

YouthGrounds Pilot Training Program Evaluation Report



Supported by:



This project received funding from the Australian Government.

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the pressing issue of youth unemployment in Melbourne's western suburbs, the YouthGrounds Café and Training Program, an innovative social enterprise initiative by Future Connect, endeavours to create meaningful change. Operating as a social enterprise coffee business alongside a transformative 10-week training program, this pilot project, launched in October 2023, is designed to empower young individuals aged 16-25 to connect to employment pathways.

Our unique approach is grounded in community co-design, emphasising youth-centred and place-based solutions. Hosted at the Kurunjang Community Hub, our initiative goes beyond just a training program; it catalyses positive community impact by integrating work experience and community connections. The dual focus on a social enterprise coffee business and a training program reflects our commitment to not only impart practical skills, such as barista skills and customer service but also to foster the development of essential work ready skills for young people's careers.

Target cohort

The YouthGrounds training program pilot was designed for, and targeted young people aged 16 – 24 with a connection to Melbourne's West, and who were interested in participating and could commit to the 10-week training program.

Program Objectives

The YouthGrounds Training Program aims to equip young people with essential work readiness skills, work experience, and networking opportunities, overcoming barriers to employment and establishing a foundation for future career pathways. Over 10 weeks, participants immersed themselves in areas such as teamwork, communication, networking, and customer service. Our ultimate goal is to empower young people with the skills, confidence, and community connections needed to break barriers, explore diverse opportunities, and achieve lasting success in their chosen pathways.

2. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

This report outlines our evaluation framework designed to measure the transformation in participants' skills, confidence, career aspirations, and overall program effectiveness within the YouthGrounds Training Program. The evaluation is guided by the design principles that underpin the YouthGrounds program's creation, to assess the program's alignment with our core objectives.

Design/Guiding Principles of the YouthGrounds training program

- Provide opportunities for young people to develop hospitality skills and gain work experience.
- Give young people networking opportunities to grow their social capital.
- Connect local employers with young people as potential employees.

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture participants' perspectives on their engagement, and skill development; and to learn the extent to which the pilot program successfully achieved its intended goals. This includes practical skill assessments conducted in the café, the Most Significant Change Technique, participant pre- and post-program surveys, and reflective group sessions. This multifaceted approach captures the diverse experiences of our participants and allows us to assess the transformative journey they undertake.

Table 1: Summary of Evaluation Methods

	Pre	During	Post	Purpose	
Quantitative methods:					
Pre-program survey	√			Participant self-assessment of confidence and skills prior to starting the training program	
Post-program survey			√	Participant self-assessment of confidence and skills after completing the training program.	
				To compare with pre-program responses for domains of change	

Qualitative methods:					
Most Significant Change Technique			✓	To capture and understand the most impactful and meaningful changes experienced by participants	
Practical skills assessment		✓		To evaluate participants' hands- on skills, measuring their proficiency and application of acquired skills in the café setting.	
Reflective group sessions	✓	✓	√	To encourage participants to share their experiences, challenges and insights so we can adapt the session delivery. To evaluate the overall experience, so as to make improvements in planning future program.	

Intended Outcomes:

We defined three key areas of what success looks like for young people based on the input from the co-design:

- 1. Increase in confidence and social skills
- 2. Building technical skills in café work
- 3. Becoming work-ready and building networks, connections with community and a sense of belonging

2.1 Description of program participants

Recruitment for the YouthGrounds pilot program successfully engaged with young people across Melbourne's West, resulting in 27 expressions of interest for the program from young people within the intended age range and area. 12 young people were accepted, and the others were not ready for various reasons such as finishing school, age and transportation issues.

A snapshot of the YouthGrounds Training Program includes:

- Engaging participants aged 16-22.
- Diverse backgrounds represented, including those currently in school, recent school graduates, and individuals who have disengaged from traditional educational pathways.
- Approximately 27 Expressions of Interest received, resulting in the enrolment of 12 participants.
- A significant portion of our cohort faces challenges in reading and writing, many participants have a mild intellectual disability, learning difficulties, or neurodiversities like autism and ADHD.
- 10 participants successfully completed the training program. High number of young people in the program were living with anxiety/social anxiety.

2.2 Pre and post-Program Survey

The Pre and Post-Program Surveys are designed to measure participants' journeys by exploring key areas such as skill development, confidence building, and the attainment of career aspirations. The surveys were carefully designed with simple language and visual elements in order to be accessible for young people with a range of reading and writing skill levels.

This section provides an in-depth look at the specific objectives, evaluation questions, indicators, and data collection strategies employed in the Pre and Post-Program Surveys. Eight young people responded to the post-program survey, with 6 completing it fully.

Project Objectives	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Data Collection Strategy
Did young people develop proficiency in specific areas such as barista skills, food preparation techniques, customer service etiquette?	 Did you gain the specific skills you hoped to gain from this program? Did the program meet your expectations in terms of skill development and career preparation? How would you rate the quality of training you received during the program? Are there any specific aspects of the program that you believe improvements could be made? 	75% of respondents expressed satisfaction, stating that they had acquired all the specific skills they hoped to gain from the program. In contrast, 25% of respondents believe they have acquired only some of the expected skills.	Training Attendance Participant Surveys Verbal Survey
Did young people enhance their collaboration and teamwork skills, learning how to work effectively with colleagues to achieve common goals?	 Have you seen an improvement in your ability to work effectively in a team since completing the program? Please provide specific examples. Are there any specific aspects of the program that you found particularly beneficial? 	75% of respondents stated the importance of teamwork in the program, highlighting the positive impact of the program on young participants' collaboration and teamwork skills	Participant Surveys Most Significant Change Technique Verbal Survey
Did young people gain practical work experience in a professional hospitality setting?	 How would you describe your hands-on experience in the café during the program? Can you provide specific examples of tasks or responsibilities you undertook during your work experience shift in the cafe? 	60% of young participants have more than 70% attendance of working in the cafe. Narratives from the Most Significant Change Technique reflect at least 70% of participants gaining practical experience and building meaningful connections with other program participants.	Training Attendance Most significant Change Technique
Did young people develop a strong sense of belonging within the program, building meaningful connections with the community and feeling connected to a supportive community of peers, mentors, and staff members?	 Did you form meaningful connections or relationships with your peers or colleagues in the hospitality setting? Did you feel adequately supported during your practical work experience in the cafe? Please share any instances that stood out. Are there any specific interactions with trainers, community members, or peers that stand out as particularly influential in your journey? How would you rate the quality of support you received during the program? 	More than 70% of young participants expressed a strong sense of belonging and rated the quality of support as excellent.	Participant Surveys Oral survey with community members
Did young people develop a clearer vision of their future career paths?	 Do you believe your practical work experience has positively influenced your career aspirations or goals? If yes, how? How has your understanding of your future career evolved through the program? 	Positive influences were seen in at least three of the MSC stories	Most Significant Change Technique
Did the pilot program have a significant impact on young participants?	 What did you feel was the most significant impact or change of your involvement in the program? Have you had any opportunities to apply the skills you learned during the program in real-world situations? If so, please describe. In what ways has the program contributed to your personal growth and development, both professionally and personally? 	A significant impact was seen in at least three of the MSC stories	Most Significant Change Technique Feedback from parents

Post-Program Survey Results

When evaluating participants' achievement of target skills, 75% confirmed the successful acquisition of all specific skills expected from the program, while 25% admitted to acquiring only some, indicating areas for improvement. Notably, no one reported a lack of acquired skills, showcasing overall positive outcomes for skill development. Similarly, experiences varied in assessing the program's alignment with skill development and career readiness expectations. Four interviewees noted partial alignment, while another four deemed the program met their expectations, emphasising the acquisition of new skills and practical application of existing ones (customer service, food and beverage knowledge, teamwork and collaboration, communication skills, and time management and other- see pre-program survey in Appendix 1).

Regarding confidence in pursuing a hospitality career post-program, the majority expressed a moderate to extremely high level, with three rating as 'Moderately confident,' and another three indicating higher confidence levels ('Very confident' and 'Extremely confident'). Importantly, no participant reported feeling 'Not confident at all' or 'Slightly confident,' highlighting the program's overall positive impact on participants' confidence.

In terms of beneficial aspects of the program, surprisingly, over 50% emphasised 'teamwork,' indicating a positive trend in collaboration and teamwork skills enhancement. The repeated mention of 'teamwork,' 'learning together,' and 'making lunch together' suggests active engagement in collaborative activities was enjoyed by program participants.

Survey outcomes on training quality revealed a mixed response, with 50% rating it as "excellent" and 33.33% as "good." One participant's 'Extremely Poor' rating cited dissatisfaction with numerous disliked workshops. In contrast, support quality received positive ratings, with 'Good' and 'Excellent' from the majority, and no 'Poor' or 'Extremely Poor' ratings, indicating overall satisfaction with the support provided to program participants.

Regarding program design preferences, all respondents favoured preparing lunch together, citing reasons like building closer relationships, ensuring backup meals, and enjoying good food. On the need for increased barista/coffee training, four out of six expressed a preference for additional sessions, suggesting a perceived benefit in enhancing preparedness for upcoming cafe work experiences.

The collated post-program survey can be found in Appendix 2.

YOUTHGROUNDS

PILOT PROGRAM IMPACTS

27

expressions of Interest received 12

Young people enrolled into the program

89 hrs

of training, support and work experience provided



Young participants completed the training



PROGRAM OUTCOME



SKILLS

BARISTA

GROWTH IN CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS

CLEAR EDUCATION/ CAREER **PATHWAYS**

ESTABLISHED

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Young Participants reporting improvement in acquired skills



Young participants incorporating program skills into daily activities



80%



2.3 Most Significant Change Story Technique

Upon the conclusion of the training program, Future Connect executed the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique to capsulate the impact of the program on young participants who attended the 10-week session. This application closely follows the original MSC process, with modifications made only where necessary for contextual success within the program.

The MSC story interviews were conducted on the final week of the training program. Due to personal reasons and school events, some participants were absent. As a result, we were able to undertake interviews with only 5 participants. From the collected headlines, five were chosen to be crafted into detailed stories.

Through the implementation of the MSC technique, their stories aim to address and validate key questions:

- What has been the most significant change in the lives of participants since joining the project?
- What were the enabling factors that led to the change?

Following the collection and collation of all stories, a voting process took place to determine which story exemplified the most significant change. The selection panel, comprising all Future Connect staff, engaged in blind voting to identify the story with the most substantial impact, aligning with the project's original goals.

Story 1

Participant 1, a recent school graduate who enrolled in the YouthGrounds Training Program, aspired to gain valuable café experience. Despite limited work exposure, their enthusiasm fuelled a journey toward newfound confidence and skills.

Immersed in the café environment, Participant 1 discovered the joy of serving customers, improved their cooking skills, and expressed a keen interest in recipes, showcasing a desire to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills at home. Participant 1 described the program as extending beyond basic skills, creating an environment where they not only learned about barista skills but also found joy in culinary exploration.

The most significant change for Participant 1 was the newfound confidence cultivated through the program. Beyond the cafe setting, they discovered a

sense of accomplishment in preparing breakfast for their family, using skills acquired at the cafe. A simple sandwich became a symbol of achievement, bringing pride and joy to Participant 1's family. This transformation was important for Participant 1 as it reshaped the way they viewed themselves and their abilities.

Despite initially considering studying hospitality, Participant 1 received an offer to study IT at university in the midst of the training program. However, they expressed a commitment to continuing the practice of preparing meals learned at the cafe for their family, highlighting the lasting impact of the program on their daily life.

Story 2

Participant 2, disengaged from school due to personal reasons, joined the program on the recommendation of a teacher, approaching it without specific expectations. Despite their confidence in working at a busy takeaway restaurant—handling orders, serving customers, and collaborating in a team— Participant 2 approached this new venture with curiosity.

As the program unfolded, Participant 2 discovered new skills in coffee making and explored their creative side through cupcake decorating. This experience not only transformed their perspective on coffee but also highlighted the ease of trying new things. Drawing from their hospitality background, Participant 2 shared their expertise with others, particularly guiding them during food preparations. This mentorship role not only boosted their confidence but also revealed latent leadership skills and forged new connections.

The most significant change for Participant 2 was gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and adopting a fresh perspective on their surroundings. This transformation was closely tied to a shift in their environment, experiencing less crowding than in typical school and work settings. This opportunity provided a valuable introspective period. In the quieter moments at the cafe, Participant 2 found value and reflected on future career opportunities. This change prompted a reconsideration of their comfort zone, opening up new possibilities, including considering a future path they hadn't envisioned before. Participant 2 plans to return to school, pursuing studies in Trade.

Concluding their experience, Participant 2 expressed the program's value and expressed a desire to rejoin or become an alumni.

Story 3

Participant 3, a young person currently not in school, initially entered the YouthGrounds Training program with apprehension. Struggling with social anxiety, they were hesitant to step into the unfamiliar territory of the program because they were unsure what to expect.

As the program progressed, Participant 3 engaged in various activities, including learning how to use coffee machines and other equipment. Through hands-on experiences and practice, they discovered the joy of mastering new skills, particularly in the art of coffee making. Despite initial reservations about working in a team, Participant 3 gradually found comfort in collaboration and shared learning. The supportive environment fostered connections with peers and staff, creating a sense of belonging that was previously unfamiliar to them.

The most significant change for Participant 3 was the transformation of their perspective on teamwork. Overcoming their fear of working in a team, they not only developed essential collaboration skills but also formed meaningful connections with their colleagues. This newfound sense of belonging marked an essential moment in their personal development journey.

The change became evident in Participant 3's increased confidence in the cafe. They actively participated in team activities, shared their thoughts during workshop sessions, and even contributed ideas for improving the program with the staff. This shift in attitude and behaviour reflected a remarkable change in their approach to social interactions and teamwork.

For Participant 3, the significance lies in their personal growth and the development of skills that extend beyond the program. The newfound ability to work comfortably in a team opens doors to future opportunities, both in the hospitality industry and beyond. Participant 3 is considering going back to study, perhaps exploring paths related to community development or youth work—a completely new idea post program.

Story 4

Participant 4, a student with irregular school attendance, enrolled in the YouthGrounds Training Program at the recommendation of their school teacher, aspiring to gain skills for future part-time employment.

Initially hesitant, Participant 4 evolved from tentative interactions to confident engagement with customers. Serving coffee and initiating small talk became second nature, earning praise from the barista manager, who noted the positive surprise expressed by customers at Participant 4's ability to

initiate engaging conversations. This affirmation from both the manager and customers significantly increased Participant 4's confidence.

The most significant change for Participant 4 was the newfound confidence in customer communication, elevating their self-esteem. The once intimidating prospect of conversing with customers transformed into a source of accomplishment and ease. This shift marked not only a change in skills but also a significant boost in Participant 4's self-perception.

For Participant 4, the significance lies in the empowerment derived from effective communication. The ability to comfortably engage with customers represents a fundamental change in how they perceive their capabilities, extending beyond the cafe setting. This newfound confidence may pave the way for future opportunities, with Participant 4 considering a path into Bricklaying and Blocklaying studies.

Story 5

Participant 5, initially hesitant about joining the program, took the leap at the recommendation of their school teacher, aspiring to learn cooking skills for their dream of running a mobile crepe cart. The uncertainty and fear of isolation lingered at the start, with Participant 5 wishing for the companionship of more friends from school.

From sitting with familiar faces during breaks, Participant 5 gradually embraced the collective spirit, participated in group activities, and learned to use the coffee machine and kitchen equipment. The once hesitant individual started participating in lunch preparations, fostering a sense of comfort and camaraderie. Slowly shedding inhibitions, Participant 5 initiated conversations, forming bonds with other participants and becoming an active part of the training. The experience of learning and practicing skills together with others became a source of joy and empowerment.

The most significant change for Participant 5 was in their perception of teamwork. Although there were initial challenges in stepping out of the comfort zone, especially when it came to customer interactions, the encouragement and support from team members served as a catalyst for change. The once daunting task of taking orders and serving customers, transformed into a confident and comfortable experience. Participant 5 recognised the value of teamwork as the cornerstone of their growth during the program. Participant 5's parents observed a significant positive change. Excitement radiated from Participant 5 as they shared newfound skills and stories from the cafe experience, even taking the initiative to prepare meals for the family. The connection made at the cafe extended beyond the training, becoming tales of friendship and shared experiences.

The impact of the program went beyond new-found skills. Teamwork, initially a challenge, became the most cherished aspect of their journey. Participant 5 expressed a desire to rejoin the program or become an alumni.

2.3.1 Analysis of Most Significant Change Stories

After the Most Significant Change (MSC) stories were collected, the Future Connect team and the project advisory group members engaged in discussions, evaluations, and voting to identify the story with the most significant change aligned with the intended outcomes of the YouthGrounds Training Program. Among the diverse MSC stories collected, *Participant 3's* narrative received the most votes, signifying the most significant change reflective of the intended program outcomes. The team recognised that this story

- exemplifies the most significant change, emphasising capacity-building for young people in various spaces as reflected in the story.
- showcased a willingness to reengage with the community and school—a
 pivotal change indicative of the program's effectiveness in fostering a
 sense of belonging.
- highlighted how the program enabled the young person to perceive open options and reduce the constraints imposed by anxiety.

Following the review and sorting of the stories, the Future Connect team also established two domains of change (DoC) or common themes seen throughout the stories. The agreed-upon DoCs were **Employability Skills Development and Personal Growth.**

Domain of Change 1: Employability Skill Development

Participants in the YouthGrounds Pilot Training Program demonstrated significant growth in employability skills, specifically in barista skills, food preparation, and customer service. This tangible progress, evident through hands-on experiences during the 10-week program, extended beyond the confines of the café setting. They acquired practical skills, notably in operating the coffee machine and effectively working in a cafe. Participant 1 experienced a transformative journey, transitioning from a recent school graduate with limited exposure to gaining newfound confidence. Participant 2's narrative further underscored the development of crucial soft skills, contributing to heightened confidence and increased readiness for future employment. The collective journey of participants addressed initial challenges in customer service skills, evolving into a showcase of growth through mentoring and leadership roles within the program.

Domain of Change 2: Personal Growth

Another significant area of change resulting from the training program is personal growth, particularly in overcoming challenges such as social anxiety. The participant found comfort and direction through the program, overcoming social anxiety, reconnecting with others, and developing valuable soft skills in a group setting — all indicative of increased confidence and resilience. A parallel narrative was observed in Participant 5's story, mirroring the emphasis on personal growth, showcasing the evolution from initial hesitations to confident engagement. These personal growth skills are valuable takeaways for participants, aiding in their continued growth and preparing them to face challenges in their future workplaces. Future Connect team and the Advisory Group agreed that across these individual journeys, a common and overarching theme emerges—capacity building. While the manifestation of this growth varies for each young person, the stories collectively highlight the profound impact of the program on participants.

The themes emerging from these narratives include the development of crucial soft and transferable skills, equipping participants to be ready for employment opportunities. Moreover, the stories reveal a significant shift in how these young individuals envision their futures, illustrating a growth in their ability to perceive and pursue a bigger picture for themselves.

3. Program Impact

The program's impact is diverse, with participants experiencing positive shifts in self-perception, interpersonal skills, and confidence in the context of future employment. Several participants have established pathways that they are actively pursuing. One participant has committed to returning to school, another has applied to a TAFE course in her chosen field, and several are considering their options.

The program's broader influence is evident in the creation of a supportive community, extending beyond cafe-related skills to bring joy and practical applications in daily life. Actively involved family members express satisfaction, and some participants have found comfort and direction, overcame social anxiety and expressed a renewed sense of possibilities. The emphasis on teamwork has led to the formation of strong connections and a profound sense of belonging, with participants forming friendships that extend beyond the program's duration.

Addressing Key Questions:

What were the enabling factors that led to the change?

- **Supportive Environment:** The program's supportive environment played a crucial role, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging participants to step out of their comfort zones.
- Hands-on Learning: The hands-on learning approach allowed participants
 to discover joy in mastering new skills, contributing to increased
 confidence and a positive shift in self-perception. This learning method
 promotes positive shifts in self-perception, as participants gain confidence
 in their abilities, realising the tangible impact of their efforts.
- Team Activities: The collaborative nature of tasks, such as making sandwiches and decorating cupcakes, promoted a sense of shared achievement, contributing to a positive group dynamic. The encouragement from team members played an important role in overcoming individual challenges, showcasing the transformative potential of collaborative efforts in fostering personal growth and resilience.

4. YouthGrounds Program 2024 Next Steps

The YouthGrounds training program will continue in 2024, running two 10-week programs in Term 2 and Term 4. The YouthGrounds café will provide structured workplace learning opportunities for students needing supported placements in Term 1 and 3.

Based on the pilot program evaluation, the YouthGrounds training program has been adapted and modified in 2024, with continued monitoring and evaluation of the program. The following changes have been implemented in the 2024 training program:

The training program will be co-located with the café at Kurunjang Community Hub, with support from Melton City Council

- The 2023 pilot took place across two venues: the work experience at the café in Kurunjang and the workshop training sessions at Taylors Hill Youth and Community Centre. Transport and access to both venues were a major issue for the young people participating in the program. Young people living in Melton needed assistance to get to Taylors Hill, and vice versa those living on the east side of the City of Melton and Brimbank needed support accessing the café in Kurunjang. As a result, we have consolidated the program to operate from one location.
- Until better support and transport infrastructure are available, the program
 participants will need to independently travel to Kurunjang Community
 Hub. We anticipate the cohort of young people enrolling in the program
 in 2024 will live in the proximity of Kurunjang Community Hub.

The number of hours of barista training and work experience has been doubled in 2024.

 This is based on feedback from the pilot, with young people wanting more time to learn hands-on skills and practice in the café.

The workshop sessions have been condensed to 5 sessions across 5 weeks in 2024, compared to 13 sessions across 8 weeks in the pilot.

 In the 2023 pilot we noticed a distinct drop in engagement in the workshops after the 5th week and received feedback that the content could be condensed.

The program start time has been changed to 9:30 am rather than 10 am.

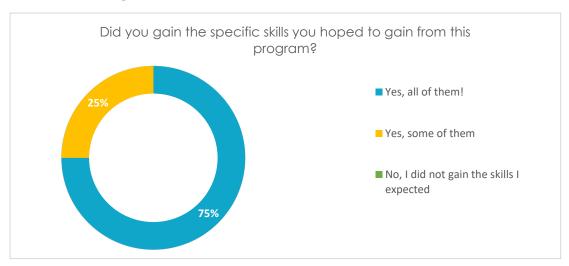
There are three main reasons for this. One, for young people getting lifts
from parents doing other school drop-offs, 9:30 am is a more convenient
time. Young people also wanted to start earlier and finish earlier. The third
reason was we noticed a drop in engagement and concentration after
lunch, so the lunchtime cooking activity has now been scheduled as the
last activity of the day.

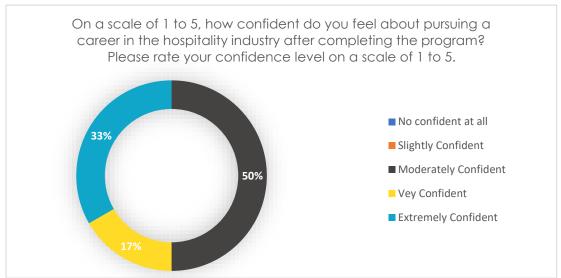
5. Appendix 1- Pre-Program Survey Questions,

Week 1 - Please take a few minutes to complete this survey to help us understand your goals, expectations, and background before the program begins.

How would you rate your confidence in pursuing a career in hospitality?							
Not confident at all (1)	Slightly confident (2)	Moderately confident (3)	Very Confident (4)	Extremely Confident (5)			
2. What specific skills or experience do you hope to gain from this program? (Check all that apply) Customer service Food and beverage knowledge Teamwork and collaboration Communication skills Social Connection Time management Other (please specify):							
3. How confident are you in your current career aspirations?							
Not confident at all (1)	Slightly confident (2)	Moderately confident (3)	Very Confident (4)	Extremely Confident (5)			
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable are you with customer service interactions?							
Not confident at all	Slightly confident (2)	Moderately confident (3)	Very Confident (4)	Extremely Confident (5)			
5. Have you had previous experience in the hospitality industry? If so, please describe.							
6. What do you believe is the most important aspect of working in hospitality?							
7. What is the most challenging aspect of working in hospitality for you?							

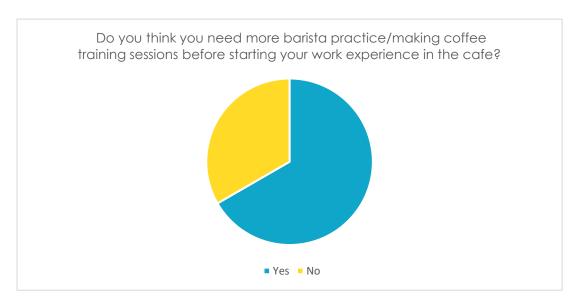
Appendix 2- Feedback from Post Program Survey











What is the most enjoyable part of the training program for you?

delivering food to customers

Making food

the small group of people make it easy to learn

everything cleaning dishes free

Cleaning dishes free

Making stir fry

learning so much work experience

Are there any specific aspects of the program that you found particularly beneficial?



Are there any specific aspects of the program that you believe improvements could be made?

- No
- No
- learning how to make coffee
- I don't know
- I don't know
- More hands-on activities, less workshops
- trying to figure out all the forms at the start

