**

Fiona Muscat (Project Manager)  
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PRACE

**Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Information Session flyer

Attachment 2: Outcomes Star (Recovery)

Attachment 3: Group Reflections on General Community Issues

Attachment 4: Review of Modules and Resources