Transformative learning in Diploma of Community Services programs

by

Katrina Kavanagh

Diploma of Community Services
Associate Degree of Training and Education
Graduate Certificate of Community Services
Bachelor of Vocational Education and Training
A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education and Professional Studies

School of Education
Griffith University

September, 2018
Contents

List of tables 5
Glossary 6
Abstract 7
Acknowledgements 8
Declaration 9

1. Introduction 10

2. Literature Review 13
   The Australian Vocational Education and Training System 13
   The Diploma of Community Services Work 15
   Competency Based Training 17
   Preparation for the Community Sector 18
   Identity Formation 20
   Adult Learning 21
   Transformative Learning Theory 23
   Criticisms of Transformative Learning Theory 25
   Transformative Learning Theory Development 26
   Transformative Learning in a VET context 25

3. Methodology 31
   Autoethnography 32
   Narrative 32
   Thematic analysis 33
Interviews 34
Interview questions 34
Recruitment 35

4. Narratives 37

5. Analysis and Discussion 63

Stage 1 – What is happening to me? 65
Stage 2 – Trying new things 66
Stage 3 – Gaining confidence 67
Stage 4 – Thinking differently 68

Working in the Community Sector 69

6. Conclusion 72

Research Implications 75

References 77

Appendix A – Australian Qualification Framework Qualification levels 85
Appendix B - Diploma of Community Services Qualification 87
Appendix C – Unit of Competency – Example 97
Appendix D – Unit of Competency Assessment requirements – Example 101
Appendix E – Email to colleagues and network contacts seeking project participants 104
Appendix F – Project – Information Sheet 106
Appendix G – Project – Consent form 109
List of Tables

Table 1. Similarity between reported learning experiences and Mezirow’s phases of perspective transformation 63

Table 2. Stages of learning described by participants with suggested links to Mezirow’s phases 64
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACWA</td>
<td>Australian Community Workers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Quality Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBT</td>
<td>Competency Based Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRC</td>
<td>Industry Reference Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISC</td>
<td>Industry Skills Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>Register Training Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Training and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Employment in the Australian community services industry will generally require an individual to undertake a formal qualification. One such qualification is the Diploma of Community Services which is a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program. Like all VET qualifications in Australia it is ‘competency based’ - that is, it uses a curriculum model which involves submitting a job role to a task analysis and employing a behavioural template to the analysis to produce ‘units of competency’. In my experience as a community services worker and now as a community services VET teacher I have become increasingly aware of personal change in Diploma of Community Services students that is not part of the competency-based curriculum and the impact such change has on job readiness. According to a handful of research projects (e.g. Hodge, 2010a) personal change is an important part of the process of becoming a worker - especially in human services areas of work. This idea will be explored in this project. Drawing on the theory of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 2006) this project explores experiences of personal change in learners while studying the Diploma of Community Services. Transformative learning concepts will be considered in the context of the participant’s experience. This research will be of interest to community services organisations and education institutions interested in the training of effective community services workers.
Acknowledgements

The completion of this study has been possible with the support of many people.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Steven Hodge and Dr Mark Tyler. Dr Steven Hodge introduced me to the world of research and has offered support and guidance ever since, his continued encouragement and reassurance has been incredible, and I appreciate it very much. Dr Mark Tyler has provided me with the candid feedback I needed, I am very thankful for this as it has helped me develop as a researcher.

Thank you to my colleagues and network contacts for being so encouraging and positive about my research topic and for actively facilitating the contact with project participants. Thanks also to those past Diploma of Community Services students who generously gave up their time and enthusiastically shared their insights and experiences to provide the data for this study.

I am extremely fortunate to have great friends and a loving family. I appreciate the care, support and interest my friends have given me throughout this project and my family who are always on my side offering unwavering love and encouragement. To my children Georgia and Tez, you are my world and I hope my completion of this project gives you the confidence to do anything you set out to do – even when it seems difficult!
Declaration

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Katrina Kavanagh

Date: 18/9/2018
1. Introduction

The idea that an individual might experience change on a personal level when studying community services first became evident to me when I completed a community services program over 20 years ago. I chose to complete the Diploma of Community Services to work in the community sector but as I moved through the course I learnt a lot more than I had anticipated.

This qualification provided me with knowledge of the community sector and practical opportunities for skill development. Throughout the program I also seemed to learn more about ‘me’. The content and humanistic nature of the course somehow prompted me to question things – my ideals, beliefs, relationships and life in general and for me this process was enlightening. Despite being confronting at times, this change in my personal thinking encouraged me to think deeper and a better understanding of me, my life and my future followed. I began to have a very different outlook of the world. Interestingly this learning was not spoken about and did not form part of the formal learning program, however, I felt that this learning was instrumental in my readiness for work. I had become more personable, less judgemental, empathetic, assertive, confident and communicative. Post study, I worked in the community sector for over 14 years and believe that both the formal learning I received and the changes I experienced on a personal level contributed to my effectiveness as a worker.

I am now employed by a TAFE Institute and am a VET educator in community services programs including the Diploma of Community Services. In the 10 years I have been a teacher I have observed that my students not only learn new knowledge and develop new skills such as those described in the official competency-based curriculum but also seem to change on a personal level – just as I experienced some time before. I have been part of discussions with other teachers regarding this experience, but they reported little understanding as to how this learning actually occurs in our classrooms. As VET educators we deliver content as outlined in a unit of competency which relates to industry skill requirements. The learning is outcome focused and students are assessed partially through the performing of tasks. If students are learning more than what is outlined in units of competency then having a better understanding of this learning would be beneficial and could influence VET practitioner teaching practice; particularly if these changes better prepare the learner for the community sector.

In my attempts to understand more about this topic I have considered other theoretical concepts which potentially describe the personal learning I experienced as a student and the changes I have observed in my students. The idea of personal change in an education setting has been explored and
the term ‘transformation’ has been used to describe this concept. Wade (1998, p. 714) calls these changes a ‘personal transformation’ and defines this as a ‘dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition’. Furthermore, Wade believes this allows an individual to become more ‘clear’ and their vision of the world is expanded. Mezirow (1978) explains this as an expansion of consciousness and developed the concept of ‘meaning perspective transformation’ which relates to a person’s frame of reference according to their past experiences which will influence their thinking, beliefs and actions. Perspective transformation is a 10-phase process whereby individuals may become more aware of their personal assumptions and form new perspectives (Mezirow 1991). I also consider ‘Identify formation’ which Guenther (2005) explains as a person knowing how they are being influenced by their surroundings and look at information about adult learning in a broader context. While having an understanding of these concepts is beneficial and relevant to this project, it is Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and the 10 phases of transformation differentiated in that theory I believe is most useful in the exploration of the personal change which a learner in community services programs may experience. I provide information about transformative learning theory, its criticisms and its development as well as looking at this concept in a VET context.

This research project set out to explore the following questions:

- **Whether and how students completing the Diploma of Community Services experience transformative learning; and**

- **Whether transformative learning contributes to their effectiveness as a community services worker.**

The research design for this project used a qualitative research approach which involved interviewing 15 individuals who completed the Diploma of Community Services within the past 10 years. I used my teaching networks and community services contacts to recruit participants. The design has an autoethnographic element, used a semi-structured interview format in the data collection phase, and a thematic narrative analysis method to analyse the data gathered.

This research project will focus on the Diploma of Community Services. I have had many years of experience in teaching units, conducting assessments and developing learning materials for
this program. I believe that my work experience both in the industry and in education provides me with the knowledge and insight to adequately explore if students in community services programs do experience transformative learning and if this contributes to their work readiness.

Findings from this project may prove useful to teachers in community services programs, those managing and facilitating community services qualifications and community services organisations.
2. Literature review

This literature review will start with an overview of the VET system, as this project relates directly to the delivery of a VET qualification. I will provide information about the Diploma of Community Services, I discuss competency-based training and preparing the learner for the community services sector. I look at Adult Learning, Identity Formation, Transformative Learning Theory, Criticisms of Transformative Learning Theory, Transformative Learning Theory Development and Transformative learning in a VET Context.

The Australian Vocational Education and Training system

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an education sector that aims to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills required to undertake particular occupations in the labour market. VET in Australia is implemented through a network which includes the Australian Government, eight state and territory governments together with industry representatives, public and private training providers. The aim of this system is to provide nationally consistent training across Australia (Smith & Keating 2003).

The Australian VET system evolved from an economic crisis in the 1980s (Smith & Keating 2003). As a strategy to develop a more skilled workforce and to be competitive in the global market, the ‘National Training Reform Agenda’ was developed and the implementation of a system which was led by industry and was demand driven took place (Billet et al. 1998). The direction and strategic objectives of this then new system was outlined in the policy document ‘Shaping our future: Australia’s National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004 – 2010’ which highlighted four strategic objectives. These included the development of a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy. Employers and individuals were a planned focal point, and communities and regions would be strengthened economically and socially through education and employment and Indigenous Australians would gain viable job skills and their culture would be shared (ANTA 2004). Industry Skills Councils were established to involve industry in the designing and reviewing of VET programs to ensure industry requirements were met.

These reforms to Australia’s VET system designed in the 1990s were implemented and the responsibility of engaging industry (in this case the community and human services sector) now lies with the group SkillsIQ, a ‘Skills Service Organisation’ overseen by an Industry Reference Council. The role of SkillsIQ is to develop and review VET curriculum including the Community Services Training
Package which specifies content for Diploma of Community Services programs in Australia. The term ‘training package’ refers to the competency-based curriculum for a specific occupational area.

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are accredited for the delivery of training packages and award nationally recognised qualifications derived from those packages. An RTO may be a public institute such as an institute of ‘Technical and Further Education’ (TAFE) or a private provider. However, all RTOs must adhere to standards set out in the ‘Australian Quality Framework’ (AQF) which is overseen by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) (ASQA 2015).

A range of qualification levels can be gained in VET. These differ in relation to volume of learning and are mostly applied skill or knowledge. The AQF levels describe the complexity and achievement expectations as required by graduates to be granted a particular qualification. Ten levels exist in the AQF in VET, from level 1 to level 10 and each level outlines learning outcomes which is the criteria required for that level (Refer to Appendix A). To gain a qualification level, learners must display the knowledge, skills and application of knowledge and skills. As an AQF level 5 qualification, Diploma of Community Services graduates should be able to demonstrate the following:

**AQF level 5 criteria**

**Summary:** Graduates at this level will have specialised knowledge and skills for skilled/paraprofessional work and/or further learning.

**Knowledge:** Graduates at this level will have technical and theoretical knowledge in a specific area or a broad field of work and learning.

**Skills:** Graduates at this level will have a broad range of cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:

- analyse information to complete a range of activities
- provide and transmit solutions to sometimes complex problems
- transmit information and skills to others

**Application:** Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, judgement and defined knowledge responsibility in known or changing contexts and within broad but established parameters.
According to the AQF, the ‘volume of learning’ for a Diploma level qualification is typically 1-2 years (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013, p. 38).

Generic learning outcomes are also included in VET learning delivery. These are considered skills an individual may achieve in the learning environment and can apply in the context of study, work and life in general which will include literacy and numeracy levels as required by that level, communication skills and the ability to work with others, skills related to thinking such as decision making and problem solving and personal skills which include self-direction and acting with integrity (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013). The VET sector in Australia predominantly delivers qualifications in the first five AQF levels. The qualification that is the focus of this research is thus at the upper end of qualifications provided in VET.

The Diploma of Community Services

Community Services qualification guidelines are located within the Community Services Training Package with the latest version being endorsed in July 2015. This package focuses on the development of skills specific to the community sector and covers qualifications such as general community support, working with children, families, people with disabilities; mental health issues; drug and alcohol issues; aged care; the health and leisure sector; and chaplaincy skills and knowledge (Commonwealth of Australia 2018).

The Diploma of Community Services qualification consists of 16 units of competency. To be awarded the qualification students need to successfully complete 16 units; 8 core units and 8 electives (Refer to Appendix B). The core units include:

- CHCCCS007  Develop and implement service programs
- CHCCOM003  Develop workplace communication strategies
- CHCDEV002  Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services
- CHCDIV003  Manage and promote diversity
- CHCLEG003  Manage legal and ethical compliance
- CHCMGT005  Facilitate workplace debriefing and support processes
- CHCPRP003  Reflect on and improve own professional practice
- HLTWHS004  Manage work health and safety
The RTO can decide to deliver a specialised version of this course and include particular electives based upon specific requirements of industry employers or a more generalised community services qualification can be delivered. As mentioned, eight core units must be delivered. Elective selection can also be influenced by other accreditation bodies specific to the industry. Registered Training Organisations who offer the Diploma of Community Services course can apply for accreditation with the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA). ACWA is a community services professional body that offers professional membership for workers and students. Fundamental to ACWA’s role is the quality of educational, fieldwork and practice standards to ensure community workers are well prepared for their role (ACWA 2012).

Learning Institutions can apply for accreditation. A condition of accreditation includes the inclusion of particular electives which ACWA consider best prepare learners for the community sector. The current Diploma of Community Services is required to have the following elective units for ACWA accreditation:

1. CHCDEV001 Confirm client developmental status
2. CHCCSM005 Develop, facilitate and review all aspects of case management
3. CHCCCS004 Assess co-existing needs
4. CHCADV002 Provide advocacy and representation services or CHCADV005 Provide systems advocacy services
5. CHCCDE010 Develop and lead community engagement strategies to enhance participation or CHCCDE011 Implement community development strategies or CHCCDE012 Work within organisation and government structures to enable community development outcomes
6. CHCCSL501A Work within a structured counselling framework or CHCCSL502A Apply specialist interpersonal and counselling interview skills or CHCCSL503B Facilitate the counselling relationship or CHCCSL507B Support clients in decision-making processes or CHCCSL509A Reflect and improve upon counselling skills (ACWA 2017).

ACWA accreditation also requires an RTO to meet standards in terms of delivery, course duration and placement hours. The Diploma of Community Services has a mandatory 100 hours placement component, however, ACWA accreditation standards require 400 hours of work placement. According ACWA (2012) accreditation with ACWA is a mark of educational quality in the community sector. Many
RTOs offer an ACWA-compliant version of the Diploma, improving their position in the market. At the time this project was conducted, the Diploma of Community Services program I teach was ACWA accredited.

**Competency Based Training**

The National Training Reform Agenda brought with it the implementation of Competency Based Training principles to VET (Smith & Keating, 2003). Competency Based Training (CBT) offers a systematic application of learned and applied skills that relate to those skills required in the workplace (Misko 1999). The skills and knowledge required for particular workforce industries are documented in Training Packages. Training Packages include three nationally endorsed components; Qualification frameworks, units of competencies (Refer to Appendix C for example) and assessment guidelines (Refer to Appendix D for example), all of which focus on the application of ‘required skills and knowledge’ and provide a framework for assessing competency (National Quality Council 2007). VET teachers and trainers are responsible for interpreting competencies and designing and/or facilitating learning and assessment (Smith & Keating 2003).

This model of curriculum is specific to the vocational education and training system and it is not without its critics. For example, Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) highlight issues with CBT in VET and explain that a significant criticism of this system is the focus on ‘competency’ which potentially restricts the learning to narrow learning outcomes and limits the student from having a greater understanding of an occupation. Furthermore, the ‘fragmentation’ of CBT adds to the argument that this system is limiting. Breaking the qualification requirements into units of competencies causes a fragmentation of the knowledge required. The current system does not provide guidance on how to ‘unite the learning’ and prepare the worker for the job role – as a whole (Hodge 2010b).

Ashworth and Saxton (1990) write about the meaning of competence in a competency-based system and believe it is not clear if competence is a personal attribute, an act or outcome of an action. They argue that competence statements can be uninformative and that a lack of reference to the personal processes involved in a skill is problematic. The issue of interpretation has been explored and Clayton et al. (2010) suggest that teachers are not always confident with interpreting competencies, and that further development in this area is required. A study undertaken by Hodge (2014) reiterates this by explaining that ‘interpreting competencies is a sophisticated ability’ and initial and also continuing education may need to be reconsidered so that practitioners acquire this ability. Simons et al. (2006)
highlight the VET teaching entry level qualification, the *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* may not be adequate in preparing teachers for the demands of diverse students.

A concern I have as a VET teacher is the gap between the content of the units of competency delivered in the Diploma of Community Services and the role of the community services worker. It is a complex area of work and preparing new workers for the community sector includes more than what appears in the relevant units of competency. This is highlighted by Wheelahan (2009) who identified community services as an area in which the CBT model can potentially inhibit the acquisition of required knowledge as the sector includes particular disciplinary bodies of knowledge; that the fragmented delivery of units could affect the preparation of the worker for industry. Furthermore, in my experience the nature of community services work involves working with human beings and the focus on performance of a task as required by CBT does not allow the development of particular attitudes or mindsets required for this occupation. In the study undertaken by Hodge (2010a) which included interviewing trainers teaching the Certificate IV in Youth Work, one trainer saw ‘personal adjustment and development as a desirable complement to the acquisition of industry specific knowledge and skills’ (p. 183). With my involvement in the community sector and in VET education, I can appreciate what has been identified by this trainer, that while the development of practical skills is important, a personal element to this training seems to exist.

Furthermore, Hodge (2010c) introduces the concept ‘transformative practice’ among trainers in some VET program areas. The Youth Work trainers he interviewed saw themselves as being involved in the ‘significant change’ of their learners. These teachers explained that due to the complexity of youth work, according to their experience, learners needed to have an awareness of who they were and who they were going to be working with. As quoted by one of the study’s participants – ‘It is not a matter of them learning a step-by-step skill because you are dealing with people’ (p. 58). The CBT model appears not to explicitly provide the opportunity for this deeper kind of learning, as might be said to be generally required for workers to competently work in the community sector. As an experienced community services worker and a teacher in this area I see a disconnect in what a unit of competency requires me to teach in the classroom and the development of a prepared community worker.

**Preparation for the community sector**

My work in the community sector was interesting and rewarding, but it was also challenging and at times even distressing. As a student in community services and now a teacher I am aware of theoretical content and pedagogy which can challenge an individual. According to Hyland (2006) when
a value dimension exists, a therapeutic dimension of some kind will be involved and the process of developing personal and social skills, building emotional intelligence and building self-esteem may occur. While changes may occur without actual therapy taking place, the content delivered in the Diploma of Community Services may impact an individual in some way. Bernacki and Jaeger (2008) found that students undertaking a ‘service-learning course’ reported that they become more ‘compassionate, sensitive, have a greater ability to solve social problems and process a greater efficacy to make the world a better place’ (p. 82).

My experience in the community sector was always interesting - I worked closely with a lot of different staff, the work could be challenging, and this working relationship needed to be communicative and supportive to ensure a productive and safe working environment was maintained. It is the clients, the people seeking help who come with great variance - different genders, ages, personalities, experiences, circumstances, hardships and the like. While community work practices need to be in place, in my experience a worker also needs to be flexible in their practice, approachable and able to build rapport with a client so good support, guidance and appropriate referral can occur. A worker will need to have tangible skills and knowledge – established interviewing skills, conflict management techniques, good documentation capability, an understanding of issues impacting the community and good knowledge of human behaviour and development but what community services workers also need is to be empathic and understanding, to be aware of their own values, beliefs and behaviours to ensure these do not impact on the client you are working with. It is a complex area of work, interesting, rewarding and challenging all at once.

Training workers to be adequately prepared for the community sector has had its challenges for me as a teacher. The Community Services Training Package provides some guidance with practical skills and knowledge required however interpreting the requirements can be difficult. Delivering the information in an appropriate manner (as some content can be challenging for some individuals) is required and I often need to support students in the classroom and at other times if the content raises issues for them. The content can be interesting and if taught well the student can learn a lot about the community sector but on a personal level, I don’t believe I am adequately able to guide students who may be reacting to the information I am delivering or who may be experiencing changes on a personal level. Are they learning to be empathetic, compassionate, non-discriminating, non-judgemental, able to connect with people? – as required when working with members of the community. As a teacher in this environment I do not believe I am adequately preparing learners for the community sector.
Identity formation

Australian VET researchers who have considered personal change in learners often use the language ‘identity’ or ‘identity formation’ as a way to highlight learning outcomes that go beyond the job tasks described in training packages. Purdie et al. in Guenther (2005) explains that identity involves the individual knowing who they are, their knowledge, and their perception. A person’s identity is influenced by their surroundings and their interactions. Illeris (2014) writes that ‘identity is understood as the experience of being who one is, both internally as the experience of the self, and externally in relation to others’ (p. 145). Jarvis (2012) explains that as people live their life, ‘it is a combination of processes whereby the ‘whole’ person – body (genetically, physically and biologically), and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or and integrated into the persons biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person’ (p. 4). The question of ‘who am I’ is not simple but quite complex (Guenther 2005, Jopling 2000). The community services student who takes part in an environment where difficult client situations are the subject of work will need to grapple with situations that question their own values, opinions and understanding of the world. During teaching, content delivered, and various assessments will often focus on ‘what’ one would do in a particular situation and ‘why’ they would do it that way. New skills will emerge for the student, new ways of looking at things may also be learned. However, according to these researchers, the learner’s identity can be altered as well. Identity can be defined as ‘the individual, expressed through perceptions of self-concept that include self-esteem and self-confidence and which is influenced by the social interactions, relationships and the norms and values in which the individual is situated’ (Guenther 2005). Change in identity as a result of learning in VET programs is not anticipated in training packages but may be a regular part of the experience of VET students, at least in community services programs.

The role of learning in identity formation has been discussed as the development of self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation as outcomes of participation in VET (Drumbell 2000). As I have experienced working with clients in the community sector, this industry requires the worker to be competent in their work practices and confident in themselves as the work can be emotionally demanding. The importance of having confidence in one’s self is highlighted by Schuller et al. (2002) where it is suggested that confidence leads to other possible actions such as having the ability to make sense of your own personal experience, to put forward your own views, the ability to acknowledge mistakes, to confront problems, to challenge the views of others, to ask for help, to accept the views of others, to put themselves in unfamiliar situations, to communicate more effectively with professionals, to
communicate more effectively in personal relationships, to become better problem-solvers, to support others, to perform more effectively socially and to take on more responsibility within the family and the community.

**Adult learning**

As this project focuses on the potential transformative process of adult learners, it is important to consider the broader context of adult learning. Cranton (2016) writes ‘Adult learners are mature, socially responsible individuals who participate in sustained informal and formal activities that lead them to acquire new knowledge, skills or values; revise their basic beliefs and assumptions; or change the way they see some aspects of themselves and the world around them’ (p. 2). Many theorists have contributed to adult learning data collection. Knowles (1975) described adult learning as self-directed. He says that an individual identifies their own needs, sets their own goals, they choose how they learn, can gather materials, find resources and can judge their own progress. Early research such as Dewey (1938) proposed that adult learning should be practical and experiential. The idea of humanism in adult education was discussed by Knowles (1980) and we see collaboration and participation as key features of adult education today. This idea has been questioned by Brookfield (2001) as collaborative approaches could make people feel vulnerable and exposed. As a teacher in VET I often use a collaborative approach in my teaching practice but nurturing learners to reduce vulnerability is necessary. I also acknowledge the rich learning environment that exists in an adult learning environment. Knowles (1980) also emphasized the rich experiences and resources that adult learners bring to the learning setting. Cranton (2016) explains that from a constructivist point of view learners share these experiences and resources with each other to create knowledge.

Adult learning differs from children’s learning. Knowles (1980) explains that the experienced lived by adults is the biggest difference and this therefore has consequences for learning, he identifies that adults have more to contribute to the learning environment; they have a richer foundation of experience which they can relate to old and new experiences. He adds, that adults have acquired a larger number of fixed habits and patterns of thought and can often be less open-minded. Mezirow (1978) suggests that transformation of meaning perspectives relates to the universal processes of adult learning while children learning consists of the ‘formation’ of meaning perspectives (p. 12). In teaching adults, I have worked with individuals who are concerned or hesitant about returning to study. Students have often expressed having a bad experience in school previously or it has been a long time since they’ve engaged in formal education. Cranton (2016) highlights that with people
changing careers and retraining more in the last decades that people may be less anxious about returning to study in the future.

An understanding of learning styles has also been a topic of interest in adult learning and Cranton (2012) explains that Cognitive style refers to how people acquire, process, store and use information. According to MacKeracher (2004) learning styles is a preference for a certain way of learning - and that one style is not better than the other. Kolb (1984, 2015) developed the idea of Convergers, Assimilators, Divergers and Accommodators. The Convergers are learners who prefer to arrive quickly at specific conclusions, Assimilators like to integrate ideas into models and theories. Divergers enjoy generating ideas and working with others. Accommodators learn by experience and engage in trial and error learning. All educators, both adult educators and educators of children are concerned with learning style, it is not specific to one level of education (Cranton 2016). As a teacher, how adults learn is important to ensure I accommodate the varied learning styles in the classroom.

In the late 1960’s. Abraham Maslow developed a hierarchical theory of human needs. He focused on human potential and believed that humans strive to reach the highest level of their capabilities (Maslow 1970). Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs are identified (in ascending order) as physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualisation. Each of these must be satisfied (although not completely), before the next level asserts itself (Maslow 1970). As another notable contributor to adult learning exploration Malcom Knowles, said that adults are usually voluntary learners and they need to be actively engaged in learning. They need goal oriented, relevant, practical experiences in order to get the most from teaching (Knowles 1980). In the early 1970s Knowles introduced the term ‘Andragogy’ which focuses on special needs of adult learners and he identified six assumptions about adult learning: (1) need to know, (2) self-concept, (3) prior experience, (4) readiness to learn, (5) learning orientation, and (6) motivation to learn (Knowles, Swanson, & Holton 2005). According to the theory of Andragogy, a trainer needs to recognise the rich resource within adult learners themselves, therefore adult education should focus on experiential techniques which taps into the experience of learners such as group discussion, problem-solving, case methods, simulation exercises, games, and role-play, instead of just transferring information in lecture style delivery (Brookfield 1986, Knowles et al. 2005).

While having a good understanding of adult learning is useful for this project, according to Cranton (2016) not all learning is transformative. I appreciate this statement she makes, ‘It is when instrumental and communicative learning leads us to question our previously held views about ourselves and the world around us that the potential for the transformative learning exists’ (p. 14).
The community services learning environment is very communicative and participatory, the content can be challenging for some, it is an environment which can potentially be transformative hence my interest in the transformative learning theory and undertaking this project.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

Earlier, I considered the concept of Identity Formation and VET research that describes changes in identity relates to my research questions. This research shows that although VET curriculum and outcomes are strictly defined in job performance terms, personal change can be demonstrated as another type of outcome. The limitation of the identity research is that it does not explain the process of identity change in learning programs. Demonstrating that identity shifts can occur in a competency-based learning environment is a helpful step. However, the work of Jack Mezirow (1978, 1990, 1991, 2006) focuses on deep personal change that impacts identity and also provides a detailed explanation of the process itself. This theory of change provides a useful way of understanding the phenomenon I am interested in.

Jack Mezirow developed the theory of transformative learning, outlining it in publications beginning in the 1970s. The main idea in this theory is that while learning can involve acquiring knowledge and skills, it can also happen at another level. Mezirow (1978) introduced the term ‘meaning perspective’ to refer to what changes may occur at this other level. He defined a meaning perspective as the ‘the structure of psychocultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to past experience’ (p. 18). These psychocultural assumptions include assumptions about knowledge, values, language and other people. Meaning perspectives are acquired in childhood and become a part of who we are. But according to Mezirow, these assumptions can be challenged and potentially changed if adults have experiences that conflict with their assumptions. It would therefore be fair to suggest that when students commence a Diploma of Community Services program they arrive with their current meaning perspectives according to their life experience. As they move through the course, the units and the learning content, they may experience challenges to their meaning perspectives and thus a potential for perspective change is possible. Mezirow termed the changes that follow from change in meaning perspectives ‘transformative learning’.

Based on his research into women returning to study, Mezirow (1978) identified 10 phases of perspective transformation. In Mezirow (2000) further explanations for the phases were provided:

1. A disorienting dilemma
A person attends a learning environment in mid-life and experiences a very different worldview to their own and they become disoriented about their own beliefs and life choices.

2. **Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame**

The new worldview generates feelings of uneasiness and potentially even fear. One may consider previous ways of looking at the world that felt uncertain.

3. **A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions**

Using critical reflection, a person will assess their underlying beliefs as a result of the self-examination (Phase 2).

4. **Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change**

The person converses with friends, colleagues, family or classmates and learns that the new worldview is not unfamiliar to other people. A person may also learn that others have experienced similar learning experiences and understand the interruption caused from the disorienting dilemma.

5. **Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions**

Possible new roles are identified to move forward in life (with close friends, peers, teachers and colleagues).

6. **Planning of a course of action**

Planning a way forward that aligns with their new expanded worldview.

7. **Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans**

Specific knowledge and skills are acquired to follow an individual’s plan such as training or getting a new job.

8. **Provisional trying of new roles**

New roles are tried, modified and adjusted as required.

9. **Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships**

New roles continue to be practiced with greater confidence.

10. **A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.**

An individual consolidates the new responses to life with the expanded, more flexible worldview.
While Mezirow (1991) does not believe all 10 phases are required for perspective transformation he does highlight the importance of Phase 1 – ‘a disorienting dilemma’ in terms of raising consciousness and the discomfort associated with Phase 2 – ‘Self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame’. Phase 3 ‘critical assessment’ is considered by Mezirow as the most important as reflection on one’s own assumptions is necessary.

**Criticisms of Transformative Learning Theory**

As time progressed Mezirow refined and defended his theory of transformative learning (Erickson 2007). Many theorists have considered the idea of transformative learning, weaknesses of the theory have been highlighted and different perspectives have been offered. Taylor (1998) writes as a result of reviews, it was found that transformative learning was effective in capturing the meaning making process of adult learning however the theory needed to give greater attention to the role of context, the varying nature of what motivated the transformative learning, others ways that individuals might know things (adults learners attend with such varied knowledge), the importance of relationships and a clearer definition of perspective transformation outcomes.

Taylor (1998) also adds that Mezirow does not acknowledge that all learning in fact is situated and it is important to consider context. The role context plays in shaping transformative learning has been historically overlooked by Mezirow according to Clark & Wilson (1991). The theory is also criticised for its over-emphasis on the individual at the expense of power and social actions (Hart 1990). Taylor (2008) identifies that little consideration by Mezirow is given to the role of context and social change in the transformative experience and Whitelaw et al (2004) and Taylor (2003) believed that context must not only be considered but also orchestrated in the learning environment as this will increase the likelihood of transformative learning. Dirkx (1998) explains that a full understanding of one’s personal situation depends on the deeper understanding of the social, political and cultural context in which one lives. Mezirow wrote more about autonomous characteristics that transcend context such as greater self-directness, assertiveness, self-confidence and self-esteem experienced by an individual (Mezirow 2000). Mezirow (2000) argues that a transformative shift always leads an individual towards improved psychological health and therefore this flows on to the community through improved social and cultural outcomes derived from individual actions.

Mezirow’s theory was also challenged in terms of not taking enough account of relationships. Taylor (2007) writes that it is through trustful relationships that allow people to have questioning discussions, share information openly and achieve mutual and consensual understanding. Peer-learning
partnerships were identified by Eisen (2001) as being important to transformative learning and that establishing authentic relationships where the power is equalised allowing for learner autonomy and the development of trust. Mezirow (1991a, 1994b) argued that the central element to the perspective transformation is critical self-reflection and that if a learner rationalised a new point of view without dealing with the deep feelings that accompanied the original meaning scheme or perspective, perspective transformation could not occur. Merriam (2004) suggests however that a person would need to have a high enough level of cognitive functioning to engage in rational discourse and to critically reflect. Collard and Law (1989) believe that ideal reflection is never really possible because of contingent variables. Mezirow (1989, 2000) responded to this by saying that while critical reflection may not ever be ideal it can however contribute to transformative learning.

Newman (2012) criticises the idea of transformative learning and believes this is just good teaching. He explains that good learning has instrumental aspects which is to do with skills and tasks - it’s communicative, it’s affective as we react to people and events, it’s interpretive as we learn about ourselves, it has essential aspects as we apprehend the essence of things, the critical aspect is to do with appraisal, the political aspect is about examining conflicts if interest and expressions of power in order to make judgements, the passionate aspect relates to emotion and the moral relates to coming to know what is right and wrong. Newman proposes that ‘we strike the phrase transformative learning from the educational lexicon altogether’ (p. 51). Howie and Bagnall (2013) conclude that an array of inadequacies exist and that Transformative Learning Theory is in fact not a theory of learning. While they acknowledge that it has been widely accepted and adopted, they believe it to be simply a ‘metaphor’.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) perceived there to be a lack of fundamental research into the theory’s underpinnings. Taylor (2007) writes, ‘there is still much that is not known about transformative learning and much to learn about how people revise their interpretations about the world around them’ (p. 189).

**Transformative Learning Theory development**

Throughout his career Jack Mezirow continued to develop his theory of transformative learning. He was initially influenced by theorists such as Pablo Friere, Thomas Kuhn and Jurgen Habermas (Calleja 2014). Pablo Friere developed the idea of conscientisation and believed learning to be about perceiving social, political and economic contradictions so that a person can take action against oppressive elements of reality (Calleja 2014). He speaks of stages of consciousness growth –
intransitive thought, semitransitive and critical transivity – which is characterised by critical reflection, critical self-reflection on assumptions and critical discourse (Mezirow 1978a, 1978, 1985). As Mezirow (1991a) writes Kuhn uses paradigm to describe a collection of ways of seeing methods of inquiry; beliefs, ideas, values and attitudes. He developed the idea of paradigm which characterises the way we look through rather than look at in viewing the world. In Mezirow’s theory the paradigm became the frame of reference which when reformulated, can lead to perspective transformation (Bowers 1984). Jurgen Habermas was instrumental in influencing the social-linguistic context of transformative learning (Mezirow 1991a). He discusses the dynamics of communicative action and identifies the dynamics of the lifeworld, learning and social integration. Mezirow believed that through meaning perspectives individuals interpret their experience of the lifeworld (Calleja 2014). Critical reflection as Habermas (1984) writes is the process of validity testing and highlights four forms of discourses - theoretical discourse, practical discourse and therapeutic discourse. This provides the possibility to transform meaning schemes and perspectives (Mezirow 1991b).

Mezirow developed and extended his theory over time. Mezirow (1991) writes about old experiences being reinterpreted from a new set of expectations which gives individuals new meaning and perspective to an old experience. While he initially called these expectations ‘meaning perspectives’ he later replaced the term meaning perspective with ‘frame of reference’ (Mezirow 1997, 2000). In Mezirow (2000) he expands his theory and writes about the ‘Frames of reference’ having 2 components, habits of mind and points of view. He explains that habits of mind are broad, habitual ways of thinking and writes that we take our meaning perspectives (mind sets) and make them more inclusive, open, capable of change, reflective and more able to guide action.

Mezirow (1991a) also expanded the original 10 phases of perspective transformation to include ‘renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships. This phase was placed between the original Phase 8 (Trying new roles) and Phase 9 (Self-confidence in new roles). This new phase was based on the importance of critical self-reflection. At this time, he also discussed the idea that meaning is individualistic and is found inside the learner rather than being found in external influences such as books and speeches however it is due to communicating in others that the meaning becomes significant (Kitchenham 2008).

Mezirow later refined his earlier work on critical reflection (Mezirow 1998). He developed his theory to include 2 aspects of critical reflection. One included the critical reflection of assumptions where the learner looks back on something that has occurred and also examines the assumptions that were involved in the reflection process (Kitchenham 2008). Critical self-reflection was the other new aspect
of critical reflection. He explained that a learner would examine their worldview based on their own belief or value system (Mezirow 1995). Mezirow (1998) wrote about critical reflection and introduced the ideas of objective reframing which includes considering the assumption and subjective reframing which relates to what caused the assumption to occur.

Transformative learning theory has developed and incorporated new ideas as it has been tested and challenged, it has however significantly influenced what we know about adult learning (Kitchenham 2008).

**Transformative learning in a VET context**

Little research using transformative learning theory has focused on vocational education. In America, Magro (2002) has explored transformative learning in technical education. There is little adaptation of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory to the VET system in Australia. Hodge (2008) made the argument that this learning process should be of interest to program facilitators and managers of vocational education and training. As a teacher in the VET sector I can see how Mezirow’s 10 phases of meaning perspectives transformation can be related to VET and to community services programs (the focus of this project) in particular. I experienced a similar process of change as a student and have identified similar changes in my students. I have seen students being challenged by content and potentially having a ‘disorienting’ experience. I am aware of the benefits of reflective practice and incorporate this into my teaching and I have certainly recognised learners becoming more self-confident and know the significance of new perspectives and its integration into one’s life – because I’ve lived it.

The challenge for me as a teacher is how I could monitor this circumstance, to nurture and support students. King and Wright (2003) refer to ‘ethical dimensions’ and highlight the need for the educator to continually assess the appropriate methods so outcomes are fostered. In my experience as a teacher this would be important to ensure learners were supported throughout the learning process. A teacher would need to manage conflict and support students to understand how to deal with ethical issues and dilemmas which arose in a responsible and professional manner (Cranton 2006). Magro (2002) identified that teachers practiced transformative pedagogies despite not being aware of this. And that providing a safe, open and trusting learning environment which supported a learner provided choice and self-direction. This learning environment has a community services feel about it. The content delivered, and the topics discussed often leads to individuals sharing information or discussing
beliefs and value systems thus a safe learning environment needs to be maintained to ensure students feel adequately supported.

Hodge (2010a) explored the area of transformative learning in Australian VET. He documented the experiences of Certificate IV in Youth Work students and Motorcycle Technology Apprentices and gained the perspective of trainers. With Youth Work studies being closely related to general community services work, the outcomes of this research are interesting and relate to this project. These participants indicated that personal changes did occur when undertaking this training and that a particular ‘mind-set, perspective or outlook’ was specific to the youth work occupation. This study highlights that personal changes can potentially occur when undertaking training in the area of community services. Choy (2009) also identifies that transformative learning was a useful lens for researching personal change in workplace settings. In her study of ‘work learners’ employed by the Queensland Health and Community Services Workforce Council who were undertaking a Graduate Certificate in Education, Choy explained ‘The cohort in this case study demonstrated deep learning, where they linked new ideas to what they already know, to derive new and meaningful perspectives’ (p.70). Particularly interesting is that the meaning perspectives were challenged through reflection, reflective discourses and reasoning and this led to a change in perspectives. I would like to build on this evidence and explore if these changes occur when an individual undertakes a VET Diploma of Community Services program.

Mezirow (1991) highlights the importance of reflection as this can provoke perspective transformation. Critical reflection can be defined as the ability to examine and question our prior assumptions and to assess our knowledge, understanding and beliefs (Mezirow 1990). The content delivered in a community services qualification can challenge an individual – particularly if they have experienced a related issue in the past. My students come to the classroom with a lot of life history and it is not uncommon for learners to disclose personal experiences related to family violence, drug and alcohol issues, suicide and other such difficult life experiences. As a teacher I understand and appreciate the benefits of providing learners with the skill of reflective practice, I teach students to use this as a tool to identify practice issues, to highlight training gaps and it also provides an opportunity for individuals to identify and document their thoughts and feelings if challenges arise for them.

The literature I have reviewed shows that the Diploma of Community Services is a national, competency-based program in the Australian VET system that is supposed to give students the skills and knowledge to perform competently in community services work. From my own experience and
some research, the Diploma of Community Services can impact on students at a personal level. I have found the theory of transformative learning to be a useful way to make sense of personal change. In this theory, meaning perspectives refer to what changes at the personal level, and perspective transformation is the process of this change. Mezirow’s phases of perspective transformation seem to describe changes I saw in myself and have seen in my own students as they more through the curriculum of the Diploma of Community Services. There has been some research in vocational education (e.g. Magro 2002) that describes transformative learning in programs to prepare people for skilled occupations. In Australia, there has been a limited number of projects that look at possible transformative learning in VET programs (Choy 2009, Hodge 2010a). None of this research has focused on transformative learning in community services programs, although Hodge (2010a) includes one case study of youth work vocational education – a related area. My research aimed to add to this research based by investigating transformative learning in the Diploma of Community Services. I wanted to not only see whether transformative learning was taking place, but whether it related to the purpose of the Diploma program – to prepare people to work in community services. My research questions were therefore:

- **Whether and how students completing the Diploma of Community Services experience transformative learning; and**

- **Whether transformative learning contributes to their effectiveness as a community services worker.**

This research project gained ethical approval from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee. Along with my Griffith University Ethics application I submitted all documents as required including Information Sheet, Consent Form and Interview Questions. I was vigilant in ensuring all research participants were fully informed, were provided with the Information Sheet and Consent Forms were signed prior to commencing the interviews.
3. Methodology

Kumar (2014) explains research design as the process you will follow during the research journey to find answers to research questions. He also highlights the importance of effective research design which should be as valid, objective, accurate and economical as possible. Taking this into account I considered the methodological options for this project to find the answers to my research questions.

Considering the best method to explore these questions took some time. I could see the separate benefits of using a quantitative, qualitative and a mix methods approach. The quantitative methodology is a rigid, structured and pre-determined approach to research (Kumar 2014). As Dawson (2007) writes, it offers the opportunity to conduct a large-scale study which generates statistics regarding the topic. This method could allow me to gain specific information using a survey or questionnaire, for participants to answer specific questions about their experience in undertaking the Diploma of Community Services. Quantitative research is suited to research questions where previous research has been done that allows specific items to be included in surveys. The qualitative research method uses strategies of enquiry which allows the collection of open-minded, emerging data with the intent of identifying developing themes (Creswell 2003). While this method may not have the scope to reach as many participants, the flexible nature of the process would provide an opportunity to gain more in-depth information about the experiences of participants. It is suited to questions where there has not been as much prior research, requiring the researcher to be more ‘exploratory’.

Using a mixed method approach was also appealing. This involves the collecting of data using both methods (Creswell 2003) and takes advantage of the strengths that each approach has to offer (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2010). I had considered using questionnaires to gather information from many individuals and to then interview a smaller cohort to gain further insight. The mixed method approach would provide the sequential process which begins with a quantitative method to ‘test’ the theory and would be followed by a qualitative method to provide a more detailed exploration (Creswell 2003).

After considering all options a qualitative method proved the best option for this project. As Dawson (2007) explains qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences. This method provides the opportunity to be flexible and evolving, the open frame of enquiry would allow the information to emerge throughout an interview process. The main focus in qualitative research is ‘to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people’ (Kumar 2014 p. 135). The idea of transformative learning in the VET system is complex and relatively few research projects are available to specify items for
survey and questionnaire instruments, and I felt this method offered the opportunity to explore the topic in more depth using a less structured and emergent process.

Many approaches to research sit under the ‘qualitative’ umbrella. Since I am using my own experience as a base for conceptualising the research and to guide data collection and analysis, I decided that my project has an ‘autoethnographic’ (Kumar 2014) aspect. Because the phases of perspective transformation make a kind of story of learning and change, a ‘narrative’ (Reissman 2008) approach was also included. To generate this kind of data, a ‘semi-structured’ interview format (Kumar 2014) was used, with the structure provided by the phases of transformation identified by Mezirow (1991) and ideas picked up from related research. The analysis of data required looking across learner stories for common ideas or themes that might help to highlight anything unique about the experiences of Diploma of Community Services students. A ‘thematic’ type of analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used to identify common experiences. I overview each of these aspects below.

**Autoethnography**

Creswell (2002) explains autoethnography as a narrative approach that places the researcher into the research. The experiences of the researcher are seen as important for the goal of the research. According to Smith (2005), ‘using autoethnography, researchers can use their experiences, together with those of other participants, to complement their research’ (p. 71). Autoethnography also helped me to understand my own perspective on personal change in Diploma of Community Services programs. If I can be sure of where I stand, I felt I would be able to separate myself from what participants were saying so I could hear their own individual perspective more clearly, not get them mixed up. Smith (2005, p. 71) wrote that ‘Autoethnographies can use alternate forms of representation, such as short stories, poems and artistic interpretations.’ For this project, I decided to use the first person so the reader could be aware of when my own perspective was in play. That is how the autoethnographic aspect of the research is represented. I have also included stories in the body of this report at appropriate points to further explain to the reader where I am coming from. I did not feel it was necessary to include poems or other artistic representations.

**Narrative**

A major form of qualitative research is narrative research (Creswell 2012). It is an approach where ‘the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives’ (Creswell 2012). In my research, I did not ask for whole life stories. But because the research is about personal change, I believed it was appropriate to use the narrative approach. My questions
were supposed to get participants to talk about how learning in the Diploma of Community Services impacted back on their lives. Although my interview schedule had a structure, I did not interrupt participants when they started to open up about how their learning changed their perspective on the world, and very often the stories lead into how their whole life changed. The Findings chapter (below) shows how the questions started participants talking about their partners, and about their family life and about their past.

Reissman (2008) provides detailed instructions about data collection and analysis when using the narrative approach. She separates two kinds of narrative research. She describes ‘structural’ narrative that focuses on how participants’ stories unfold, the phases or sequence in the narrative. Because Mezirow’s theory explains transformative learning as a number of phases it is appropriate to explore for this structure in participant narrative. Reissman also describes ‘thematic’ narrative research that looks for meaningful episodes and focuses on these ‘themes’. This kind of narrative approach applies when special experiences are described. The participants in my research also highlighted particular experiences in their learning. In the Findings chapter below, participants sometimes emphasise the sequence or structure, and other times they talk about a strong learning experience or how a particular aspect of their life has been impacted.

Thematic analysis

Qualitative research helps to show meanings and significance in experience. Thematic analysis (Kumar 2014) is a procedure in qualitative research to describe meanings so that we can see them clearly. Thematic analysis allowed me to better understand what it is like from the participant’s perspective and how the individual would make sense of their experience. There are different types of thematic analysis. They use careful reading or listening to what research participants say about their experiences and identify the main ideas or meanings that are important in what the participant says. There are more complex ways of doing this like ‘grounded theory’ (e.g. Charmaz 2006) or ‘interpretative phenomenological analysis’ (e.g. Smith & Osborn 2008). Thematic narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008) stays closer to what participants say. I used this approach in my data analysis. I already had some concepts (transformative learning theory, behavioural learning theory in CBT) to connect with the things participants were saying, but I was also able to step back and not impose my concepts because of my autoethnographic approach.

Braun and Clark (2006) explain that a theme ‘captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data
set’ (2006, p. 82). In line with this definition, I was looking for words and sentences used by participants that connect with Mezirow’s (1991) phases of perspective transformation. These were what is important from the perspective of the research. For meanings or patterns, I was looking for sequences of experiences that were like or dissimilar to Mezirow’s phases and where a number of participants said similar things about changes they experienced.

**Interviews**

I sought participants who had completed a Diploma of Community Services in the past 10 years, had gained work in the community sector and who had experienced some personal change while studying in this area. Once I recruited the participants for this project via colleagues and network contacts (Refer to Appendix E) and have provided them with the required information sheet (Refer to Appendix F) and consent form (Refer to Appendix G), I arranged a time to conduct an interview. I interviewed the project participants either in person or by telephone depending on the distance or convenience for the interviewee. The interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are considered the most popular type of interviews used in qualitative social research where the interviewer wants to know specific information which can be compared and contrasted with information gained in other interviews (Dawson, 2007). The semi-structured interview process allows the interview to be more flexible to potentially explore new paths if they arise (Doody & Noonan 2013). I believe this was useful in gathering the data to address the questions asked in this research project.

**Interview questions**

For the interviews I was interested in personal stories about changes triggered by learning in Diploma of Community Services programs. I used a semi-structured approach (Kumar 2014). That is, I had questions on my sheet, but if participants started to tell stories or go off on tangents, I did not interrupt them. When the time was right, I would continue to ask questions. Sometimes participants would provide answers to questions that I did not ask them. My questions were more like ‘prompts’ for the interviews.

The first question was designed to start the conversation and bring the participants back to the time they started the course. Questions two to 11 are questions that summarise the idea of each of the 10 phases of perspective transformation as explained by Mezirow (1991). The final two questions were to prompt reflection on the nature of any personal changes and whether any changes directly contributed to effectiveness in community services work.
The questions I asked each of the project participants included:

1. When you commenced the Diploma of Community Services, what did you expect to learn about?
   As a learner how did this course impact you?
2. What did you find challenging or disorienting?
3. In terms of self-examination did you feel any guilt or shame as you moved though the course?
4. Did the course have an impact on the way you might critically reflect on beliefs, values or expectations of either your ‘self’, others, society?
5. Completing the course did you find that had become challenged or disturbed within your ‘self’?
   Did you find others were feeling this way?
6. In terms of exploring new roles, relationships and actions do you feel more confident with this?
7. Would you take a different course of action compared to before commencing the course?
8. Do you think differently about your plans for the future?
   Do you prepare differently for the future?
9. In terms of implementing plans how do you go about gathering the knowledge and information required?
   Is this different to how you might have done this prior to competing the course?
10. Did the course have an impact on you in terms of trying new roles?
11. Since study the Diploma of Community Services do you feel more confident?
   Do other people tell you that you present more confident?
12. Do you think you have different perspectives now than before you studied the Diploma of Community Services?
13. Do you think the Diploma of Community Services prepared you for the work you are doing the community sector?

Recruitment

As a VET teacher in community services I had a number of options in terms of identifying participants for this project. I have industry contacts, many of whom have colleagues in the community sector who have completed the Diploma of Community Services and I have access to other teachers in the VET sector who will have knowledge of past students. I am also a member of the Victorian Community Services Moderation Network. This group meets regularly to moderate and to discuss best practice in the delivery of the Diploma of Community Services. The Diploma of Community Services delivered at FedUni TAFE is at this time accredited with the Australian Community Services Association and I have
regular contact with the association; this offered another opportunity to reach participants if necessary. I believe the most effective option was to use my contacts at the Victorian Community Services Moderation Network as this provided access to potential participants in various locations and who have attended different education institutions. The members of the group had immediate knowledge of individuals who have completed the Diploma of Community Services and have commenced work in the community sector. I communicated with the Network members via email informing them of the project and asking them to invite individuals to be part of the project (Refer to Appendix E).

I interviewed 15 individuals who have completed the Diploma of Community Services within the past 10 years and who have commenced working in the community sector.

I recorded the interviews and transcribed them. After that I carefully and repeatedly read the transcripts for themes. The next section presents the findings as narratives followed by the theme analysis.
4. Narratives

In this chapter I present the findings of the research as narratives for each of the 15 participants. These narratives show how studying the Diploma of Community Services impacted on the learning and lives of participants. Several of the narratives describe deep personal change of the kind conceptualised in the theory of transformative learning. Some of the narratives present changes that are closer to the skills and knowledge described in units of competency. Each narrative is headed by a pseudonym used in place of the real name of the participant.

Mark

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2008*

*Currently working in the Youth Justice area*

Mark explained that when he commenced the Diploma he had little knowledge of the welfare field, he knew people who worked in local community agencies and they suggested the course – Mark was previously a butcher. Interestingly, Mark said one of his teachers told the class that when you complete a course like this, you will come out the other end looking at things differently. Mark continued on by saying,

‘It just opened up a whole new perspective on a lot of things, just made you aware of the whole different way that people lived as well’

When I asked Mark if he found anything disorienting or challenging, he said ‘no’ but added,

‘… but I suppose it also allowed me to look on my situation at the time as well and just - even looking back on things like how family dynamics work and things like that …. I’d been a couple of years out of the divorce …. I was able to really put perspective on that as well, as to relationship dynamics and all that kind of stuff’

We talked about whether Mark might have handled things differently pre-course as opposed to after and he said,

‘Oh, for sure. One of the main things for me was being able to look at the effects of what was going on for one of my kids…. just allowed me to look at how things were going and gave me the courage to then pursue custody of my daughter…. gave me the knowledge and the courage to actually do something about it’

Mark spoke a lot about gaining a self-awareness and that he gained a totally different way of thinking about situations. He credited this with what he learned about ‘critical thinking’. He explained that now he was able to look for ‘other perspectives and the other angles’. Mark didn’t feel that the course
changed his values and beliefs, but he gained the ability to look for reasons for how other people might be behaving. Mark continued by saying that some of his classmates reacted differently to parts of the course and some students left the course either half-way through and even three-quarters through.

In terms of being challenged by any of the course content Mark explained,

‘I’m a pretty go with the flow kind of a guy’ and added ‘I reckon some people would have a different [experience] depending on a person’s life experience or their personality’

In terms of exploring new roles and relationships, Mark spoke about having a better understanding of himself in the way he behaves and that prior to the course he was adamant that, ‘I’m like this and this is who I am’ but that now he is able to put more perspective around why he is the way he is. This allowed him to feel more comfortable with himself and able to address things that he wasn’t so comfortable with. Mark said the course helped him learn how to ‘talk himself up’ and that he is more confident with identifying what he ‘can do’. Mark also said that he felt he was more focused now and explained,

‘I think I’m probably more - I’m trying to think of the word, more targeted maybe. Before I went along with the flow.... whereas now, I’m probably more decisive about what I do’

When we spoke about planning and if Mark had experienced a difference since completing the course, he said he thinks about the future more and plans more. He looks at all options, to make the ‘best choice’ that he can make at the time. He was also able to see how this was useful in his work practice and provided a detailed response,

‘It’s around that decision making and problem solving and all that kind of stuff. You just improved with doing the course. That’s the kind of stuff that we have - in my role now, we sit down with kids and say okay well you didn't make the greatest choice here.... what could you have done differently? Let’s look at the problem solving. If this situation comes up again, what else could you do? When you are trying to develop that within a bunch of teenagers and of course it is going to reflect on yourself .... you use those in your life as well’

Mark talked about having a few roles since finishing the course and that he feels more confident than he used to be. Mark did not think his perspectives were totally different, but he just has a better understanding of things and is more informed about a wider range of things. He continued by saying that the knowledge learned about socioeconomics and disadvantaged people, information about politics and concepts around critical thinking was extremely valuable.
Mark was able to articulate how the course guided him in his learning and explained that this was helpful when it came to work in the community sector. He said his teachers provided content and would then put it in a work context. Guest speakers were brought in to talk about expectations of the job role and he found this very useful. Mark added that he felt he learnt a lot from the course; from policy and procedure to case work, to service referrals and working with other agencies; and a lot about himself.

Alan

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2017*

*Is currently working in the Family Violence area*

Alan commenced the Diploma of Community Services after completing the Certificate IV in Community Services, he had identified that he wanted to learn more in particular about the drug and alcohol area. He also wanted to find more solutions to social problems and he wanted a career change, a new direction.

When I asked Alan if the course impacted on him any particular way, he answered,

‘Enormously so. Enormously so…. it taught me about listening skills, it taught me to separate my feelings from the facts of the matter and to listen much more intently’

Alan spoke about being challenged at one point during the course when learning about family violence. He said,

‘I struggled with the family violence thing because I was in a relationship that has subsequently been found to be abusive and that was not something that I understood’

Alan was able to make some sense of the situation he had experienced,

‘… it made it clear to me …. we have to examine our own feelings and our part in whatever we’re doing. If X didn’t do this, then that wouldn’t happen, where you take responsibility for your own wellbeing’

Alan is an older person (64 years) and entered the Diploma of Community Services with a lot of life experience. He told me he was confronted during the course and soon realised he needed to put to what he knew ‘to one side to allow room for what I am learning and not reject’. Alan added,

‘Oh, it altered my perspective immeasurably’
We discussed the need to be non-judgemental in this area of work and Alan explained that he had learnt a lot about this during the course. Alan also talked about becoming more aware of how he ‘behaves’ around his children and others. Another aspect that Alan raised was becoming more aware of his past,

‘... it makes you examine some of the things you may have done in your life. You know, the so-called skeletons in everyone’s cupboard that you have successfully veneered over. It puts you in a better place to when you’re feeling strong and serene, as it were, to go back to them and unpack them and acknowledge your part in these and what you did or didn’t do. It’s very confronting’

When asked if class members expressed a similar experience Alan talked about his belief that most people go into community services because they have a bad experience in their life and they don’t want other people to go through the same thing. He felt when this occurred the people would become ‘fixated’ on ‘fixing’ the problem and he has learnt that when working the community sector, you are not there to ‘fix’ things, you can only empower people. He mentioned that there were a lot of buzz words like ‘empower’ but he acknowledged,

‘... but they change your mindset or they changed my mindset to say okay, I can recognise a bad behaviour or unfair or unjust or racist or bigoted behaviour, but it is not my job to change that person from being a bigot or being a racist. It is my job to try and empower them to think about why they do that because I have an inherent belief that goodness is within us all and we just have to let it come to the top, that’s all’

In terms of trying new roles, new relationships, new actions Alan expressed that there wasn’t anything he wouldn’t have a go at now. He said he simply handles things differently now. He talked about being the oldest sibling and being expected to take a leadership role in the family, he was always required to ‘sort everything out’. Alan said he has learnt that he ‘doesn’t have to be the boss’. Alan said he was mindful in class of putting his hand up to always say what he thought, he said he realised that he didn’t need to be the ‘best’.

Alan said he relies a lot more on evidence and does not believe everything he hears, particularly in the media. He said he is very ‘fluid’ in his thoughts now but said the things he holds dear, that are not negotiable have reduced to just a couple of things – kindness, compassion, empathy and fairness. In terms of a change in perspectives compared to before the course, Alan explained that the main changes were his ideas about inclusiveness and equality and said the course opened up a whole new way of analysing things. He spoke about challenging his teacher about this and that she then challenged him back, providing lots of information about statistics and case studies. Alan said he has since realised that the teacher was right and has vastly changed his views.
The course prepared Alan for the community sector particularly in the areas of family violence and working with young people, but Alan added that the most important thing he learnt was ‘silence’ because it shows that you are not going to have all the answers, that you are not superior to that person, therefore it empowers them. Alan finished by saying ‘I will be forever thankful to my TAFE teachers for what they have taught me’.

Beth

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2015*

*Currently working the area of Disability*

Beth began our interview by saying that she wanted to get a job by completing the Diploma. She didn’t think she would get as much out of it or that it would be so ‘involved’. Beth mentioned how ‘awesome’ her teachers were and that they brought so much experience and knowledge.

As a learner Beth explained, that she had not had such a good track record when it came to study and this course was the first thing she had ever completed. Beth talked about having a difficult past and that she was ‘out of control’ as a younger person. She enjoyed the social context of the classes which was helpful because in the past she had felt anxious about being in big social groups or having to commit to something every day. The other issue for Beth was that she found some of the learning challenging, in particular the ‘Counselling unit’ because she had had a lot of counselling in the past and the role plays felt like she was being counselled again. Beth talked about having a lot of fear during the course, the fear of not finishing or doing well, she had pinned a lot on this course as she hoped it would bring a new direction.

When asked more about the learning, Beth said she learned not to be judgemental and explained that the course had a huge impact on her values and beliefs; she realised she had been quite judgemental about people in the past. She talked about her relationship with her partner and felt she gained more clarity about this, she now interacts more effectively,

‘I think we began to talk about stuff more.... rather than just being in denial. It made me really look at my thought processes and my actions and what was going on behind my actions .... rather than just blow up in anger and just - I'd think through things all the time... like I'd question everything’

Beth credited the course with the state of her relationship today and said that she communicates better with her partner, resolves issues without being angry or aggressive and they are both able to express their feelings more. Beth also said she was thankful that her partner was prepared to grow
with her as they have a very happy life today. Beth recently had a baby and she was glad that their home environment was working so well.

In the past Beth had cleaning jobs and hospitality positions and said this course gave her the ability to gain work in the disability field and that she ‘loved it’. She felt the course took her out of her comfort zone and that without it, she would have just stayed where she felt comfortable. Beth is very successful in her work role and management roles have been discussed. She said prior to the course she would have felt too afraid to seek a position in management, ‘my mind wouldn’t have gone down that path’. Planning for the future is very different for Beth now,

‘…. my life was completely chaotic before…. I’d never planned for anything. It was just utter chaos’

Beth seemed almost surprised about her development with planning more,

‘I mean even since that course we saved. So I worked, maintained a job, saved money for a house - I've never saved in my life Katrina, seriously, like saved money. So I know if I set a goal now that I will achieve it. Because there’s no other option, do you know what I mean?’

Beth talked a lot about her future looking ‘bleak’ before undertaking the Diploma of Community Services and that now she is an avid planner. She has the skills to do research to gain the information required, can allocate timelines, breaks down the task into smaller steps and she simply ‘chips away at whatever needs to be done to get where I need to go’. Beth explained that her brain simply did not know how to plan or set goals and that the process would have been too overwhelming for her in the past. Today Beth says she is ‘definitely a more confident person’ particularly with new roles and would not hesitate to try a new role, she added ‘I’d just give it a go’. Beth said that she is not completely ‘100%’ on a social level but she is aware of this issue and plans to continue working on it. Before completing the course, she said she would not have even acknowledged this was an issue. She added that she was more confident in her work, in her relationship and from a broader family perspective.

Beth says her family and partner have noticed a change in her, she thinks they were impressed she had finished the course and been so successful in this area of work. She also explained she was more confident with setting clear boundaries with her family and that in the past ‘everything was a bit messy with my family’ and that her family relationships are a lot healthier now.

In terms of a change in perspectives Beth said she is less judgemental today, less stubborn about her opinion, can put herself in another person’s shoes and is a lot more compassionate. All of this helped Beth to feel better prepared to work in the community sector, in her case in the disability area.
Upon reflection, Beth finished the interview by saying,

‘For me is was like being blind, your eyes became open, it’s just awesome’

Alana

Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2013

Currently works in the Youth area

Alana’s interview commenced with her explaining that she expected to learn about work practices and to get a job. Alana particularly found it interesting to look at cycles of family violence and generational unemployment. She learnt a lot about how to communicate, she became more aware of her vocabulary and how best to talk to people and she added that completing the counselling type units were helpful in this regard. She explained,

‘It definitely opened my eyes up and made me think a lot more. I had to think about things, and why people do things, and what led them to do things’

Alana said she is now more aware of how she approaches things, she is more flexible and understands that everyone is different and she is now not so ‘hot headed’. She learnt how to accept other people’s opinions and she learnt,

‘... that it’s okay to have another opinion, because everyone’s been brought up differently.... I remember I was a bit hot-headed when I first came in there, and here I was in a class, that I was about to go out and be in the workforce and listen to other peoples’ opinions all day long, but yet I just couldn’t sit in a classroom and listen to 26 other opinions, without getting frustrated by it’

Alana added,

‘So I guess that changed my personality a little bit I suppose’

Interestingly Alana talked about her appreciation of ‘a safe environment’. The challenges Alana experienced was the increasing awareness of her ‘self’. Anna said she felt a lot of fear, a fear of being wrong and she would respond very strongly,

‘Like, how dare you, I’ve been through hell and back, you can’t tell me’

Despite being difficult at times, Alana said she started to realise ‘I’m not such a victim here’. She began to reflect on those ‘hot headed times’ and she started to ask herself ‘what am I doing?’ And ‘what’s wrong with you?’ Alana said she at times would need to apologise to the class for her behaviour,
‘So there were a few moments like that. There were a few ah-ha moments, a lot of those. A lot of the times I would just reflect, I’d probably zone out a little bit and reflect on my own life’

This time was challenging but Alana said she started to recognise she wasn’t the only person who had ‘stuff’ go on in their lives, this raised a lot of emotion for her. Alana had experienced a tense relationship with her mother and felt she was a victim of her circumstances however Alana said she is now able to have a better understanding about the situation, she can now better understand where her mother was coming from. She added it was the study of sociology that helped her understand this and said, while she could never forget what she saw, she could now understand where her mother was at during the time. Alana explained her relationship with her sister was always difficult, she said ‘we just clashed’ but now she views and deals with that situation very differently. She said she realises that telling her sister what to do never works, she instead asks, ‘what do you need?’ and ‘how can I help?’

Alana talked a lot about how the learning was beneficial. She said she learnt to listen, rather than judge, she also said she doesn’t ‘blame people anymore’ and spoke about the hurt she had previously carried,

‘I had a lot of hurt, there was a lot of hurt inside me. When I first started the course, I think I looked at it like, I can do this, because I’ve got experience, and I know what it’s like to be .... So there were a few raw nerves touched every now and again, and I had to learn how to deal with that in a professional manner I suppose, and not take everything so personally, and that other people have got their opinion about it too, and they’ve probably been through the same thing’

Alana also talked about other people in the course being challenged,

‘I remember there was always a box of tissues in the classroom, and they were always used. I remember a lot of people walking out of a class and having a going-home moment. Yeah, those people really grew I think, they either went one way or went the other. There were a lot of people in there that I think were the same as me, that they came in thinking they could fix everything, but it was actually them that needed repairing’

Alana says completing the Diploma of Community Services had a significant impact on her and that she sees things differently now,

‘I was in a relationship while I was in that course, and it was awful. Lots of transitions through emotions there. Now I know what people deserve in life.... I know what’s wrong and what’s right. Yeah, I think I knew before, but now it’s very black and white’

She also felt that it impacted on her parenting as well,
‘Yep, you see the light. I think mostly with my son, my relationship with him was - I realised yeah, it’s pretty special. So I think I grew up a lot, especially in the last year. I grew up a lot. So yeah, I probably ended up being a better mum’

Alana separated from her partner during the course,

‘I think I had enough emotional intelligence to eventually do it... I was very empowered’

Alana also spoke of significant changes to family relationships and when asked what is different, she answered,

‘I think especially my family... things were healed, or they were healing. I was healing, so they are healing... there was a lot of forgiving’

When the topic of planning was discussed, Alana said she always planned to have a career and wanted to be good at it; she has accomplished that. But she said now she feels more generally informed. She added,

‘I achieved that, and that has definitely changed my life. I love what I do, so I’m a prouder, happier person’

Alana spoke about recently gaining a new position at work and that she is very confident in trying new things now. She talks about appearing confident in the past but thinks that was more like ‘fake confidence’. Alana talked about being confident in the workplace and in her personal life within her new relationship. She spoke about the pride she feels with having her own money and being financially stable, she has achieved her goal of buying a home and is proud of her achievements. She believes she will have a long career, and this gives her a lot of reassurance.

In terms of new perspectives Alana says she has a new perspective on ‘everything’ including society and the media. She explained she sees things differently from ‘people who don’t work in the field’,

‘Little tiny things that just pop up all the time that society just have no idea about at all, unless you’re in it, and you’re working in a field, they’ve just got no idea’

Alana finished by saying the course definitely prepared her for the workplace, she said she tells people all the time to do it, that it’s ‘not text book stuff’, and that it’s very ‘hands on’. Alana also added that you need to know your ‘triggers’ and the course opens up who you are as a person, it will teach you to be confident, strong and happy’ She also acknowledges the importance of self-care.

Michelle

*Completed the course in 2015*
Currently works in the Mental Health area

Michelle entered the course after having some experience in the community sector working with young people. Michelle said she thinks she was naïve in the beginning and didn’t think she would learn very much, she said she was ‘over-confident’ about what she knew but when we spoke about what she did learn she said,

‘Oh just in amazing ways. It changed my life - and that sounds a bit over the top, but it really did. I just grew so much as a person in so many ways. Yeah. It opened my mind. Yeah, just in general. I couldn't have imagined that it would change, change my way of thinking’

Michelle said a number of times that the course ‘opened my mind’ and that she ‘grew as a person’. She added that she learnt a lot about self-awareness, that in the past she had difficulties in balancing her assertiveness, and she would feel guilty if she had hurt someone. Michelle explained she had difficulties with class members voicing opinions, their judgement and treatment of others and would become angry; this gave her some insight into her own behaviour. Since then she said she is now better prepared and would deal with the classmates differently, she would be less angry about their behaviour.

Michelle talked about being ‘triggered’ at times during the course and she started to question herself more and became more prepared to deal with ‘stuff’,

‘I think you can look at it and then go well okay, you know I haven't dealt with that…. so I was able to sort of look at that and question myself, why did I become emotional trying to talk about that story in class? I thought that.... I was well past that, but it did trigger some emotion’

Looking at your own values and beliefs was a big part of the course according to Michelle, ‘you question them’ she said. She also felt that if she had not completed the course she would never have questioned her values, beliefs and views. In terms of the course content Michelle said she didn’t have a huge reaction and felt this may have been because she had worked in the community sector, she had also not experienced things like violence or sexual assault in her past. However, others in the class did experience some difficulties, they would become highly emotional at times and people would ‘navigate their way through different issues’ but some left the course and she felt that perhaps this was due to them being ‘triggered’ too much.

When we discussed the topic of confidence Michelle said she felt very confident in her work role and in particular when communicating with people, she said that her family also thought she was more confident, and she explained,
‘It’s given me the confidence to believe in myself and my own skills that I can try new things, and the confidence ... to step out of my comfort zone and to just give it a go, to believe in myself I guess’

Michelle also talked about growing as a person and that it had affected her home life,

‘….really grew as a person and I think that rubbed off on my husband. I think that he has learnt a lot from me sharing and that's affected our parenting, that's affected the way the kids communicate’

Michelle said that the course gave her a safe place to step out of her comfort zone and to try new skills and that she uses those skills every day. Michelle talked about having the confidence to buy a house and believes the learning she received contributed to that. She explained that these days she plans more and completes more research than she would have before. She added,

‘.... knowledge is power, we grow as people and I grew a lot in that time’

And then she said,

‘It just enhanced my perspective on life in general’

Michelle talked about thinking differently and that she questions things, she said,

‘....the picture has broadened than what it was before and I perhaps have matured a little bit more than what I was before, so I do think, think differently’

In terms of work readiness, Michelle said she was definitely prepared her for the workplace. The extent of discussion and communication which took place during the course was most useful.

**Cate**

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2015*

*Currently works in the Mental Health area*

When Cate started the Diploma of Community Services she said she wanted to learn a lot of new skills regarding community services and wanted to complete the course for her own confidence. She has since got a job in the mental health area and said, ‘I still can’t believe it’. Cate talked about having a ‘low opinion’ of herself and that during the course her ‘confidence level went way up’ and her ‘self-worth as well’ she added,

‘It taught me a lot about myself, about other people as well, which helped me to look at myself in a different light because I was getting taught how to look at other people in a different light’
Cate said teachers believing in her was important, but she also said that the experience brought up a lot of things that she had ‘buried’ and that the course brings people out of themselves,

‘…. it was hard though sometimes. Sometimes I would go home and think about things and have little triggers and stuff. But as the course went on I learnt different techniques and stuff to handle that and it made me go back to counselling, to get some counselling’

Cate said she does not believe you can help others if you don’t look after yourself. She talked about having a difficult past and with people in her life she needed to established boundaries. Cate wished she’d done the course earlier but also believes she would not have been in a position personally to finish it before.

Other people in class also had experienced difficulties according to Cate, she said sometimes the content was confronting but she didn’t want to ‘run away’, she knew the course was helping her work through her own issues and regularly asked herself questions such as, ‘What was I doing wrong’ and ‘Why have I chosen certain people?’ Cate said she felt that she had found her voice and explained,

‘Just having that more - a bit more confidence in myself to do that and to - like another thing this course really taught me was assertiveness. I'll probably be practising that for the rest of my life, but I really know what it means now. It's like I feel like I have more courage to speak out a bit more now’

Cate explained the course did not really change her values but helped to bring out the values she already had, and she learnt that it’s ok for people to have different values. She also said that before the course she would just ‘live day by day’ and just tried to get through but today she thinks more about things,

‘I'm still me, of course. But I think more about things more in a - like instead of in a negative way it's a bit more open’

Having the confidence to get a job or to even look for a job was important to Cate, she believes she would never have been able to do that prior to completing the course. With her new found confidence Cate said she has more ‘get up and go’ and now ‘strives for more in life’. She also feels good about being more financially stable and adds,

‘Because I'm earning now and I'm more excited about the future’

Life is very different for Cate now, she plans for the future and said she does a lot more research about things, to get where she needs to go. The course she said, very much prepared her to work in the community sector and it also gave her a new life.
Kya

Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2016

Currently working in the Youth Justice area

Kya thought that she would learn about community services issues such as working with people with disabilities and mental health – she said she didn’t really have any expectations but was surprised when her attitudes changed, and she began to have less judgement of others,

‘I think my attitudes towards things really quickly changed. My whole attitude towards that sort of stuff is different. Definitely communication skills, that’s completely different... and dealing with confrontation and conflict and stuff because I used to be fiery and now I’m just very placid’

In the past Kya said she has always been an outspoken person but now she knows how to do it properly, she is able to sit back and take in the whole situation. Kya thought she would be ‘triggered’ a lot more, but she felt she handled difficult content fairly well. She could however appreciate that some of the content was confronting. Kya was raised in a ‘middle class family’ and said she did not have a troubled background. What Kya did get from the course was that she developed a ‘passion’ for helping people. What mostly surprised Kya was the self-examination she experienced and subsequently has some real regrets about the past, she said,

‘I’d look at myself in high school and I’d be like, oh God, I was a bully sometimes ... I don’t want to be that person, I’m not that person. I didn’t deal with things very well when I was younger’

Furthermore, on a personal level, Kya experienced a change in terms of the relationship with her partner at the time and she explained,

‘I don’t want to put myself through things that I don’t deserve. That's when I started trying to work on it all and be like, okay, we need to talk about this. I can't be with you if it's like this, it's not helpful and I’m not happy’

Kya talked about her Mum noticing a real change and Kya said she remembers even saying ‘I’m changing, I’m different’. Kya says she also able to educate her friends now, she has become very protective of disadvantaged people and tries to help the people around her have a better understanding of the welfare world. Kya says she also is a lot more prepared to deal with issues within her family, so she feels other people have benefited from her learning. The other point Kya raised was her appreciation of seeking help when needed and often encourages family and friends to attend counselling and seek support with issues they may be facing.
Interestingly, having a catholic school education Kya feels her view on religion has changed and believes working with young people would be difficult if she maintained such a conservative view. She did say however that her core values remained the same. Kya spoke about other classmates who had strong beliefs and opinions and said there were often ‘dramas’ amongst class members with people not getting along or having differing opinions. Kya said the issue of abortion was confronting for some people, she added ‘I don’t know how those people are going to go out there [in the sector]’.

Kya said having teachers who had worked in the sector was ‘amazing’. She said that she has developed confidence in her work practice and strives to do her best but more importantly believes she became a better person. She is also happy to receive feedback now unlike before when she found this very uncomfortable, she said,

‘I like the way I am happy to change to be a good worker. I like that I take on other skills and different things so openly. I don’t want to end up being a worker that thinks I know everything’

Kya says she has always been an outgoing person but has realised she was too trusting in the past and now is more protective of herself. She says she thinks more about her future and where she wants to go and although she wasn’t always a planner but does more planning these days and thinks about completing further study. Kya spoke of an activity she completed during the Diploma, a goal planning assessment, she said she ‘hated it’ and found it very difficult but understands the importance of this practice now.

In terms of preparation for work in the community sector Kya thinks this is dependent on how much a person is prepared to change, she said ‘just because you go and do a course like that doesn’t mean that you’re going to work well in industry’. She talked about the need for people to not only be trained well but says,

‘…. you only get out of the course what you put in and how much you are willing to, I don’t know, adapt and change and look at what you’re being taught’

Kya finished by saying that communication, reflective practice and student placement made her the worker and person she is today.

**Jade**

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2016*

*Currently working in the Disability area*
Jade completed a Certificate IV in Disability and then decided to undertake the Diploma of Community Services. She thought the Diploma would give her more understanding about community services and she did learn a lot about job opportunities in this area. Jade found the course very difficult because she didn’t have much self-confidence, at different points she wanted to give up and didn’t think she could do it. Jade credited teacher guidance with getting her through. One of the main things that she struggled with was being confident in the learning environment and said,

‘I’m a very shy person. I don’t like being out of my comfort zone. I like being in my own space. I suppose the dynamics too, especially in the classroom, different opinions and some people were more outgoing and stronger willed than I’

Jade explained she struggled with a lot of personal issues and was almost ‘fearful’ of attending class, she was concerned about not being accepted or made to look silly. Over time she said, she began to feel more confident and contributed more. She said sometimes the fear overtook but she really wanted to overcome this,

‘It was either you can sit and wallow and not do anything with your life or move on. So, I didn’t want to sit and wallow’

Jade raised her personal issues a number of times during the interview and explained that she had received professional help, she said,

‘I’d been in a situation in a relationship where my beliefs and my values weren’t heard, like I was just pushed to the side and my self-confidence was really low. I didn’t have enough to stand up for myself. I would just go into my shell because that was the easiest way to cope. By coming here and doing the course I thought, hang on a minute. I can be more of a person. I don’t have to feel scared of being shut into a corner. I can have a voice and I can stand up for myself. Getting that confidence and that self-esteem back… I started changing and started believing in myself’

While Jade found the course content sometimes very challenging, she did graduate which she never thought possible. She said getting a job in the disability area helped with her self-esteem, she made new friends and was financially more stable, she explained,

‘Just having the confidence, wanting to better myself and have a better life. Because yeah, I was in a bad spot and I think this course changed my life’

Jade continued by saying that she saw some people in class ‘stuck’ and were unable to change their opinion but for many the course opened their eyes and quieter people found their voice. Previous to the course, Jade said she would never have been able to confidently talk to colleagues in the work place, speak to a supervisor, speak in staff meetings and confidently undertake work practices,
‘Before I would have just hid away, would have stayed away and not done anything about it. I just would have curled in a ball and [it] would have just sucked my life out. But now that I’ve done the course and I’m at work, I’ve got more confidence in at least trying to solve the situation’

Jade said she still finds it hard to meet new people and in terms of planning says, ‘it’s a whole new ball game now’. She says now I want to travel and buy a house. In the past Jade says she never planned,

‘I wouldn't have even thought about anything before. As I said I was - I couldn’t even fathom at times.. living. So working and doing the course has actually given me purpose to actually live my life now, and move on, and know that there is something better out there, instead of being shut away and being too scared to step out the door and find new things’

The other change that Jade experienced was a change in her family dynamics, she said she didn’t have the best childhood or the best parents. She added that she always had a difficult relationship with her sister but was now able to stand up for herself, she and her sister can speak about things and in fact they have become closer.

Overall Jade said she feels a lot more confident in the workplace and with her role in the family, she said,

‘Way more confident than I did before, yep. In my own personal life, in my work life, and even my family life. I can see that things have changed. Yeah, and I’m not that scared little person anymore’

Jade says her Dad has told her that he has noticed a change and says he is proud of her. The interviewed concluded with Jade saying,

‘Whereas beforehand I probably couldn’t see the path - old cliché, the forest, the trees were all closed in and I couldn’t see a way through ... the path has come open. It’s wide and there’s forks in the road. I’ve got more options now, of which one I can take. Whereas before it was all closed in, and it was just trees everywhere and there was no way out. Whereas now the path opened up’

Paul

_Completed the Diploma of Community Services in_

_Currently works in Family Services_

Paul entered the Diploma of Community Services with clear goals of learning about the field of community services, he said previously he had lived like a ‘gypsy’ often doing hospitality work and he wanted to settle down. Paul said that he didn’t think a lot of the course content changed his thinking but credited student placement as being significant in his learning. Although he later mentioned,
‘I think doing the course was actually a big change in my - well I guess a lot of things in my life’

Paul said he did a lot of extra reading and research while completing the course. He said he felt informed about topics such as feminism but realised after a placement in a Men’s Behaviour Change program that he needed to re-assess his ‘own ways’ and he said that was difficult. Paul said he didn’t find anything disturbing but more frustrating because he felt the course content was not at a high enough level for him. He again said he did not think the course was life changing but it changed his attitudes and ideas, he is more open now, he explained,

‘... the teachers had warned about triggers on suicide and triggers on drugs and that kind of stuff wasn’t an issue. It was more when I was actually reflecting on myself and my values’

Paul said he found many of the class discussions frustrating because in his opinion ‘people where so narrow-minded’. He added that he was quite an opinionated person but needed to work on allowing others to have their opinion. When we talked about confidence Paul said,

‘No, I’m a very not confident person. It’s kind of a bit of a front... that’s something I’ve struggled through. I come across as quite arrogant and I got that in the class a lot but that’s just something I’ve learnt to deal with because - well that’s the way I kind of work with things’

Paul continued by saying he did believe the course helped with his confidence but had become more confident while working in the community sector, he said he feels a lot more professional after working for a period of time. Paul added that he thinks the course gave him a clearer direction. He said he had never planned previously but now does more of this, he sets goals and is more assertive in getting things done. He is even more open to researching issues and said,

‘I guess one thing it did help me with was to research things deeper before I make an end kind of opinion. Actually go back and get all the details before I go, right this is what I think’

Paul said he did not experience a lot of change in terms of perspective however recognises that some change did occur. He concluded the interview by saying,

‘I was open to it, I wanted to change. I wanted to be - I wanted to practice what I preached and I wanted my actions to align with my values’

Peter

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2016*

*Currently working on a not-for-profit project – Youth camps*
This interview started with Peter saying he expected to learn about ‘sociology type stuff’ and ‘working with humans’. He added that he didn’t really know what to expect so he kept an open mind but also said,

‘But I guess it strengthened me as a person I guess I could say’

When we discussed whether he felt challenged or disoriented throughout the course, Peter explained the content around family violence was challenging due his past as he said, ‘I grew up with a not good father’. Peter said he knew this would be difficult, but he believes that this will be the case forever. Peter had experienced homelessness and had drug issues as a teenager. He talked about still having the same values and beliefs, but he mentioned that some classmates were ‘triggered’, that some of the older members of the group had ‘older value systems’ and found the content too confronting and he felt this effected their success in the course. He gave the example of one person needing to leave the room when the issue of gender was being discussed and transgender issues were raised. Peter also felt that lived experience was important,

‘I also noticed in the studies, people who didn’t have life experience such as that, they were not so well connected to the framework and the ideas. Because they have no lived experience’

When we spoke about confidence Peter said he feels a lot more confident and he had even started his own not-for-profit organisation and said,

‘I don’t think I would have took that step unless I had done these studies’

Peter said that due to this new-found confidence he had entered a new relationship which he thinks would not have happened before gaining confidence from the course. In terms of planning, he said he didn’t plan in the past and still does not plan now, he does not set long term goals, but he does work towards reaching his ‘ambitions’,

Peter said he completes a lot more research about things these days and that he will research information, he will talk more to people and to professionals a lot more than he would have in the past. He said the course and doing student placements helped link him to contacts and this was very beneficial when setting up the non-for-profit venture. He felt the course prepared him for trying new things and added,

‘Because just the ground roots stuff of your role plays, to the actually doing when you’re going in placements. It’s a new technique, new field, new things’
Family and friends say Peter is more confident since completing the Diploma of Community Services but said that his mother wonders why he would want to re-visit such hard times from the past. The interview ended with Peter saying that the course definitely prepared him for the community sector as it gave him workplace skills and the confidence to implement them.

**Abigail**

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2015*

*Currently working in the Men’s support area*

Abigail wanted to get a job in the community sector and thought she would learn about programs in the sector, different approaches to the theory underlining the processes and also about policies, procedures and legislation. Abigail explained she had come to the course with a lot of life history and had experienced family violence in her past and said this was challenging at times during the course,

‘Personally, for me the thing that I found difficult was when we watched a few videos and things of domestic violence situations and the trauma that the children go through. That’s very confronting for me because of what my eldest son experienced. I actually walked out of one class, I had to just excuse myself’

Abigail also added that while some things are confronting, she feels they can also be empowering. She explained some people were very confronted by the content, but she believes this is necessary to work in the community sector. Abigail added,

‘I guess the discussion that was provoked by what we’d watched... people talked about their own experiences and of course there were some terrible experiences. But the others that hadn’t experienced trauma in their life were very wide eyed. Then again, you get into the workforce and you think you know what abuse is and you think you know what trauma is until you read the files on the kids’

Abigail at first was concerned about her literacy level and thought as a mature aged student she would struggle. This concern subsided once Abigail received good feedback for her first assessment, and this gave her confidence. She also said she had a ‘fabulous teacher’ who went ‘over and above’ to support her.

When the idea of confidence was discussed Abigail said she had always been a confident person but now feels confident *and* competent. In terms of undertaking different actions, Abigail does not think much has changed but feels more informed and does a lot more research today. She actively seeks new learning opportunities and attends seminars and workshops to continue being informed and she credited the Diploma with giving her the knowledge of how to do this. Abigail does not believe she
plans more than before but still has her ‘dreams and passion’. She also says she is more prepared to try new things and to seek work opportunities. We spoke about values and beliefs and Abigail did not feel these had changed for her and that although she did not have any guilt and shame she did find the topic of domestic violence and trauma difficult because her son had seen a lot when he was younger. Abigail continued to say that her son had had a drug addiction and had come through this, she felt that she was more prepared to help him by completing the Diploma of Community Services.

Abigail finished by saying that the course very much prepared her to work in the community sector, she said the content and teachers were great.

**Sonia**

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2014*

*Currently working in the Family Services area*

Sonia had originally thought she wanted to go into nursing but after completing a Certificate IV in Community Services she decided the next step was the Diploma of Community Services. She wasn’t sure about what she could expect from the Diploma. In terms of her learning, Sonia did learn about issues facing the community and said she felt ‘quite sheltered’ at first, she said,

> ‘It was really eye opening to what was going on [in the community] I suppose when you're living quite comfortably middle class and don't have that exposure .... looking at people for the people as opposed to their situation is one thing, I took a lot out of that as well. The person is the person, the problem doesn't identify the person’

Sonia said the course impacted her in a ‘good way’ and explained she had some very difficult experiences in her past and she was subsequently struggling with her identity. She did however acknowledge that other classmates struggled more with the content than she did,

> ‘.... some of it was relative to myself so I was able to reflect upon my own situation, my own circumstances and really grow with that. I found that probably the others that I did the course with were more taken aback by the information that they got, probably wore that a bit harder than I did. I’ve not - it doesn’t, I don’t know, I’m not really shaken terribly easily by that sort of stuff. There was more just an intrigue of how prevalent it was’

Sonia learnt a lot about herself during the Diploma and said she didn’t realise she was so strong and could ‘fire up’ about topics she felt strongly about. What she did learn was that she was very judgemental about people,
‘I suppose I was really - oh I suppose in that sense I blamed the person’s situation on themselves and couldn’t understand why the community and tax payers should have to fund the resources to support them’

She now believes that we as a community have a responsibility to address these issues. Sonia says that she interacts with people differently and thinks differently now.

‘Even going to my parents is different. I find that I think and I speak and I analyse things a lot differently now with everybody’

Sonia did not believe her values and beliefs had changed but recognised she had been raised in a small town and that her parents were very conservative, they were critical of people and could be very derogatory towards others. The Diploma of Community Services however gave Sonia an opportunity to challenge things, to reflect, to understand others and to reconsider her own behaviours. She found the reflection tools the most useful and now looks at things differently,

‘.... it’s almost like slow brain washing, it really is. I feel like you’re just slowly moulded into opening up your mind to view the wider picture like you’ve had blinkers on the whole time’

And added,

‘I didn’t think I would walk away with a great deal of change’

In the class environment, Sonia said a lot of people were challenged, the content was confronting at times and this clashed with people’s values and beliefs. She said some people ‘just couldn’t carry on’. For Sonia she stuck with the course and believes her personal life was even enhanced,

‘I think I’ve gained better tools to be able to read situations a lot better. Being able to de-escalate situations when they come along .... you’re more in tune with people. More in tune with yourself as well so that you’re able to articulate yourself better.... More in tune with your own emotions so you can stand there and say to your partner look I’ve had a really bad day’

Sonia believes she goes about things very differently now and is more aware of her own behaviour and her emotions, she explains,

‘I think it’s that whole ripple effect of being aware and being able to analyse a lot more future thinking. Being able to analyse the repercussions and how your actions can impact on others around you. I notice a lot with my children, how I interact with my kids has changed a lot’

The course content helped with this, Sonia said learning about psychology, child development and domestic violence was very useful and credited this information with her development on a personal level. Sonia is in a new relationship and said she has definitely ‘chosen’ differently this time. Sonia
spoke highly of her teachers, she said they made the classroom very industry like and treated students like they were workers. Sonia said this very much prepared her work in the community sector and explained this learning environment gave her direction, it gave her the skills to work in the community sector. She also values being informed now and researches and plans more. Sonia plans to do a Master program in the future – to which she would never have considered in the past.

This interview ended with Sonia saying,

‘I guess at the end of that I feel like I’ve gained control. I’ve got control of who I am, of what I can do, got the stability. I suppose, yeah, some sense of direction’

Briana

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2016*

*Currently working in the Family Violence area*

Briana thought she would learn about the welfare sector including homelessness, alcohol and drugs information and domestic violence; she hoped the course would lead her to work in the field. Briana talked about having some difficult past experiences with a family member, she explained,

‘I had my own personal experiences with some things in the welfare sector within my family. So, I think I grew learning about what actually happens in the community and how our clients overcome these sorts of traumas in their life. Obviously, that’s helped me help that certain person in my family to grow and be a better person, I guess. Even myself, I think I’ve grown stronger as a person within my emotions and how I cope with things as well’

The content therefore was challenging for Briana, she said that the content around drugs and alcohol was particularly confronting as she worried a lot about her relative in this regard. She sighted the Diploma for helping her to understand the situation better and to ‘not give up on her’ (her relative). The course however did raise a lot of emotion for Briana and learning about reflective practice helped her reflect on how her family difficulties had affected her. Briana said she did suffer some guilt as she had previously given up on the family member and she learnt new skills about how to help and support rather than judge.

The course impacted Briana’s values and beliefs and she is now more accepting of others, less judgemental, she explains,

‘I guess that’s where I’ve grown in myself .... to give people a chance. Everyone has a background and they’ve all come from somewhere .... but you could be that one person who changes them, and that’s the way I see life now’
Briana sighted that student placement helped with her confidence in terms of workplace skills and knowledge and feels very competent in her work practices and in her personal life, people will often come to her for advice. Despite her new way of thinking causing some difficulties with her partner, they are planning to marry. She added, she communicates a lot better now and can navigate any issues, she added,

‘I’ve always been opinionated I suppose, but .... I have more of a voice now’

In terms of planning Briana said she is better at this now, she said she can communicate more effectively and used her wedding planning as an example of her current planning venture. In terms of her future, she said she has always known that she wanted to ‘do better’ than her previous employment job in retail. Briana said that she had dreamed of having a family, house and wedding and that had not changed but she felt more confident in doing these. She said,

‘I guess I feel like I’ve matured, so I might approach things a little bit more confidently’

Briana is ‘100%’ confident with her work and people in her life always say she has more confidence and her family say that she has really grown as a person, she added,

‘... it definitely gives you more confidence and self-esteem to know that you’re doing the right thing’

Briana credited entering the community sector and doing placement that really developed her work skills and the confidence to do her job well but ended by saying the Diploma helped with making her less judgemental and for gaining new perspectives, she finished by saying,

‘Having a different perspective on people's lives and being able to step back and listen to their story and not judge them before they've even opened their mouth’

**Matt**

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2016*

*Currently working in the Family Services area*

Matt thought the course would provide him with a way to help his community. He said that he first commenced the course in 2010 but was overwhelmed with the work and assessments and did not continue. After spending the next 4 years working in the disability area, he felt he had more understanding of the community sector and felt more prepared to enrol in the course once again. The Diploma then showed him the reality of what really happens in the community, he said he learnt how
to deal with emotion and to be more positive. He has developed more drive for social justice, and he wants to play an active role to ‘change things’. He also learnt that self-care was important,

‘I often had quite a few challenges. I think we learned a lot through the actual course itself about self-care and that, but you don’t realise until you actually get out in the field how important it is’

Matt talked a lot about self-care as he felt the course was very ‘full on’. He said some people in the class were ‘shocked’ about the content being delivered, particularly younger members of the group. He added that many dropped out with only 11 out of 23 finishing the program. Matt spoke about some people having conservative views or strong religious beliefs and that some people even left their relationships during the course. The course for him however strengthened his relationship with his wife. Learning about psychology and topics related to your childhood was confronting for Matt. He also said he had been diagnosed with mental illness and he learnt a lot about himself during this time.

Matt also said that he feels more confident, he also said he feels ‘more balanced’ and explained,

‘.... well it’s hard to explain - it just gave you - it’s a clearer view - like I was less - I was more balanced’

In terms of planning, Matt said he hasn’t ever been a planner but would be more likely to research something to gather information and makes informed decisions these days.

Overall Matt said people say he is more confident, and he said he is better able to control his emotions (he is less angry and more accepting), he communicates better, he even became physically healthier during the course. He said he enjoyed what he was doing and that he generally presents himself better now, a lot more confidently.

Matt felt prepared to work in the community sector, he feels confident and competent. He said that the course content, supportive teachers and student placement were vital in his development as a worker. He said he was prepared both professionally and personally.

Andrea

*Completed the Diploma of Community Services in 2015*

*Currently working in the Young parents support area*

Andrea embarked on the Diploma of Community Services because she was looking for a new chapter in her life, she always thought she could do more with her life and decided she wanted to help
vulnerable people in society. She was nervous about doing the course, she hadn’t been to school for a long time. But despite this the Diploma very much had an impact on her, she explained,

‘So for me it was about opening up my pathways, opening up my ability to find where I belonged. So for me to come back to school was a big decision but it gave me clarity as to who I was and what I wanted to achieve in the world’

During the course Andrea’s confidence grew and she noticed a difference in how she thought about herself, she explained,

‘It opened up - I had a lot of doubt in my life and one of them is my ability…. it changed my thinking, it changed that thinking pattern’

Andrea sighted the friends she made in class as important because they were experiencing the same things, they had doubts as well and they supported each other. Support from teachers made a ‘huge difference’ as they would constantly say, ‘you can do this’. Andrea thinks that it comes back to how people deal with situations, she believes you need to put your own issues aside, so you can adequately work with others. Andrea learnt about reflective practice and felt she grew during the experience, she explained,

‘So it’s the ability to be able to constantly evolve yourself, and that really was part of the course teaching me that’

As a mother of 3 children and husband and home being on a farm, Alison felt somewhat guilty pursuing her interests, but she felt it was important, she said,

‘…. it’s only a short time, it’s a short-term loss of time for a greater gain, type thing. Because you know, even though I’m working …. I feel that I am a better person now than what I was when I first started…. I can see things more clearly than before, you know?’

More personal challenges existed for Andrea in terms of her confidence, but she said she wasn’t too challenged by the content presented. She said it was delivered by the teachers in a manner that explained that the information as important, it got us to think about things from a different perspective. Andrea talked about some of the other students in the class being challenged by the content and added that the older students were often ‘stuck in their ways’ and could be quite judgemental.

When we discussed the idea of exploring new roles and relationships and Andrea referred to her work and feeling confident in that space to do this. She also talked about planning more and setting goals since completing the course and is generally more organised in her life. Andrea says she seeks new learning opportunities, she added,
‘I’ve identified my strengths, now I need to work on those areas of where I need to improve’

Self-doubt has always been an issue for Andrea, and she said that her husband tells her that she is a lot more confident now. It has affected her family life and she has more confidence in talking to her parents as she had never ‘stood up’ to them before, and now they take her more seriously. In fact, Andrea took a lead role recently in helping a family member in crisis and this was impressive for her family to see.

Lots of learning about work practices occurred for Andrea and thus she felt very prepared to work in the community sector. She said that the course offered her information about mental health, disability, homelessness and other such sociological issues.

Andrea felt that this learning environment was important to her development and she has a very changed view about things,

‘I look at things through a whole set of clean glass …. I’m more informed, more informed about what actually goes on out there in the world, you know? I think I lived in a little sheltered box’
5. Analysis and discussion

The narratives give us stories of learning and change. In this chapter I analyse and discuss the experiences reported in the narratives to draw out answers to my research questions. I also delve into comments that were not included in the narratives to fill out the answers. In my analysis I look across the narratives to identify common experiences using a ‘thematic narrative’ (Reissman 2008) approach. To answer the question of whether students completing the Diploma of Community Services experience transformative learning, I first present a summary of the surface similarities between the narratives of each participant and Mezirow’s (1991) phases of perspective transformation in a table. The interview questions included prompts to find out if participants had experienced anything like each of the phases of perspective transformation.

Table 1. Similarity between reported learning experiences and Mezirow’s phases of perspective transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Alan</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Alana</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
<th>Cate</th>
<th>Kya</th>
<th>Jade</th>
<th>Paul</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Abigail</th>
<th>Sonia</th>
<th>Briana</th>
<th>Matt</th>
<th>Andrea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disorienting</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>what</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical assessment</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of one’s</td>
<td>what</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discontent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of options</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Planning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying new roles</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Key:  
Yes: If the participant provided definite examples of perspective transformation.  
No: If the participant stated that they did not experience perspective transformation.  
Somewhat: If I identified some semblance of the theory throughout the interview.

Table 1 presents an initial analysis of possible links between participant experiences and Mezirow’s (1991) phases. But when I read and re-read the learning experiences reported by participants, I
discovered that four main ‘stages’ emerged that capture important experiences for participants. These four stages can be seen to incorporate a number of Mezirow’s phases. In the conclusion I explain that this analysis presents a challenge to Mezirow’s way of separating different aspects of perspective change, although my findings do not disagree with the basics of his theory of perspective transformation.

I will also consider if the interviewees felt they were prepared for the community sector and discuss the ideas around why some people may experience change and others do not. This section will conclude with a discussion on the potential implications of this research project.

As I analysed the information gathered, I noticed overarching themes emerging that seemed to group particular phases identified by Mezirow (1991). While I identified elements of the perspective phases throughout, I mostly saw individuals being challenged by the content being delivered, the planning and research component of this training had an impact, learners often experienced a growth in confidence and many reported perspective change. I have developed the Table below which groups the phases together to give a clearer idea of the emerging themes. The data gathered will be discussed in this section using this four-stage format.

*Table 2. Stages of learning described by participants with suggested links to Mezirow’s phases.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages identified</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Mezirow’s perspective change phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>What is happening to me?</td>
<td>Disorienting Dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of one’s discontent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Trying new things</td>
<td>Exploration of options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Action Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Gaining confidence</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trying new roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Thinking differently</td>
<td>New perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I start by observing that the responses by participants to the question about their initial learning expectations was generally quite similar. Some expected to learn about community services, and some entered the course hoping it would lead to work in the sector. Others were not sure what they would learn and said they had no expectations at that time. No interviewees however talked about the expectations of personal change, being emotionally challenged or having a change in their actions or
perspectives. In the following I focus on the changes reported by participants after they entered the program.

**Stage 1 - What is happening to me?**

It is the complexity of the learning in community services which seems to initiate the transformative learning processes. The Diploma of Community Services essentially provides learning that will equip individuals to effectively work in an industry where clients will generally be in crisis. Workers will need to have a wide breadth of knowledge to adequately meet the needs of the people they will work with. Subsequently, the course will provide information about various areas such as sociology, psychology and human development as well as learning about strategies commonly used in industry such as case management, debriefing and counselling. The course will also aim to give students a good understanding of groups they are likely to work with such as those with mental health issues, alcohol and drug addiction, people with disabilities, young people and people experiencing family violence. The course will also focus on legal boundaries, ethical practice and critical reflection. There will be some variance from course to course as providers will choose their own electives to add to the core units which must be delivered.

The participants interviewed had completed the Diploma of Community Services within the last 10 years and had entered the community sector. In this context the study provided some rich examples of transformative learning, particularly in this first stage where people were learning about sociology and the issues impacting society, concepts of psychology as people learn about human development and legal and ethical issues. This potentially triggered the individual into looking at their own life situations. Many of the interviewees reported having life experiences (either personally or within their family) which involved family violence, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness and mental health. Many people in society may experience such issues however to be in a classroom when the reality of the issue and its potential causes and effects are being discussed can be confronting. When a disorienting dilemma was discussed Alan, Alana, Jade, Peter and Abigail all talked about having personally experienced domestic violence or had witnessed it in their lives. Jade talked about her experience in a volatile relationship that had significantly affected her self-confidence and self-esteem. The idea of taking part in discussions with people in the class who had strong opinions and large personalities was difficult for her. If an argument ensued in the classroom this would remind her of circumstances she had experienced in the past.
Matt said that he wasn’t particularly challenged by the content, but he reacted by becoming more self-aware. He had been through a divorce and was better able to see his role in that situation and that this instigated a new way of doing things. He says that he is more comfortable with himself now after acknowledging and working through this. Alan also talked about the course instigating self-examination and that he examined the things he had done in the past and subsequently deals with situations very differently now. Cate entered the course with a low opinion of herself due to her past experiences, she found some of the content challenging but it raised her awareness of her personal issues and she subsequently made the decision to return to counselling. Some students experienced Mezirow’s phase of critical assessment and recognising discontent and thus made some extreme life changes. Alana spoke of being in a relationship while completing the course and ceasing that relationship after becoming more self-aware and having a better understanding of what she ‘deserves in life’. Beth also saw this learning experience as a major turning point in her life. She said her life had been out of control in the past and that the challenging content and understanding of her situation prompted a realisation of discontent and she used the strategies learned to change ‘every facet’ of her life.

**Stage 2 – Trying new things**

Preparing community services workers will include the development of skills in research to explore options for clients, deciding on plans of actions and referral possibilities. Also, as a professional practice tool, workers will need to identify and plan their learning needs to ensure they remain up-to-date on sector trends and referral program availability to meet the needs of clients. Information will be delivered, activities planned, and assessments completed to develop these skills. A number of interviewees talked about becoming more aware of their own judgements and prejudices and this awareness prompted plans to change their behaviour moving forward. A transformative learning experience is evident here as indicated in Mezirow’s phases of Exploration of options and Action planning.

Matt, Michelle, Cate, Kya, Paul, Jade, Sonia and Briana said they definitely plan more generally now than they previously had. Some specific examples emerged of people using skills learned to plan in their personal lives such as Beth, Alana and Michelle buying a home which as they say required planning and research. Jade and Cate are planning to travel in the future and felt more able to research options and put their plans into place. Being more informed was considered important for many of the project participants and as Alan said he does more research about things these days and doesn’t just rely on the media to form his opinions and Kya talked about being more informed about issues.
and bringing new perspectives to discussions with family and friends. Alan and Alana spoke about becoming more aware of their own behaviour and Briana and Kya realised they were very judgemental and planned to act differently post course.

Planning for the future was also a topic discussed with many planning more than they had previously. Many researched to inform themselves in the workplace and also as a strategy to reach their goals.

**Stage 3 - Gaining confidence**

It was a common theme throughout the interviews that participants felt more confident post learning in this environment. Students are encouraged to communicate, will often be required to work together and class activities might include role plays, debates, small group activities, large group activities and the like. Often assessments will require students to practice skills learned, they may practice advocating for a client, chairing a staff meeting or feeding back results from an activity to the larger group. The course offers ample opportunity for individuals to try new things and adapt the knowledge learned. Over time students will often become more comfortable in undertaking such activities and the potential for a growth in confidence exits.

Some students appeared to enter the program with high levels of confidence such as Paul, Abigail, Alan and Briana however others such as Beth, Jade and Andrea felt more confidence after completing the community services study. Some interviewees such as Briana and Matt talked about this in a work context and said they felt very confident when working with clients. Paul, Briana and Kya talked about the placement component of the course being particularly significant for them in the development of their confidence and their subsequent ability to adapt knowledge learned in the classroom. Other individuals such as Jade, Beth and Andrea talked about their new-found confidence effecting not only their working life but also significantly affecting their personal life. Andrea says she is better able to use the information learned to communicate better, listen to others and confidently delivers her point of view; and that this has even altered her role in the family as they take her more seriously. Jade had used the communications skills and new confidence to rectify her relationship with her sister and Kya talked about taking on a new role as confidant or one who informs the people around her and prompting change in perspectives among her friends and family. In Sonia’s circumstance the knowledge acquired and the growth in confidence gave her the opportunity to choose differently as she moved on with a new partner and says her choice in partner was very different than the first time around. Peter too has entered into a new relationship and credited this with his new-found confidence.
Many examples of participants taking the skills and knowledge learned and adapting it to different situations existed in this study. Communications skills in particular proved important in maintaining relationships, developing new skills and becoming more confident in all areas of one’s life.

**Stage 4 - Thinking differently**

The majority of interviewees said they experienced change; that their views were altered, and their perspectives were different now. Many, like Alan, Kya, Beth, Matt, Sonia and Briana said they are now less judgemental, more accepting and compassionate than before. Which is important for workers entering the workplace and working with people in the community. Alan talked about his perspectives being altered ‘immeasurably’, that he was more fluid in his thoughts and Matt said that he learned about different ways of thinking about situations. Again, a useful tool to be used in the sector as workers need to work with people who may have had very different life experiences, different views and different living situations. It is important that workers do not expect clients to operate as they do and are able to see situations from different perspectives.

Some participants were even more descriptive regarding their new-found perspectives. Alana talked about the change she experienced as ‘life changing’ and that it even changed her personality and said she is now more emotionally intelligent. For some people the experience was even more profound such as in Jade’s case where it gave her ‘purpose in life’ and she said that she can see more clearly now. For Cate it helped her ‘strive for life’. Andrea said that she has less doubt in her life and that she felt that the changes she experienced contributed to her finding where she belonged. Kya talked about her attitude changing and that she grew up during this process. Kya even talked about this experience being very powerful, that she felt very different within herself and that she was a better person now. Michelle and Briana said they grew as people and Sonia said she thinks differently, speaks differently, gained control and is in tune with her emotions. In fact, dealing with emotions was raised by a few interviewees. Matt said he was much more aware of his emotions, that he was less angry and more positive. Furthermore, Michelle said it changed her way of thinking, opened up her mind and Peter said it strengthened him as a person.

Examples of change in perspective has been reported by the project participants, Beth and Jade said it most eloquently - Beth said, ‘it was like being blind, your eyes become open’ and Jade said, she couldn’t ‘see through the forest, the trees were all closed in and I couldn’t see a way through’.

I have presented my findings in narratives and a theme analysis. In the next section I consider how perspective transformation as described by the participants in the narratives and themes may relate
to being an effective practitioner in community services roles. This part of my findings is mainly from the questions I asked about how changes relate to being effective in employment.

**Working in the community sector**

For the participants of this project, all indicated that the Diploma of Community Services prepared them for the community sector. How useful this information was to their industry work varied slightly but essentially all of those interviewed felt prepared in some way. While some, like Paul and Briana focused on work skills such as case noting or report writing, many referred to their change in perspective being important. Being less judgemental, more accepting and compassionate are necessary mindsets when working with people and to be an effective worker an individual will need to develop these. The skills gained with researching help options for clients and planning a strategy to provide change in a situation is also vital knowledge. Confidence is very necessary both when working with clients and colleagues. A worker will need to work with colleagues to provide informed, collaborative and safe work environments. There will however be the need to present information to groups of colleagues and networks and to represent and advocate for your client. At times working with clients will be difficult and even somewhat dangerous, it is important for workers to be confident in themselves and confident in their skills. Thinking differently is also important as in my experience working in the community sector, it can be challenging. Clients requiring support will often have a very different lived experience than a worker and having the ability to see things from their view is best working practice when preparing a case plan for the individual.

Interviewee Kya particularly thought it was the communication skills she learnt was most effective and readily adapted these skills to her work with young people. Michelle also thought that it was the focus on communication and discussion which was helpful. Alan said it was the learning about how to listen which was most important. The hands-on nature of the course was considered useful in preparing community service workers and in particular it was the opportunity to undertake a placement in industry which was considered vital to consolidate classroom learning. Mark, Alana, Kya, Paul and Matt all highlighted the importance of work placement in their preparation for the sector.

The Diploma of Community Services has a number of units which may challenge an individual but are necessary in the development of competent and confident workers. Sociology, psychology and counselling where highlighted as areas which instigated change along with electives (or topics) such as family violence, drug and alcohol and mental health. These subjects may challenge people and Alana expressed the need for a safe learning environment to help learners navigate ‘triggers’. The
Diploma of Community Services program uses reflective practice as a professional tool and if taught correctly is an essential process in the development of workers. It is a practice to be used in industry to ensure the worker can reflect on situations, acknowledge triggers, to identify any training required and to monitor self-care.

It was evident in this study that while people experienced some very similar triggers of change and growth some people did have less of a changing experience. Mark mentioned that he was a pretty easy-going person, so he didn’t find the content so challenging and Paul also said he was quite a ‘left wing thinker’ going into the course so he already possessed a more liberal perspective about things. Paul had felt other people in his class were ‘small minded’ and were not able to expand their view. Some interviewees also identified the age of students as an influence in their ability to cope with the content and preparedness to broaden their perspectives. While both Paul and Matt saw that some younger students were shocked by the content, Peter thought it was the older students who had strong values and beliefs and were more likely to struggle with the content. Alan however was an exception to this being an older person, and he felt it was those who attended with a difficult life history that effected their potential for change. Peter actually felt that life experience was important when coming into a course like the Diploma of Community Services because people with lived experience can better relate to the framework. Jade highlighted that personality may be an issue, that shy people may be too intimidated to engage in heated conversation or to express their opinion in a large group. Mark said that it was more about the extent of issues the person brought that effected their journey and Kya and Paul said that people will change, only if they are open to it.

The majority of interviewees had examples of classmates who experienced difficulties while studying in this program and saw many people leave the course without finishing. They believed that the main reasons people left included their personal issues being too great or if they were confronted by the content. The participants also said that some people simply were unable to see things from a different perspective and that the Diploma of Community Services provided a learning environment which was challenging not only regarding the content but on a personal level. Some people seemed more open to personal change than others however if individuals were prepared to walk this journey their change in perspectives proved not only useful for working in industry but also impacted their personal lives.

Teachers delivering the content in a professional manner was considered important. Kya talked about teacher experience in the industry being a bonus, but it was the support provided to students which was considered paramount by Alana, Beth, Jade, Matt and Andrea. Cate credited her teachers with
having belief in her and this was important to her success as well as the transformation she experienced on a personal level.
6. Conclusion

My interest in personal change when studying community services came when I completed such a program in 1995 and learnt more than industry skills and knowledge. I learnt a lot about myself and experienced extensive personal change. When I became a teacher, it seemed to me that learners were having a similar experience and when I discovered Transformative Learning Theory, I was keen to explore if this theory could explain the changes people seemed to experience. This research project aimed to explore if students completing the Diploma of Community Services experienced transformative learning and to identify if this learning contributed to their success as a Community Services Worker. According to Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow 1978, 1990, 1991, 2006) we will develop meaning perspectives according to our life experience. But when learners enter a learning environment to prepare for work in an area such as community services their meaning perspectives may be challenged, expand or transform. To explore this concept Mezirow’s 10 Phases of perspective change were used to help determine if transformative learning occurs in this environment and to what extent change may have occurred.

This study has provided some rich data in terms of exploring transformative learning in the context of studying the Diploma of Community Services qualification. To my first research question, Whether and how students completing the Diploma of Community Services experience transformative learning my research suggests that such students can indeed experience perspective transformation. In relation to the ‘How’ part of the question, all of the project participants reported learning that seemed similar to at least some of Mezirow’s 10 phases of perspective transformation and this learning was consistently triggered by experiences within their Diploma of Community Services program. In relation to my first interview question in particular - many experienced or witnessed examples of disorienting dilemmas in that people were often confronted by the content delivered. This process was particularly hard for those who attended with difficult or traumatic life histories of their own. Participants reported that this learning environment prompted them to look at their own behaviour and to learn about how to conduct themselves differently. Self-awareness often followed. The phase of disorientation instigated much change in the individuals interviewed. A number of participants reported a significant change in personal behaviours, their judgement of people and prejudice and aimed to be different. Many examples of change in research, planning and being prepared to try new things were highlighted in this study. It was the growth in confidence and new perspectives gained which was particularly evident in the data gathered. But while the participants’ experiences displayed similarities with some or all of Mezirow’s phases, in the context of the Diploma of Community Services four main stages could be
identified. These stages take us closer to answering the ‘How’ in my first research question. These stages of wondering *What is happening to me? Or Trying new things, Gaining confidence and Thinking differently* seem to be a better description of the different aspects of meaning perspective change as experienced by the participants. As such, these four stages may be of interest to community services training providers and educators. If VET educators are aware that these stages might be something their students go through, then steps can be taken to ensure the learning environment is safer for students experiencing emotionally demanding learning. Educators could also develop learning activities that allow students to try new things, build confidence and exercise new ways of thinking. Educators could know to expect some of these kinds of occurrences and therefore be better prepared to help students who may feel distressed by the process.

It is important to consider Adult Learning Theory to this context now this data has been collected. As identified earlier in this paper many learners who embark on community services training are mature age, attend with a wealth of life experience, have concerns about returning to study particularly if they have previously had a bad school experience and it is often a long time since they may have engaged in formal study. Not to mention the challenges of completing study - caring for children, family responsibilities and students often need to work as well to pay the bills! The difference which exists in training community services workers is that the training particularly focuses on learning about challenges in a client’s life (domestic violence, mental health, poverty, drugs and alcohol) - discussions, debates and group work form a large part of community services teaching and this can be challenging for people who may relate to the discussion due to their own life experiences or who are challenged by the classroom dynamics due to their personality or the life experience which has shaped them. Much of the community service education includes learning about empowerment, advocacy and identifying support options for clients and this in turn can encourage the learner to adapt this to their own life which may instigate change. Also, reflective practice is a work practice required by community services workers and is taught in the Diploma of Community Services (unlike in all VET courses) and this promotes and encourages the learner to potentially identify aspects of their work practice and even personal aspects of their life which may prompt change. Therefore, the learning environment of the community services student differs from the average VET student experience and thus educators having a better understanding of Transformative Learning Theory could be useful in guiding and support students through this potentially challenging time.

Furthermore, the changes reported by participants in this research were considered useful by them when working in the community sector. This is an answer to my second research question, *Whether transformative learning contributes to graduates’ effectiveness as a community services worker.* This
response prompts another question – are particular meaning perspectives required when working in the community sector? Understanding the expectations of the industry in relation to personal meaning perspectives on the part of practitioners would better guide the training of community services workers. I was unable to find community services-specific information on this within the VET sector literature and believe more exploration would be beneficial. If in fact the industry expects a worker to be non-judgmental, compassionate, empathetic, accepting, open minded and the like – all features that relate to meaning perspectives rather than specific skills and knowledge that are described in units of competency – then the training of workers should reflect this, and individual change should be better understood and even nurtured in the classroom environment. While particular knowledge and techniques may be easily transferred to an education program, in my experience as a teacher, it is a challenge to prepare a student inwardly for the realities of this work. Units of competency do not adequately accommodate this learning and more flexibility in the training ought to occur. The realities of community work can challenge an individual on a personal level, and one must establish strategies to cope during the study period and for the duration of one’s career. How does a teacher teach this? How do they support a student who is triggered by content? And how does a teacher develop caring, considerate, non-judgemental, inclusive people to work with often very vulnerable members of the community who are usually in crisis? It is the human, existential nature of this industry which is not adequately captured in a training package and units of competency. This highlights the need to question if a competency-based training model is suitable to provide the learning required for community service work.

While Australian VET system leaders advocate that competency-based training models provide consistency in training across Australia this does not necessarily happen in practice, particularly in the development of community services workers. The participants interviewed for this project largely completed face-to-face delivered courses and those completing an online program may not have the same experience, especially in relation to challenges they may experience and possible transformative learning that may be triggered. This is a complex area of training and a re-evaluation of the community services learning environment is required. Adequate learning time needs to be allocated to training these workers and teachers need more time to support and nurture students. As this project has indicated, there is great potential for transformative learning and this could be better nurtured if better understood. The requirements of this learning environment may differ greatly from other training programs such as the trade areas. Teachers need to be more aware of the impact content delivered may have on learners and careful planning of activities and discussion is necessary. This ideal learning environment is however in contrast to the current VET learning landscape which seems to
focus more on reducing program time and resources to reduce costs and narrow compliance regimes than on the personal experience, changes and challenges of the learners.

Teachers were mentioned often in this study as having an impact on students. Participants spoke about teachers who had experience in the field and who had good skills in the delivery of content. What was also appreciated by students completing such a program was the support provided by teachers, the encouragement they provided and the belief in individuals they had. It could be said that VET community service teachers bring their skills in supporting people into the community services classroom. Interviewees of this study have identified triggers can occur for learners, so providing support to individuals studying in this area is necessary. This is definitely not covered in the training and preparation of VET teachers. The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment will provide new teachers with information about understanding units of competencies, assessing and compliance expectations however it does not offer information about supporting students or encouraging growth and personal change in learners. This is however extremely important in the preparation of community services workers and thus teachers having an understanding of transformative learning would be very useful.

This study aimed to explore if individuals studying the Diploma of Community Services experienced transformative learning and some strong evidence exists that this is the case. Past learners of this program reported being challenged by the content delivered but over the duration of the course they had grown in confidence and often this led to doing things differently and gaining new perspectives. Community Services is a complex area of work and the delivery of this learning is also complex and further consideration is required in meeting the requirements of the community sector. I hope the results of this study offers valuable information regarding transformative learning in this context. Understanding how this training effects an individual, the potential for personal change and the influence this could have on worker preparation could guide how community services workers are trained in VET in the future.

**Research implications**

Transformative Learning Theory and in particular Mezirow’s 10 phases of perspective change is a very specific theory and putting it into a particular context has its difficulties. While participants reported they experienced change, it was challenging at times to identify exactly how the changed experienced fitted in with the 10 phases of transformation. This may be somewhat due to my research experience which is another implication for this study. The interviews provided a lot of data and in analysing it I
identified other questions I would have liked to ask to instigate deeper responses. This may have given me clearer indications of where the data fitted with the theory. I do however believe there is a lot of evidence provided from this study which indicates that transformative learning can occur when studying the Diploma of Community Services.

Some limitations exist with the project Methodology. Mezirow’s theory of Transformative Learning is complex and how best to research it within a community service VET context proved challenging. I needed to find past Diploma of Community Services students who felt they had experienced some change by engaging in this learning. I used my contacts to identify potential research participants however a broader representation of participants would have been preferable. I saw some real similarities in experiences which related to the teachers and teaching methods which seemed to influence a person’s experience – but this was not the focus of this small project. Using Mezirow’s 10 phases of perspective change was somewhat restrictive and trying to pose the interview questions and have the interviewees understand the concept was a challenge. I do however believe that the research method used, and the participants interviewed did gather data which contributes to the research of transformative learning in community services programs.

One difficulty I found with this study was the potential for varied information. The Diploma of Community Services is delivered by many providers, it can be delivered differently at each institution, the units can be different according to provider preference, the teacher experience can vary, and teacher competence can make a difference and their capacity or desire to provide support to students can be different. There can also be a real difference in learning environments depending on those enrolled. If a class happens to have a number of students who have deep personal issues, this can greatly affect the community services learning environment.

I also need to identify that my personal experience as a student instigated much personal change which I believe was very transformative. My experience as a teacher has also influenced my views as I have personally seen individuals change dramatically while undertaking a community services program. I have seen many people struggle in this learning environment and often wanted to understand more about why, in order to better support my students. I think it is also important to mention that six of the project participants had been past students of mine, some of which did experience change and others such as Paul who did not. I do believe I have maintained professionalism and fairness in conducting this study.
References


Appendix A

Australian Qualification Framework Qualification Levels
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQF Level</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate I</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have knowledge and skills for initial work, community involvement and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certificate II</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have knowledge and skills for work in a defined context and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Certificate IV</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for specialised and/or skilled work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have specialised knowledge and skills for skilled/paraprofessional work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have broad knowledge and skills for paraprofessional/highly skilled work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have broad knowledge and skills for paraprofessional/highly skilled work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelor Honours Degree</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have advanced knowledge and skills for professional or highly skilled work and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Research Casework or Extended</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have specialised knowledge and skills for research, and/or professional practice and/or further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>Graduates at this level will have systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialised research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B

Diploma of Community Services Qualification
CHC52015 Diploma of Community Services

Modification History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Release 2 | This version was released in CHC Community Services Training Package release 3.0

Client service's qualifications also merged to this qualification:

Merged: CHC50612/CHC50812/CHC51108/CHC51812/CHC51912/CHC52008/CHC52212

Statutory & forensic child, youth & family welfare specialisation added.

Units of competency updated (see mapping at www.cshisc.com.au).

Equivalent outcome.

| Release 1 | This version was released in CHC Community Services Training Package release 2.0 and meets the requirements of the 2012 Standards for Training Packages.

Merged CHC50612/CHC50812/CHC52008/CHC52212. Significant changes to core units. Change in packaging rules. Removal of entry requirements. Minimum work requirements of 100 hours.

Qualification Description

This qualification reflects the roles of community services, case management and social housing workers involved in the managing, co-ordinating and/or delivering of person-centred services to individuals, groups and communities.

At this level, workers have specialised skills in community services and work autonomously under broad directions from senior management. Workers are usually providing direct support to individuals or groups of individuals. Workers may also have responsibility for the supervision of other workers and volunteers and/or case management; program coordination or the development of new business opportunities.

Note that the Statutory & forensic child, youth & family welfare specialisation must be achieved in order to meet the minimum education requirements for child protection and youth justice practice in Victoria. In addition, to meet the minimum education requirements for entry into child protection
practice in Victoria, diploma qualifications must be approved by the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA)

To achieve this qualification, the candidate must have completed at least 100 hours of work as detailed in the Assessment Requirements of units of competency.

No licensing, legislative, regulatory or certification requirements apply to this qualification at the time of publication.

**Packaging Rules**

Total number of units = 16

- 8 core units
- 8 elective units, consisting of:
  - at least 6 units from the electives listed below
  - up to 2 units from the electives listed below, any endorsed Training Packages or accredited courses – these units must be relevant to the work outcome

Any combination of electives that meets the rules above can be selected for the award of the Diploma of Community Services. Where appropriate, electives may be packaged to provide a qualification with a specialisation.

**Packaging for each specialisation:**

- at least 4 Group A electives must be selected for award of the Diploma of Community Services (Case Management)
- at least 3 Group B electives must be selected for award of the Diploma of Community Services (Social Housing)
- all Group C electives must be selected for award of the Diploma of Community Services (Statutory & forensic child, youth & family welfare)

All electives chosen must contribute to a valid, industry-supported vocational outcome.

**Core units**

CHCCCS007 Develop and implement service programs

CHCCCOM003 Develop workplace communication strategies
CHCDEV002  Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services

CHCDIV003  Manage and promote diversity

CHCLEG003  Manage legal and ethical compliance

CHCMGT005  Facilitate workplace debriefing and support processes

CHCPRP003  Reflect on and improve own professional practice

HLTWH5004  Manage work health and safety

Elective units

Group A electives – CASE MANAGEMENT specialisation

CHCCCS004  Assess co-existing needs

CHCCSM004  Coordinate complex case requirements

CHCCSM005  Develop, facilitate and review all aspects of case management

CHCCSM006  Provide case management supervision

CHCCSM007  Undertake case management in a child protection framework

Group B electives – SOCIAL HOUSING specialisation

CHCADV004  Represent organisation in court or tribunal

CHCSOH002  Manage and maintain tenancy agreements and services

CHCSOH008  Manage head lease

CHCSOH009  Develop quality systems in line with registration standards

CHCSOH011  Develop social housing enterprise opportunities

CHCSOH012  Acquire properties by purchase or transfer

CPPDSM5005A  Contribute to a detailed property feasibility study

CPPDSM5013A  Develop a tenancy mix strategy

CPPDSM5022A  Implement asset management plan
CPPDSM5026A  Manage a consultant property project team
CPPDSM5034A  Monitor performance of property or facility portfolio
CPPDSM6007A  Develop lifecycle asset management plan

**Group C electives – STATUTORY & FORENSIC CHILD, YOUTH & FAMILY WELFARE specialisation**

CHCCCS004  Assess co-existing needs
CHCCSL001  Establish and confirm the counselling relationship
CHCCSM005  Develop, facilitate and review all aspects of case management
CHCCDE011  Implement community development strategies
CHCDEV001  Confirm client developmental status
CHCMHS013  Implement trauma informed care
CHCPRT001  Identify and respond to children and young people at risk
CHCPRT003  Work collaboratively to maintain an environment safe for children and young people

**Other electives**

CHCADV002  Provide advocacy and representation services
CHCADV003  Represent clients in court
CHCADV005  Provide systems advocacy services
CHCAGE001  Facilitate the empowerment of older people
CHCAOD004  Assess needs of client with alcohol and other drugs issues
CHCAOD005  Provide alcohol and other drug withdrawal services
CHCAOD007  Develop strategies for alcohol and other drugs relapse prevention and management
CHCAOD008  Provide advanced interventions to meet the needs of clients with alcohol and other drugs issues
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHCAOD009</td>
<td>Develop and review individual alcohol and other drugs treatment plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCCS003</td>
<td>Increase the safety of individuals at risk of suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCCS009</td>
<td>Facilitate responsible behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCCS019</td>
<td>Recognise and respond to crisis situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCCS024</td>
<td>Support individuals with autism spectrum disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE007</td>
<td>Develop and provide community projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE008</td>
<td>Support community action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE009</td>
<td>Develop and Support community leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE010</td>
<td>Develop and lead community engagement strategies to enhance participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE012</td>
<td>Work within organisation and government structures to enable community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCDE015</td>
<td>Develop and implement a community renewal plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCOM004</td>
<td>Present information to stakeholder groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCSL002</td>
<td>Apply specialist interpersonal and counselling interview skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCSL003</td>
<td>Facilitate the counselling relationship and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCCSL007</td>
<td>Support counselling clients in decision-making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDEV003</td>
<td>Analyse client information for service planning and delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDFV006</td>
<td>Counsel clients affected by domestic and family violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDFV007</td>
<td>Work with users of violence to effect change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDIS005</td>
<td>Develop and provide person-centered service responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDIS006</td>
<td>Develop and promote positive person-centered behaviour supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCDIS008</td>
<td>Facilitate community participation and social inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHCDIS010  Provide person-centered services to people with disability with complex needs
CHCDIV002  Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety
CHCEDU002  Plan health promotion and community intervention
CHCEDU003  Provide sexual and reproductive health information to clients
CHCEDU004  Develop, implement and review sexual and reproductive health education programs
CHCEDU009  Provide parenting, health and well-being education
CHCFAM001  Operate in a family law environment
CHCFAM003  Support people to improve relationships
CHCFAM004  Facilitate changeovers
CHCFAM005  Facilitate and monitor contact
CHCFAM006  Assist families to self-manage contact
CHGGRP002  Plan and conduct group activities
CHCINM001  Meet statutory and organisation information requirements
CHCLLN001  Respond to client language, literacy and numeracy needs
CHCMGT001  Develop, implement and review quality framework
CHCMGT002  Manage partnership agreements with service providers
CHCMGT003  Lead the work team
CHCMGT004  Secure and manage funding
CHCMGT006  Coordinate client directed services
CHCMHS001  Work with people with mental health issues
CHCMHS002  Establish a self-directed recovery relationship
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS003</td>
<td>Provide recovery oriented mental health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS004</td>
<td>Work collaboratively with the care network and other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS005</td>
<td>Provide services to people with co-existing mental health and alcohol and other drugs issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS006</td>
<td>Facilitate the recovery process with the person, family and carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS008</td>
<td>Promote and facilitate self advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCMHS011</td>
<td>Assess and promote social, emotional and physical wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPOL002</td>
<td>Develop and implement policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPOL003</td>
<td>Research and apply evidence to practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRP001</td>
<td>Develop and maintain networks and collaborative partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRP003</td>
<td>Reflect on and improve own professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRP004</td>
<td>Promote and represent the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRP005</td>
<td>Engage with health professionals and the health system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRT002</td>
<td>Support the rights and safety of children and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCPRT008</td>
<td>Provide supervision in a secure system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCSET001</td>
<td>Work with forced migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCSET002</td>
<td>Undertake bicultural work with forced migrants in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCISOH001</td>
<td>Work with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCYTH001</td>
<td>Engage respectfully with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCYTH004</td>
<td>Respond to critical situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCYTH005</td>
<td>Develop and implement procedures to enable young people to address their needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCYTH010</td>
<td>Provide services for young people appropriate to their needs and circumstances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHCYTH012  Manage service response to young people in crisis
HLTAID006  Provide advanced first aid
BSBATS IW515  Secure funding
BSBFIM501  Manage budgets and financial plans
BSBHRM506  Manage recruitment selection and induction processes
BSBHRM513  Manage workforce planning
BSBINN601  Lead and manage organisational change
BSBMGT404  Lead and facilitate off-site staff
BSBMGT502  Manage people performance
BSBMGT516  Facilitate continuous improvement
BSBMGT605  Provide leadership across the organisation
BSBPMG511  Manage project scope
BSBPMG512  Manage project time
BSBPMG513  Manage project quality
BSBPMG514  Manage project cost
BSBPMG515  Manage project human resources
BSBPMG516  Manage project information and communication
BSBPMG519  Manage project stakeholder engagement
BSBPMG522  Undertake project work
BSBPUB504  Develop and implement crisis management plans
BSBRSK501  Manage risk
BSBWOR403  Manage stress in the workplace
BSBWOR502  Lead and manage team effectiveness
CPPSEC3013A  Control person using empty hand techniques
PSPGOV506A  Support workplace coaching and mentoring
TAEDEL502A  Provide advanced facilitation practice

**Qualification Mapping Information**

No equivalent qualification.

**Links**

Companion volumes from the CS&HISC website - http://www.cshisc.com.au
Appendix C

Unit of Competency - Example
CHCDEV002 Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services

Modification History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Release 2 | Updated:  
• assessor requirements statement  
• foundation skills lead in statement  
• licensing statement  
• modification history to reflect 2012 standards  
Equivalent outcome. |
| Release 1 | This version was released in CHC Community Services Training Package release 1.0 and meets the requirements of the 2012 Standards for Training Packages.  
Significant changes to elements and performance criteria.  
New evidence requirements for assessment.  
Removed pre-requisite. |

Application

This unit of competency describes the skills and knowledge required to function independently and to plan and undertake community work and associated services.

The unit describes the application of knowledge of the broad social and cultural context in which work is planned and implemented in the community services industry.

This unit applies to workers who seek to better understand their client groups and issues that impact on the lives of their clients and hence on their delivery of services.

The skills in this unit must be applied in accordance with Commonwealth and State/Territory legislation, Australian/New Zealand standards and industry codes of practice.
## Elements and Performance Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>PERFORMANCE CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements define the essential outcomes.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Performance criteria specify the level of performance needed to demonstrate achievement of the element.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Identify social and cultural issues impacting on clients in Australian society

   1.1 Identify major social and cultural institutions in Australian society and their societal functions

   1.2 Identify ways in which major institutions in Australian society can impact clients as individuals and as part of community and family groups

   1.3 Examine and identify possible effects and consequences of conditions and experiences of inequality on clients as individuals and as part of community and family groups

   1.4 Identify impacts of long-term unemployment and associated issues on clients as individuals and as family members

   1.5 Where relevant, identify factors associated with age in Australian society and their impact on clients as individuals and in family and community settings

2. Analyse impacts of social and cultural factors on clients

   2.1 Use available information to identify and analyse social and cultural factors impacting on individual clients, groups or communities

   2.2 Clarify current health and wellbeing and associated needs for individual clients, groups or communities

   2.3 Make informed decisions in relation to specific work to be undertaken and/or services to be provided to client/s

3. Monitor impact of social and cultural factors on community work and services provided to clients

   3.1 Monitor impact of work undertaken and/or services provided to clients, in line with scope of own work role and organisational policies and procedures

   3.2 Review effectiveness of work undertaken and/or services provided to clients, in relation to identified social and cultural factors impacting on clients, groups or communities
### ELEMENT

**ELEMENT**

Elements define the
essential outcomes.

### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

Performance criteria specify the level of performance needed to
demonstrate achievement of the element.

3.3 If required, revise aspects of work undertaken and/or
services provided to better address social and cultural issues and
enhance outcomes for clients, groups or communities

### Foundation Skills

The Foundation Skills describe those required skills (language, literacy, numeracy and employment
skills) that are essential to performance.

Foundation skills essential to performance are explicit in the performance criteria of this unit of
competency.

### Unit Mapping Information

No equivalent unit.

### Links

Appendix D

Unit of Competency Assessment requirements – Example
Assessment Requirements for CHCDEV002 Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services

Modification History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Release 2</td>
<td>Updated:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• assessor requirements statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• foundation skills lead in statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• licensing statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• modification history to reflect 2012 standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equivalent outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release 1</td>
<td>This version was released in CHC Community Services Training Package release 1.0 and meets the requirements of the 2012 Standards for Training Packages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significant changes to elements and performance criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New evidence requirements for assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Removed pre-requisite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance Evidence

The candidate must show evidence of the ability to complete tasks outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage tasks and manage contingencies in the context of the job role. There must be demonstrated evidence that the candidate has completed the following tasks:

- advised, referred or provided at least three clients with access to services based on socio-cultural information gathered
- monitored and reviewed effectiveness of work and/or services provided to clients
- revised work and/or services provided to clients to enhance client outcomes and better address their social and cultural issues
- performed the activities outlined in the performance criteria of this unit during a period of at least 100 hours of work within a community services workplace.
Knowledge Evidence

The candidate must be able to demonstrate essential knowledge required to effectively do the task outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, manage the task and manage contingencies in the context of the work role. These include knowledge of:

- functions of social and cultural institutions within Australian society
- factors contributing to client experiences of inequality and the possible effects and consequences on their role in society
- effects and consequences of unemployment on clients and in our society
- contemporary frameworks and influences underpinning social policy
- political and economic theory and systems
- concepts of inequality and how they impact on individuals and society
- different beliefs about various stratifications in our society and the ways in which stereotypes develop, and their impact
- specific policy decisions and their impact on community work
- organisational standards, policies and procedures.

Assessment Conditions

Skills must be demonstrated in the workplace.

In addition, simulations and scenarios must be used where the full range of contexts and situations cannot be provided in the workplace or may occur only rarely. These are situations relating to emergency or unplanned procedures where assessment in these circumstances would be unsafe or is impractical.

Simulated assessment environments must simulate the real-life working environment where these skills and knowledge would be performed, with all the relevant equipment and resources of that working environment.

Assessors must satisfy the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015/AQTF mandatory competency requirements for assessors.

Links

Appendix E

Email to colleagues and network contacts seeking project participants
Dear Colleagues,

I am completing a Master of Education and Professional Studies and am conducting a research project titled ‘Transformative learning in community services and the impact on job readiness’.

This project aims to explore if learners experience any personal changes when undertaking Diploma of Community Services and if this affects their readiness for work in the community sector. I am seeking past students who have completed the Diploma of Community Services within the past 10 years.

Please provide the following details for any individuals who may be interested in taking part:

Katrina Kavanagh

katrina.kavanagh@griffithuni.edu.au

5327 8408

Alternatively, I am happy to contact the participant if they prefer. Please be aware that this initial contact does not mean the individual must take part in the study. I will explain the project and the process to the potential project participant and a Consent form will be provided if the individual decides to take part.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank-you for being prepared to pass on my details to any potential project participants.

Kind regards,

Katrina Kavanagh
Appendix F

Project – Information Sheet
What kinds of personal changes do students experience when undertaking community services programs in VET?

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher
Katrina Kavanagh
School of Education and Professional Studies
Phone: 0409430397
Email: katrina.kavanagh@griffithuni.edu.au

Research Supervisors
Dr Steven Hodge
Phone: 0421224474
Email: s.hodge@griffith.edu.au

Dr Mark Tyler
Email: m.tyler@griffith.edu.au

Why is the research being conducted?
This research is to understand more about what kinds of changes occur when students undertake community services programs in VET. I would like to gain the perspectives of students and teachers to gather information about if personal changes occur, the kinds of changes and what might have prompted such changes. This research will focus on the Diploma of Community Services. The research is conducted in the context of my Masters of Education and Professional Studies.

What you will be asked to do
You are invited to participate in an interview so I can understand more about your experiences and your perspectives regarding any personal changes you might have experienced when studying the Diploma of Community Services or your perspective if you have been a teacher of the Diploma of Community Services.

With your permission I will record the interview and transcribe it (type it up). I expect the interview to take up to an hour. I will conduct the interview at a time and place convenient to you (e.g. in the workplace, at a café, at the institute). If I require to clarify information or check my understanding of what you have said at a later date, I may recontact you to seek that clarification.

When the research is complete a thesis will be written and submitted. If successful that thesis will be publically available through the university library and through online databases. Feel free to get in touch with me (Katrina) (katrina.kavanagh@griffithuni.edu.au) for updates on the availability of the report.

Your participation is voluntary
Your participation in this research is voluntary. You do not need to answer every question unless you wish to do so. Also, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Benefits of the research
This research may lead to understanding more about personal changes that might occur when studying a community services program in VET and help identify if more consideration of these changes should be more considered in the delivery of the Diploma of Community Services.

Risks to you
Participation in this research is not likely to put you at any foreseeable risk.

The ethical conduct of this research
Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research project you should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Information about your personal identity will not be included in any reporting or publications from this research. When we record the interview we will keep the digital file on a password-protected university computer. A reputable commercial transcription service may have access to the recording as well the researcher. Once the recording has been transcribed I will erase the original recording. The university must securely store transcripts for a period of five years after reporting or any publications from the research. Because your data will be identifiable until the transcript has been prepared, we include the following Privacy Statement:

“The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 4375.”

PLEASE RETAIN THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR FUTURE REFERENCE
Appendix G

Project - Consent form
Transformative learning in community services and the impact on job readiness.

CONSENT FORM

Researcher
Katrina Kavanagh
School of Education and Professional Studies
Phone: 0409 430 397
Email: katrina.kavanagh@griffithuni.edu.au

Research Supervisors
Dr Steven Hodge
Phone: 0421224474
Email: s.hodge@griffith.edu.au
Dr Mark Tyler
Email: m.tyler@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include participating in a focus group, and possibly follow up contact to clarify information;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand that no foreseeable risks are involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the researcher;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- I understand that my personal identity will not be disclosed in any reporting or publications from this research;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- I agree to participate in the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional: Follow up contact details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research has ethical approval from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference Number: 2017/482).