

MISSION AUSTRALIA

In association with

Audi

Audi Women in Automotive

Evaluation Report



Audi Women in Automotive Project:

Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

The Audi Women in Automotive project was jointly developed by Mission Australia and Audi in order to encourage mothers/long term unemployed women to enter a non-traditional field of employment, the automotive industry. The pilot program ran for eight weeks in late 2017, with participants undertaking both TAFE training in Automotive Administration and a vocational placement within an Audi dealership.

This report presents the findings of an evaluation designed to assess the effectiveness of the pilot program in building participants' confidence, work skills and knowledge. This evaluation draws upon both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to gain a thorough understanding of participants' circumstances and experiences within the program, as well as their outcomes.

From the evaluation it is clear that the overall sentiment towards the Audi Women in Automotive project was very positive, with high levels of participant satisfaction and most suggesting a strong likelihood to recommend the program to others. The evaluation found that all participants felt they had developed their skills through taking part in the program, half indicated gaining work experience and one third indicated improved confidence in the job market as a result of their participation.

The evaluation also revealed that a particularly important benefit derived from taking part in the program was improved self-confidence. Participants indicated that completing the program gave them a great sense of pride and achievement and helped them to develop new work or training aspirations. At the conclusion of the program, all participants felt that the program would help them re-enter the work force, 80% said that they were now interested in working in the automotive industry and 80% also felt that being involved in the program had made them more confident in their ability to manage their time between home and work.

The program's mix of theoretical and practical learning experiences was valued by participants, as were the flexible hours and relatively short duration of the program. The support provided to them by Audi, TAFE and Mission Australia staff, ensuring they could overcome potential barriers to participation, was greatly appreciated. The small group nature of the program also gave participants a strong sense of community, with friendships being forged and the women acting as a further support network for one another.

While the participants acknowledged ongoing barriers to workforce participation (primarily childcare, domestic responsibilities, and for some, language or IT challenges), the Audi Women in Automotive project was described as an important 'kick start' and three participants were thrilled to have received job offers following their participation in the project. When asked if there were any areas for improvement, most were very satisfied with the program's current structure. Some felt, however, that the vocational placement could be enhanced by better alerting staff at the Audi

dealerships about the program and its objectives so that participants could make a more meaningful contribution and feel better integrated into the dealership environment.

Encouragingly, analysis of participants' responses to the Personal Wellbeing Index incorporated into the intake and exit quantitative surveys revealed marked improvements in participants' satisfaction with what they are achieving in life, with feeling part of their community and with their future security after their involvement in the Audi Women in Automotive project.

Key Findings

Personal

- All participants felt they developed the skills needed for future employment.
- Of particular importance were the improvements noted in self-confidence.
- The project broadened the participants' understanding of a non-traditional industry for women, which participants felt gave them further opportunities for employment.
- Quantitative improvements were seen in participants' personal wellbeing, especially in terms of satisfaction with their achievements, feeling part of the community and their future security.

Program

- Participants would recommend the program to others.
- All participants valued the mix of theoretical and practical components of the program.
- The participants valued the scheduling of the program, enabling them to carry out both their household responsibilities and training commitments.
- Some participants felt there could be better communication with the staff at Audi dealerships regarding their working arrangements.
- Participants felt better placed to re-enter the workforce after completing the program.

Future barriers

- Despite the above, participants still felt there were barriers to them re-entering the workforce, particularly around childcare responsibilities. While three participants were offered employment at Audi, childcare prevented them from taking up these opportunities.

Recommendations

- Mission Australia continues to develop our relationship with the Audi Foundation and uses this pilot as an example of a project that can enhance the wellbeing of women and broaden their employment opportunities.
- Mission Australia recognises that this program is a successful model which could also be applied in other contexts and industries e.g. childcare and social services.

Project Background

The Audi Women in Automotive Project was jointly developed by Mission Australia and Audi. This innovative pilot employment program was designed to assist mothers/long term unemployed women interested in entering a non-traditional field of employment, specifically, the automotive industry. The program aimed to build women's confidence, work skills and knowledge through education and on-the-job work experience. It also focused on exploring employment possibilities across a range of areas such as retail, sales and after service.

In total, ten participants were recruited for the pilot program through Mission Australia's ParentsNext Project in South Western Sydney. ParentsNext is a pre-employment program funded through the Department of Jobs and Small Business that has been in operation since 2016. The program supports parents who have children under the age of six to plan and prepare for employment by the time their youngest child commences school. Many parents who engage with the ParentsNext program have never had the opportunity to enter the workforce or have been out of the workforce for a number of years. As such, the ParentsNext program was ideally suited to referring eligible clients to the Audi Women in Automotive project and providing support to participants as they engaged in the pilot.

The Audi Women in Automotive Project was structured to comprise both theoretical and practical components, specifically completion of a TAFE Statement of Attainment and a vocational placement within an Audi dealership. The theoretical component was conducted at Mission Australia's ParentsNext site by external TAFE providers. A one day training course was also undertaken at Audi Centre Sydney, where participants learnt about Audi and its vehicles 'bumper to bumper' and were given health and safety training within a workshop environment. The vocational placement consisted of unpaid work experience designed to provide participants with practical exposure to administration/reception, sales and after sales roles within a dealership environment. Vocational placements were offered at several Audi dealership sites including Sutherland, Zetland, North Ryde and Five Dock.

Overall, the pilot program was designed to run for eight weeks, from mid October to early December 2017. In the first five weeks of the program, participants attended two days per week of classroom training, followed by one day per week of vocational placement within an Audi dealership. The following three weeks, four participants took the opportunity to extend this vocational placement within Audi.

In order to accommodate participants' need to drop off and pick up their children from school or childcare, both the theoretical and practical components of the program were conducted between the hours of 10am and 2pm, thereby eliminating a potential major barrier to participation. Additionally, Audi covered the cost of childcare for those that did not have previous arrangements and funded the employment of a 0.6 FTE employee to provide administrative support for the project.

Of the ten mothers who commenced in the program, all but one remained engaged until its completion. Moreover, at the conclusion of the program, offers of employment were made to three of the program participants and a further two participants enrolled in further study.

Methodology

Mission Australia's internal Research and Evaluation team was engaged to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Audi Women in Automotive Project. The evaluation utilised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to gain a holistic view of participants' backgrounds, experiences in the program and program outcomes.

Quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire administered to participants at two points in time – commencement of the program (survey one - mid October 2017) and at completion of the training component of the program (survey two - mid November 2017). The questionnaire was developed by Mission Australia's Research and Evaluation team in consultation with Mission Australia ParentsNext staff and key stakeholders from Audi and TAFE NSW. It captured participant demographics, training and employment aspirations and perceived barriers to achieving these, participant wellbeing and feelings about the future. Importantly, it sought to ascertain the effectiveness of the Audi Women in Automotive Project through comparing responses of participants both before and after their involvement in the program. The survey was administered in hard copy, with literacy support on offer from ParentsNext staff if required.

In total, 7 participants completed the survey at the commencement of the program and 8 participants completed the follow up survey a month later. Participant responses were able to be matched across the two waves of data collection through the inclusion of an item asking their job seeker ID (a unique client identifier). In total, 6 participants were able to be matched i.e. they completed the survey at both points in time. For the purposes of this report, all data presented is based on these matched responses in order to accurately determine the impact of the program on participants' aspirations, wellbeing and outlook for the future.

Additionally, qualitative data was also gathered through one on one structured interviews with program participants at the completion of their vocational placement. All participants were invited to take part, with 7 electing to do so. The interview allowed for a more in-depth discussion of the topics covered within the questionnaire, as well as providing an opportunity for participants to reflect on the program's strengths and any areas for improvement.

Quantitative Findings

Demographics

All participants in the program were female and were enrolled in the Bankstown ParentsNext program. Further demographic breakdowns are provided in Table 1 below. As can be seen, two thirds of the participants had 3 or more dependent children, and half were single parents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the 6 participants who completed both surveys

	Percent or mean
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status	
Neither	
Neither	83.3%
Aboriginal	16.7%
Torres Strait Islander	0.0%
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%
Living arrangements	
I live by myself with my child/ren	50.0%
I live with my parents and my child/ren	0.0%
I live with my spouse/partner and my/our child/ren	33.3%
I live in a group household with my child/ren	16.7%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%
Number of dependent children	
One	16.7%
Two	16.7%
Three	33.3%
Four	33.3%
Five +	0.0%
Length of time receiving assistance from ParentsNext	
Range	1-12 months
Average	6.2 months

Age	
Range	29-45 years
Average	34.8 years

Education and employment status of participants

Of the six participants who completed both surveys, half (50.0%) indicated that the highest qualification they had completed previously was Year 12/Higher School Certificate or equivalent, two (33.3%) indicated having completed a Non trade certificate I, II, III, IV/Diploma/Advanced Diploma and one (16.7%) indicated having completed a Bachelor degree.

At the commencement of the program, only one participant (16.7%) indicated currently attending any training program or study. None of the participants indicated that they had worked in a full-time or part-time job of any kind in the previous month. Similarly, none of the participants reported actively looking for work at any time in the last month.

At the time of the second survey (after completion of the vocational placement), unsurprisingly two thirds of participants (66.7%) indicated that they were currently attending some type of training program or study, two participants (33.3%) indicated that they had a full-time or part-time job and one participant (16.7%) indicated that they had actively looked for work during the past month.

The reasons cited by participants for not looking for work at the time of each survey are listed in Table 2 below. Encouragingly, 'lacking necessary school, training, skills or experience' was no longer cited as a barrier to looking for work by the time of the second survey after participation in the Audi Women in Automotive Project. There were also reduced percentages of women citing 'childcare', 'ill health of a family member' and 'no job in a suitable location' as a barrier. The participants were more likely in the second wave of research, however, to cite 'no job with suitable hours' as a barrier to employment. As detailed further below, concern about job hours was also a theme that emerged in the qualitative interviews. While participants were very grateful for the short hours and flexibility offered in the Audi Women in Automotive project, they recognised that this would not be the case for employment more generally and were concerned about their ability to find work that would accommodate school or childcare pick-up and drop-off times.

Table 2. Reasons why participants were not looking for work

Reason	Survey One	Survey Two
Childcare	50.0%	33.3%
Ill health of family member	16.7%	0.0%
Lack necessary schooling, training, skills or experience	16.7%	0.0%
Difficulties with language or ethnic background	16.7%	16.7%
Difficulties with reading/writing	16.7%	16.7%
No job with suitable hours	16.7%	50.0%
No job in suitable location	16.7%	0.0%
Participation in Audi program	0.0%	16.7%

When asked if they would accept employment if it was offered to them, 100.0% of those who responded to this question in both survey one and survey two indicated that they would do so. When asked at the time of the second survey if they would be interested in attending any further training programs, four out of the five participants who answered this question indicated an interest in further training opportunities. Other industries participants indicated an interest in training in included childcare, community services and retail/hospitality.

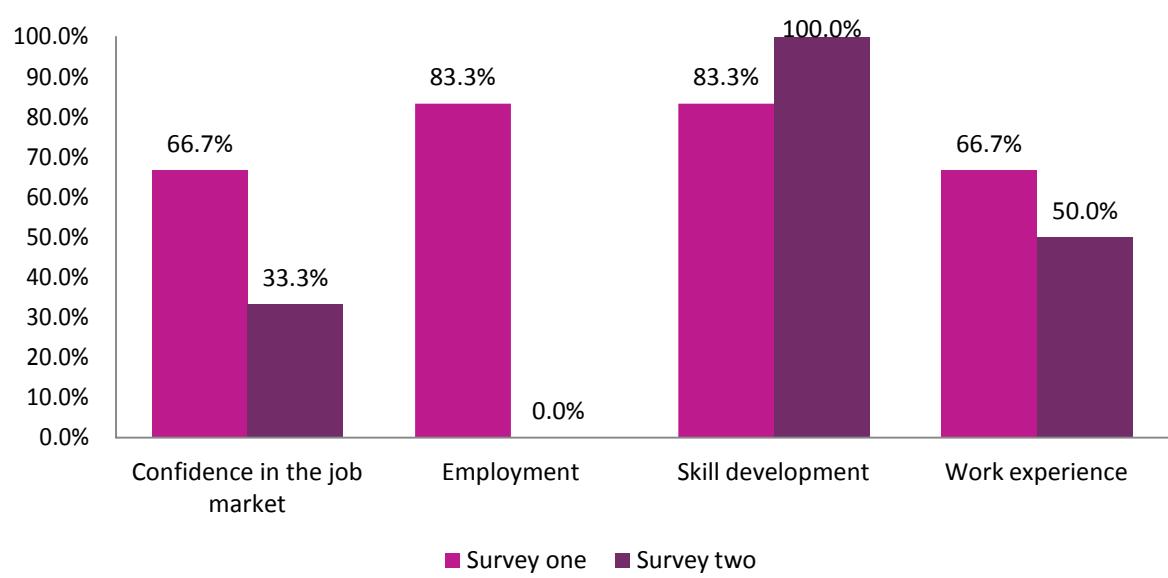
Expectations regarding the Women in Automotive program

At the commencement of the Audi Women in Automotive project, all participants indicated being either 'very confident' (83.3%) or 'confident' (16.7%) in their ability to complete the program. Three (50.0%) of the participants felt there may be barriers to them completing the program, but of these participants, two of the three (66.7%) felt that the Audi Women in Automotive project would help them to overcome these barriers. At the time of the second survey, none of the participants indicated having encountered any barriers which impacted on them completing the Audi Women in Automotive project.

The expectations of participants at the commencement of the program are outlined in Figure 1. This figure also indicates what participants felt they had achieved through participating in the program at the time of the second survey. As can be seen, the majority of participants had high expectations of the program upon entry, expecting program outcomes to include confidence in the job market, employment, skill development and work experience. At the time of the second survey, these high

initial expectations had not been fulfilled for all participants. This may in part be related to the longer term nature of these goals (e.g. finding employment), however only half of the participants indicated having achieved work experience through their participation and only one third felt the program had given them confidence in the job market. While participants were not asked the reasons behind their responses, the qualitative research indicated that while completing their vocational placement, a number of the participants began to develop concerns around the practicalities of 'real world' work requirements outside of the program, particularly around standard working hours which may have reduced their confidence in finding work that would accommodate their family and domestic requirements.

Figure 1: Expectations and achievements related to participation in the Women in Automotive Project



When asked in survey one in an open ended question what they thought the Audi Women in Automotive program would help them with, the main benefits participants anticipated were increased confidence, work experience and improved knowledge about the automotive industry. One specifically mentioned she hoped it would give her 'the confidence to obtain a position in car sales'. When asked in the second survey what the program actually helped them with, response were similar, indicating that participants' expectations had been fulfilled. The main responses related to improved self-confidence, increased knowledge about the automotive industry and car parts, gaining work experience and learning new skills. One participant indicated that the program had helped her in 'regaining confidence, utilising skills I have and gaining new skills'.

Outcomes of participation in the Audi Women in Automotive Project

Work/training aspirations and confidence

The second survey conducted after participants' completion of the vocational placement asked a range of questions aimed at assessing the impact of the Audi Women in Automotive project. Some of these questions were asked solely at this point in time, while others were asked in both surveys allowing for comparisons to be drawn and inferences made about the potential benefits of the project.

Encouragingly, the responses among the five participants who answered all of these questions were overwhelmingly positive, suggesting that the Audi Women in Automotive project had helped improve their confidence and workplace readiness, as well as enhancing their interest in working within the automotive industry. 100% of participants answering these questions indicated that the Audi Women in Automotive project will help them re-enter the workforce, 80% said that they were now interested in working in the automotive industry and 80% also felt that being involved in the program had made them more confident in their ability to manage their time between home and work.

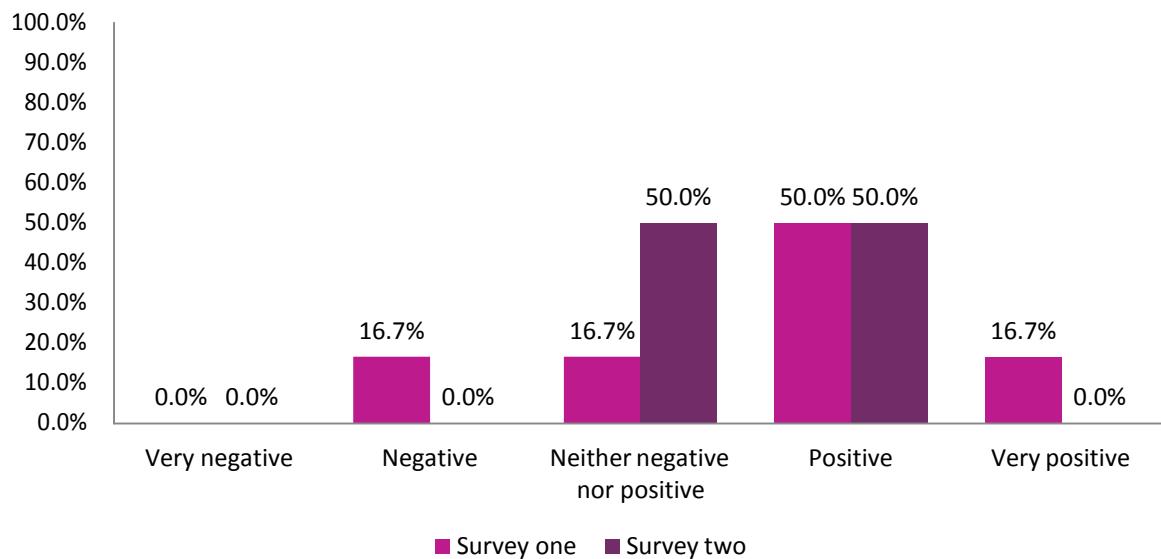
Respondents were also asked in both waves of the survey whether they felt they needed support from their case worker across a range of areas including setting goals, assisting with course materials, resume and letter writing, interview skills and advice on childcare assistance. The majority of participants felt they needed help with each of these areas at both points in time, with the perceived need for assistance actually increasing by the time participants had completed their vocational placement. This may perhaps reflect the fact that these women were now thinking more seriously about re-entering the workforce and were aware of the practical help they would need in doing so.

Wellbeing

Participants in the Audi Women in Automotive Project were asked a range of questions designed to gauge their level of optimism about the future and their personal wellbeing at the time of each of the surveys. Results to these questions have been compared across the two survey periods in order to assess any changes participants may have experienced.

Figure 2 below shows the shifts between survey one and two in terms of participants' feelings about the future. While results were similar across the two survey periods with half of all participants feeling 'positive' about the future, there were some shifts between categories. Encouragingly, at the time of the second survey, no respondents indicated feeling either 'negative' or 'very negative' about the future.

Figure 2: Participants' feelings about the future



A validated measure of subjective wellbeing, the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), was also used in both surveys. This index is designed to be sensitive to fluctuations in a person's circumstances and encompasses the constructs of satisfaction with the following domains: standard of living; health; achieving; relationships; safety; community; future security. It also includes a stand-alone question on satisfaction with life as a whole. Survey participants are asked to rate their satisfaction with these domains on a scale of 0-10. The scores on these seven domains are averaged to form a single composite personal wellbeing score that is standardised onto a 0-100 point scale, where 0 is completely dissatisfied and 100 is completely satisfied. The following guidelines are given by the developers of the index for the interpretation of individual subjective wellbeing scores as measured by the PWI:

70+ points	'Normal': A person is likely to be experiencing a normal level of wellbeing
51-69 points	'Challenged': Personal wellbeing is likely to be challenged / compromised
<50 points	'High-risk': Very low personal wellbeing / strong likelihood of depression

In Australia, the average PWI is approximately 75. In Table 3 below, the averages for each of the PWI domains have been compared across the two data collection periods for the Audi Women in Automotive Project based on the 5 respondents who completed all relevant questions in each survey.

Table 3. Standardised mean scores from Audi Women in Automotive participants and the general Australian adult population for the Personal Wellbeing Index

Question	Average Score at Survey One	Average Score at Survey Two	Normative data (2017)¹
Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?	54.0	52.0	75.9
How satisfied are you with your standard of living?	66.0	62.0	79.4
How satisfied are you with your health?	64.0	62.0	73.2
How satisfied are you with what you are achieving in life?	50.0	64.0	72.6
How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?	68.0	52.0	78.6
How satisfied are you with how safe you feel?	74.0	70.0	80.3
How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?	58.0	72.0	72.4
How satisfied are you with your future security?	54.0	62.0	71.2
Overall wellbeing score	62.0	63.4	75.5

While it is impossible to attribute change on these measures directly to the Audi Women in Automotive project without full knowledge of other factors in participants' lives over the research period, it is very encouraging to see marked improvements in respondents' satisfaction with what they are achieving in life, with feeling part of their community and with their future security between the two waves of the survey. The qualitative research confirmed these findings, with participants identifying an improved sense of achievement and community as major benefits derived from their participation in the program (as detailed further below). Responses to all other items remained fairly steady across the two survey periods; however, there was also an unexplainable downward shift in reported satisfaction with personal relationships. This finding was not reflected in the qualitative interviews.

Qualitative Findings

As mentioned, the qualitative semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for more in-depth discussion of participants' experiences within the Audi Women in Automotive project, how it accommodated their personal circumstances and aspirations, strengths of the program and areas for improvement. Overall, all participants who were involved were very positive about their experience with the Audi Women in Automotive project, with the vast majority saying they would recommend it

¹ See <https://www.australianunity.com.au/media-centre/wellbeing>

to others. More detailed feedback about the program is provided below, incorporating direct participant quotes to give insight into the impact the program had at an individual level.

Structure of the Audi Women in Automotive project

There was a consensus among participants that a good balance had been achieved in the program through its mix of coursework and vocational placement time. Both elements were seen as excellent learning opportunities, increasing participant knowledge and allowing this knowledge to then be applied within a work environment. Being given time at the start of each week to reflect and debrief on their last week's experience with the training provider and Mission Australia staff was also deemed to be very useful.

Participants reflected favourably on the project's daily contact hours, the number of days per week it ran and its timing in the year. They were grateful that the program took account of school drop off and pick up times, allowing them ample travel time and removing this otherwise major barrier to their participation. They also appreciated the flexible and accommodating nature of all parties involved, and the understanding that was shown if they needed to miss a day or leave early due to family or caring responsibilities. In terms of the timing of the project across October to early December, most felt this was a good choice. In particular, it ensured the program had concluded before the busy end of year/Christmas period which was particularly critical for those who had children commencing in primary school or childcare the following year; allowing them time to help their children to prepare for this transition. It also aligned with a time of year participants were beginning to plan and set goals for the year ahead, allowing participants to look into and prepare for future studies or employment opportunities.

In terms of the number of weeks the program ran for, most felt the current length of the program was about right. Through keeping the program duration relatively short, participants felt that the program was less overwhelming and more achievable than longer term study. The chosen length of the program also seemed to help maintain momentum and interest and meant participants were readily able to derive a sense of success from completing the program. This was significant as many participants had not engaged in any study or employment for a number of years.

Some individuals indicated, however, that they would have liked to have seen the program extended. In particular, there was a desire for more time working within the Audi dealerships, further rotations within the dealerships (exposing participants to a greater range of business areas) and perhaps further training in areas including information technology/computer skills.

Barriers to participation

As highlighted in the quantitative research, while some of the participants initially felt that there could be barriers to their participation in the Audi Women in Automotive project, these did not interfere with their successful completion of the program. In the interviews with participants, many spoke of the excellent support and practical assistance offered to them by Mission Australia and Audi staff, who went out of their way to minimise barriers and ensure participants had every chance to succeed. Assistance was both financial (in the form of fuel vouchers, child care, purchase of work apparel etc.) and also emotional, with participants feeling greatly encouraged by program staff and offered flexibility when needed to take care of outside responsibilities e.g. in the case of a sick child or family member.

"Shoes, clothes, the kids in childcare are covered and the petrol ...They open at a study time that's already very good for the parents who've got kids. It's very perfect, helpful to support us to go back to the community."

"So they're showing you that 'we're with you' not just 'here, take it and go'. You know, they tried to eliminate all the things I think that would put a burden on you as well. I think that's the easiest way to put it."

As per the demographics of south western Sydney, a number of the participants spoke English as a second language and identified some challenges experienced as a result of this. Although this may have meant these participants took longer to understand some of the coursework and terminology used within the vocational placement, they mentioned feeling well supported by all those involved in the program. One of these participants indicated that she had spent additional time outside of the program cross referencing terms such as vehicle parts with the words used to describe these in her first language.

For these participants, the Audi Women in Automotive program had the additional benefit of helping them to become more confident in their use of spoken English. This in turn boosted their overall self-confidence and made many of them realise that their scope for employment may be greater than what they had previously thought. A couple of the participants stated that they entered the program with the belief that if they pursued employment it would need to be in a position where they either worked with those from their own cultural background or were not required to converse in English. The Audi Women in Automotive project allowed the participants the opportunity to challenge this belief. While these participants recognised that further English language education and practice would be required in order to fulfil the requirements of some positions such as reception or administrative roles, the program made them feel that this was not necessarily something outside of their abilities.

"I have to improve my English so I can be working with Aussie people; before I was thinking I could only work with Chinese people, show up to do the cashier ... That's it, that's work I can do. But now I think if I can do the English skill, the door is open for me."

Through learning in an environment with others from different cultural backgrounds, these participants also gained a friendship group outside of their cultural community, which not all participants had experienced in the past.

"Because before I was alone, always in the Chinese community – never talk, meet, touch the Aussie people, never close – now this brings me to open my heart, it's a very good opportunity. I met a lot of friends."

The only other barrier identified by some participants in the program was the distance between their vocational placement and the location of their children's school or childcare centre. While all respondents appreciated the course being run over 4 hours during the middle of the day and indicated that both the TAFE teaching staff and Audi team had been very accommodating and flexible with regards to these needs, some still felt distance would pose a challenge should they seek ongoing employment, especially if they were to conform to standard business hours.

Benefits derived from participating in the Audi Women in Automotive project

Participants all spoke very highly of the many benefits they had derived from participating in the Audi Women in Automotive project. Key benefits identified by participants included:

- Improved self-confidence;
- A sense of achievement and pride in completing the course and gaining a Statement of Attainment;
- A wider social network and sense of community;
- Enjoyment in learning new and useful things that could also have broader applicability in their personal lives and future employment; and
- The development of new aspirations for study or work.

As the quantitative research shows, one of the most critical benefits that participants gained from their involvement in the Audi Women in Automotive project was improved self-confidence.

Participants mentioned increased self-esteem, a sense of ‘self’ outside of their identity as a mother and a stronger belief in their own capabilities. For some, this more positive mindset had spillover effects in their role as a parent. In the words of program participants:

“I felt more confident and I’m happy. Like when I call my dad I say ‘I did this, this and this’. And he said that I used to be such a shy person and what happened to me?”

“I learnt to feel that little bit more confident in the fact that you know, I’ve done this course and now I know more than I thought I did.”

“It gave that bit of confidence like, hey, if I was legitimately in this job, or in a workplace, people actually do like me and see me as a benefit for the company and not a burden, you know what I mean?”

“I feel like I’m a happier parent as well. I don’t feel like things get to me as much, because I have my goals and my dreams I’m happy and I feel like that is important and sometimes I felt a bit selfish to find that important before this...I feel like it’s given me some sort of therapy without the cost, and that’s been really, really helpful for me.”

Participants also enjoyed gaining experience in a workplace – an environment quite different to their usual one as stay-at-home mothers. Especially after a period of absence from the workforce, this workplace exposure heightened their confidence and allayed fears about returning to work.

“Just getting back into the workplace even though we weren’t getting paid for it. Just being around people that are working and stuff. It wasn’t as nerve-racking as I thought.”

As touched upon earlier, the short and achievable nature of the program meant that participants derived a great sense of satisfaction in completing it – a major milestone particularly for those who had not studied beyond school or had been out of the workforce for many years.

“For me, one thing was about starting something and finishing it. So it’d been a while since I’d been able to do that, from just stuff in life that had happened”.

The participants also strongly valued gaining a Statement of Attainment at the end of the program.

"And as I said, the best thing about it is it's not a waste of time or just going there; you may not get a job out of it too, but you get a Statement of Attainment. I think that it's great to have something. If you have kids you can show them 'hey I done something, here's my certificate' – I think that's amazing."

One of the unanticipated benefits of the course work component of the program was that it allowed a group of mothers, some of whom are single parents, to form a community with each other. Discovering that others were facing similar challenges to them acted as an important motivator for some participants and the support provided by the other women helped them to continue in the course, even when personal circumstances may have made this challenging at times. The comradeship that developed between participants also helped overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation that some had previously been harbouring.

"I feel like it's given me an opportunity to re-evaluate my capabilities, I suppose. It's given me a chance to be with other people who are in a similar situation and to know that they're rising above that stuff too; whereas I felt a little bit alone before in all my challenges, and I felt like they kind of overwhelmed me for a while. Whereas now I see that other people have done it, or are doing it, and that kind of gives me that confidence back, I suppose, to know that I can do it – I just need to not be so harsh on myself, and there are opportunities out there and there are people that are willing to help you; whereas I didn't feel that way before."

Feedback was particularly positive about the quality of the TAFE teaching staff that not only made the theoretical component of the course enjoyable and easily understood but also played a key role in boosting participants' confidence in their abilities. The content of the course was universally deemed to be relevant and useful, with participants able to see that some of the knowledge they had gained could be applied in other broader circumstances. For instance, they acquired vehicle knowledge that they could apply to car maintenance at home and also gained business knowledge e.g. on Occupational, Health and Safety and other legal issues which could be applied across a variety of industries.

"I learnt a lot about cars and how to take care of my car and stuff – car maintenance. Also the skills I learnt apply to a lot of different industries – how to be a salesperson in the makeup industry for example; it's all about customer service. So I learnt a lot, to do a lot of things."

"Oh yeah, in the law, when we were doing the law for the two sessions, I actually learnt things that would help me in my own situations, which was great. I learnt ways how to write specific letters, like if it was to a council or something; what are rules and regulations like for fire safety; it opened my eyes again."

"Yeah I actually learnt a fair bit for the outside that'll benefit me for later, which was fantastic."

Finally, as supported by the quantitative research, most participants acknowledged that their participation in the program had played a key role in helping them to develop future study or employment aspirations. Some indicated that the program had been particularly helpful in alerting them to the type of roles that may be best suited to their interests and skill sets. For others, the program had inspired them to pursue future study or training to address areas of weakness (for instance, computing skills or English language abilities). As expressed by one participant, who

echoed the sentiment of many of the women, the program provided an important ‘kickstart’. It encouraged participants to plan for their future, moreover it empowered them through granting them a sense of control and choice over what this future might hold.

“It just gives you a little bit of a push, you know ...”

“It made me more open to work or study. I was scared at first before I did this course, I was scared that how am I gonna manage it with four kids and my husband? But then I found yeah, it’s alright, I can do both, why not?”

“So – I feel like I’ve got a bit more of a clearer indication of where I’m going. I still have some ideas, but I know that I have a bit of an indication of what I want, what I’m interested in and where I’m going. And that’s based upon the support that I’ve gotten as well. Because I felt like my head was a little bit all over the shop, like ‘what am I gonna do?’ and it was all based around just getting money. Because that’s where I felt like I was at, whereas now I feel like I have more opportunity to say ‘yes I do want the money, but I also want to do something that I like, that I’m good at so I can stay there and be happy as well’. And that’s gonna work around my life and my child.”

“I feel like I have some stuff to look forward to which is nice.”

Areas for improvement

While participants were generally very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Audi Women in Automotive project and felt that the pilot program was very well executed, a few participants mentioned that they felt the vocational placement could have been better communicated to staff at the Audi dealerships they were based in. Specifically, these participants felt that some additional planning could have occurred before their arrival at the dealerships, so key staff were anticipating their arrival and could have planned an appropriate work load/task list.

“Just make sure they’re aware, and have activities for the work placement students so they’re not just sitting there.”

“Most of the times when I went, they didn’t even know I was coming.”

“So I think they should be advised ‘hey these people are coming and we need to allocate work for them’ because sometimes to be honest, they didn’t know what to give me for work, or I’d just sit here and do nothing, or just answer the phone. I think they need to be more specific and prepared.”

Most participants seemed keen to gain exposure to as many areas of the business as possible, so potentially broadening their work experience to other areas within the dealership would have been seen as a positive.

“I really wanted to get a feel of working in the sales department, but unfortunately I didn’t get that chance. So I don’t know what it’s like to actually be in the frontline of Audi. I only worked in the call centre, so there wasn’t really much that I did get to see other than answering the phone, filing, things like that; picking up small parts. So I’m not really sure. I would’ve liked to have tried the sales – that’s where I thought I was actually going – and then I was disappointed when I wasn’t put there.”

Some participants also mentioned a desire for more time in the vocational placement.

"I really enjoyed it so I guess I wanted more; I wanted more work experience. I was thinking like, the last few weeks – because we only got the Wednesday – so I was hoping for the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. I know that might not be possible based on the fact that they've still got a business to run. But if possible it would've been cool with a few more days, so I could've soaked up a little bit more, other than just the one day a week; see how things are going at the beginning of the week or the end of the week."

Others discussed a desire for some training in information technology since this appeared important for a number of roles within the dealership.

"I reckon an IT [course] – when you go into the workforce you've gotta be familiarised with computers and stuff. So I reckon an IT course would be great."

Only one participant expressed frustration that the program had not led more directly into employment opportunities.

"But actually I wanted to come to this program because I wanted to find a job. But now, I've already finished this program but I can't find a job. That's a problem."

Interest in pursuing employment within the automotive industry

The Audi Women in Automotive project was beneficial in opening participants up to opportunities in a non-traditional field of employment for women - the automotive industry. While some had commenced with a keen interest in vehicles, others had not or at least had never considered exploring potential career opportunities in this area. Some participants indicated having been previously unaware of the opportunities there might be for women within the automotive industry and were excited to learn that this was a field that could be open to them.

"It's different, especially to my family, like a woman doing that in the dealership, it's different. So I wanted to prove something to myself and to the others, and other women too."

At the conclusion of the Audi Women in Automotive project, some of the participants expressed a keen desire to pursue employment within Audi or the broader automotive industry. Others recognised that perhaps the automotive industry was not the perfect match for their interests and skill sets but had developed new aspirations towards training or employment in other industries.

"So I did learn that from going to a placement. I realised actually what I do like to do and what I hate to do, which was great."

A common concern among participants in relation to seeking employment within the automotive industry was whether they could obtain a role which would accommodate the flexible/part-time working arrangements they required in order to continue to meet their family and domestic responsibilities. Some felt that the timing of shifts (which were much longer than their placement hours) was at odds with the commitment that they felt to support and be there for their children.

When talking about future aspirations all participants spoke about looking for work opportunities that were the right fit with their parenting responsibilities, with their children being their number one priority. Some noted that as single parents they had limited support networks, further restricting the employment options available to them.

In a very positive outcome, three participants were made offers of employment within the Audi network which had been very gratefully received. These participants were very keen to take up the offers of employment but said they first needed to ensure that they could put appropriate arrangements in place for childcare etc. In the qualitative interviews, these participants mentioned that Audi had been very open to discussing flexible work arrangements, including part time hours, and had also allowed them ample time to consider the offers. When participants were unable to commit at this point in time, Audi offered to keep the window open for future employment opportunities when they were in a position to re-engage in the workforce. They also offered references to assist participants in finding employment.

"And they said any time you want to work just give us a call and you're welcome any time."

"So I'm gonna study things to help me with this work later. And they're gonna give us anyway a reference from the company because we completed this course. So they told us in the future, whenever you go to any dealership you want to work with, this reference can help you a lot."

Two participants have since enrolled to complete further study.

Conclusion

The Audi Women in Automotive pilot program was successful in building the confidence, knowledge and workplace skills of participants. It helped them to hone their aspirations for future training and employment and even resulted in three of the participants being offered employment within the Audi dealership network, as well as two enrolling in further study. Importantly, the confidence and skills gained by participants had wide reaching benefits, equipping them not only for future employment in the automotive industry, but for broader study and employment opportunities. There were also positive spillover effects into participants' personal lives, with some mentioning a renewed sense of identity and pride which they carried into their roles as parents. The sense of comradeship and community developed through the group nature of the program provided participants with an important support network which helped them to overcome personal barriers and complete the program.

At the conclusion of the program, participants unanimously felt better equipped to re-enter the workforce, with many now considering employment opportunities within the automotive industry that they wouldn't have previously. Participants indicated that their involvement in the project made them more confident in their ability to manage their time between home and work. Moreover, marked improvements were seen in participants' satisfaction with what they are achieving in life, with feeling part of their community and with their future security at the conclusion of the pilot.

Participants were generally very happy with the structure of the program, its mix of theoretical and practical components and the flexibility and support on offer. The only suggestions for improvement concerned extending the duration of the vocational placement and ensuring this component of the

course was well communicated to staff within Audi dealerships so that participants felt better integrated into the dealership environment and could make a more meaningful contribution.