

# THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE



## Evaluation of The Whitten Project

**A pilot project aimed at developing emerging young community leaders**

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# **EVALUATION OF THE WHITTEN PROJECT**

A PILOT PROJECT AIMED AT DEVELOPING  
EMERGING YOUNG COMMUNITY LEADERS  
ACROSS MELBOURNE'S WESTERN REGION

Final Report

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THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE

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# About

## The Victoria Institute

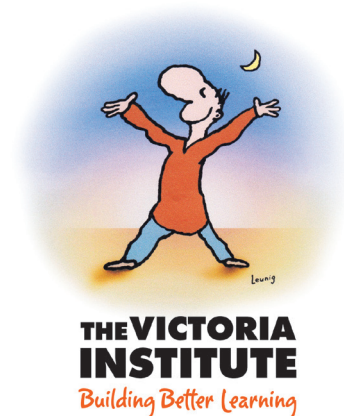
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Led by Professor Roger Slee (Director), we aim to analyse, evaluate and challenge education practices, curriculum and assessment.

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

The purpose of this report was to deliver the findings of an evaluation of The Whitten Youth Leadership Project (The Whitten Project). The research conducted for this evaluation aimed to examine the benefits of The Whitten Project for participants, project Stakeholders and the broader community in the following key areas; (1) Selection of participants, (2) Content of the project, (3) Delivery, and (4) Participant gains and development. This evaluation was guided by The Whitten Project's key performance indicators.

## Methods

The evaluation study sought to gain insight from a number of groups involved in The Whitten Project such as participants, program staff, Stakeholders (e.g. council staff) and parents. A number of data gathering techniques were used including online surveys with young leaders, parents and Stakeholders and face-to-face interviews with a sample of Stakeholders. The study also used existing data to examine attendance rates and session feedback, and to evaluate the curriculum of the Project.

## Findings

The findings for this report are divided into three areas in accordance to The Whitten Project aims and objectives.

### Selection and Participation:

- There is a significant gender imbalance among participants, with three boys participating for every girl
- Attendance and participation in Project sessions was extremely high over the 11 activity sessions

### Content and Delivery:

- Project curriculum adheres to core objectives and generally promotes key elements
- Involvement of sports leaders was highly valued by participants and Stakeholders
- Flexibility of Project staff delivering the sessions was identified as a strength
- Participants in the research emphasised clarifying learning outcomes across curriculum, explicating connections between learning objectives and outcomes and potentially reordering sessions to aide development of participant learning.

#### Participant Development:

- Participants identified the value of the project in terms of learning new skills and being able to apply these to other aspects of their lives
- Participant and parent feedback about the Project was very positive, especially in terms of personal development in areas such as confidence and leadership skill development
- Stakeholders identified a number of benefits of the program including (1) value and impact of the Project on participant leadership skills developments and community involvement, (2) development of personal skills and experiential learning the project provided.
- Stakeholders highlighted changes for the Project in the areas of participant recruitment, number of sessions and Council collaborations.


### Recommendations

*Selection* – Several recommendations have been posed in relation to the selection process for The Whitten Project, including broadening the nomination pool to include more female participants and addressing potential barriers to participation for disadvantaged young people (e.g. transport). Additional recommendations for this area of the project were to better communicate the aims, content and operation of the project during the nomination process, especially regarding the physical activities and level of engagement with sport for potential participants.

*Content* – Several recommendations for the content of The Whitten Project were linked to making a stronger and more explicit connection between session objectives and learning outcomes. For example, not only aligning session learning goals to the overall project objectives (core objectives), but to specific session targets articulated in a more detailed session plan. Building on this, results of the research highlight the need to make assessment of learning outcomes more distinctive such that The Project can build a solid foundation for a program curriculum. Implementing these recommendations would also support the recommendation that The Steering Committee explore connections to the Victorian Certificate for Applied Learning (VCAL).

*Delivery* – Recommendations for the delivery of The Whitten Project included refining aspects of the program such as (1) increasing participatory learning activities (2) streamlining contact hours with participants to achieve core objectives and (3) ensuring adequate preparation of session facilitators.

*Participant Development* – In the area of participant development the recommendations are twofold; to increase youth ownership in The Whitten Project by involving young people more in the design and delivery of the curriculum and to introduce data collection tools that measure participant development over the life of the Project.



*Research and Evaluation* – Additional recommendations have also been made to add to the rigour of the evaluation component of The Whitten Project. This includes involving an evaluation team in the early stages of the Project and building upon and improving existing data collection techniques by The Whitten Project staff. In addition, it would be useful for the Project to establish an ethical guideline to ensure participants' data (e.g. session feedback) remains anonymous and to use a consistent format to increase response rates and to aid analysis.



## Evaluation aims and questions

This document provides a report on the evaluation of The Whitten Youth Leadership Project (The Whitten Project) based in Melbourne's West.

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to identify the benefits The Whitten Project brings Councils, project Stakeholders, the community and its young participants.

The evaluation is being conducted across four key project activities seeking to identify strengths and improvements in:

- Selection,
- Content,
- Delivery, and
- Participant Development

Key performance indicators have been predetermined for The Whitten Project and these are used as evaluation criteria:

- Project development and implementation,
- Participant engagement and development,
- Core curriculum, and
- Coaching and mentoring



# THE CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHITTEN PROJECT

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## 2.1 Operation

The Whitten Project is a pilot project aimed at developing young emerging community leaders across Melbourne's West. Using Australian Football and the Western Bulldogs as a learning vehicle, The Whitten Project aims to provide young people with an education program offering coaching, mentoring and leadership development for life, civic and sport industry pathways. The Whitten Project is community focused and provides a range of community capacity building outcomes involving contributions from program participants in community engagement, skill and knowledge development and the promotion of social inclusion. The project is funded by five local Councils in Melbourne's West: Maribyrnong City Council, Moonee Valley City Council, Melton City Council, Hobsons Bay City Council and Brimbank City Council; the AFL and SportWest through a Victorian Government grant. AFL Victoria, Victoria University and the Western Bulldogs are providing defined in-kind contributions. The Whitten Project has a project manager and is guided by a steering committee of Council representatives and other funding partners.

The Whitten Project ran for the first time in 2013. Forty-five young people in grades 9-10 were nominated and selected to participate in the eight-month program that combines sport, leadership development, and community activities. The young leaders attend 'whole group sessions' as part of The Whitten Project facilitated by the project manager and project coaches/mentors. These sessions often involve guest speakers. The young leaders also attend a number of 'Council sessions' with just the young leaders from their City Council. The sessions are facilitated by a staff member from that Council. As a part of the Whitten Project participants are required to work with their local City Council to undertake a Community Leadership Project (CLP), which aims at drawing their interest in sport and recreation by involving them in the issue of 'inclusion' by examining the theme "Sport and Community Clubs for All."

## 2.2 Objectives

Core objective:

"Using Australian Football and the Western Bulldogs as a vehicle to provide young people of the West to engage in the community and develop their leadership potential"

Objectives of The Whitten Project include:

- Implement the Whitten Project using Australian Football as a vehicle to develop emerging leaders in football, sport and the community

- Provide an inclusive environment for young people from diverse backgrounds to learn and develop leadership skills and traits to assist them in emerging as community and civic leaders
- Empower emerging young leaders and provide opportunities to engage and advocate across football, community, education and sport
- Assist participants to strengthen their local identity, social connections, relationship and sense of belonging in the community
- Provide participants access to mentoring and coaching and promote respect, responsibility, fair play, health and life-long learning
- Integrate curriculum to capitalise on existing infrastructures and resources across all project partners
- Use collaborative and accountable practices to ensure the engagement of project partners and Stakeholders
- Promote and acknowledge the project and its funding partners through media and marketing opportunities
- Report periodically to the Project Steering Committee, communicate with Project Partners and attain deliverables as defined in the Memorandum of Understanding between each funding partner and the Western Bulldogs
- The various components of the Whitten Project are evaluated through this research to examine the overall effectiveness of the program.

## 2.3 Youth development through sports and community participation

The Whitten Project incorporates leadership development through engagement in a sports based program with a community/Council based component. This approach is supported by research in the field of youth development through sports and community participation.

Existing literature shows that sports have been important in promoting mental health and well-being (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013) while also providing opportunities to develop leadership experiences (Wright & Cote, 2003) and a sense of local identity, civic commitment and increased volunteering (Lopez & Moore, 2006; Eley & Kirk, 2002). Hansen and colleagues' (2005) study of youth engagement with various institutions found that participating in community activities promoted positive identity development, prosocial norms and links to adults, while sports activities specifically related to positive identity work and emotional development. For adolescents of high school age, 'youth driven' programs in which young people are able to assist with decision-making and other areas of program, have been especially successful in terms of developing leadership skills (Larsen, Hansen & Moneta, 2006).

Recent research indicates that youth who participate in activities such as community service, arts and music programs, sports activities, political or social action, and youth organisational work have fewer negative outcomes such as school failure and dropout (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger & Alisat, 2007; Janosz, Le Blana, Boulerice & Tremblay 1997; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997) criminal activity



(Mahoney, 2000) and teen pregnancy (Allen & Philliber, 1997). Other research has noted the benefits of participation in civic and community activities including increased psychosocial well-being (Checkoway, 2011) sense of agency and teamwork (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003), academic success (Barber, Eccles & Stone, 2001) political knowledge and participation (Niemi, Hepburn & Chapman, 2000) and fostering young people's commitment to civic participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Community-based youth organisations and activities are places in which young people develop a collective voice, sense of identity through group membership, and which promotes action for social justice (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007; Ginwright & James, 2002; Watts, 2007).



## 3.1 Introduction

Guided by The Whitten Project evaluation brief, the research team identified a range of informants and Stakeholders who would be consulted as part of the evaluation of The Whitten Project:

- Young leaders who participated in the program
- Parents/guardians of the young leaders
- Stakeholders and partners organisations

A range of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data from each of these groups. These are detailed below. Archival data from The Whitten Project's first year of operation were also analysed.

We would like to acknowledge the support and contribution of those involved in the Project in providing the data that forms the basis of this evaluation – the young leaders, parents, stakeholders and the Project Manager.

## 3.2 Consideration of ethical issues

The evaluation study was approved by Victoria University's Human Ethics committee. Following approval, information and consent forms were distributed to informants and Stakeholders. Parental consent and young leader consent was sought for all young leaders invited to take part in the evaluation. Through the evaluation, the voluntary nature of participation has been stressed, and informed consent sought. All people contacted to take part in the evaluation study were assured their identity would not be revealed. The names of respondents are therefore not included.

## 3.3 Archival data and program documentation

Data were collected in collaboration with The Whitten Project manager. These data included program documentation related to the:

- Selection process
- Project brief
- Program design and delivery
- Program content and curriculum
- Session feedback from participants

## 3.4 Views and experiences of those involved in The Whitten Project

### On-line survey with young leaders

Data were collected via an online survey to capture their views and experiences of the young leaders of The Whitten Project and its impact on their development. 11 young leaders (of an invited 15) completed the survey. 15 (of a possible 41) young leaders and their parents consented for the young leader to participate in this aspect of the evaluation.

An online group discussion was also set up. Invitations were sent out to the 15 young leaders who had agreed to participate. The group discussion was open for a week. Unfortunately only one young leader engaged with this method of data collection. A possible explanation for this was the timing of the discussion which coincided with school examinations for some young leaders.

### On-line survey with parents of young leaders

Data were collected via an online survey to gather the views and experiences of parents of young leaders involved in The Whitten Project. 12 parents (of an invited 34) completed the survey.

### On-line survey and interviews with Stakeholders

Data were collected via an online survey to gather the perspectives of a range of Stakeholders and partners involved in the funding, delivery and strategic development of The Whitten Project. 19 Stakeholders completed the online survey (of a potential 34). Interviews were conducted with a representative from each of the City Councils involved in the project, one member of staff from the Western Bulldogs Club and one Cadet.

## 3.5 Limitations

As the summary of the data collection methods indicates, constraints related to the timing of the evaluation limited the opportunity to gather interview or focus group data from the young leaders but their views are represented through the online survey. While a variety of young leaders, parents and Stakeholders are represented in the data collected, the number of people consulted is small. This is expected for a project of this size but should be borne in mind when reading the results. Data related to the Council sessions and community leadership project is limited in comparison to data available for the whole group sessions. It is recommended that for future evaluations of The Whitten Project an evaluation team are involved at an earlier stage of operation.





# PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUNG LEADERS

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## 4

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of program documentation and data related to the selection process and participation and attendance of The Whitten Project participants.

### 4.2 Selection process

An initial letter of invitation was sent to local Councils and selected groups. It outlined the main criteria for nomination. Suitable nominees were to be identified as 'emerging leaders of the West' who had identified 'leadership' capacity. Leadership traits were defined as:

- honesty
- setting positive examples
- searching for solutions
- willing to take considered risks or try something new
- inclusive and encouraging of others
- looks to strengthen others around them

Participants had to commit to attending sessions at the Whitten Oval, Etihad Stadium and local Council locations. Participation in the project was free although they had to find their own transport to activities. Provisions were offered to those for whom this would be a barrier to their participation. Sessions were scheduled for both outside of school hours and some sessions occurred during school time. Nominees were limited to boys and girls under the age of 16 by the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013.

The invitation to nominate emphasised that nominees 'need not play or be highly skilled in the game', but they may be 'looking for a career in sports coaching, administration or community service'. There appears to be a potential contradiction of this intention in that at least half of the nominating groups were then associated directly with football. Several Stakeholders mentioned a lack of information at the early nomination stage, but stated that communication was excellent once the project was running. Some Stakeholders mentioned that the sessions at Whitten Oval did require a significant physical program so it would be helpful to clarify at nomination stage that an interest in sport and physical activity is desirable with more clarity about requirements for the physical program.



Nominations were sought from local principals in each of the target Local Government Authorities (LGAs), president or coach coordinator of a local junior Western Region Football League, or a staff member from any of the project partners, which included the five LGA Councils (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton and Moonee Valley), the Western Bulldogs, Victoria University, AFL and AFL Victoria.

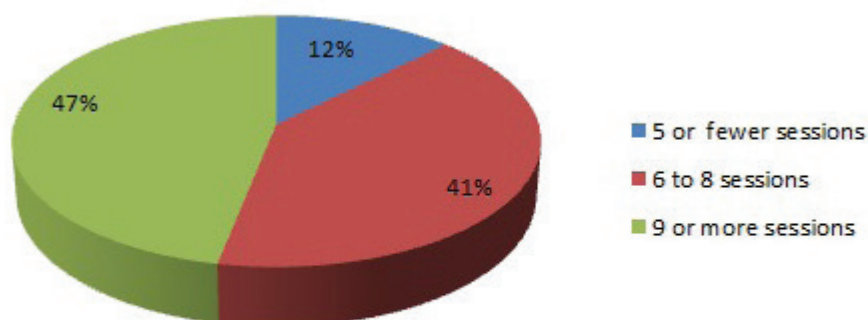
Nominations opened on 25<sup>th</sup> February and closed on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2013 allowing about three weeks for the recruitment period. Analysis of interviews with the LGA Council representatives will provide further clarity on any issues they experienced with a relatively short timeframe for recruitment.

Curriculum delivery commenced at the beginning of second term. Participants had to commit to engaging with a range of physical and community activities held over an eight month period. This included 11 sessions held by the Whitten Project team and additional sessions run by the local Councils. Participants had to make a significant time commitment both within and outside of school hours.

The project was successful in attracting nine girls and 33 boys to participate. In future operations of the project consideration should be given to increasing girls' participation levels.

## 4.3 Participation and attendance analysis

**Figure 01: Number of sessions attended by all participants**



There were ten participants from Brimbank and Melton, nine from Hobsons Bay, eight from Maribyrnong and five from Moonee Valley. Of the eleven activity sessions held by the Whitten Project team, 93% (38/42) of young people attended over 50% of the sessions. Almost three-quarters of participants (74%) attended at least eight of the eleven sessions. This indicates very high engagement levels and retention of participants in the project.

There was no available data on attendance at and content of local Council activities. This is important to collect in future programs to better understand the levels of commitment and engagement with all aspects of the project. It also presents an opportunity to ensure that the curriculum offered by the Whitten Project team is consistent and synergistic with the LGA sessions. As one Stakeholder noted, there is a great opportunity to apply and align the Council session material with the content covered at



the Whitten Project team's sessions. The Council sessions provide an opportunity to reinforce, apply and contextualise the theoretical content covered relevant to the young people's leadership experience around their local communities. Without the Council activity participation and content data it is difficult to evaluate participation and engagement from the additional sessions offered by the LGAs. With these data, there is an opportunity to evaluate how participation in the project impacted participation, personal development, sense of identity, and leadership of the young people in subsequent local community activities.

Only 7% (4/42) of participants did not complete at least half of the sessions. Three were males and one was female. Reasons cited for non-attendance by these participants included: illness, accident, family reasons or other sporting commitments. Although the sample size is too small to draw conclusions, these data suggest that there was no significant gender bias given as reasons for withdrawal from the project. Reasons for absences cited by the whole cohort are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 01: Reasons for absence from whole group sessions**

Observation	Number of session absences
Family	14
Footy	14
Illness	8
Other sport (Baseball, Lacrosse)	7
Accident	4
Work experience	2
Work	1
School reason e.g. excursion	1
Holiday	1

The two most frequent reasons given for missing a single session were 'footy' and 'family'. It would be useful to interrogate the 'family' responses in future to ascertain whether distance or difficulty with transport to venues is an issue for some participants, or whether there was some other potential barrier restricting participation. The large number of absences due to 'footy' indicates another potential limitation in recruiting participants primarily from football-related groups.

**Table 02: Numbers of sessions attended by young leaders by LGA**

	<6 sessions	6 sessions	7 sessions	8 sessions	9 sessions	10 sessions	11 sessions
Brimbank	1	0	0	4	1	1	3
Hobson's Bay	0	0	0	1	3	4	1
Maribyrnong	2	0	1	1	1	3	0
Melton	0	2	2	1	1	3	1
Moonee Valley	1	0	1	0	2	0	1

Analysis of attendance by LGA shows that both Brimbank (10/10) and Hobsons Bay (9/9) had 100% of participants who attended eight or more sessions. Maribyrnong (5/8) had 63% of participants who attended eight or more sessions and both Melton (6/10) and Moonee Valley (3/5) had 60% of participants who attended eight or more sessions. With a small sample size, it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions, but it would appear that distance from Whitten Oval and Etihad were not significant barriers to participation given that Brimbank participants potentially had to travel further than the Maribyrnong participants. Distance may have been a factor for the Melton participants and this requires further consideration.

## 4.4 Summary

Despite the small sample size, findings from the analysis of attendance and participation indicate that notwithstanding a significant time commitment over eight months, there were very high levels of engagement and completion of this project. The Whitten Project team and LGAs are to be congratulated for engaging these young people so well. The cooperation between the Whitten Project team and local Councils is to be highly commended.

The ratio of more than three boys to every girl suggests a gender imbalance that should be considered if this program continues. As will be discussed in the analysis of Stakeholder interviews with the LGA representatives, interviewees flagged the recruitment process as an area that they would like reviewed. One LGA interviewee commented on the gender bias as evidenced by the recruitment process targeting football clubs exclusively despite the letter stipulating that nominees did not have to play sport. That LGA was particularly keen to encourage more girls to participate in sport generally and wanted to target netball clubs. The interviewee also described the difficulty of local governments trying to recruit in schools, which are the jurisdiction of state government.









# CURRICULUM CONTENT AND DELIVERY

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## 5

### 5.1 Introduction

The stated core objective of The Whitten Project involves two aspects: to develop leadership potential for its participants and create opportunities for community engagement.

The curriculum for The Whitten Project was established around three key elements:

- I. Mind – representing learning, leadership traits and personality;
- II. Body – involving fitness, health and physical ability;
- III. Spirit – promoting relationships, mental health, fun, aspiration and team spirit.

This section of the evaluation assesses The Whitten Project's curriculum (design/content and delivery) against the stated core objective and key elements.

### 5.2 Curriculum content

#### 5.2.1 Available data

The evaluation analysed curriculum content provided by The Whitten Project. Varied data was available for the 11 'whole group' sessions that had taken place at the time of the evaluation. The curriculum content was used in the sessions where young leaders from across the different Councils came together for The Whitten Project. These sessions were held at various locations in Melbourne. A final 12<sup>th</sup> whole group session is due to take place after the completion of the evaluation. A separate curriculum document had been developed for the Community Leadership Project. The project manager collated curriculum content.

#### 5.2.2 Nature of the data

Curriculum content included a wide range of teaching materials used within each session through to an assortment of accompanying documents provided to participants such as Project session overviews and session expectations guidance. Noticeably absent from the curriculum content are explicit session plans outlining how the content of each session relates to specific learning outcomes and how these tie back to The Project's core objective and key elements. The Community Leadership Project document was the only example from the curriculum content provided that formally addresses potential learning outcomes. The documents were delivered to participants in hard copy as well as via PowerPoint presentations in sessions.

### 5.2.3 Accompanying documents

Curriculum content is inferred and suggested in a series of documents used in delivery of The Whitten Project. For example, the Session Agendas, Participants Information and Project Expectations documents each address aspects of curriculum content.

The Participants Information document outlines each of the planned sessions. The logistics of each session (location, time, attire, directions, etc.) are plainly displayed. Several Project policies are also summarised (e.g. Property, Health and Safety, behavioural standards). Learning objectives for the sessions are implied under a heading titled 'What to expect from this session'. Session Two states:

The session will provide you an opportunity to meet other young leaders from other Councils across Western Melbourne. Personal leadership and decision-making will be explored and you will develop an understanding on how decisions you make impact your environment including peers, family, school and sporting clubs. You will be involved in determining key behaviours and traits you would like the group to be known for.

The presence of these learning objectives in the Project documents provides the grounds for developing an explicitly aligned curriculum. Each of the session objectives remain closely connected to the overall Project objective and the three key elements.

### 5.2.4 Session materials

The session materials used in the delivery of the Project involved participants reading and writing text and visual images. Reading materials included information booklets such as those used in session 4 (AFL 9s Participant Guide) and session 9 (Auskick Junior Coach Education Manual). The Project also used bespoke questionnaires targeting participant opinion and knowledge (e.g. session 1 Getting to know you). Group exercise outlines were used in select sessions (e.g. session 2 Above the Line or session 3 Goal setting). These documents set out the requirements of the activity and provided prompt questions.

Visual images were used in the Project across each session. These included still pictures, often used in PowerPoint presentations, of the session facilitator or models used within the Project to promote learning (e.g. session 5 Model of Reflection or session 6 Leadership model). Video was also used during the sessions. Session 2 presented an address by Western Bulldogs Head Coach Brendan McCartney. Sessions 6 and 7 used game footage from past Western Bulldogs Ted Whitten and Dale Morris.

### 5.2.5 Community Leadership Project

The aim of the Community Leadership Project is to contribute to the development of participant civic leadership skills. This is achieved through participants collaboratively planning an activity that addresses a community sport and/or recreation issue. Participant learning outcomes include:

- Develop an understanding of social issues and civic responsibility
- Apply research and analytical skills to identify a civic issue of importance
- Employ problem solving skills to address the issue

- Demonstrate team/group skills in planning, organising and decision making
- Contribute to the completion of a community activity
- Develop oral (presentation) and written (project report) communication skills

The document sets out a methodology to facilitate the learning outcomes. Participants work under the guidance of their LGA group to achieve the task. The document includes a timeframe for activity.

The document promotes the core objective of The Whitten Project through focusing on the development of leadership skills and community engagement.

## 5.3 Curriculum delivery

### 5.3.1 People involved

The Whitten Project engages a variety of facilitators to deliver its sessions. The Project is supported in this regard by staff at The Western Bulldogs AFL Club, representatives from the E.J. Whitten Foundation, AFL Victoria, Victoria University and SportWest. A number of elite and/or high profile sporting leaders were involved in the Project sessions. This is a distinct feature of the Whitten Project.

As mentioned in 5.2.5, LGA representatives are closely involved in the delivery of the Community Leadership Project.

### 5.3.2 Locations

The Whitten Project is delivered across several sites including The Western Bulldogs facilities at Whitten Oval (West Footscray), AFL House (Docklands) and the participating Council offices of Maribyrnong, Melton, Brimbank, Hobsons Bay and Monee Valley.

### 5.3.3 Types of activities

Delivery of the Whitten Project involves a variety of activities aimed at engaging the participants:

- Didactic approaches are used where the session facilitator delivers content to the participants (e.g. regarding life experience as an AFL player).
- Group work is also used in sessions and to facilitate the Community Leadership Project.
- Training exercises/physical activities were used in the Project. An example of this took place in session 8 where participants were trained in Level 1 Auskick/Junior Coach Education.

## 5.4 Summary

The analysis of the Project curriculum highlights several pertinent factors for future consideration. The unique involvement and contribution made by sports leaders makes the Whitten Project distinctive amongst youth development programs. The flexibility of those involved in delivering the Project contributes to its achievements. Areas for further consideration also include: i) clarification of learning outcomes across the curriculum; ii) within Project sessions, explicating connections between learning objectives and outcomes; and iii) potential reordering of sessions to aide the development of participant learning.

The curriculum adheres to the core objective of the Project and generally promotes its key elements. With greater clarification of the connections between aspects included in the curriculum, the Project may improve learning outcomes for its participants.





*The way I came across the Project in the first place was when my homeroom teacher put in a nomination for me saying that it would be a great idea to give it a shot and see what happens. So I guess he saw the qualities of a leader in me. A few weeks later I get a letter in the mail saying, "Hey, we would like you to be a part of the program."*

*At first, I was a little apprehensive because I live and breathe rugby union and this of course was a part of the Bulldogs. After awhile though, I came to realize that it was nothing to do with football. Sure every now and again it would require a little AFL Knowledge, which clearly I have none of, the main emphasis of the Project was not how far you could kick but to help us be more confident and to assist each and every-one of us with our leadership skills.*

*Even when it did require to be able to kick a ball like when we had team-building activities here at Whitten Oval for example, the focus of that was in giving it a good shot and mucking around with the others. As a whole, the Project was an absolutely fantastic opportunity to learn of already accomplished leaders and to use what we had absorbed to continue to develop our own qualities as Young Leaders.*

*One of the best experiences I had during the project would've been playing half-time AFL Nines at Etihad Stadium at the Bulldogs/ St. Kilda match. And I think I speak for all of us when I say, one of the best parts of the Project would have been meeting heaps of new people and especially other leaders our age.*

***(Male young leader graduation speech, November 2013)***



# THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG LEADERS

## 6

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### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the views and experiences of the young leaders who took part in The Whitten Project 2013. Data from session feedback sheets and an on-line survey form the basis of the analysis.

### 6.2 Session feedback

This section analyses data collected through session feedback forms provided by the Project. This feedback was collected as part of the operation of the Project rather than specifically for the evaluation. It provides useful insight on the views and experiences of the young leaders during the operation of the project. Completed session feedback forms were returned to the Project Manager and on some forms the young leaders identified themselves. The data provided by the young people is likely to have been influenced by their ongoing relationship with the Project Manager.

#### 6.2.1 Available data

Appropriate data were available for 6 of the 11 'whole group' sessions that had taken place at the time of the evaluation. The session feedback is for the sessions where young leaders from across the different Councils came together for The Whitten Project. These sessions were held at various locations in Melbourne. A final 12<sup>th</sup> whole group session is due to take place after the completion of the evaluation.

#### 6.2.2 Nature of the data

Session feedback data were available in a standardised format for sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5. A different and extended session feedback form was completed for sessions 6 and 10, and a feedback form used by an external agency delivery part of the session was completed for session 11. No session feedback data were available for sessions 7, 8 and 9. The standardised feedback form used for the majority of the sessions (2, 3, 4 and 5) reviewed 5 main areas through open-ended questions about:

1. elements of the session the young leader did not participate in, and why
2. two key points learnt from the session
3. where the young leader believe they can apply the learning
4. key actions young leaders can implement into their personal development and who can assist
5. general comments

These forms generated a range of free-form text useful to gauge the engagement and learning of the young leaders. The form does not include measures of satisfaction or development that would be useful to evaluate progress or development. Limiting the number of open-ended questions and including further closed questions would allow for comparison across sessions and the ability to analyse trends in responses.

In the forms completed for sessions 6 and 10 feedback was gathered through a mixture of closed responses and open ended questions and, importantly, a question asking young leaders for their suggestions on how to improve the session was included:

1. their general satisfaction with the session (closed)
2. the level of organisation (closed)
3. the quality of presenters (closed)
4. met session expectations (closed)
5. generated your interest in leadership (closed)
6. provided you tools/ideas to improve your leadership (closed)
7. explanations for rating any of the above as average or below (open)
8. learning about leadership qualities (open)
9. application of learning (open)
10. values/elements covered in the session (closed)
11. improving the session (open)
12. describe the experience to a friend of coach (open)
13. general comments (open)

The feedback form for session 11 has not been included in this analysis as it is specific to a workshop run by an external agency and does not align with the previous session feedback forms used.

### **6.2.3 Respondents**

On average 18 young leaders completed feedback over the 6 sessions, giving an average response rate of 52% of those who attended the session. The highest amount of feedback was received for the earliest session (21 for session 2) and the lowest amount of feedback for the latest session (9 for session 10). For 4 of the 6 sessions over 50% of the participants provided feedback on the session.

**Table 03: Numbers who completed session feedback forms**

Session No.	Number of Respondents	Number in Attendance	Percentage Responded
2	21	38	55 %
3	20	36	56 %
4	20	34	59 %
5	16 33	34	47 % 97 %*
6	20	37	54 %
10	9	22	41 %
<b>Average</b>	<b>18</b>	33.5	52%

\*Some forms were filled out by multiple students (2 or 3 students per form). In total 16 forms were completed and the figure 16 has been used in the calculation of the average number of respondents.

The session feedback forms were completed comprehensively by the young leaders with responses provided to nearly all the questions across all of the sessions. This showed, for those who completed the form, a high level of engagement with the feedback process. The responses to the open-ended questions vary in detail with some succinct responses and some more detailed highly reflective answers. The session feedback forms appear to operate, in part, as a reflective worksheet for the young leaders enabling them to think about and describe what they have learnt and how they will apply that learning.

#### **6.2.4 Non participation**

Participation data exists for 4 sessions. The data suggests a high level of participation with all of the elements of each session. Late arrival and leaving early to attend another sports commitment were reasons young leaders gave for non-participation in the beginning or end of a session (2 respondents in total). Within the small numbers of young leaders who said they were unable to participate in some or all of the physical activities in the session this was usually due to injury or illness. 1 respondent did not see themselves as a physical learning person and another was unsure of playing football.

**Table 04: Reasons for non-participation in any elements of the session**

Session No.	No. non-participation in some or all of physical activities	Reasons why (no.)	No. non-participation in other aspects	Reasons why
2	4	Unfit (1) Injury (3)	1	Other sports commitment (1)
3	5	Uncertainty (1) Non-sporty (1) Ill (1) Injury (2)	0	-
4	4	Injury (3) No reason given (1)	0	-
5	7	Injury (6) No reason given (1)	2	Late arrival (2)
6	No data	-	-	-
10	No data	-	-	-

### 6.2.5 Points of learning and personal development

The session feedback forms do not allow for an analysis of development of the young leaders over time. They do, however, provide information on the young leaders' perceptions of what they have learnt and the potential impact on their personal development. Young leaders were asked to state the 'key points they learnt from the session' and the 'key actions they can implement into their personal development'. The data showed participants felt the session had a positive impact on their:

Knowledge:

- knowledge of leadership values and qualities
- knowledge of anti-discrimination and inclusiveness

Skills:

- leadership skills
- team work skills
- social interaction skills
- organising/running a training session/event
- physical/sport development

Attitude:

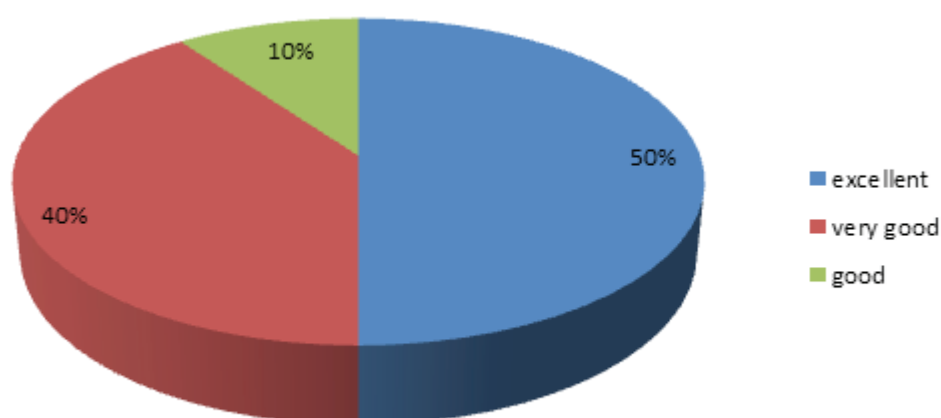
- self-motivation and persistence
- self-belief and self-esteem
- respect for others

The data suggests the young leaders are engaging in a process of self-reflection through The Whitten Project. This is another positive outcome from their involvement in the Project.

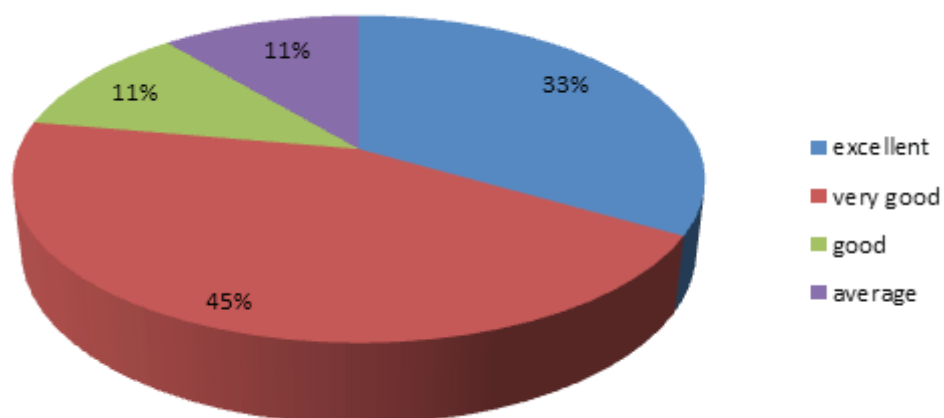
Feedback forms for sessions 6 (20 respondents) and 10 (9 respondents) provide data on the extent to

which the session provided the young leader with tools/ideas to improve their leadership. The responses were extremely positive with 90% (n=18) participants in session 6 and 78% (n=7) participants in session 10 rating the session as 'excellent' and 'very good' in providing them with tools/ideas on how to improve their leadership.

**Figure 02: Session 6 provided you tools/ideas how to improve your leadership**



**Figure 03: Session 10 provided you tools/ideas how to improve your leadership**



### 6.2.6 Application of learning

Participants were asked where they believed they would be able to apply what they had learnt from the session. Data is available for all of the 6 sessions. While examples of coach, school teacher, employer, and family were provided on the feedback form and may have guided the answers of the young leaders, they provided a wide range of open-ended responses (often citing more than one area the learning was applicable to). These have been grouped under the following overarching categories:

**Table 05: Application of learning areas**

Areas stated (for some or all of the 6 sessions)	Frequency stated (data from the 6 sessions)
Sports/sport teams	55
School/education	45
Everyday life/personal life	15
Family/home	10
Work/future career	10
Community	5
Friends	4
Scouts/Girl Guides	3
The Whitten Project	1
Social media	1

The table shows the potential impact of learning from The Whitten Project across the different spheres of the young leaders' lives from informal interactions with their family, friends, and community to organised activities such as sports teams, schooling and work. Not unsurprisingly 'sports/sport teams' are a key place where the young leaders expect to be able to apply what they have learnt from The Project but 'school/education' is also an important area. The findings indicate that the young leaders perceive their learning from The Whitten Project to have a broad relevance to their lives beyond sporting and formal education contexts.

### 6.2.7 General comments

For all 6 sessions the young leaders provided general comments on their experience of that session, and in the feedback for sessions 6 and 10 the young leaders were asked directly to offer suggestions to improve the session.

It is important to note that the general comments provided by the young leaders are extremely positive. In particular the young leaders commented on:

- their engagement with and enjoyment of the session
- learning and benefits from the session
- how inspiring the guest speakers are
- how well organised the sessions are
- their appreciation of being involved in The Whitten Project

When asked to provide ideas or suggestions for improvement the young leaders highlighted the following:



- more participatory activities
- time management (some presenters rushed, not enough time for questions)
- session too long for a weeknight
- clarification on the community project

## 6.3 Online survey results

The survey provides insight into young leader perceptions of the impact of The Whitten Project on their leadership and wider personal development and their views and experiences of participating in the project including their involvement in the community project.

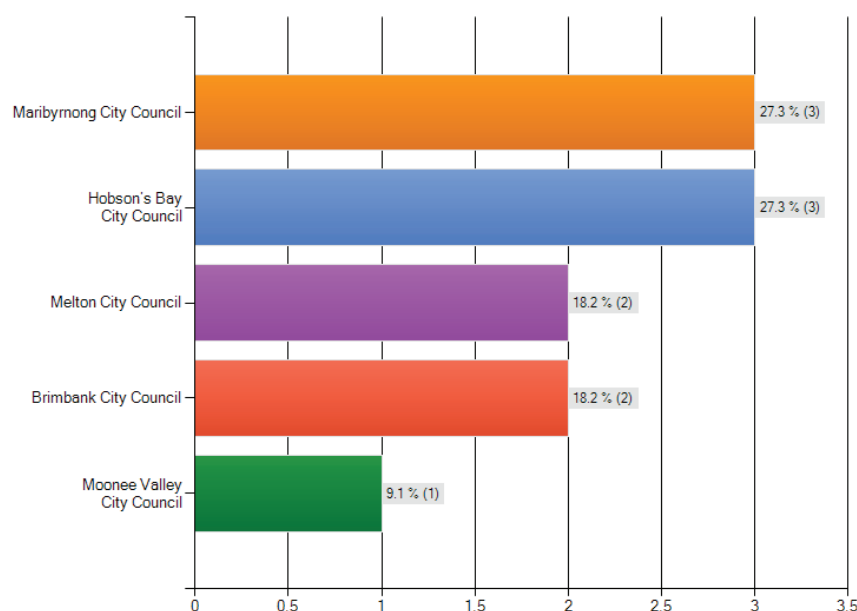
### 6.3.1 Demographics

Consent to take part in this aspect of the evaluation was sought from all the young leaders taking part in the Project at the time of the evaluation (n=41). The ethics process required consent from the young leader and a parent/guardian before a link to take part in the survey could be sent. In total 15 consent forms were received and 11 young leaders completed the online survey. This means just over a quarter of all the young leaders (27%) participated in the online survey.

Of the young leaders who responded 8 were male and 3 were female. This reflects the higher proportion of male young people participating in the Project. Their ages were: 14 (n=1), 15 (n=9) and 16 (n=1).

Surveys were completed by at least one young leader from each of the 5 City Councils involved in the Project:

**Figure 04: In which local council do you live?**

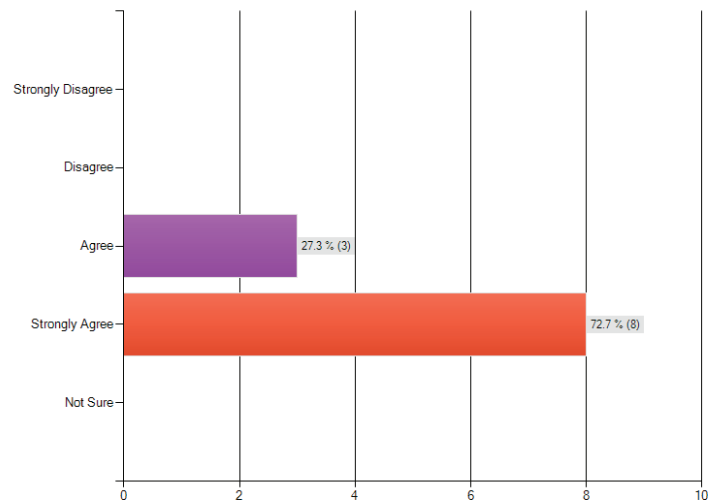


### 6.3.2 Leadership

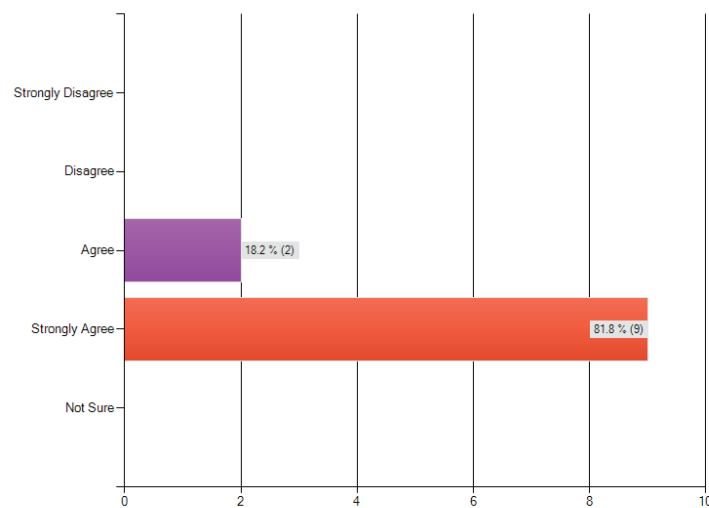
Young leaders were asked to respond to 8 questions related to how The Whitten Project has helped them to develop certain leadership skills. All 11 of the young leaders responded to all of these questions and the responses were very positive.

100% (n=9) of young leaders agreed that they are now more comfortable being a group leader, they can cooperate and work in a group, and they have developed leadership skills through adult mentors in The Whitten Project:

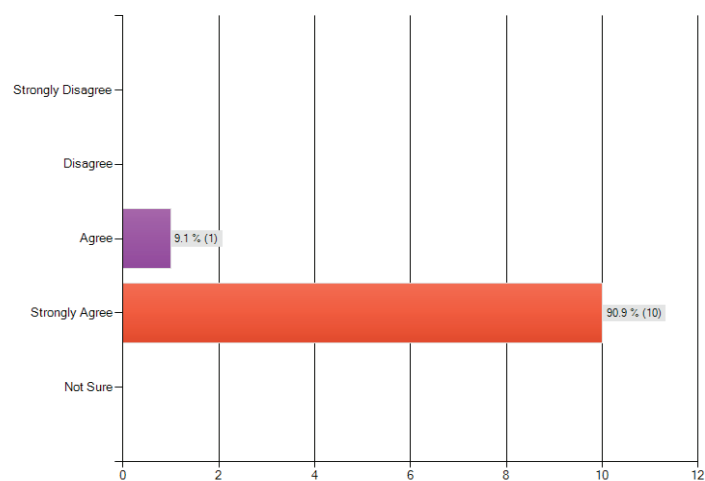
**Figure 05: I feel comfortable being a group leader.**



**Figure 06: I can cooperate and work in a group.**

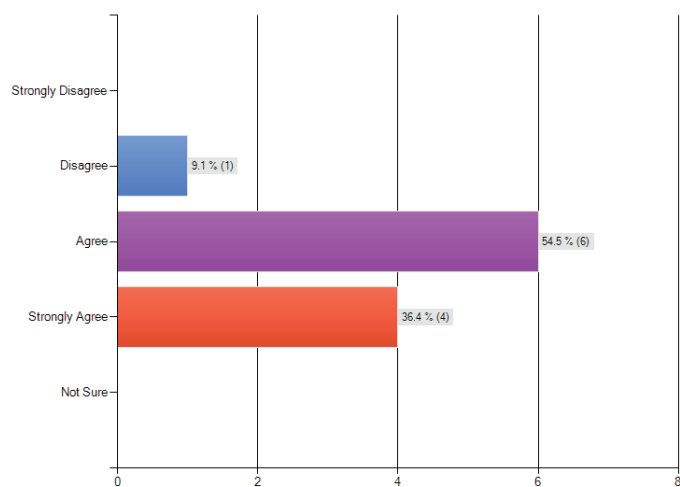


**Figure 07: I feel that adult mentors in The Whitten Project helped me develop my leadership skills**

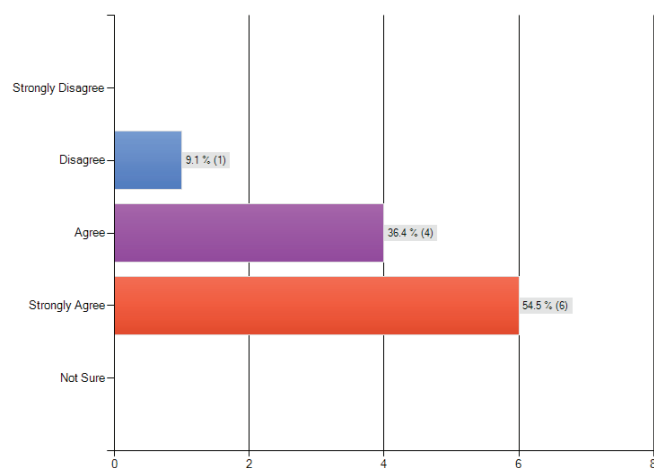


Ninety-one percent (n=9) of young leaders agreed that from participating in the project they can give clear directions, feel comfortable leading others, feel confident in leading activities outside of The Whitten Project, listen carefully to the opinion of group members and can consider several choices before making a decision:

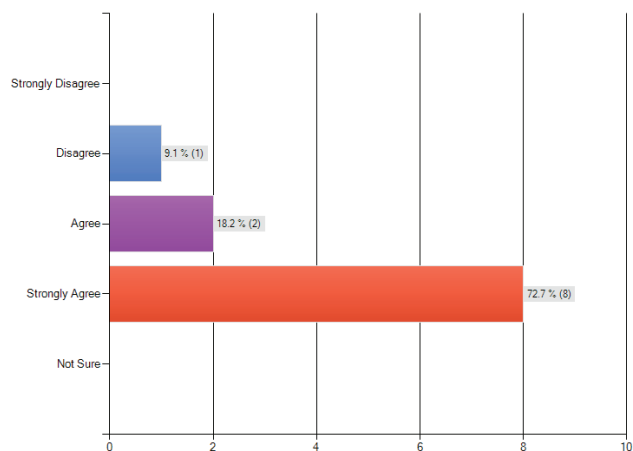
**Figure 08: I can give clear directions.**



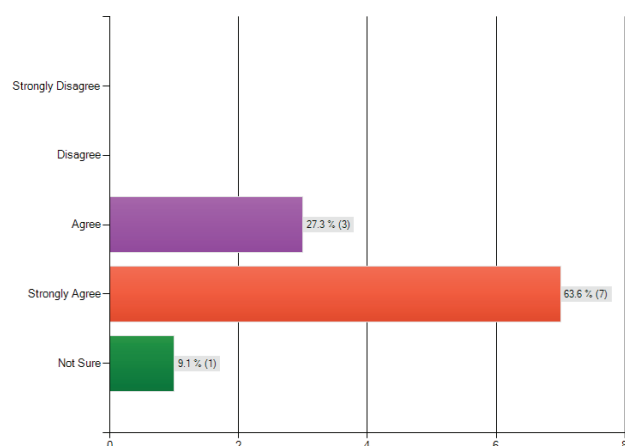
**Figure 09: I feel comfortable teaching others.**



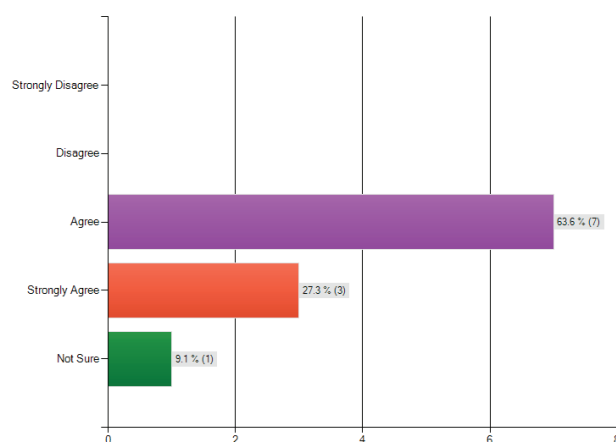
**Figure 10: I feel confident in leading activities outside of the Whitten Project.**



**Figure 11: I listen carefully to the opinion of group members.**



**Figure 12: I can consider several choices before making a decision.**



These results suggest the young leaders to perceive the Project to have had a strong impact on their leadership abilities across a range of indicators. Within these positive results are certain areas of strength. For example, 91% (n=10) strongly agreed that adult mentors in the Project helped the young leader to develop their leadership skills, 82% strongly agreed they can cooperate and work in a group, and 73% (n=8) strongly agree that they are comfortable in being a group leader and confident in leading activities outside of The Whitten Project.

There are also two areas of relative weakness: 'considering several choices before making a decision' and 'able to give clear directions'. While the responses to these questions were positive, the number of young leader strongly agreeing with these statements was lower than for other questions (n=3 for decision making; n=4 for clear directions).

The young leaders were also asked to give examples of how The Whitten Project had helped them to become a better leader. Their responses can be categorised into confidence and personal growth, and motivation and persistence:

a) Confidence and personal growth:

*It taught me to be more confident*

*My confidence of speaking up in a group environment with people I'm not familiar with has improved*

*It has made me a better leader because it has given me the courage to talk in front of large groups*

*Challenged me to try new things, to meet new people and to take risks.*

*The Whitten Project has enabled me to challenge and search for my leadership qualities including simple things like confidence and organisation.*

*It has made me more confident and all up a better person! I am proud of how I grew through the project and I hope everyone else saw my improvement throughout the sessions.*

b) Motivation and persistence:

*Taught me about persistence and trying things in different ways to get to where you want to be.*

*I have heard stories from guest speakers that have inspired me to know matter what happens, to thrive for my goal.*

*Seeing how our roles models have overcome their challenges and learning great life skills from people who have lead sporting teams at the highest level.*

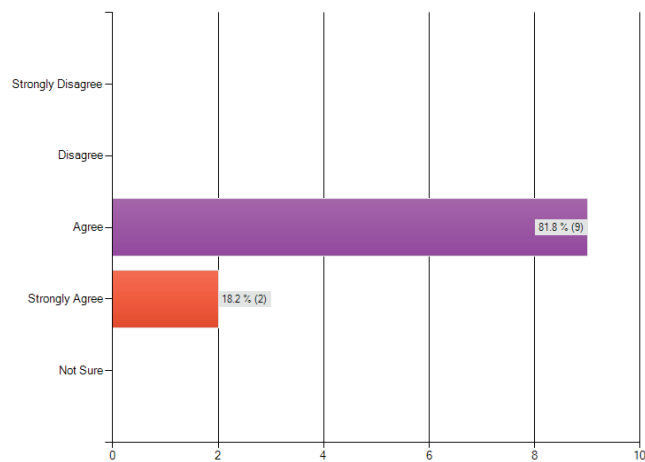
The response of one young person also indicates the value of the Project in supporting young people to develop an understanding of leadership as about their interactions with others as well as their own personal development:

*It has made me think about how I can get everyone involved in the activities.*

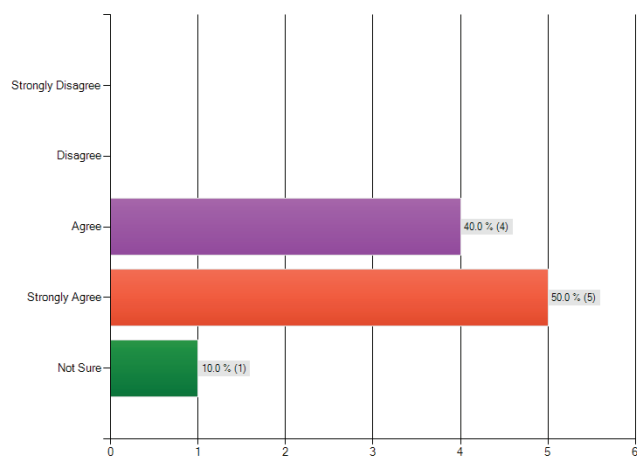
### 6.3.3 Community

Young leaders were asked to consider to what extent their participation in The Whitten Project influenced their perception, knowledge and attitude towards involvement in their communities. Overall the results were very positive with a large majority (between 80 and 100%) of the young leaders agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt their involvement in The Whitten Project had: developed their knowledge about local council activities and programs, increased their knowledge about current issues in the community, developed their ability to work with community members, provided them with opportunities to connect with young people who are different from themselves, helped build their peer networks, developed their feelings of 'belonging' to the local community, developed their sense of pride and local identity, developed their sense of responsibility to help others and increased their participation in other community activities. These results suggest that most young leaders consider The Whitten Project to have had a positive impact on their connection with and responsibility towards their communities:

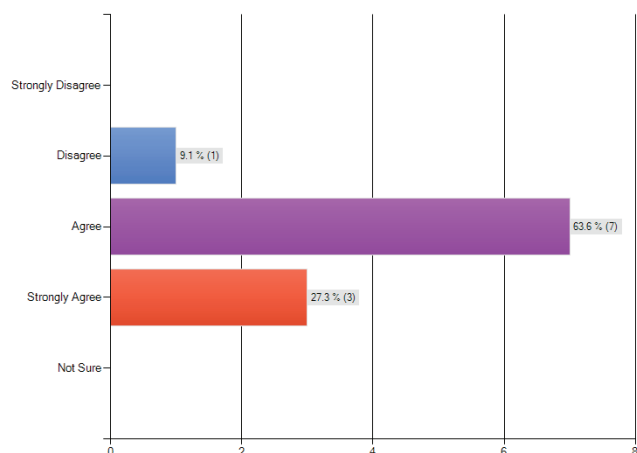
**Figure 13: Increased your knowledge about the current issues in the local community.**



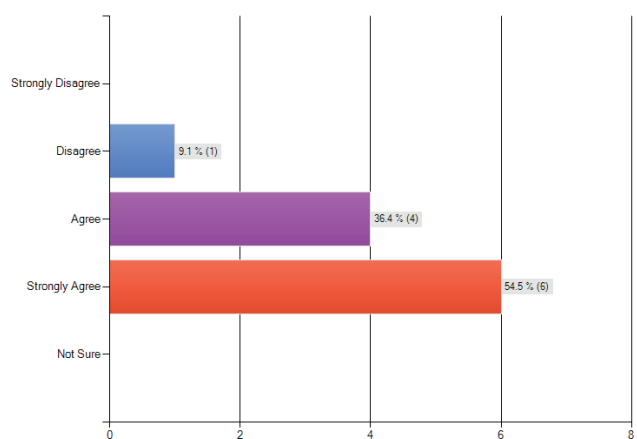
**Figure 14: Develop your sense of responsibility to help others.**



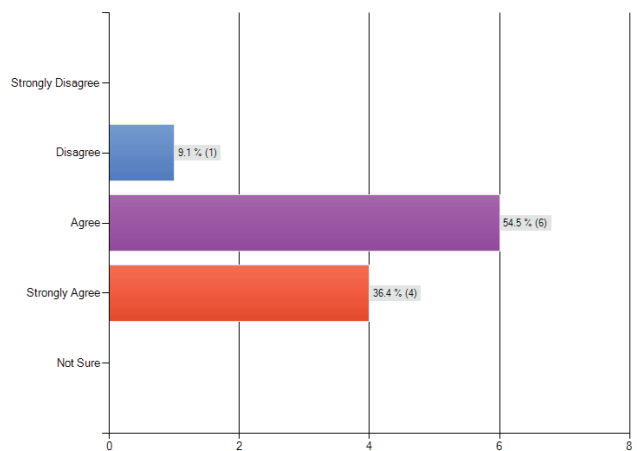
**Figure 15: Develops your knowledge about local council activities and programs.**



**Figure 16: Developed your ability to work with community members (e.g. council staff and other young people)**

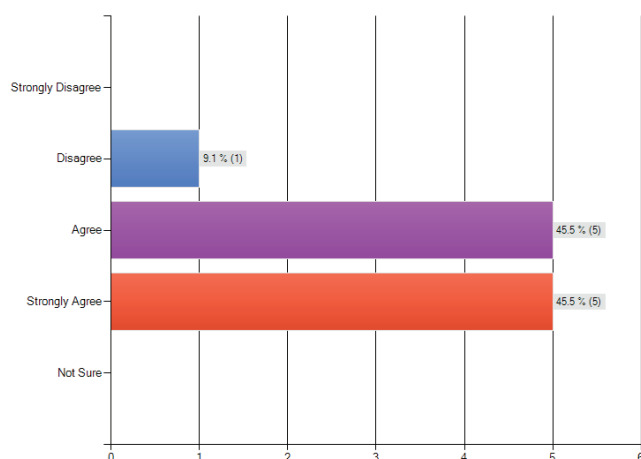


**Figure 17: Builds your peer (people your age) networks.**

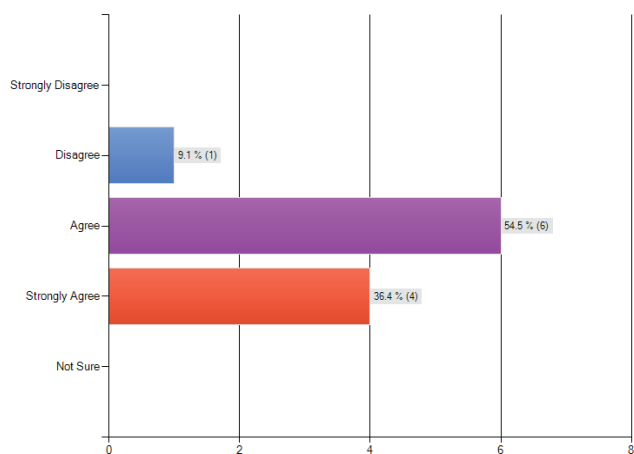




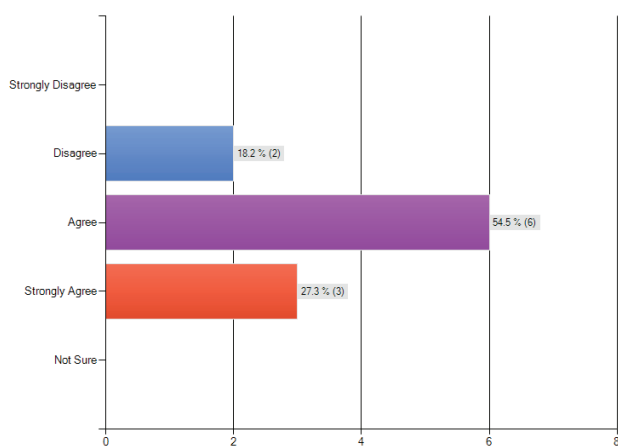
**Figure 18: Developed your feelings of ‘belonging’ to the local community.**



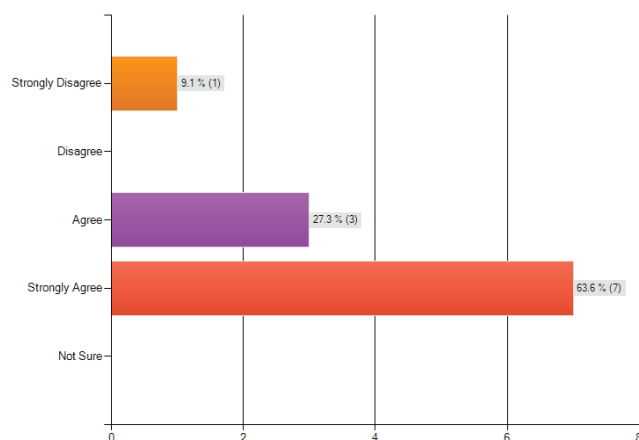
**Figure 19: Increased your participation in other community activities (e.g. cultural/arts/sports).**



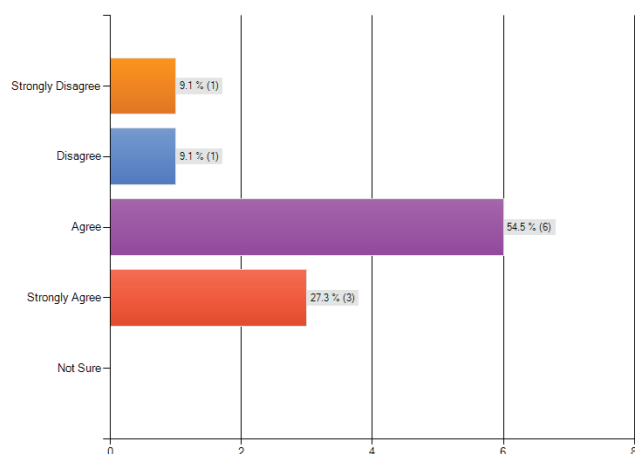
**Figure 20: Developed your sense of local identity.**



**Figure 21: Provided you with opportunities to connect with young people who are different from yourselves.**



**Figure 22: Developed your sense of pride about the community.**



Within these positive responses there are certain areas of strength. All (n=11) of young leaders surveyed responded with 'agree' or 'strongly agree' when rating The Whitten Project as a helping them build their knowledge about the current issues in the community. Sixty seven percent (n=7) strongly agreed that the Project provided opportunities to connect with young people who are different to them.

Across a number of the questions in this section one or two young people disagreed or strongly disagreed in contrast to the majority of the responses. This is in contrast to the leadership section where no negative responses were received. This may be a result of varying experiences of the City Council sessions and the different community contexts experienced by young leaders. In future delivery and evaluation, it could be useful to analyse the content, delivery and outcomes of the sessions at each City Council in relation to the other Councils.

### Community Leadership Project:

Young leaders were also asked their views on the Community Leadership Project. 10 young leaders offered an opinion of the importance of the Community Leadership Project with many commenting on their reasoning as well. These can be categorised into very important, important and quite important.

#### a) Very important

*Very important. It gives the young leaders a sense of self-reliance.*

*Very important because it gave us the chance to put what we learnt into practice and to share what we learnt with others.*

*I believe it is extremely important as the Whitten Project gets an understanding of what they are doing to help the communities clubs.*

*It is really important because it strengthens ties to the community*

*It is very important because it is putting all our learning into action.*

#### b) Important

*It's important because it's our way of giving back to the community and it's a way we can showcase the skills we have learnt throughout the project. It is also our way of giving back to the community after we have had the privilege to partake in this leadership project.*

*I think that it really made us think back to what we have learnt about a good community needs.*

*Because firstly it's a challenging task for us and leaders always need a challenge and also it relates to our community*

#### c) Quite important

*Fairly important, it teaches you valuable skills.*

*It's not vital but it helps*

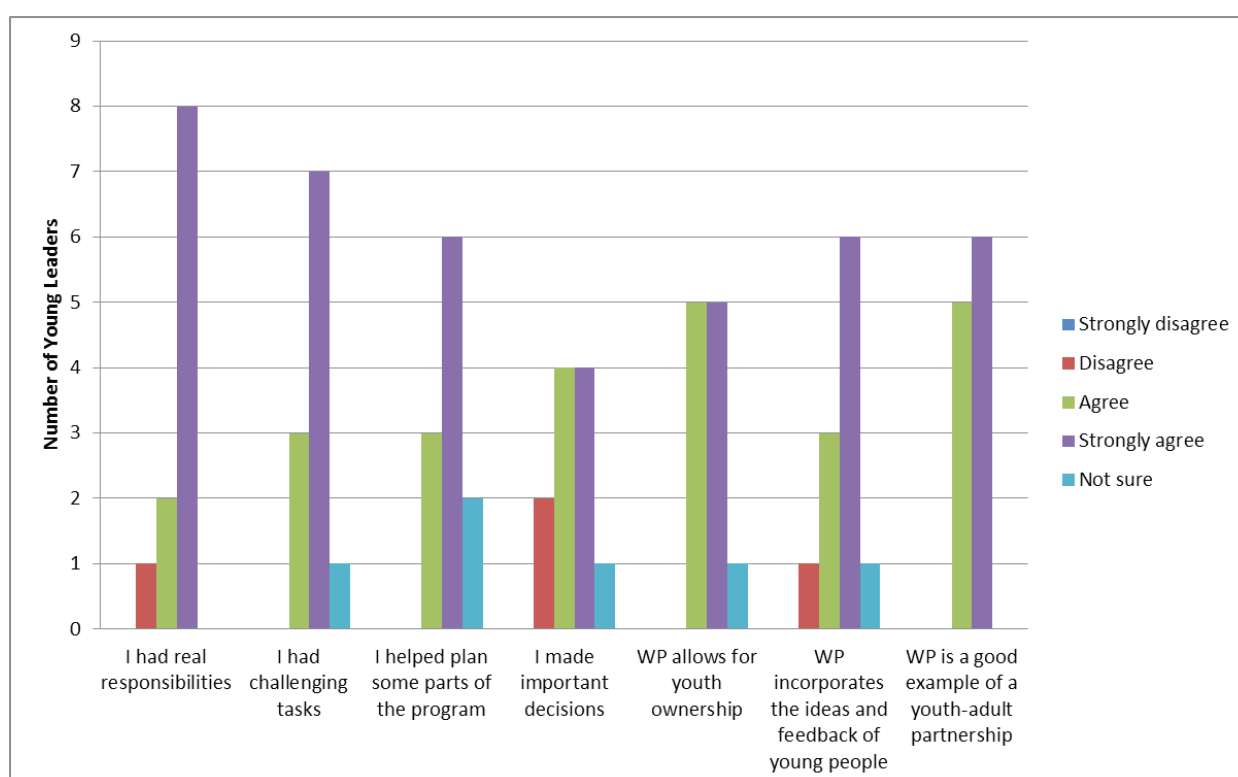
As the above quotations reveal, the young leaders consider the community project important because it allows them to:

- translate theory into practice
- engage in a challenging task
- strengthen connections to the community
- contribute to the community

### 6.3.4 Participation and ownership

Young leaders were asked to respond to questions related to their participation in and ownership of the Project. The results are positive. The majority of young leaders felt strongly that The Whitten Project provided them with real responsibilities and challenging tasks. All of the young leader agreed or strongly agreed that the project is a good example of youth-adult partnership and the majority agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to plan some parts of the program, they made important decisions, the Project allows for youth ownership and it incorporates the ideas and feedback of the young leaders. A small number of respondents were either unsure or disagreed with 6 of the 7 statements. The greatest level of disagreement or uncertainty (n=3) is for the statement: 'I made important decisions'.

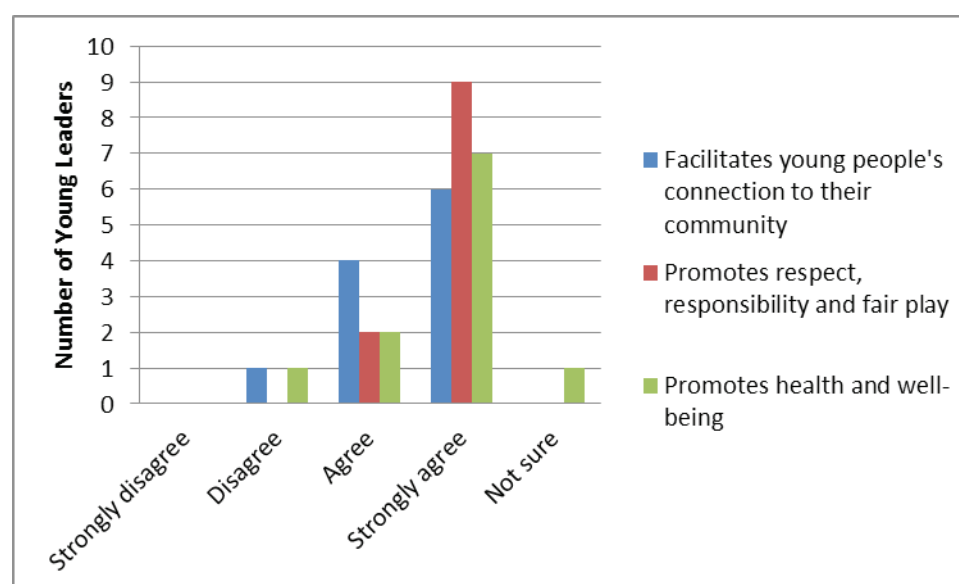
**Figure 23: Young leader opinion of their participation in and ownership of The Whitten Project**



### 6.3.5 Outcomes

Young leaders were asked their view on the extent to which The Project met the core objectives of: facilitating young people's connection to their community; promoting respect, responsibility and fair play; and promoting health and well-being:

**Figure 24: Young leader perceptions of core objectives**



The results show that the majority of young leaders believe the outcomes of the Whitten Project match its objectives in these 3 areas. A particular strength is the ability of The Whitten project to promote respect, responsibility and fair play with 100% (n=11) of respondents agreeing (n=2) or strongly agreeing (n=9) with this.

### 6.3.6 Content and Delivery

Young leaders were asked to respond to questions about the content and delivery of The Whitten Project and to explain their answers.

#### Nomination process:

Young leaders were asked an open question about their view on the nomination process and any suggestions for improvements. 10 young leaders responded to this question. Two young leaders held no strong view, five thought the process was good and four also suggested aspects that could be improved:

a) Positives: appropriate and informative

*The process of the nominations for the project were really good.*

*I don't think much could be improved I enjoyed it severely.*

*I thought it was very good and I don't think anything could be improved.*

*It was challenging but prepared us for of the project.*

*It was really well planned out and covered all areas.*

b) Improvements: scope

*Some people who have really good leadership may not have known about this opportunity and therefore did not get the opportunity to be nominated.*

*Asking more Councils could be an improvement.*

*More people nominated from areas other than sport.*

*I think it was too broad. It needs to directly determine the leadership qualities of the nominee.*

**Expectations:**

Overall 80% (n=8) of young leaders felt that the Project sessions met their expectations. The other 20% (n=2) were unsure.

The young leaders described their expectations and experience in ways that suggest the Project is providing a positive experience (through guest speakers and opportunities to apply leadership theory into practice):

*Some of the guest speakers were fantastic.*

*We had guest speakers talk to us about different areas of leadership to inspire us to do the same and we also had workshops, where we would discuss how to apply these qualities in the community, which was what I expected.*

*We learnt a lot about leadership skills and had the opportunity to put what we learnt into practice*

*Because it made me use the skills we learnt reflect into my personal life, and personally I could easily say that I am a changed personality*

The young leaders noted the well organised nature of the Project which contributed to the alignment of their expectations and experience:

*Because we did everything that was planned*

*Everything was very organized*

For some young leaders there was a slight mismatch between their expectations and their experiences in terms of what was actually involved:

*I knew what it was about but didn't know how much work was involved. I also thought AFL was the main focus.*

This mismatch is not necessarily of concern as the Project intends to challenge the participants but it may be worth making the level of work involved clearer to those young leaders who already have a number of commitments outside of school.

### **Quality of delivery:**

Sixty seven percent (n=6) of the young leaders rated the quality of the Project as very good, 22% (n=2) as average and 11% (n=1) was unsure. The open-ended responses show a high level of enthusiasm and appreciation for their experience as participants in The Whitten Project which was evidenced in comments such as:

*I loved The Whitten Project and looked forward to each session.*

*Most people my age will enjoy the experience and benefits that the Whitten Project gives you. It will be something I'll miss.*

The responses reveal that the young leaders valued the quality of support and organisation from the staff team, and interactions with the other young leaders:

*The staff related to us and we were given lots of information. The emails about what to expect were helpful.*

*Even though parts were challenging I had good support from Nathan and his team and my friends in the project.*

*The mentors/ leaders of the Whitten project were helpful and great people.*

*All the sessions were always on time, fun and easy to get along with.*

Recognising that this is a pilot project, three young leaders suggested that the Project may be able to improve. These were general comments rather than specific suggestions for improvement:

*Pretty good [quality of delivery] but since this is a first time project a lot can be improved.*

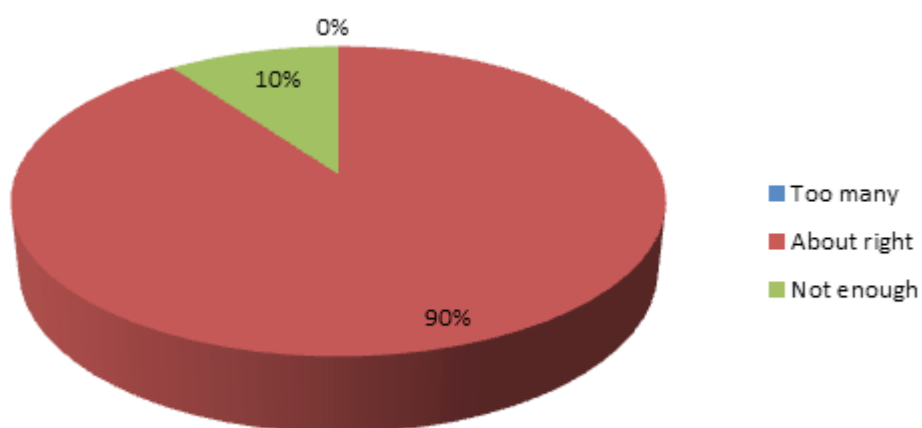
*There were parts to improve on but still good and clear.*

*There could be organisational improvements*

### Number and length of sessions

Young leaders were asked their opinion on the number and length of the sessions. The results show, that on the whole the number of sessions was 'about right' with one young leader stating there were 'not enough' sessions:

**Figure 25: Thinking about the number of sessions for The Whitten Project was there:**



The young leaders valued the number and pacing of the sessions that allowed them to consolidate their learning, maintain their engagement and meant the sessions were not too disruptive to other weekend activities:

*It was about right because they were planned out just right over the 9 months*

*We had plenty at the start so we got to know everyone and feel comfortable and excited about showing up to the project. As the year went on we had less sessions but still enough to help us with the Community Leadership Project.*

*There was the right amount because we had a good size gap between sessions, which kept us focussed.*

*Enough time between sessions to practice and think about what we learnt*

*They didn't take all our weekends and set responsible time slot*

One young person did, however, comment that:

*It was about right but not evenly spread meaning sports were sacrificed.*

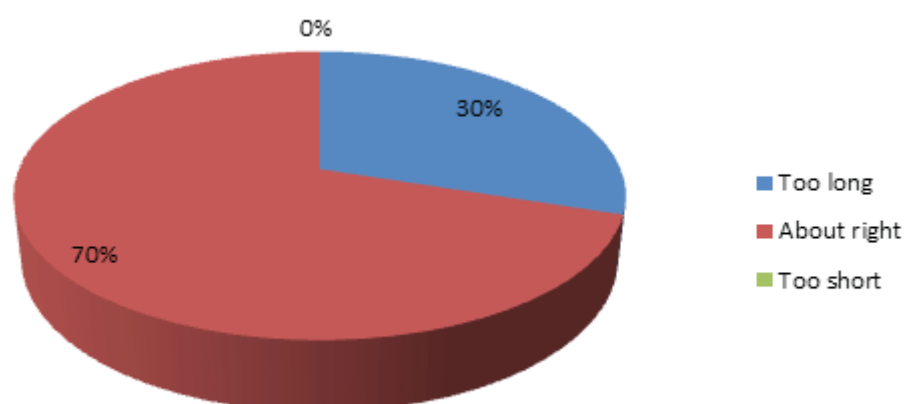
And another felt:

*There were too little sessions to spend time with our new friends.*



While happy with the pacing and number of sessions, a few young leaders (30% n=3) felt that the length of the sessions was too long.

**Figure 26: Thinking about the length of the sessions was this:**



One young leader noted that it depended on which session the questions referred to and a number of young leaders suggested the sessions were too long on the Saturdays. Participants suggested finishing earlier as some sessions were tough and the sessions meant they were missing sports and relaxation time as it is the weekend. Others felt the length of the session allowed time to do a few things at each session and even though they were missing out on other things one young leader noted it was worth it as: *I was still having experiences that I doubt I will have again.*

## 6.4 Summary

The analysis of the data from the session feedback and online survey suggests that the young leaders perceive there are many benefits to their learning and personal development from their involvement in The Whitten Project. This includes the development of leadership beliefs, knowledge and skills, and knowledge of and involvement in their community. They are able to articulate what they are learning and how they will apply it in various spheres of their lives.

Data from the young leaders demonstrates they value:

- the community leadership project as a means to apply their learning and contribute to their community
- the prestigious and inspiring guest speakers the quality of support and communication provided by the staff team
- the well-organised nature of the Project

The young leaders offered some suggestions on how to improve the content and delivery of the sessions or organisation and management of the Project.

The data highlights certain aspects for review in future running of the project:

The collection of session feedback data:

- increasing the number of young leaders who provide feedback throughout the running of The Project
- making the feedback process anonymous
- consider the value of online feedback
- providing the young leaders with a mixture of closed along with the open responses would enhance the ability to evaluate individual sessions within the context of The Project.
- having a consistent approach to collecting feedback and including indicators to measure development
- providing adequate space for improvements to be suggested and mechanisms to respond to the young leaders' ideas

The session content and delivery:

- enhancing the inclusion of those with injuries or non-sporting identities in the physical activities
- promoting youth participation in the leadership of the sessions
- including more participatory and interactive teaching and learning activities
- allowing more time for the young leaders to interact with each other
- considering how to vary the learning outcomes and scaffold learning across the sessions



*My Journey as a young leader started off when I was in an SRC (Student Representative Council) meeting. The Wellbeing Coordinator promoted it to the group and later suggested I apply to get into the Whitten Project. At first I was unsure because I thought that the Whitten Project was all about sport, which to be honest, wasn't my strongest point, but she later explained it was a leadership program so I decided to give it a go anyway. Such opportunities are not always available to someone of my age and gender.*

*It turned out I was accepted. I was excited but mainly nervous. What would they think of me? Was the first question that popped into my head, I'm different... I don't play any sports. I then believed that the main reason I was nominated was because I was showing leadership throughout the school.*

*At the first session I was introduced to my mentors and some of the many young leaders living in the Brimbank area. It was nerve racking and REALLY scary at first, but we played a few icebreakers to get to know each other, with apples... (Don't ask, it was a long story. We didn't have a ball). But by the end of the session I got a rough idea of what the project was about and even managed to get a few people's names down. But when Nathan (one of our mentors) announced there was going to be more leaders from different council areas (Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley, Hobsons Bay), I panicked again. I was more relaxed when a few of them approached me in the second session and said 'Hi' - they were all really friendly and welcoming.*

*One of the many things I have learnt in the Whitten Project was that, to be a leader, you don't always have to lead from the front - you can lead from behind. This means that instead of you teaching your friends something, maybe you could go 'behind' them and watch them slowly learn and become leaders themselves.*

*Through participation in the program, I have learned to overcome several challenges. Public speaking and meeting new people were previously things I was very nervous about. I remember being very anxious when presenting to my local council. It was extremely terrifying because we were speaking in front of the most important people in Brimbank and to do that, took some courage. I have to thank my peers and mentors that day because they assure me that I was not alone and that if I struggled no one would laugh at me.*

*I have had many positive experiences in the last 8 months. However, my favourite experience has got to be learning and growing along side the other leaders. We've all been through a lot together. You have all been a big influence on me at school and at home. It has been a huge pleasure working and developing with you all.*

*To the staff at the Whitten Project I would like to thank you for the time, dedication and commitment you showed all of us. You have certainly provided us with the tools to 'Lead' and to further develop into great leaders. To those of you who might be given an opportunity to take part in the program, I say 'Grasp the opportunity' - you won't regret it.*

***(Female young leader graduation speech, November 2013)***

# THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS OF YOUNG LEADERS

## 7

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the perceptions of parents or guardians of young leaders who took part in The Whitten Project. Data from an online survey forms the basis of the analysis.

### 7.2 Online survey results

The survey provides insight into parent perceptions of the impact of The Whitten Project on their child's development and their views and experiences of the content and delivery of the Project.

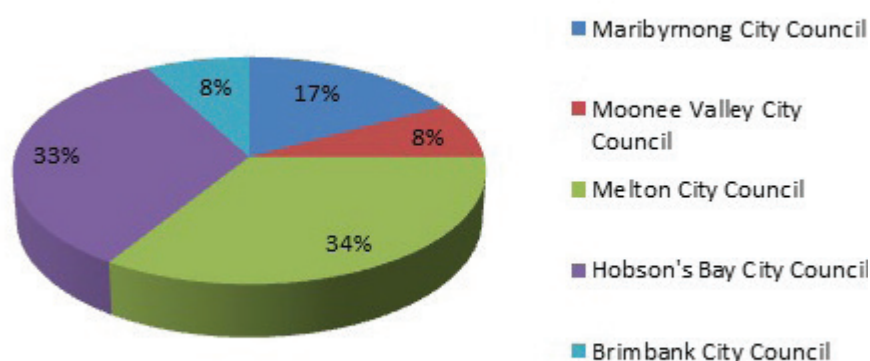
#### 7.2.1 Demographics

Twelve parents completed the online survey. While the number in the sample is low, this is a response rate of 35% (contact details were available for 34 parents of the young leaders).

Of the parents who responded 2 were male and 10 were female.

Surveys were completed by parents from each of the 5 City Councils involved in The Whitten Project:

**Figure 27: Percentage of respondents from each City Council**



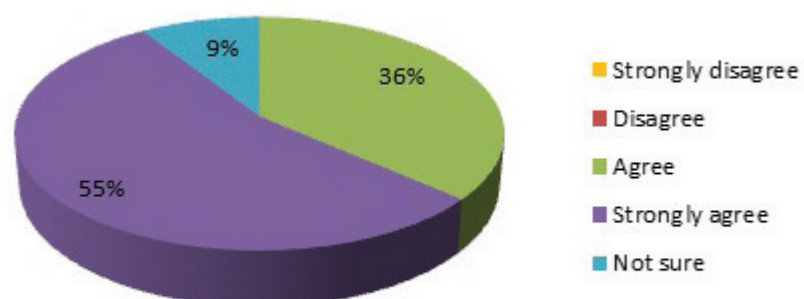
#### 7.2.2 Leadership

Parents were asked to respond to 8 questions related to their child's development as a leader. Aside from a small number of 'not sure' responses and 1 parent who skipped all of these questions, the responses were very positive with almost 100% of parents agreeing that their child is now more comfortable being a group leader, giving clear direction, cooperating and working in a group, comfortable teaching others, considers several choices before making a decision, listens carefully to the opinion of group members, is confident in leading activities outside the Whitten Project and has developed leadership skills through adult mentors in The Whitten Project. This suggests the parents that responded to the survey perceive The Whitten Project

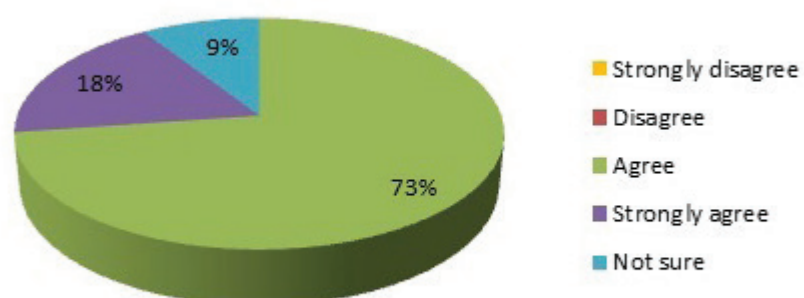


to have had a strong impact on their child's leadership abilities across a range of indicators:

**Figure 28: My child is now more comfortable being a group leader**



**Figure 29: My child can give clear directions**



**Figure 30: My child can cooperate and work in a group**

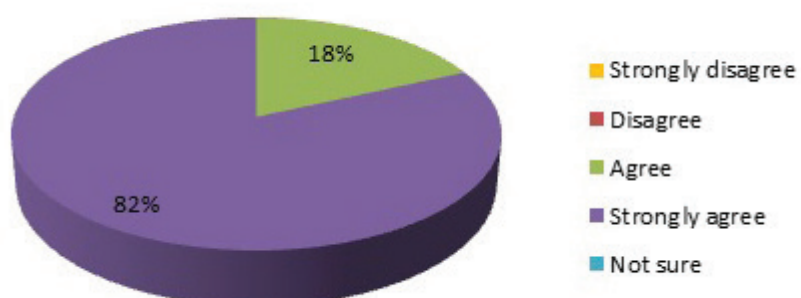


Figure 31: My child feels comfortable teaching others

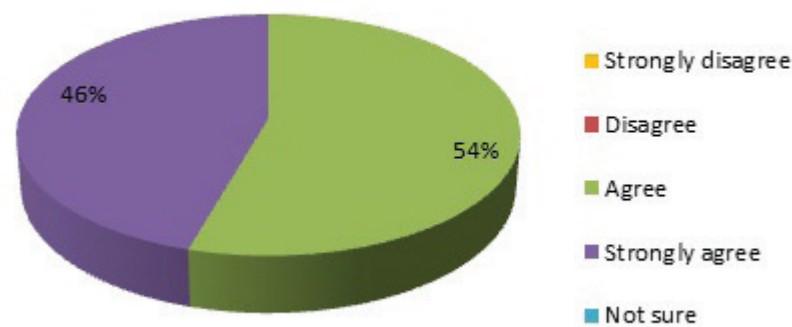


Figure 32: My child considers several choices before making a decision

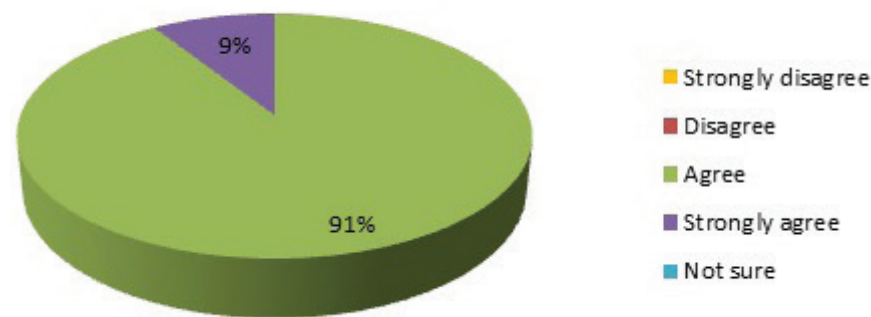
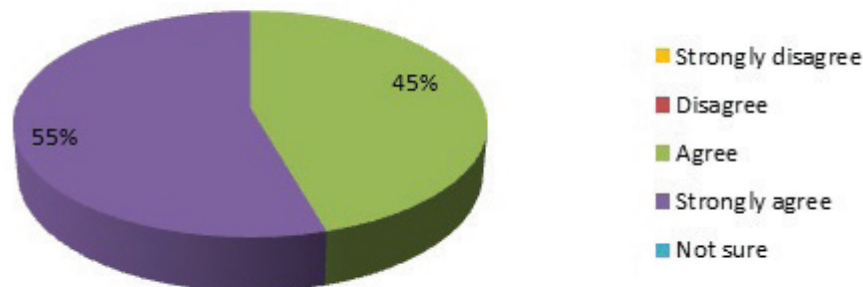
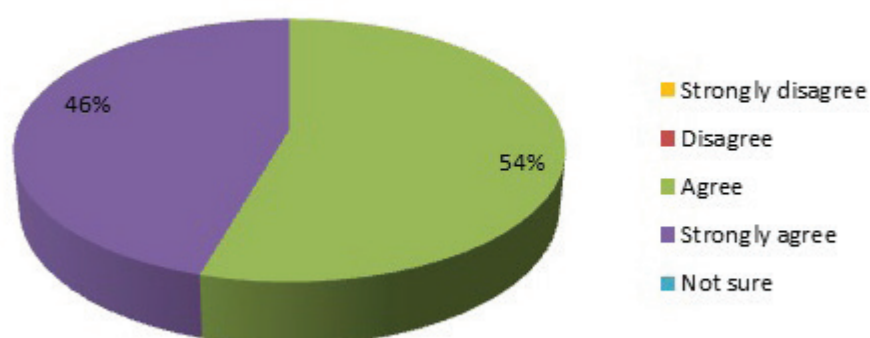


Figure 33: My child listens carefully to the opinion of group members



**Figure 34: My child is confident leading activities outside of The Whitten Project**



**Figure 35: My child has developed leadership skills through adult mentors in The Whitten Project**



Within these positive results there are certain areas of strength: 82% of parents (n=9) strongly agreed that their child can cooperate and work in a group and 73% (n=8) strongly agreed that their child has developed leadership skills through adult mentors in the Whitten Project.

While still a very positive response with 100% of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing their child considers several choices before making a decision. This aspect of leadership skills is the weakest of the indicators with only 9% (n=1) of parents stating they strongly agree with this statement.

Parents were also asked to give examples of how The Whitten Project helped their child to become a better leader. Their responses can be categorised into confidence and self-belief, sense of responsibility and knowledge and skill development. 'Confidence' was mentioned most frequently.



a) Confidence and self-belief:

*It made him realise that it isn't hard to be a leader – it's about confidence and believing in what you are trying to convey to others*

*More confident when working with people*

*He is confident to start up a conversation with people he doesn't know. Can engage with adults. Not too shy to ask question in front of the group*

*More confident in himself, exposed him to a different social group*

*Meeting new people is always hard. Just working through that process of working with new people has built confidence and taught my child take risks. Encouraged my child to be more vocal*

*The Whitten Project has made my child a better leader by improving her confidence which is evident in her sporting games and at trainings.*

b) Sense of responsibility

*To continue to think about those around her within her community and how she can support them.*

*Since the project, my daughter has been able to grasp a better understanding of responsibility and being able to manage her activities, in school and out.*

c) Knowledge and skill development

*I think our son has really benefitted from hearing from others and also the team work and setting goals. I think it will also help him in his future sporting life and career as he has learnt a great deal*

*I think my son has gained a lot of knowledge on the insights of football, and speaking publicly*

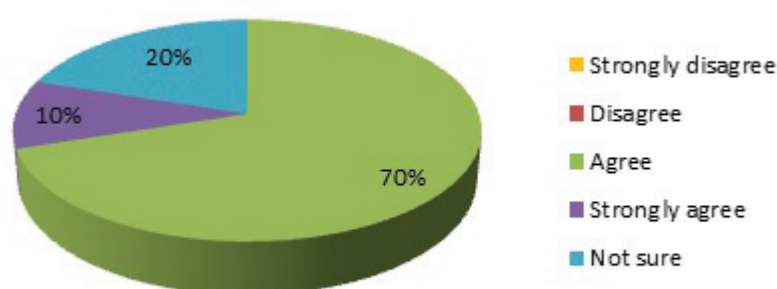
A response by one parent brings together these different categories to describe the impact of the Whitten Project on their child:

*The growth in my son this year is immense. Obviously this is part of the growing maturity, however dealing with the wonderful WP team - as well as their local community project adults has helped and encouraged my child to take the next step towards becoming a self- confident, respectful and interesting young person*

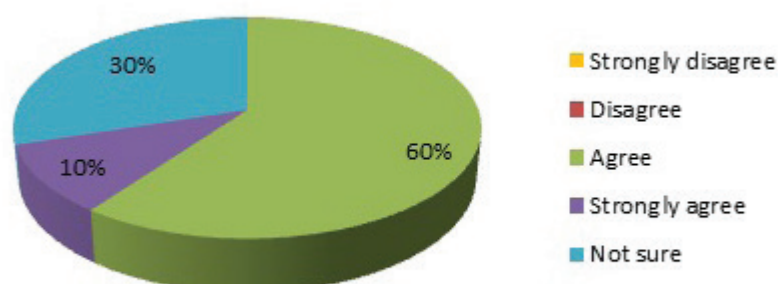
### 7.2.3 Community

Parents were asked to respond to 10 questions related to the impact of their child's experiences of community through participation in The Whitten Project. Aside from a small number of 'not sure' responses and one parent who skipped all of these questions, the responses were again very positive with almost 100% of parents (n=10) agreeing that their child developed knowledge about local Council activities and programs, increased their knowledge about the current issues in the local community, developed their ability to work with community members, had opportunities to connect with young people who are different to themselves, was able to build peer networks, developed feelings of 'belonging' to the local community, developed a sense of pride about the community, developed their sense of local identity, developed their sense of responsibility to help others and increased their participation in other community activities. This suggests parents perceive that The Whitten Project has had a positive impact on their child's responsibility to the wider community and participation in their communities.

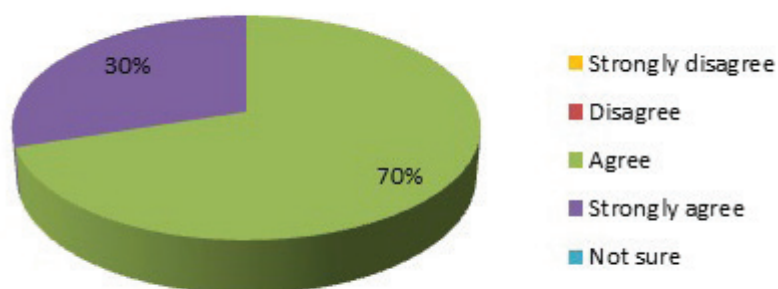
**Figure 36: Developed their knowledge about local Council activities and programs**



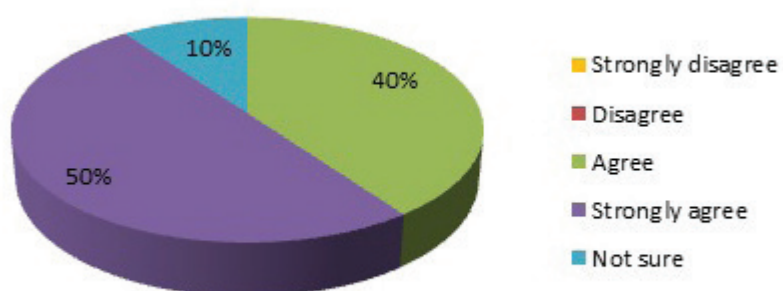
**Figure 37: Increased their knowledge about current issues in the local community**



**Figure 38: Developed their ability to work with community members**



**Figure 39: Provided them with opportunities to connect with young people who are different to themselves**



**Figure 40: Build their peer (people their own age) networks**

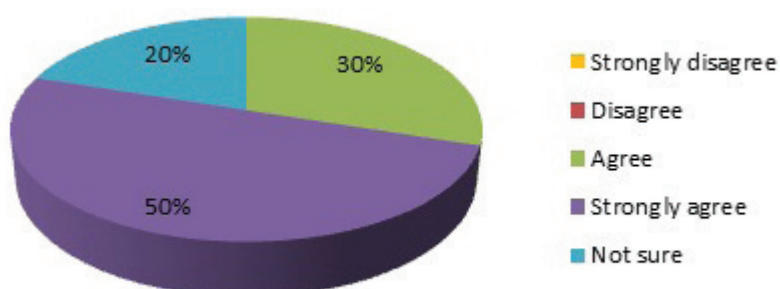


Figure 41: Developed their feelings of 'belonging' to the local community

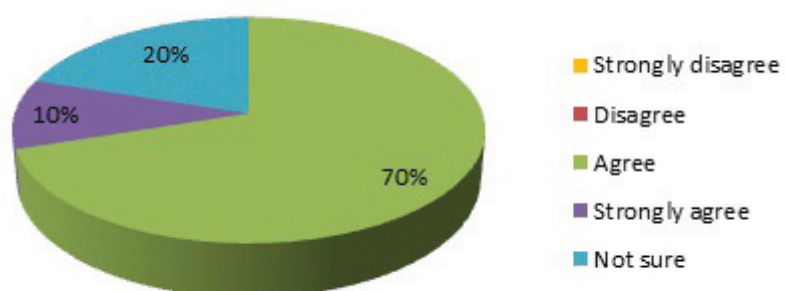


Figure 42: Developed their sense of pride about the community

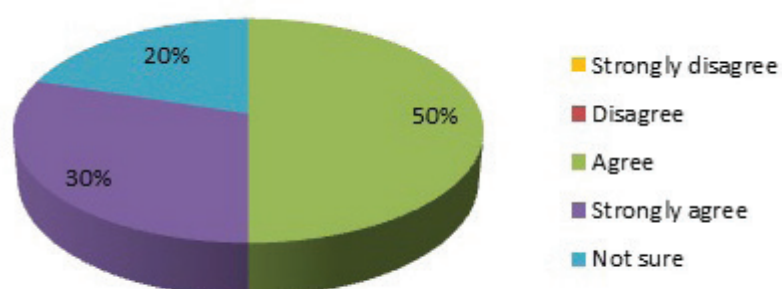
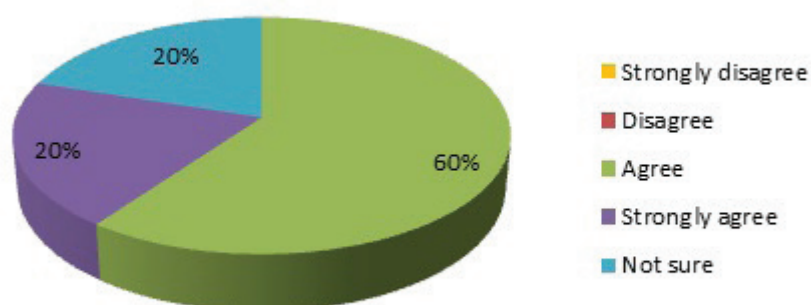
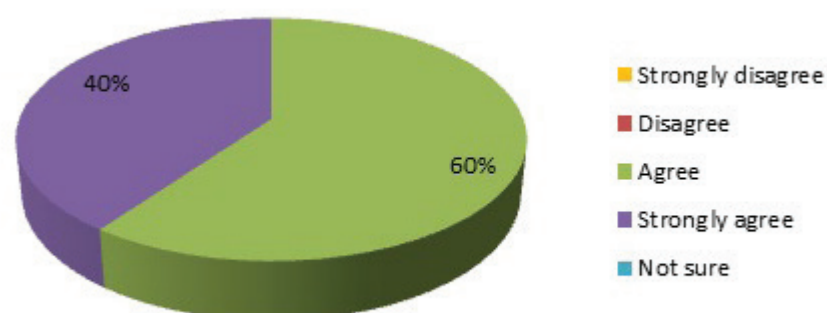


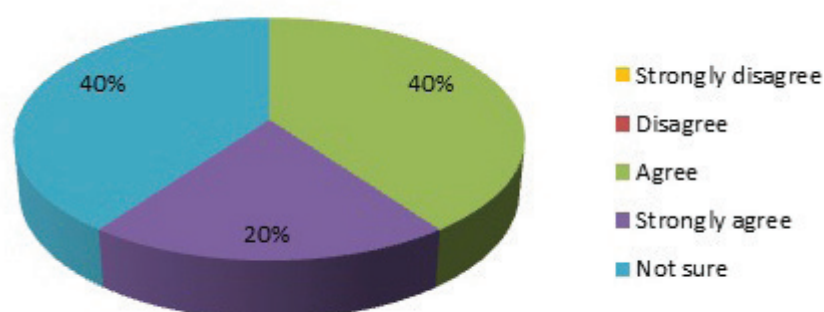
Figure 43: Developed their sense of local identity



**Figure 44: Developed their sense of responsibility to help others**



**Figure 45: Increased their participation in other community activities**



Within these positive results the connections the young leaders made within their peer community appears to be a particular strength. 50% of parents strongly agreed that the Project had provided their child with opportunities to connect with young people who are different to themselves and build networks with their peers.

Thirty percent of parents were unsure of the impact of The Whitten Project on their child's knowledge about current issues in the local community. Forty percent were unsure whether it had increased their child's participation in other community activities.

The number of 'not sure' responses in this section was slightly higher than for the leadership questions. This indicates parent knowledge regarding the community aspect of the Project is perhaps less developed than for the leadership aspects.

### **Community Leadership Project:**

Parents were also asked their opinion regarding the Community Leadership Project that young leaders undertook as part of The Whitten Project. 10 parents offered an opinion on the importance of the Community Leadership Project.

One was unsure how important it was. The other responses can be categorised into:

a) Very important

*Very important as it is all about the young leaders developing a sense of local community and being involved*

*Very important in building the confidence of the young people to lead and giving them opportunity to put the knowledge learnt into practice in a supported situation.*

*I thought the leadership project was the basis of the Whitten Project, and was therefore very important.*

*I think it was very important in creating a working relationship between the Whitten Project, local Council communities and the youth participant*

b) Important

*Important. It shows/teaches young leaders about their local community*

*I felt this was a good idea, as many teenagers have no idea what is going on around them. This made them feel part of their local community.*

*I think it opens the eyes of the young leaders, to see what is happening in their communities.*

c) Problematic

*Not really [important], I think a community project adds too much additional pressure for the young people. It should be worked on as a whole group.*

*I thought it was a good idea to get the kids to learn a bit more about what they could be doing with local groups, but there were too many sessions in the end.*

The majority of parents (n=7) valued the Community Leadership Project seeing it as central to The Whitten Project's operation and the young leader's development. Two parents suggested modifications to the way in which the Community Leadership Project was run to reduce the commitment needed from the young leaders.

Parents were also asked to for any examples of anything in particular about the Community Leadership Project that they believed worked really well. There were 4 relevant responses that can be categorised into:

a) Connection to the community

*Built my child's connection with her community.*

*Making my child feel more connected to his local area*

## b) Youth-led

*I liked the fact that the onus was put on the youth participant to come up with their own ideas for a community project, plan and carry out their ideas, This made for commitment and ownership for the kids*

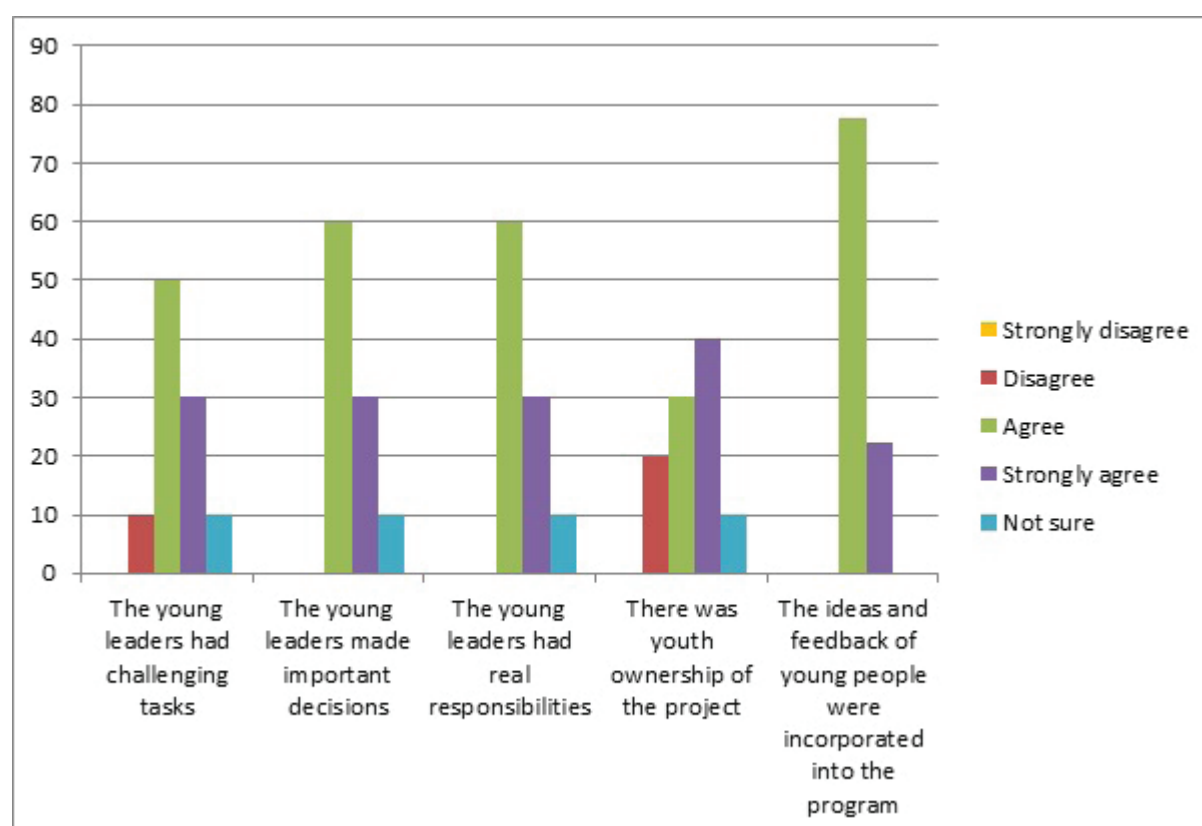
*I thought it worked well that my daughter could work with a friend and that they could make as big or small difference to the club as they could.*

### 7.2.4 Participation and ownership

Parents were asked to respond to questions related to their child's participation in The Whitten Project. The questions related to the level of participation in and youth ownership of the program.

The results are positive showing that the majority of parents perceived The Whitten Project to have challenged their child, allowed them to make important decisions, have real responsibilities and have ownership of and input into the program. A small percentage of parents disagreed that there was youth ownership of the program.

Figure 46: Parent perceptions of level of participation and ownership

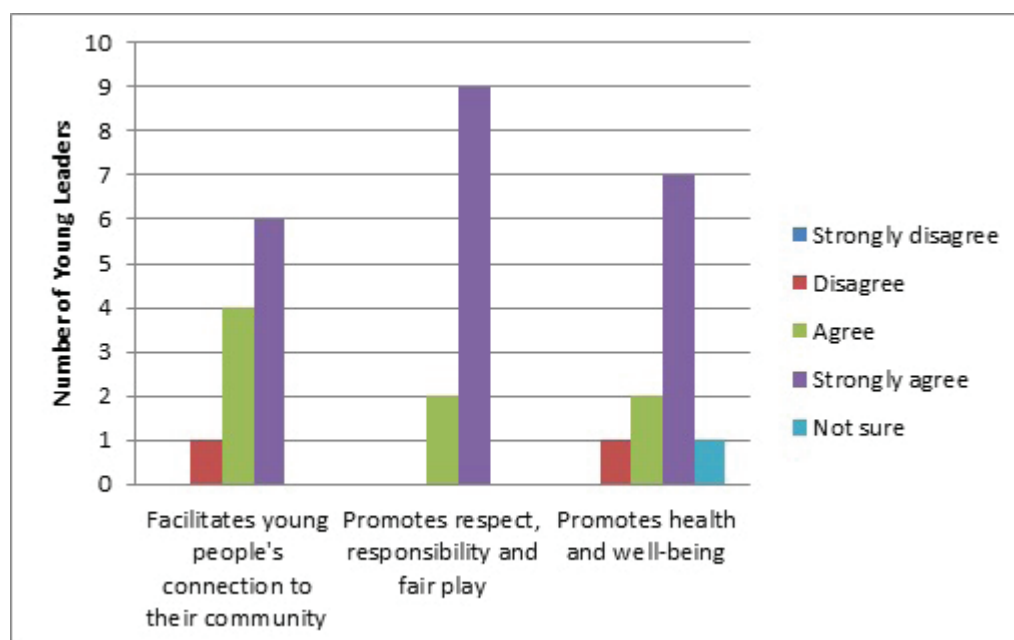


### 7.2.5 Outcomes

Parents were asked to respond to questions about the nature of The Whitten Project and its potential outcomes related to the Project's objectives.

The results were very positive with 100% of parents who answered this question (n=10) agreeing that The Whitten Project facilitates young people's connections to their community, promotes respect, responsibility and fair play and promotes health and well-being. Within what are very positive results, the perception of The Whitten Project as facilitating connection to the community is the weakest.

**Figure 47: Parent perceptions of core objectives**



## 7.2.6 Content and delivery

Parents were asked to respond to questions about the content and delivery of The Whitten Project and to explain their answers.

### Nomination process:

Parents were asked an open question about their view on the nomination process and any suggestions for improvements.

Ten parents responded to this question. Their answers are, at times, contradictory indicating different Councils may have different experiences. The responses are categorized into:

#### a) Positives: appropriate and fair

*I think it is appropriate*

*I though the nomination process was really good – the pride of my son who was nominated by his class teacher so was pleasing to see*

*Nominated by their primary school principal which I think was a fair endorsement and a good approach*

*Good idea*



b) Limitations: recruitment focus and rationale

*If students are not on the schools leadership programs then they miss out on this opportunity. Young People may be quiet achievers at school and doing great things out in the community and may have missed this opportunity because the school is unaware of what they can achieve*

*It should be offered to more young people, I think it would be better to target, misguided or harder to challenge young people to get them out of trouble.*

*My son's school didn't really fill in any details other than teachers name and contact detail and so we had to fill it in. It would have been good feedback for my son to hear about why the teacher nominated him*

c) Improvements: more information on The Whitten Project at the nomination stage

*I think there could have been more information about what to expect from the project - from the young nominees perspective*

*The nomination progress made us aware of the program, but was a bit vague with information given.*

**Expectations:**

Overall 78% (n=7) of parents felt that the Project sessions met their expectations. The other 22% (n=2) were unsure. One parents responded that they were not sure what was discussed at some sessions which may explain their uncertainty.

The free text responses to this question have been categorised into 'positive experiences' 'communication of expectations' and 'challenges'.

Parents described their impressions of the Project sessions in positive terms. These reflect the Project objectives i.e. the value of the experience for their child and for the wider community:

*It provided new learnings and experiences , building confidence and leadership skills*

*Many good fun hands on session, that did incorporate the AFL, he loved that*

*Lots of fantastic experiences for the kids*

*We have seen our child grow in confidence and knowledge and willing to take risks to support others in the community*

*The children had an amazing experience, meeting so many important leaders*

Some parents were initially unsure of what to expect from The Whitten Project but praised the communication of the Project team during the running of the program:

*I really didn't know what to expect – however I have been so pleased with all aspects of the Whitten Project.*

*At first it wasn't really clear what was going to happen*

*At the first session, we knew what we were up for and all sessions met expectations*

*The communication from the WP to parents was fantastic. Nathan his team were all very approachable and took feedback gratuitously*

One parent highlighted a potential challenge of the sessions:

*I believe it was well meaning but boys being boys at this age, it was always going to be difficult in terms of engagement*

### Quality of delivery:

Eighty percent (n=8) of parents rated the quality of delivery of The Whitten Project as 'very good'. The remaining 22% (n=2) as 'average'.

The free text responses show that parents valued The Whitten Project because:

- it was well planned
- had good mentor speakers
- supplied a uniform
- provided a safe and clean environment
- had a Project Manager who was very good with young people
- the communication between adults and young people was very good

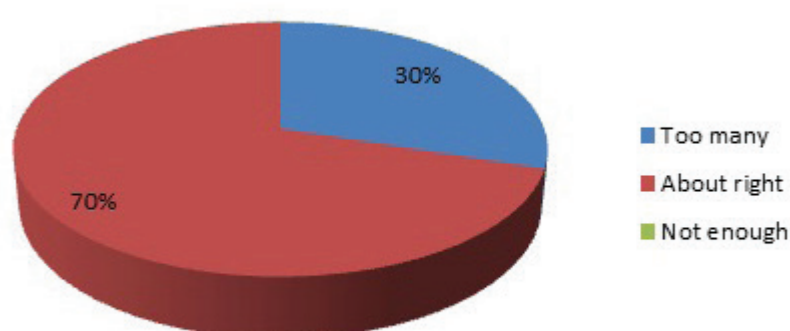
They reveal two areas for potential improvement:

- 'Fine tuning' of aspects of engagement
- Lack of information during the nomination process

### Number and length of sessions:

Parents were asked their opinion on the number and length of the sessions. The results show, that on the whole, parents felt these were both 'about right' but that three parents thought there were too many sessions and 1 parent thought they were too long. No parents suggested making the sessions longer or having more sessions:

**Figure 48: The number of sessions for The Whitten Project was**



Parent free text responses suggest that it may not be the number of sessions that is the problem but the timing of the sessions:

*Sometimes the meeting seemed to come all at once*

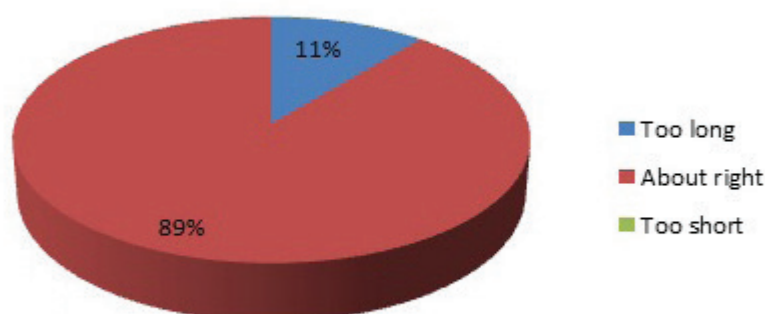
*I could say, probably just through footy season, it did get a little busy.*

*There ended up being too many council meetings and often called at short notice, it was hard*

*to fit them in as we didn't know about these at the start and my son has many other commitments in his week such as twice weekly footy training, trying out for inter league, guitar lessons, homework etc*

*12 sessions is good, I did not like having to add more sessions at a later date.*

**Figure 49: The length of the sessions was**



The free text responses from the parents showed that they felt the session length allowed for:

- the young leaders to socialise and develop relationships
- more than one activity per session
- building knowledge

Some parents were concerned that:

- the Saturday sessions were too long causing issues with engagement and impacting on the young leader involvement in other activities
- some midweek starting times were too early and difficult to get to after school

## 7.3 Summary

The results from the parent survey offer a very positive perspective on the value and impact of The Whitten Project on their child's confidence, leadership development and community involvement. The results show a high level of satisfaction from those parents who responded to the survey with the content and delivery of the Project. Areas for consideration in the development of The Whitten Project following this pilot are: enhancing the engagement of all the young people involved, more information during and about the nomination process and a review of the Community Leadership Project.



# THE PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

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## 8

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the perceptions of Stakeholders who took part in The Whitten Project. Data from an online survey and interviews with targeted individuals contribute to the analysis. The survey was open for a period of two weeks in October 2013. The interviews took place between October and November 2013.

### 8.2 Online survey results

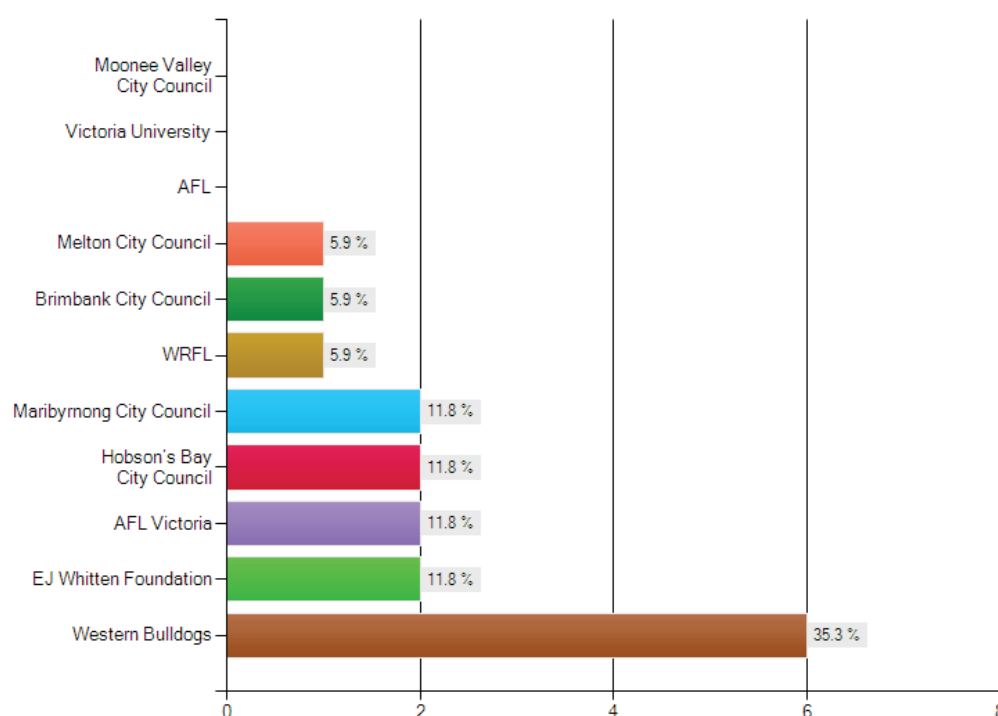
The survey provides insight into the experiences of Stakeholders involved in The Whitten Project.

#### 8.2.1 Demographics

19 Stakeholders completed the online survey. This is a response rate of 56% (contact details were available for 34 Stakeholders). Of the Stakeholders who responded 14 were male and 5 were female.

Surveys were completed by Stakeholders performing a variety of roles within the Project (e.g. Session Facilitators, Coach/Mentor, Council Officer) and from the City Councils, the Western Bulldogs, AFL Victoria, E.J. Whitten Foundation, SportWest (1) and the WRFL. Two survey respondents did not provide a response to this question.

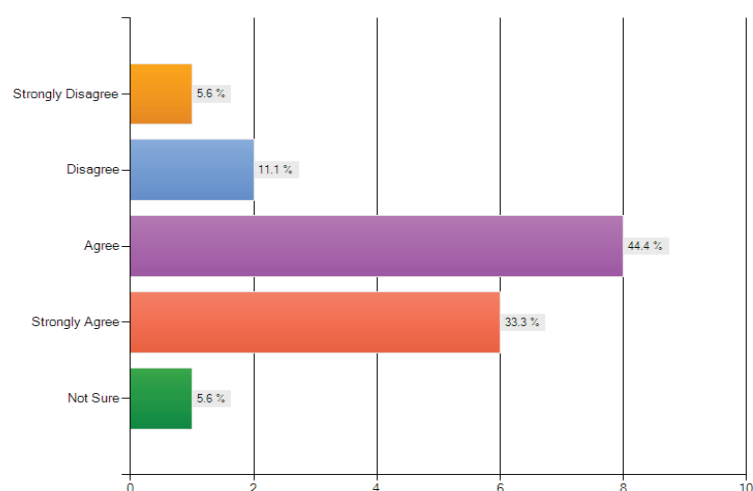
**Figure 50: Which organisation do you work/volunteer with?**



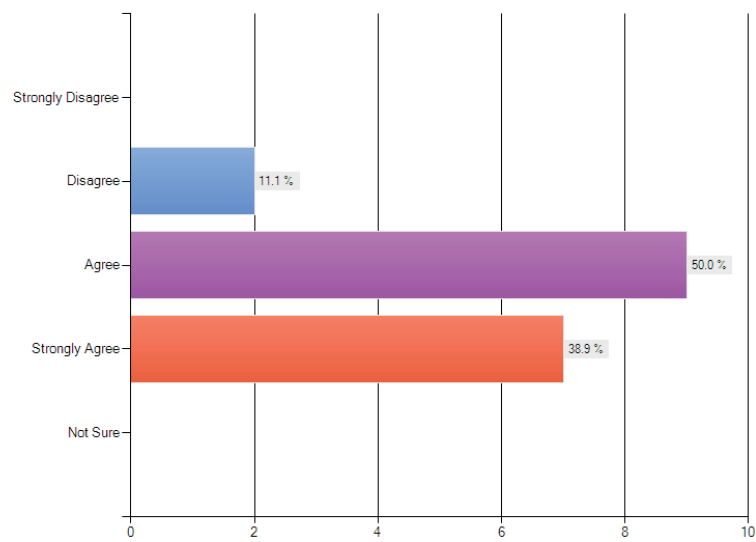
### 8.2.2 Project observations

Stakeholders were asked to respond to 7 questions related to their observations of The Whitten Project. A small number of 'disagree' responses were received on 3 of the questions and 1 Stakeholder skipped all of these questions. The responses were very positive suggesting the Stakeholders that responded to the survey perceive The Whitten Project to have had a strong impact on participants across a range of indicators:

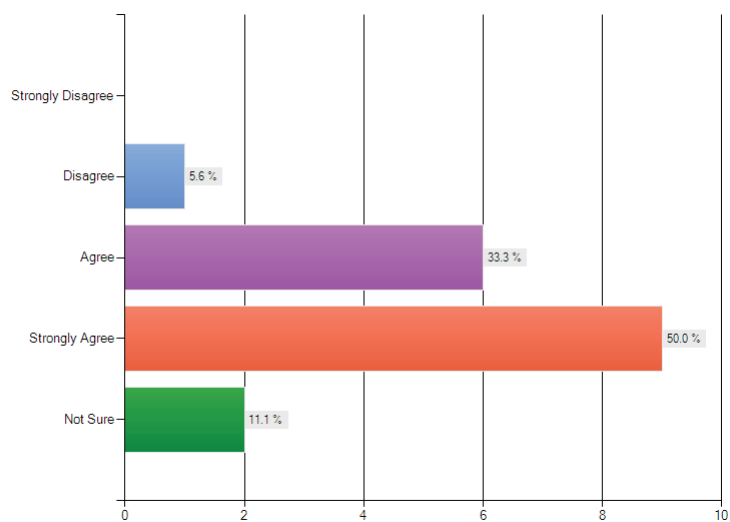
**Figure 51: Allows for youth ownership of the project (e.g. planning, advertising, decision making).**



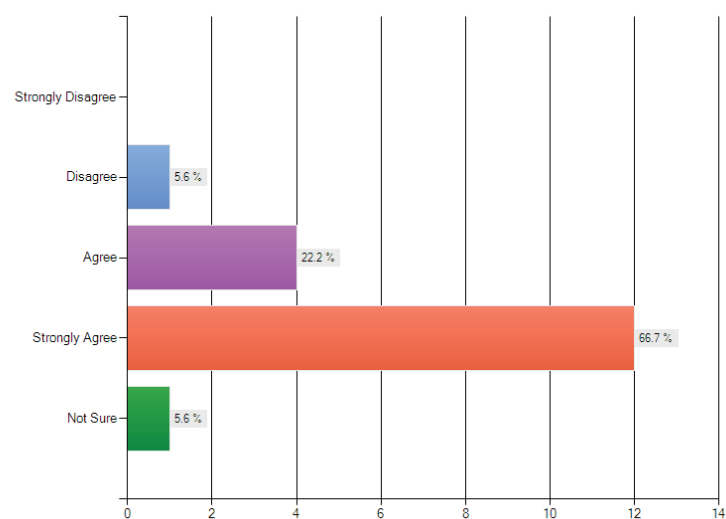
**Figure 52: Incorporates the ideas and feedback of young people into the program.**



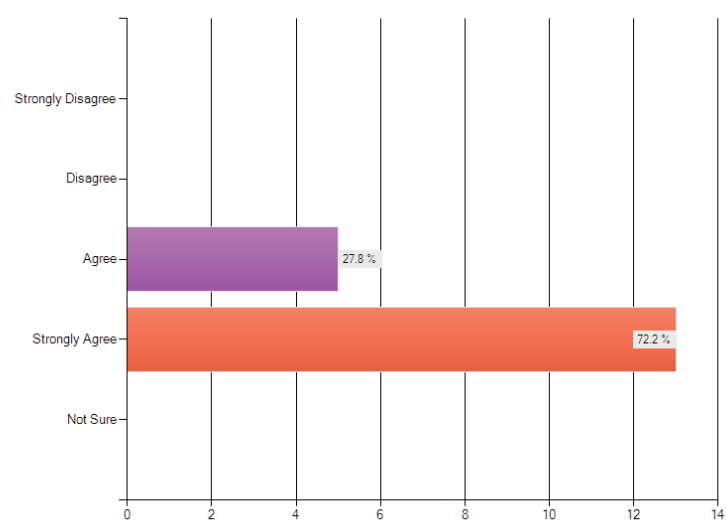
**Figure 53: Connects young people to support and resources beyond the program.**



**Figure 54: Is a good example of a youth-adult partnership.**

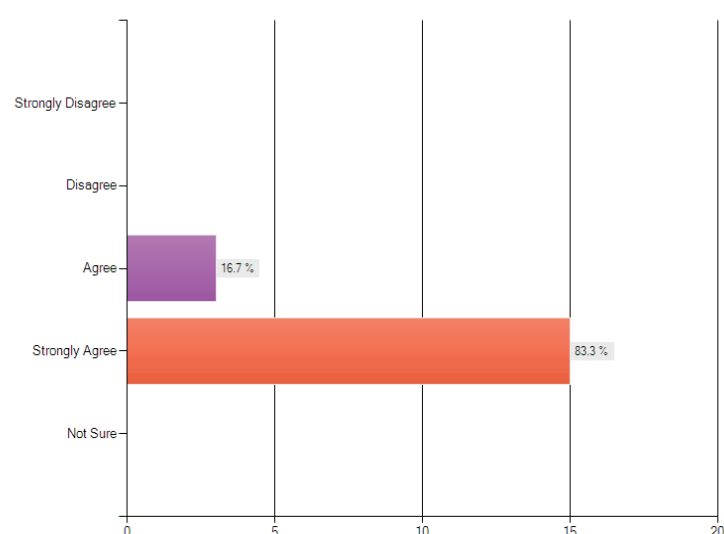


**Figure 55: Facilitates young people's connection to their community.**

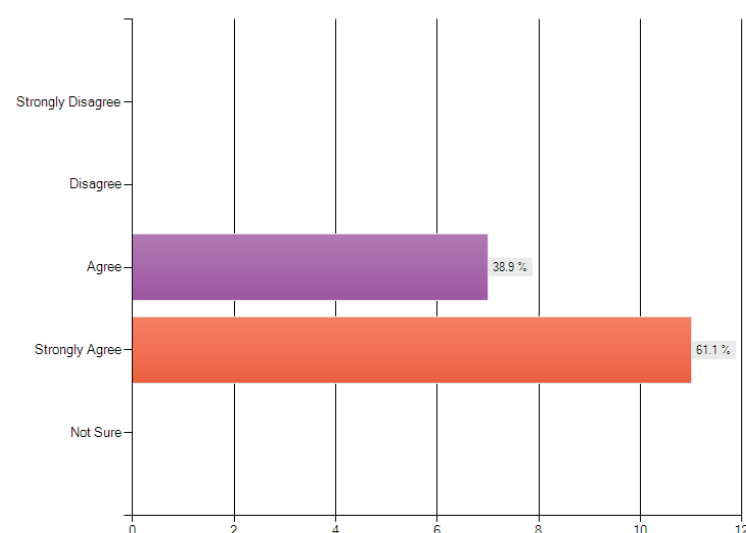




**Figure 56: Promotes respect, responsibility and fair play.**



**Figure 57: Promotes health and well-being.**



Within these positive results are certain areas of strength. For example, 72% (n=13) of Stakeholders strongly agreed that the Project facilitates young people's connection to their community, 83% (n=15) strongly agreed the Project helps to promote respect, responsibility and fair play amongst its participants, and 61% (n=11) strongly agreed that the Project promotes participant health and well-being.

The noteworthy concern raised in this aspect of the survey was 17% (n=3) of Stakeholders disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the Project allows for youth ownership. This issue may also account for the responses received regarding the Project being a good example of youth-adult partnership and the Project's capacity to incorporate ideas and feedback from its participants.

### 8.2.3 Short answer responses

Stakeholders were asked to provide short answers to a series of questions that reflected the core objective of the Project.

#### Development of leadership skills

Stakeholders were asked an open question about their view regarding the ways in which the Project helps its participants to develop leadership skills.

13 Stakeholders responded to this question. The answers received were positive and can be categorised in two themes:

##### a) Personal experiential learning

*Introduction to and experiential learning about complex leadership ideas and theories. Leadership story-telling by experienced and successful people.*

*The program deepens the knowledge of young leaders through examples, role models, experiences in both program and community settings, individual reflection and peer feedback.*

##### b) Relational connections

*Enables them to connect with other young people in their community and surrounding communities.*

*Provides with experiences they wouldn't usually get and brings them in contact with other young leaders so they can share experiences and learn from other youth in a similar position.*

#### Contribution to community

Stakeholders were asked an open question about how, in their opinion, the Project supports participants' contributing to their community.

13 Stakeholders responded to this question. The answers received were affirmative and can be categorised in two themes:

##### a) Developing personal skills/capacity

*Provide confidence that they can be active in their community and support others.*

*Through awareness of their local area and working locally.*

*Creating an atmosphere to want to develop themselves and their own community.*

##### b) Community Leadership Project

*It supports the Young Leaders to be an active part of the community by assessing what the gaps are and finding out how these can be addressed.*

*Provides experiences to connect with community programs and establishes opportunities and encouragement to design and deliver community initiatives.*

### Main benefits for young leaders

Stakeholders were asked an open question about what they perceived to be the main benefits of the Project for its participants.

12 Stakeholders responded to this question. The answers received were affirmative and can be categorised in two themes:

#### a) Growth and development

*It is pitched at a maturity level above the age group which has facilitated individual growth. It has provided opportunities for them to expand their thinking. It has role-modelled leadership and team membership.*

*The main benefit is the confidence gained by participating in the project. Young Leaders have grown more confident in themselves and realised they can achieve more if they really work hard.*

#### b) Unique experience

*Meeting new people, making new friends, experiences outside of the usual. Being part of a team/something important to them.*

*A unique program (sport as a hook), to grow and develop young people in a supportive setting. Rich experiences not readily available to young people (elite sport setting).*

*Reinforces positive messages and establishes an expectation that young people can lead, can make a difference.*

### Main benefit for the community

Stakeholders were asked an open question about what they perceived to be the main benefits of the Project for the community.

12 Stakeholders responded to this question. The answers received were favourable and can be categorised in three themes:

#### a) Generational change

*The development of young people to be the next generation of community leaders is critical for local communities in terms of local decision-making, the sustainability of community groups and impact on their peer group.*

*Longer term, it has the potential to develop leadership 'capital' in the West.*

*Future payoff is in emergence of community leadership at local level or beyond.*

#### b) Peer leadership

*Present payoff is about peer-level leadership in schools and clubs.*

*A new level of leaders that could influence their peers in the community.*

### c) Active engagement

*Young people who are engaged, wanting to support others and leading projects.*

*The main benefit for the community is that these young leaders feel connected to their community.*

*Further connects young people with the community and develops an understanding of civic responsibility.*

## Potential changes to the Project

Stakeholders were asked an open question about what future changes could be made to the design and/or delivery of the Project.

11 Stakeholders responded to this question. A range of responses was received and categorised in one main theme with 3 sub-themes:

### a) Planning

#### i. Recruitment

*The project needs to build on its current success and target more girls in the community.*

*Enhanced recruitment/selection of participants.*

*Although the program targets all youth, disadvantaged youth are unlikely to get involved due to issues with transport.*

#### ii. Delivery time

*The program trialled in 2013 involved a lot of contact hours and will benefit from being streamlined.*

*Considering the available human resources and contribution capacity by all project partners, reduce the number of contact hours and prioritise content to be delivered.*

*Make the sessions shorter (rather than 9-5) and then add more sessions if need be.*

#### iii. Council alignment

*Some alignment of the Council session material may help build further on the shared experience of the young people as citizens of the West.*

*Improve integration of the Community Leadership Project with local Council objectives and other activities.*

## 8.3 Stakeholder interviews

The individual interviews provide insight into the experiences of Stakeholders involved in The Whitten Project.

### 8.3.1 Sample

One representative from each of the participating City Councils was interviewed (n=5). One member of staff from the Western Bulldogs Club and one Cadet also contributed to this section of the evaluation.

### 8.3.2 Interview responses

#### Roles

All individuals participating in the interviews had direct contact with The Project. Council staff roles varied across managerial or co-ordinator assignments within Council services. The Western Bulldogs staff member played a central role in the development and delivery of the Project. The Cadet secured their role having been a successful candidate chosen via Victoria University's Career Professional Development initiative.

#### Purposes of the project

According to the interviewees, the purposes of the Project can be recognised in and across three levels of engagement observed in the 2013 delivery. Primarily, the individual young person was considered a main beneficiary of the Project. Several interviewees observed that a number of young people already displayed leadership qualities at the beginning of the program. What the Project achieved for its participants was to develop these skills and capacities further and direct their potential application to community-based interests. As such, the second level of engagement the Project sponsored was within a participating Council or defined community (e.g. sporting organisation/club). Here, the young person was exposed to aspects of local government and governance and encouraged to explore civic leadership through the Community Learning Project. The third level of engagement was highlighted by several of the Council staff commenting on the regional aspect of the Project. As one Council staff member acknowledged, it was *"the regional approach, all of the Councils coming together to develop a program"*, that supported the aims of promoting opportunity to Project participants. Another Council staff member noted the Project's capacity to reach across boundaries: *"We tend to be restricted by our borders and our budget and it's a football club, it attracts people, to bring that brand and those connections into play"*. The Council observations were mirrored in one comment made by the staff member from the Bulldogs who reported the club intention being to support links to community and Victoria University. As stated, the Project facilitated the showcasing of the club *"as part of the fabric of the Western region"*.

#### Comparison/contrast with other programs

The interviewees agreed that the Project supported ideals shared with other leadership-oriented youth programs e.g. personal development and building relationship skills. As the staff member from the Bulldogs said, *"from their development as people, leadership can come"*. But it was acknowledged that the Whitten Project was able to do more than this with its focus on team engagement. One Council staff member suggested this advantage stems from programming coming from a sporting context as opposed to one generated from the Arts sector.

The sporting context of the Project was also recognised by interviewees in the capacity the Western Bulldogs have to create a unique experience for the young people. One Council staff member commented: *"The Bulldogs can really bring value to the program because they have access to the speakers and Etihad experiences. This would cost a fortune if Council did it on their own"*. Similarly, another Council staff member noted: *"Access to and involvement by really accomplished people [...] The value for money of that, no individual organisation could have purchased that curriculum and those involved"*. Input from Bulldogs

staff such as AFL coach Brendon McCartney was considered “outstanding” (Council staff member). The Cadet interviewed suggested the Project offers “experiences their peers at school wouldn’t get access to” and offers “experiences other organisations can’t”.

Several staff recognised concerns emanating from their Councils regarding the Project target population. These included questions regarding value for the investment made e.g. the number of young people involved. There were also uncertainties regarding the capacity of the program to target disadvantaged young people e.g. commitment from families to engage over the length of the Project. A Council staff member suggested the Whitten Project may in fact target young people not exclusively from disadvantaged backgrounds but those likely to be in leadership roles in the Western region in the future:

*My personal opinion was that if these kids are going to be in leadership roles in the workplace or elected-type positions, or even just within voluntary extra-curricular type stuff – have some level of input into the way community takes shape – my goal was that they are introduced to ideas that require them to think about other people. So yes, you can represent what you think. Yes, you can advocate for your own views because you are a leader – that will happen. But how can you make sure that those that don’t represent themselves can be heard?*

### **Project strengths**

The interviewees nominated two themes in relation to the Project’s perceived strengths. The first theme recognised the project management of Nathan Bibby and the commitment from the Western Bulldogs. Nathan was described in the interviews as “an excellent program manager”, “fabulous”, “the right person” for the role, and the Project “lived and died” from his involvement. Council staff also recognised the high level of commitment the Western Bulldogs club dedicated to supporting the Project. One Council staff member commended “(t)he professionalism in the way they’ve gone about implementing [the Project]”. The “elite brand” of the Western Bulldogs was highlighted by several interviewees as being central to the program’s success.

The second theme considered a strength of the Project was its attention to and capacity for developing “transferable skills” with the young people. As the Cadet interviewee observed, the elite sportspeople involved as presenters in the Project focussed their talks on the types of skills they saw as applicable across a variety of life contexts and not simply those pertaining to sporting arenas. An example was given involving one young female participant recognised as belonging to a culturally and linguistically diverse community. Without previous knowledge of or experience with Australian Rules Football, the Bulldogs staff member reported her family were initially unsure if a program situated within a sporting club would distract their daughter from her academic responsibilities. As the Bulldogs staff member observed, “there are different ways of getting balance in your life”. The Cadet interviewed said that, as the program progressed, the young person was able to “join the dots” between what she was exposed to in the Project and her own life. An example of this was suggested to be the young person becoming more confident in public situations.

### **Future developments**

Recruitment was nominated by several interviewees as being an area for improvement in future delivery of the program. One Council staff member suggested the program “started behind the eight ball” because of the short period of time available between collective endorsement and the beginning of the Project. Another Council staff member acknowledged “recruitment didn’t go well” and related this to the short lead-in time and the Project being new to the community. The member of staff from the Western Bulldogs

confirmed that if the Project was to continue in 2014, the most significant change would occur around recruitment, suggesting this process could be used as part of the orientation of potential participants to the Project's objectives.

Another area highlighted for potential improvement was planning around the Community Leadership Project (CLP). Although each of the interviewees acknowledged that this aspect of the program had turned out to be a valuable learning experience for all involved, the CLP did not begin flawlessly. As one Council staff member suggested, *"we didn't get time to workshop [the CLP] ahead of time"*. Another Council staff member advocated the program *"build in more of a touch base for the kids on the community project [because] the community projects themselves didn't really get happening early enough"*. The link between Project sessions delivered and the CLP were also perceived as requiring development: *"I think [the CLP] needs to be looked at like a component of the Project but not this thing that feels like homework"* (Council staff member).

### Other observations

A number of other themes were raised in the interviews. These included:

- Consideration around the length of the Project and number of sessions;
- An exploration of partnerships with other sporting organisations and sporting club e.g. netball, soccer, etc.
- Acknowledgement that the 2013 running of the Whitten Project should be considered a "pilot" and improvements would occur in tandem with other program developments.

## 8.4 Summary

*As a Council, the return on investment is greater for us in a program like this where there is sustained activity over time that builds connectivity and strong, enduring relationships between the young leaders, the Council and their local community. A program that touches more young people but for a one-off activity does not sustain any lasting relationship with Council and community. The sustained activity in this program showed the young people that leadership was not about being the loudest as you might get in a more superficial program. This program allows young people to develop and practice a complex range of leadership skills that are becoming an essential part of who these young people are and shaping their futures in a very positive way (Interview with Council staff member).*

The results from the Stakeholder survey and interviews offer positive perspectives on the value and impact of The Whitten Project on participant leadership development and community involvement. The results show a high level of satisfaction with the Project core objective. Stakeholders valued the experiential nature of learning the Project provided. Development of personal skills was considered central to the outcomes of the Project. Several Stakeholders raised interest in seeing changes to the Project involving recruitment, total number of sessions and Council collaborations.

Two important issues were highlighted in the responses given by Stakeholders. The first involves clarification around the Whitten Project's target population. As a number of Council-based respondents reported, the extended nature of the program contributed to developing more robust outcomes for the participants. Questions were however raised regarding Council's uncertainty whether the Project was intended to involve participants from disadvantaged backgrounds. Deliberation over this issue will help to further concretise the purpose and objectives of Councils involvement with the program. This issue connects to the second point raised in a number of responses. It was suggested that collaboration between Councils and the Western Bulldogs provides greater opportunity than any individual Council could achieve on its own. This is both a situated observation and potentially a theme for the future of regionally oriented collaborations, in this instance, in support of the Whitten Project. In effect, acknowledging that collaboration will pragmatically achieve more than segregated actions undertaken by individual partners.



Cooperation between the Whitten Project team and local Councils is to be highly commended. This report has evaluated The Whitten Project across key areas including selection, content and delivery, and participant development. Findings for each area are summarised below.

## **Selection & Participation**

The project was successful in attracting 9 girls and 33 boys to participate. The ratio of more than three boys to every girl suggests a gender imbalance that should be considered if this program continues. Some clarification is required around the Project's target population in terms of whether it intends to involve participants from disadvantaged backgrounds. Of the 11 activity sessions held by the Whitten Project team, 93% (38/42) of young people attended over 50% of the sessions. Almost three-quarters of participants (74%) attended at least 8 of the 11 sessions. This indicates very high engagement levels and retention of participants in the project.

## **Content & Delivery**

The analysis of the Project curriculum highlights several pertinent factors for future consideration. The unique involvement and contribution made by sports leaders makes the Whitten Project distinctive amongst youth development programs. The collaborations between Councils and the Western Bulldogs provides greater opportunity than any individual Council could achieve on its own. The flexibility of those involved in delivering the Project contributes to its achievements. Areas for further consideration also include: i) clarification of learning outcomes across the curriculum; ii) within Project sessions, explicating connections between learning objectives and outcomes; and iii) potential reordering of sessions to aide the development of participant learning. The curriculum adheres to the core objective of the Project and generally promotes its key elements.

## **Participant development**

Data from the young leaders shows they perceived several benefits in terms of their learning and personal development from participating in The Whitten Project. They articulated what they learned during the course of the project and how they will apply it in various spheres of their lives. The young leaders were very positive about their experience of the Project. They appreciated the opportunities it provided and the contribution of those involved in its content and delivery.

Results from the parent survey offer a very positive perspective on the value and impact of the Whitten Project on their child's confidence, leadership development and community involvement. The results show a high level of satisfaction from those parents who responded to the survey with the content and delivery of the Project.

Results from the Stakeholder survey offer a positive perspective on the value and impact of The Whitten Project on participant leadership development and community involvement. The results show a high level of satisfaction with the Project core objective. Stakeholders valued the experiential nature of learning the Project provided. Development of personal skills was considered central to the outcomes of the Project. Several Stakeholders raised interest in seeing changes to the Project involving recruitment, total number of sessions and Council collaborations.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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From the perspectives of those involved with the Whitten Project, the pilot has been very successful. Building on these achievements, the report contains a number of recommendations for future delivery:

## **Selection - it is recommended that:**

- In seeking to increase girls' participation levels, consideration be given to broadening the nomination pool to include a wider range of local sporting clubs inclusive of sports that have greater female participation such as basketball and netball.
- Potential barriers to participation are identified and addressed in particular for young leaders experiencing disadvantage.
- Communication about the aims, content and operation of the Project are made clearer during the nomination process and that, in particular, the expectations around physical activities and engagement with sport are clarified.

## **Content – it is recommended that:**

- Each session to have a session plan that explicitly states the goal/s of the session tying these to a set of learning outcomes in turn connected to the Project's core objective and key elements.
- The assessment of the learning outcomes is made explicit.
- The Steering Committee explore connections to the Victoria Certificate for Applied Learning (VCAL) and possible accreditation of aspects of the Project.
- The Council and 'whole group' sessions are constructively aligned.

## **Delivery – it is recommended that:**

- The preparation and direction provided for session facilitators is made clearer in the program documentation.
- Increase the time spent on participatory and interactive learning activities during the sessions.
- Streamline the overall contact hours focusing on the core objectives, aligning the council and whole group sessions and scaffolding participant learning throughout.

## **Participant Development – it is recommended that:**

- Youth ownership of the Project is promoted through their involvement in the design and delivery of the curriculum.
- Introduce data collection tools that measure participant development over the progress of the Project.
- Further exploration of participation data to better understand the causes behind 'family' reasons for missing sessions.

## **Data collection – it is recommended that:**

- An evaluation team is involved at an earlier stage of operation to guide data collection processes and enhance stakeholder and participant engagement in the evaluation.
- That attendance data and content alignment for all activities including both the whole groups sessions

and Council sessions offered by LGAs be collected and centralised for better tracking of achievement and participation against all key performance indicators.

- Session feedback forms are made anonymous and a consistent format is used throughout the Project to increase response rates and to enhance the rigour of the data.
- Session feedback is collected for the Council as well as 'whole group' sessions.

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