



ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals

ConnectGroups' Certificate IV Programs

Service Evaluation

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Introduction

Background

ConnectGroups currently funds two Certificate IV scholarship programs, one for a complete Certificate IV in Community Services, and one for seven units of competency towards a Certificate IV in Mental Health. The scholarships are only available to leaders of Support Groups that are affiliate members of ConnectGroups. The Certificate IV classes all take place once a month in a small, group setting on ConnectGroups' premises.

The Community Services program began in 2012 as six units of competency towards a Certificate IV. A service evaluation of the program was undertaken in 2016, and based on the evaluation's recommendations, a seventh unit and a pathway to complete all fifteen units were added to the program in 2017. The Community Services program has thus completed four cycles as a six unit program, and three cycles as a seven/fifteen unit program. The Mental Health program launched in 2019 and has thus only completed one cycle so far.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate whether post-2016 cycles of ConnectGroups' Community Services and Mental Health programs are (1) increasing capacity in the Support Groups sector by upskilling its leaders and facilitators to better support their members; and (2) responding to State government reform and contributing to workforce development.

Alignment to state government strategy

Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy (published by the WA State Training Board in 2019)

The state government's *Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy* outlines the need for a skilled workforce to support the community services, disability services, aged care and allied health sectors. The document explains that the demand for services within these sectors is expected to increase in Western Australia in the coming years, meaning the demand for workers across these sectors is also expected to rise. Specifically, the document emphasizes that the number of support workers in Western Australia needs to double between 2019 and 2024. Furthermore, medical and technological advances and changes to patient care will require constant skill development for both new and existing workers.

The government states that the vocational education and training (VET) sector must providing training to meet these needs. However, the government acknowledges that the cost of VET is a major barrier for students and existing workers, and thus promotes the development of opportunities to make the VET sector more accessible.

ConnectGroups' Community Services and Mental Health programs are both highly accessible opportunities that aim to develop skilled workers in the community services sector. The programs are made accessible through the use of full scholarships, minimized time commitments and small class

environments. Upskilling Support Group leaders contributes to the abilities of these leaders to contribute to the community services sector, especially given the increasing need for support workers. This report intends to show the extent to which ConnectGroups' programs contribute to workforce development in these sectors.

Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategic Framework 2018-2025 (published by the WA Mental Health Commission in 2018)

The *Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategic Framework* was written as a guide for the planning and development of the mental health and alcohol and other drugs (AOD) workforce, aiming to grow an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce to deliver quality mental health and AOD services in Western Australia. The framework's principles include workforce planning and development across the service spectrum, a flexible and responsive workforce configuration, and equity and respect for diversity. Similarly, the framework lists one of its priorities as supporting the current and future workforce to deliver quality, culturally appropriate, secure services.

ConnectGroups' recently-implemented Mental Health program aims to contribute to the development of the mental health and AOD workforce through the upskilling of Support Group leaders. The program adds to Western Australia's capacity to enact workforce planning and development across the service spectrum, and the program has the ability to be flexible and responsive in its delivery and content. The program also meets the strategic framework's emphasis on respect for diversity and cultural inclusivity by including a unit dedicated to working with diverse people.

This report examines the extent to which ConnectGroups' Mental Health program contributes to the development of the mental health and AOD workforce.

Methodology

This report analyses the results of two surveys sent out in March of 2020. The surveys were made using the SurveyMonkey online platform, then emailed out to participants. Follow-up calls were made the next week to check whether participants had completed the survey, and if not, they were able to complete it over the phone.

The first survey was sent to all participants who have completed the Certificate IV in Community Services at ConnectGroups since 2017, and the second survey was sent to all participants who have participated in the seven units towards a Certificate IV in Mental Health at ConnectGroups in 2019. The wording of the Mental Health program survey was changed slightly to reflect its differences to the Community Services program, but was mostly kept very similar to the Community Services program survey, to allow for comparison between the two. Furthermore, some of the questions from both surveys were mapped on to questions from the 2016 survey, in order for changes over time to be noted in this report.

The surveys contained a demographics section, a Support Group section, an employment section, and a job role section. Only participants who indicated that they were employed in sectors relevant to their

Community Services or Mental Health qualifications were taken on to the job role section, while other participants skipped this section.

The pool of participants surveyed is summarized below:

Certificate IV program	Cycles surveyed	# Units	# Participants	# Survey respondents
Community Services	2017, 2018, 2019	15	27	21*
Mental Health	2019	7	5	3

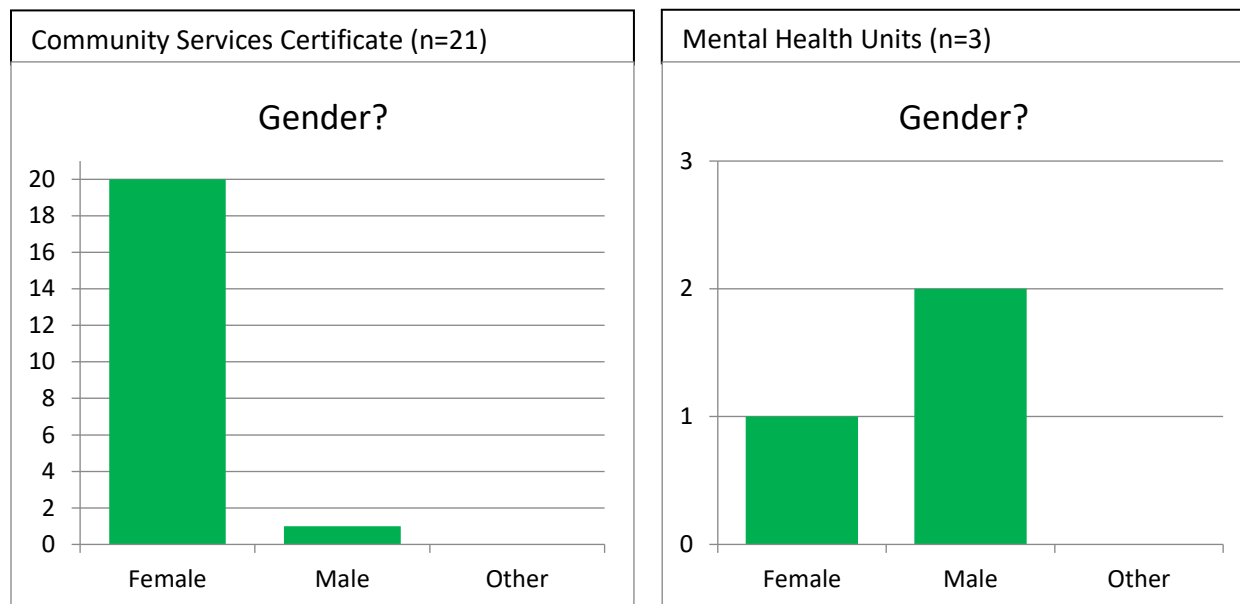
*One respondent only completed the first two questions.

The Community Services program survey had a strong response rate and a good sample size. The Mental Health program has had only a single cycle and fewer participants than the Community Services program, contributing to a very small sample size. This makes it more difficult to identify trends and draw strong conclusions from the Mental Health program survey data, but it is still useful to draw some preliminary conclusions.

Analysis of Survey Data

Demographics Section

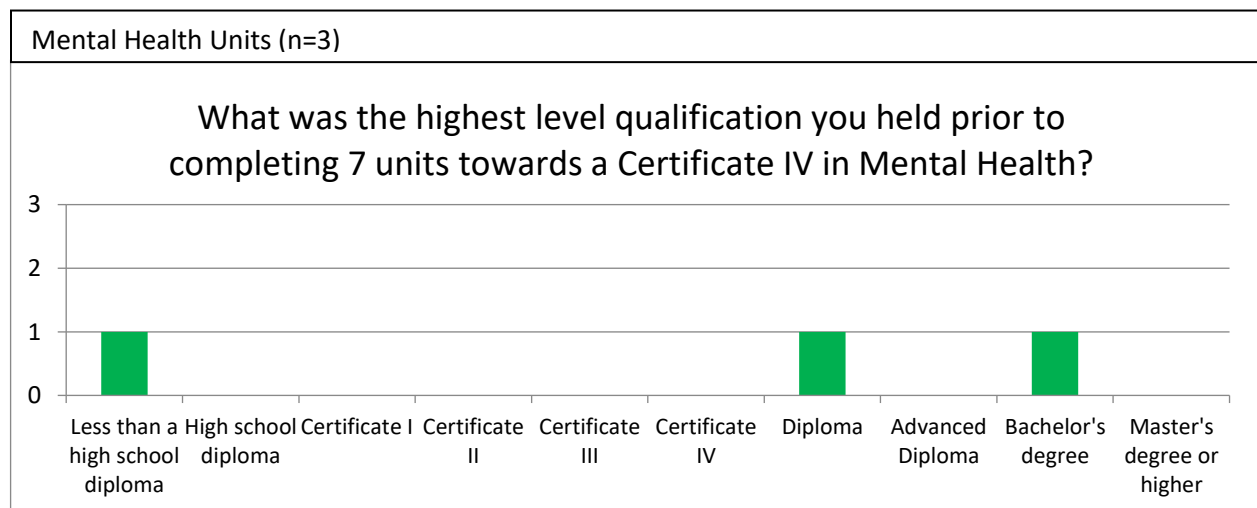
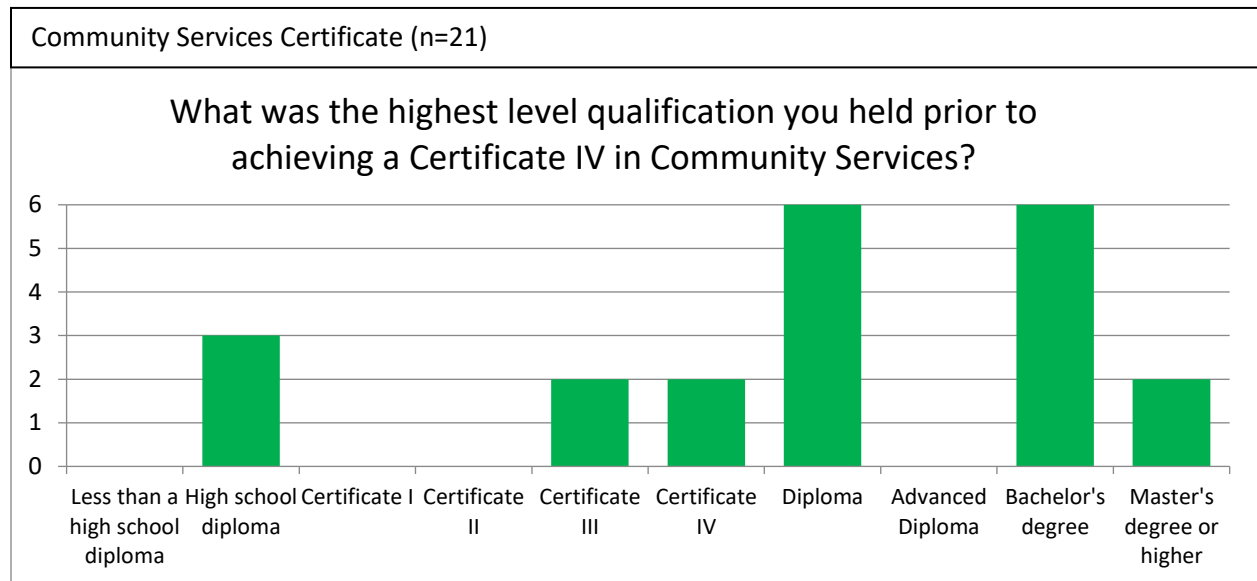
Question 1



The participants who completed the Community Services Certificate were overwhelmingly female. This links to the wider trend of female overrepresentation in volunteering positions and in the community services sector, with women making up 71.7% of non-manager roles in the community and personal service sector in 2017 and 2018.¹ This trend was not reflected in the Mental Health Units, though this may simply be due to the low number of responses.

¹ Volunteering Australia (2016), https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/giving_australia_2016_fact_sheet_-_individual_volunteering_accessible.pdf

Question 2

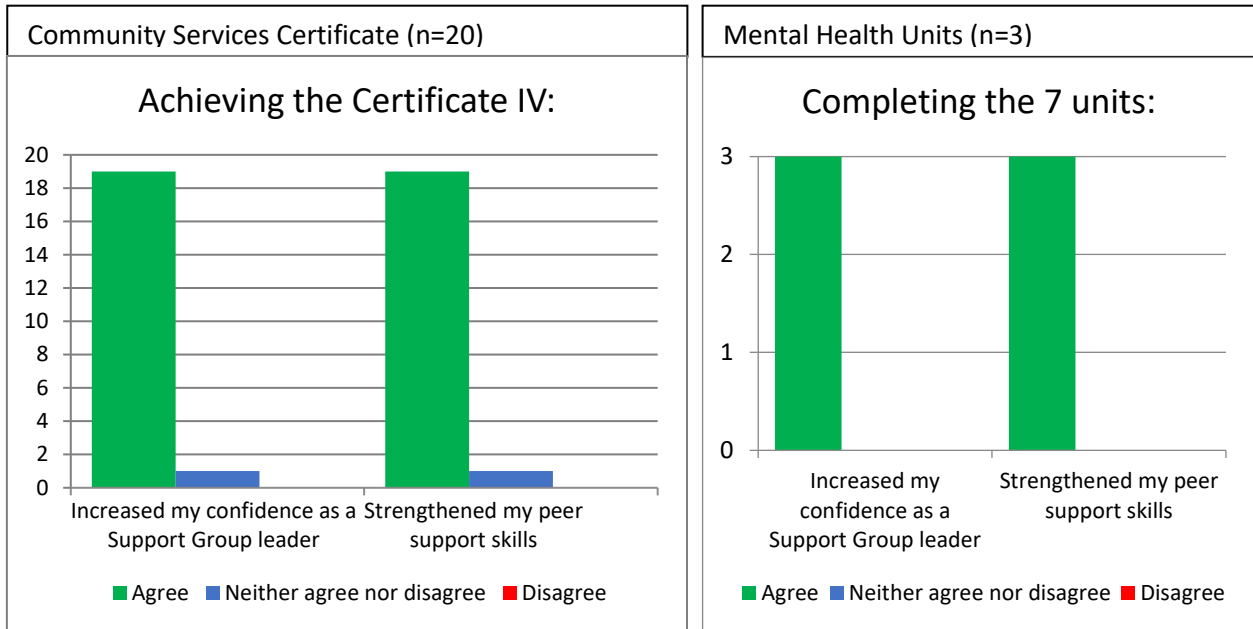


Among both sets of participants, tertiary qualifications were popular. The fact that these participants went on to complete the Community Services or Mental Health programs at ConnectGroups suggest that their prior tertiary qualifications weren't related to or didn't fully provide them with the skills needed to lead a Support Group or work in the community services or mental health sectors. This demonstrates that the ConnectGroups Certificate programs are addressing important gaps in Support Group leaders' knowledge, and contributing to the development of a skilled workforce in related sectors. In future surveys, it could be interesting to find out more about why so many people with tertiary qualifications are completing further qualifications through ConnectGroups.

The results from this question also showed that several participants' highest qualification was a high school diploma or lower, demonstrating that ConnectGroups' Community Services and Mental Health programs feel accessible to people who are new to tertiary education and who may have been out of formal education systems for some time.

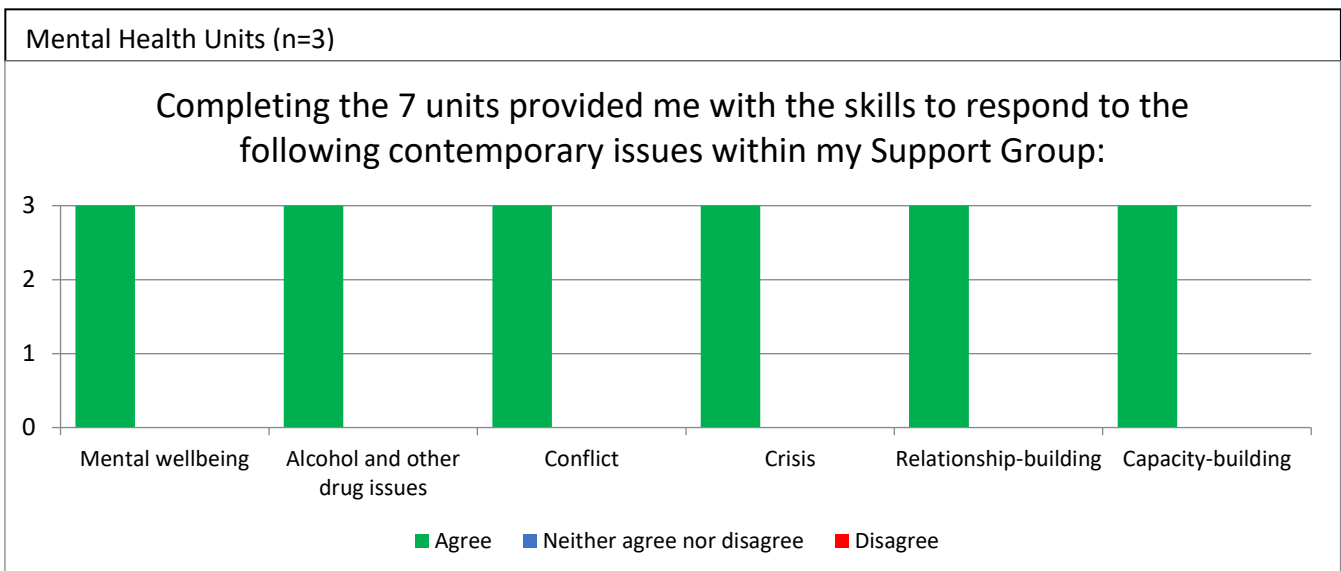
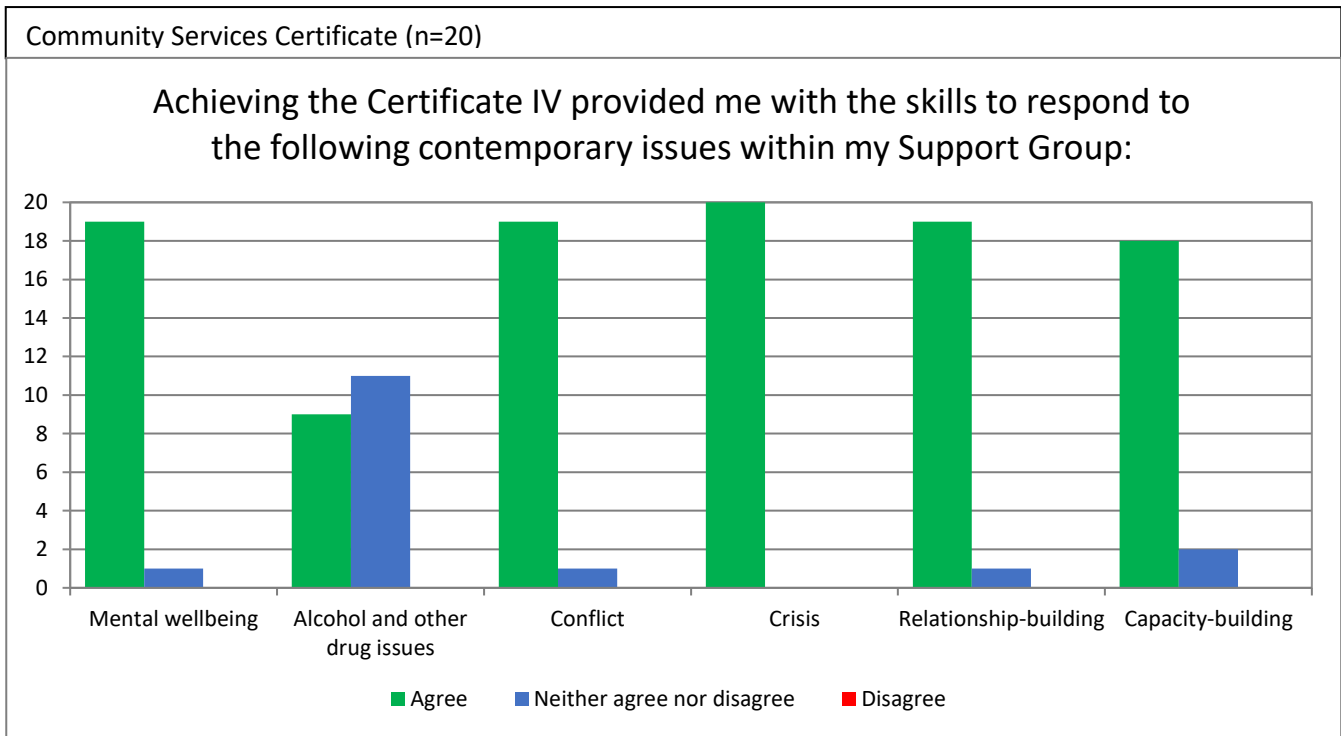
Support Group Section

Question 3



The results for Question 3 were overwhelmingly positive, demonstrating that both the Community Services and the Mental Health programs improve confidence and peer support skills within Support Group leadership roles.

Question 4

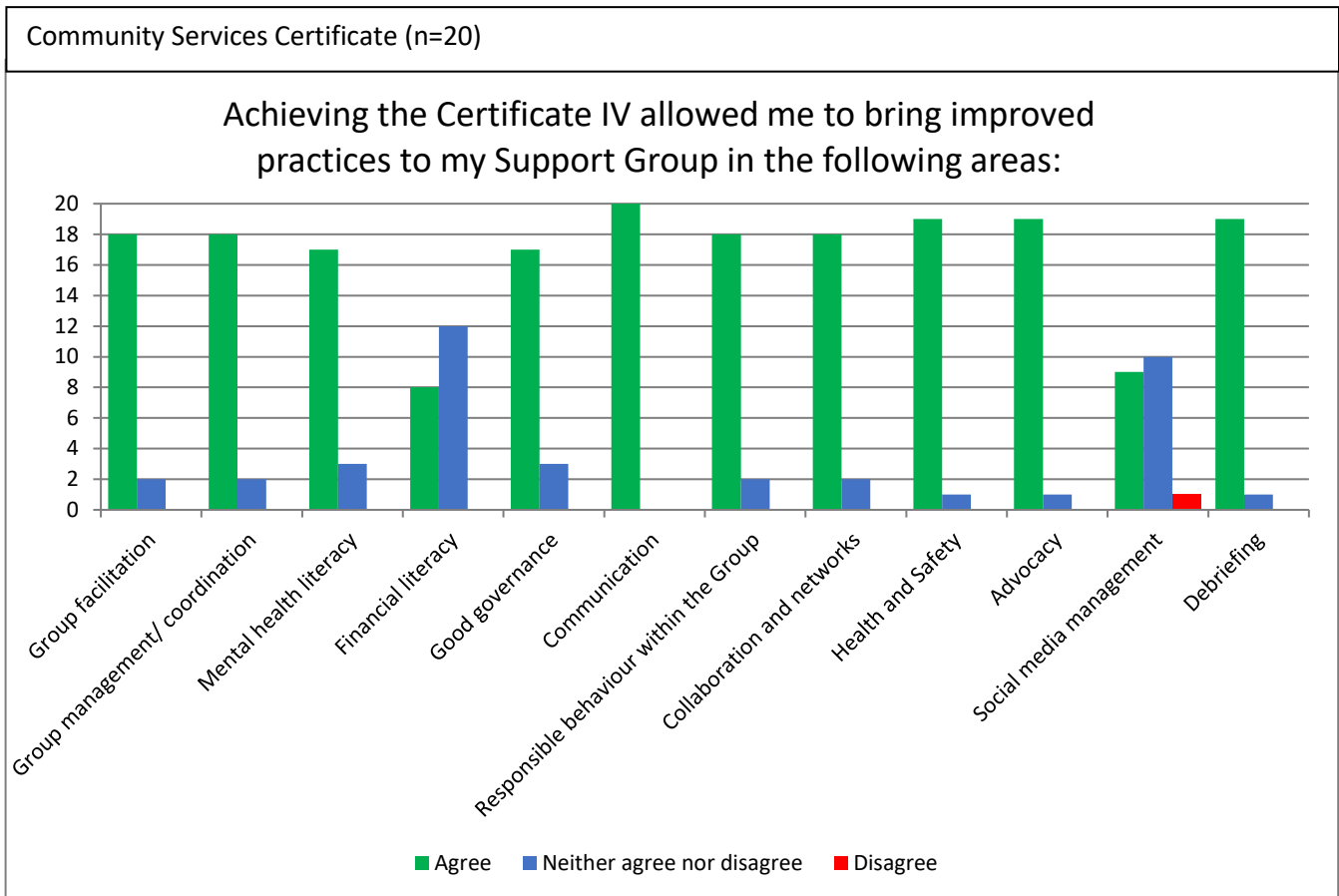


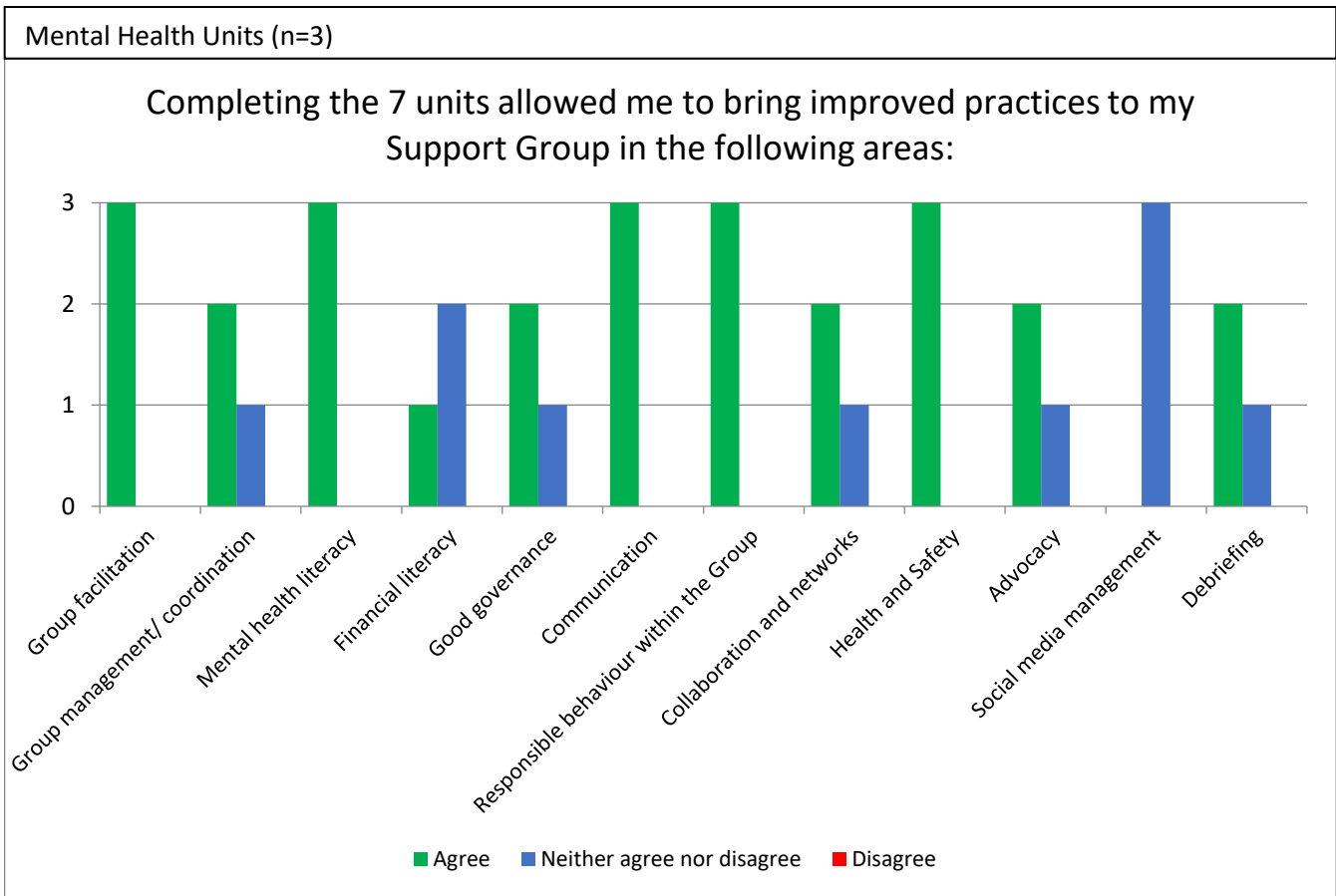
The Community Services program is shown to have covered “crisis” excellently, as well as covering mental wellbeing, conflict, crisis, relationship-building and capacity-building appropriately. The Mental Health program participants demonstrated that all the contemporary issues listed were addressed very effectively in the program.

However, a majority of participants in the Community Services program neither agreed nor disagreed that the Certificate had given them the skills to respond to AOD issues. While there is no unit within the

Community Services Certificate IV program that focuses specifically on AOD issues, it is definitely relevant to several of the Certificate’s units. To better equip Support Group leaders to deal with possible AOD issues within their Groups, this topic could be given more time and emphasis within existing Community Services units.

Question 5



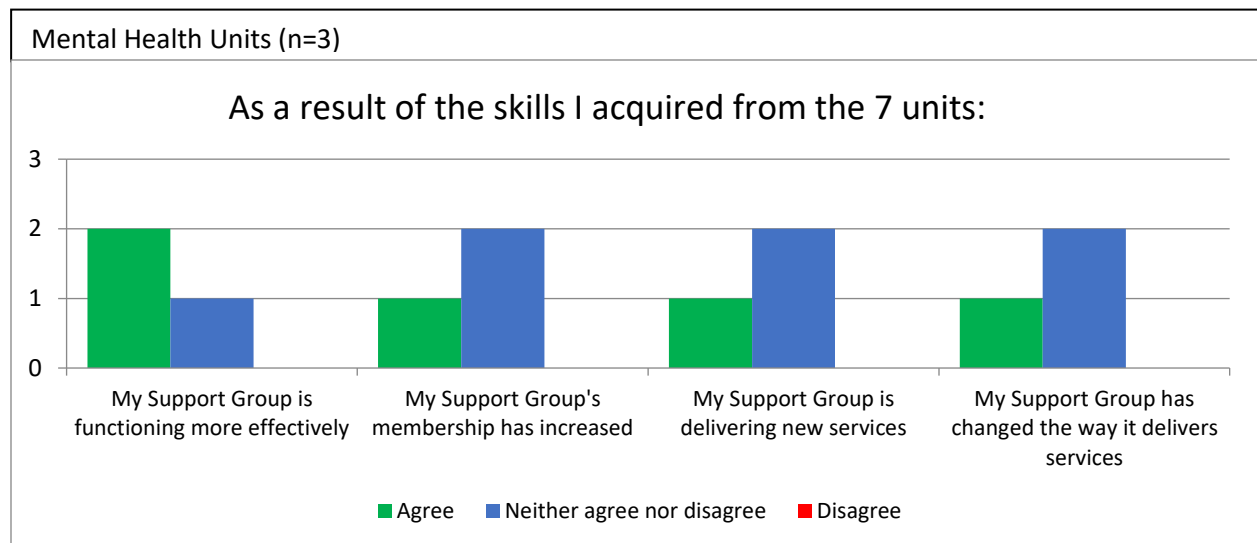
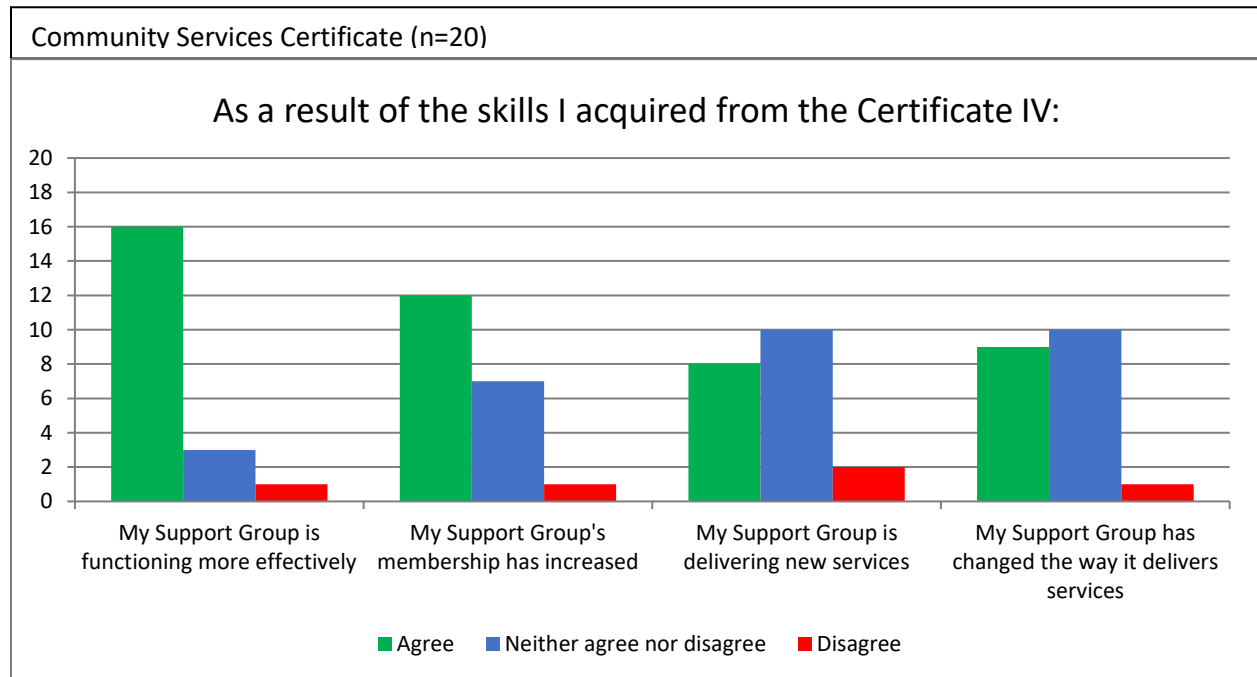


The Community Services program did well in helping participants bring improved practices to their Support Groups in most areas assessed. There is perhaps a little room for improvement in areas of mental health literacy and good governance, but the main areas where participants reported difficulties in bringing improved practices were financial literacy and social media management. Again, neither of these areas have their own unit within the program, but they are relevant to several existing units.

The Mental Health program did well in teaching group facilitation, mental health literacy, communication, responsible behaviour, and health and safety, but had proportionately more “neither agree nor disagree” in the remaining areas than the Community Services program. Participants in the Mental Health program also had the most difficulty bringing improved practices in areas of financial literacy and social media management. This is perhaps to be expected, as the Mental Health program has fewer units and a narrower focus than the Community Services program.

For most Support Groups, financial literacy is an incidental requirement, rather than a constant and essential skill. Social media management is also of varying relevance to different Support Groups, but online communication skills and practices are only going to become more prevalent as technology continues to develop. Learning basic social media skills could be especially useful for Support Group leaders wishing to appeal to young people or wishing to be more inclusive of rural and remote populations. These social media skills could be integrated into the communications unit in the Certificate IV in Community Services.

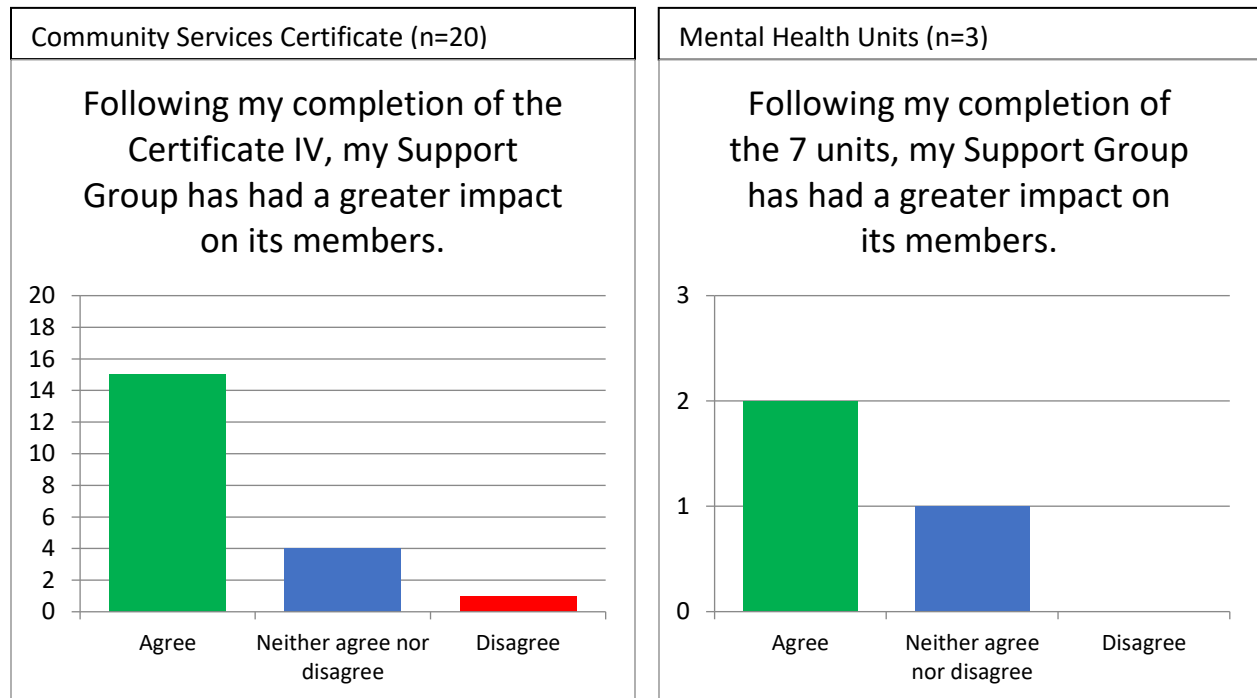
Question 6



These results show that 80 percent of the Community Services program participants believe their Support Groups are functioning more effectively as a result of the skills gained through the Certificate, which is excellent news. A majority of these participants have also seen a rise in their Support Group's membership. Furthermore, the majority of the Mental Health program participants also reported that their Support Groups are functioning more effectively as a result of their new skills. This clearly demonstrates that both programs are achieving one of their key aims: to improve Support Group functioning.

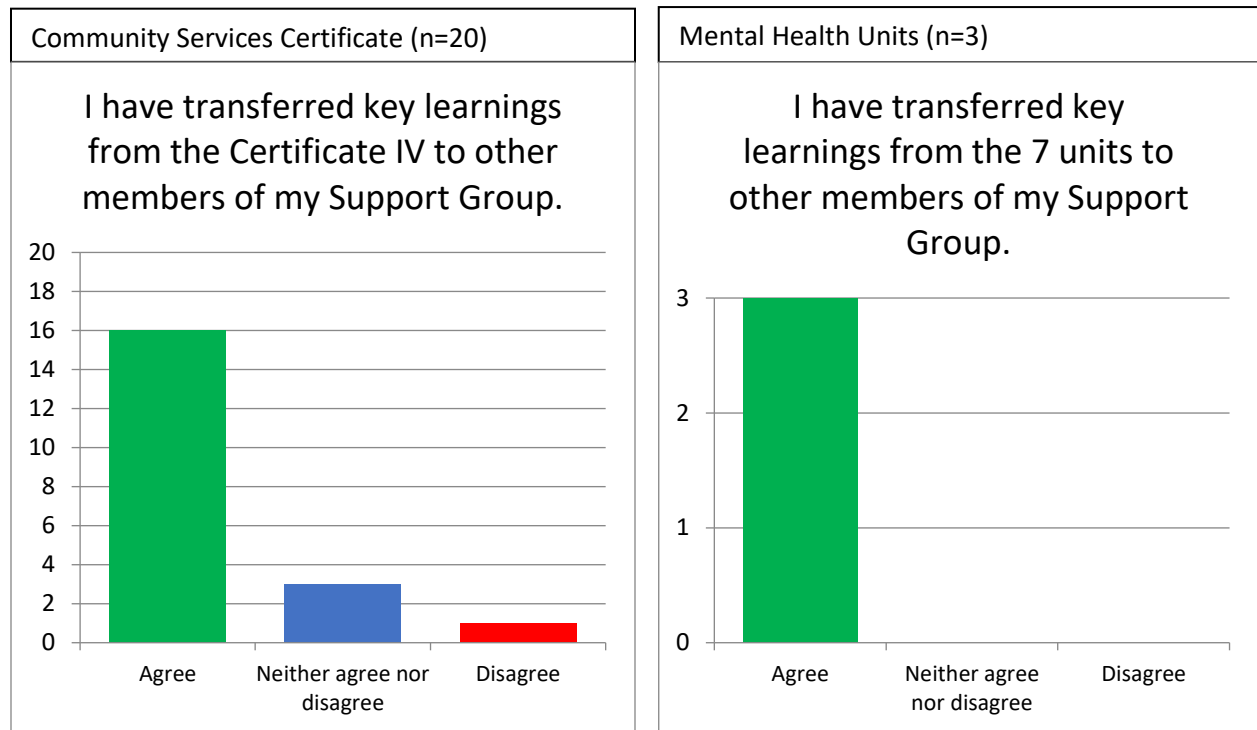
The rest of the results for Question 6 are a bit more ambiguous for both the Community Services and Mental Health programs. A majority of participants from both programs don't agree that their Support Groups are delivering new or changed services as a result of their new skills. While Question 5 demonstrated that participants are generally excelling at bringing new *practices* to their Support Groups, Question 7 shows that delivering new or changed *services* has proved trickier. This suggests that there may be a missing link in both programs between the acquirement of skills and practices, and the actual implementation of new or changed services.

Question 7



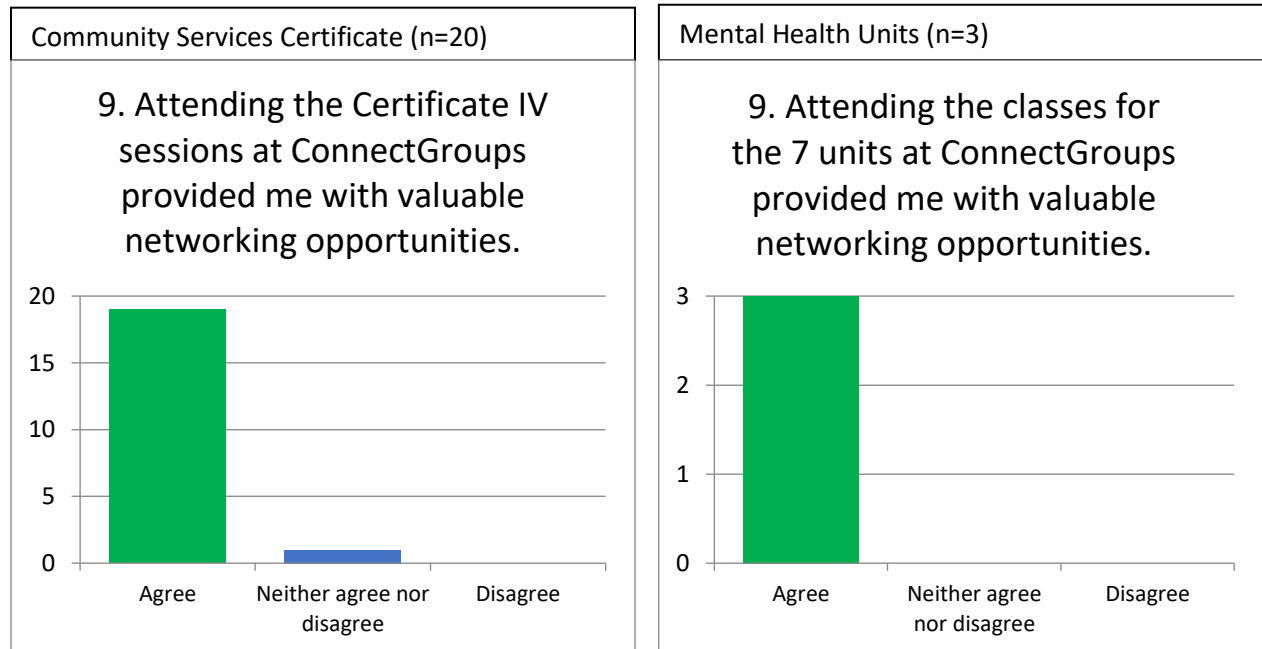
While this question yielded one “disagree” and a few “neither agree nor disagree” responses, it still demonstrates that the majority of participants have seen tangible improvements in their Support Groups since the completion of the Certificate IV programs. It is also possible that the lack of improvement seen by a few of the participants is due to events outside their control, which is something a few participants mentioned in their comments in Question 15.

Question 8



The results of this question are very positive, though they do show a little room for improvement in the Community Services program, in terms of ensuring that Support Group leaders know how to effectively transfer key learnings to other members of their Support Groups. Transferring these key skills ensures that all members are on the same page, and that Support Group leaders have well-trained backup leadership, contributing to the longevity of Support Groups.

Question 9

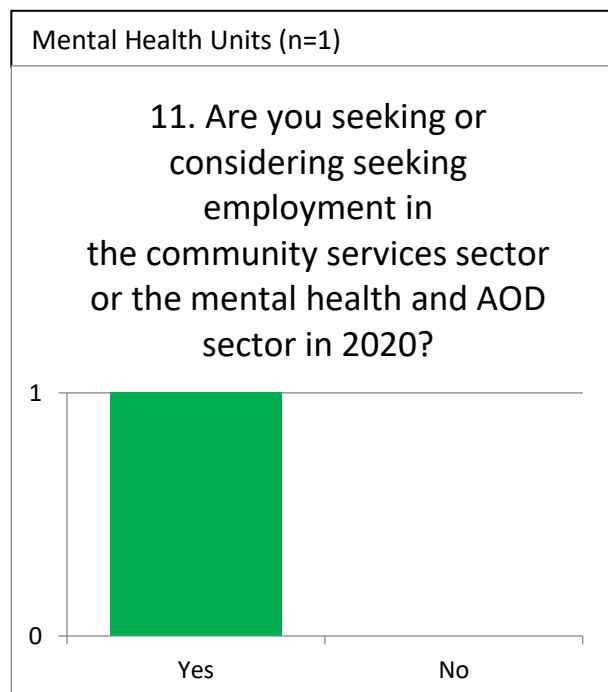
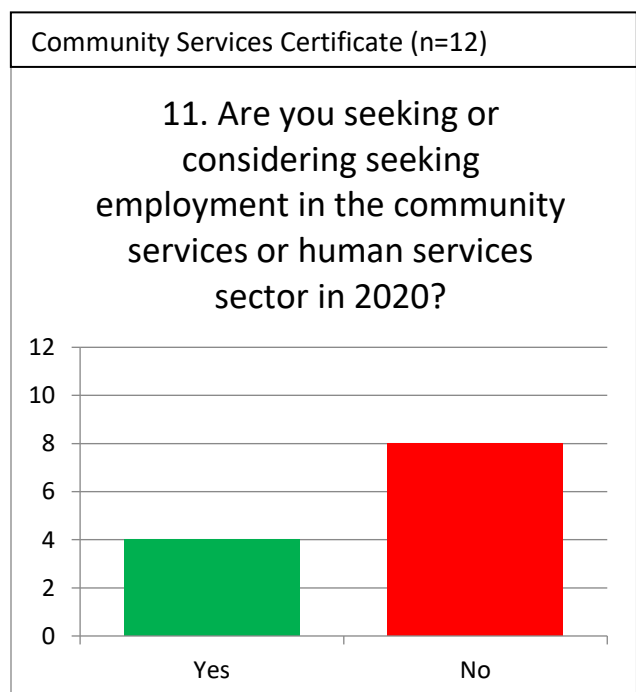
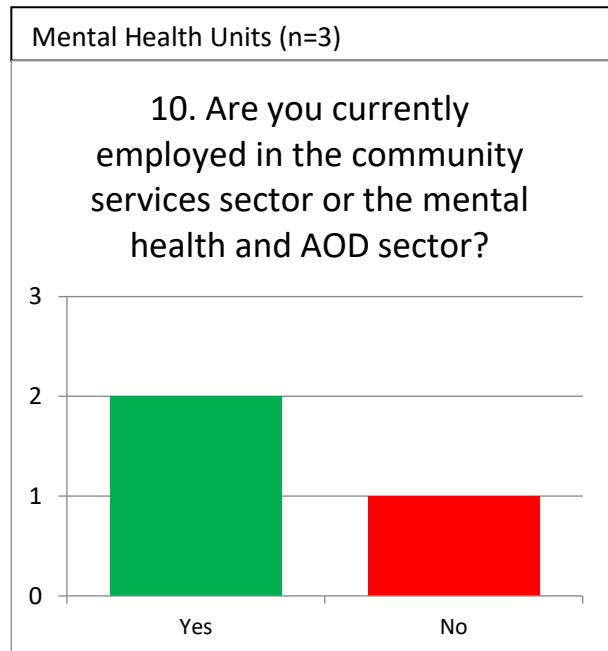


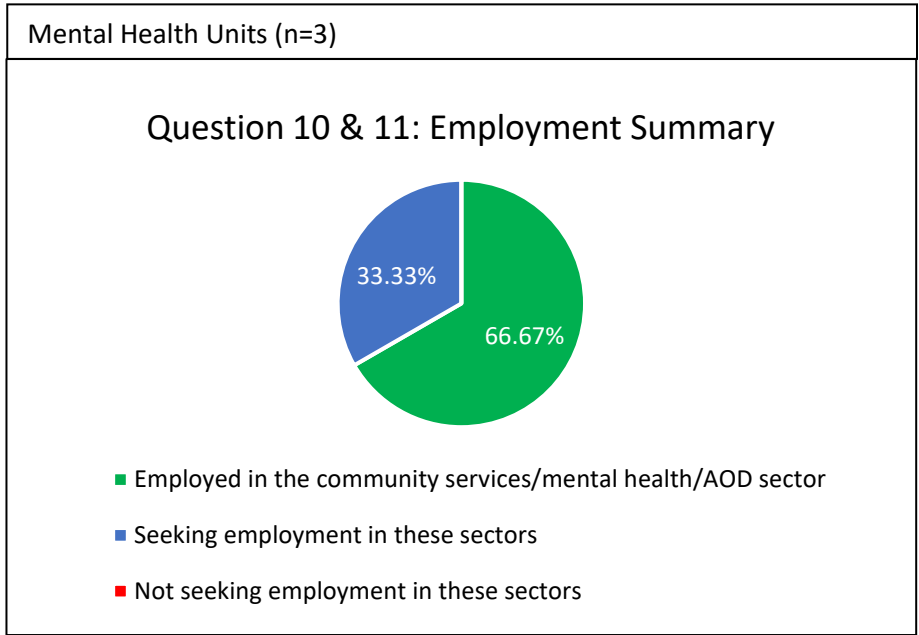
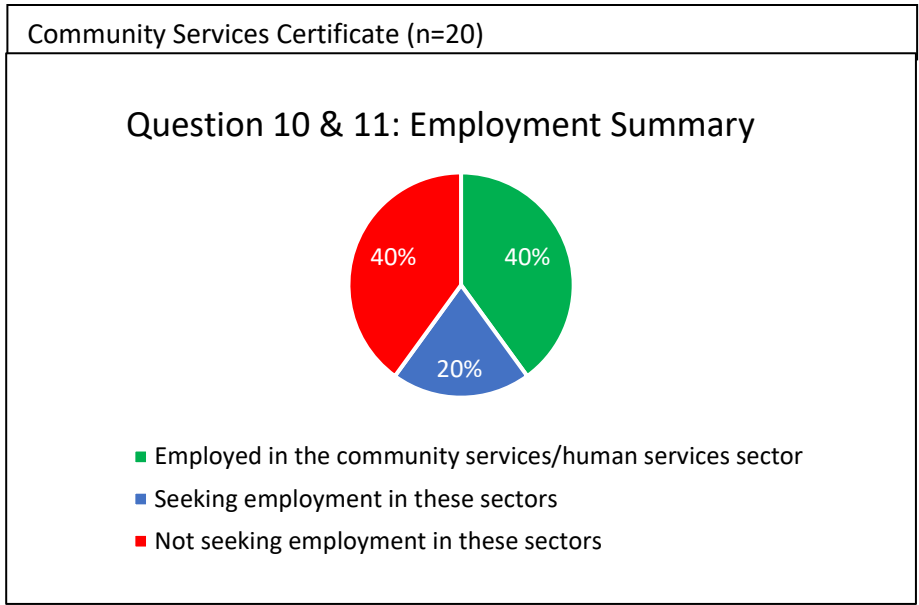
These results reinforce that the open and friendly environment ConnectGroups fosters through its Certificate IV programs is extremely effective at facilitating networking between Support Group leaders, a benefit that similar education pathways do not always have.

Employment Section

Question 10 and 11

These two questions will be discussed together, as participants who answered “No” to Question 10 were taken on to Question 11 to build on the information received in Question 10. These participants then skipped the job role section and were taken straight to the last question of the survey. Meanwhile, participants who answered “Yes” to Question 10 skipped Question 11 and were taken straight to the job role section.





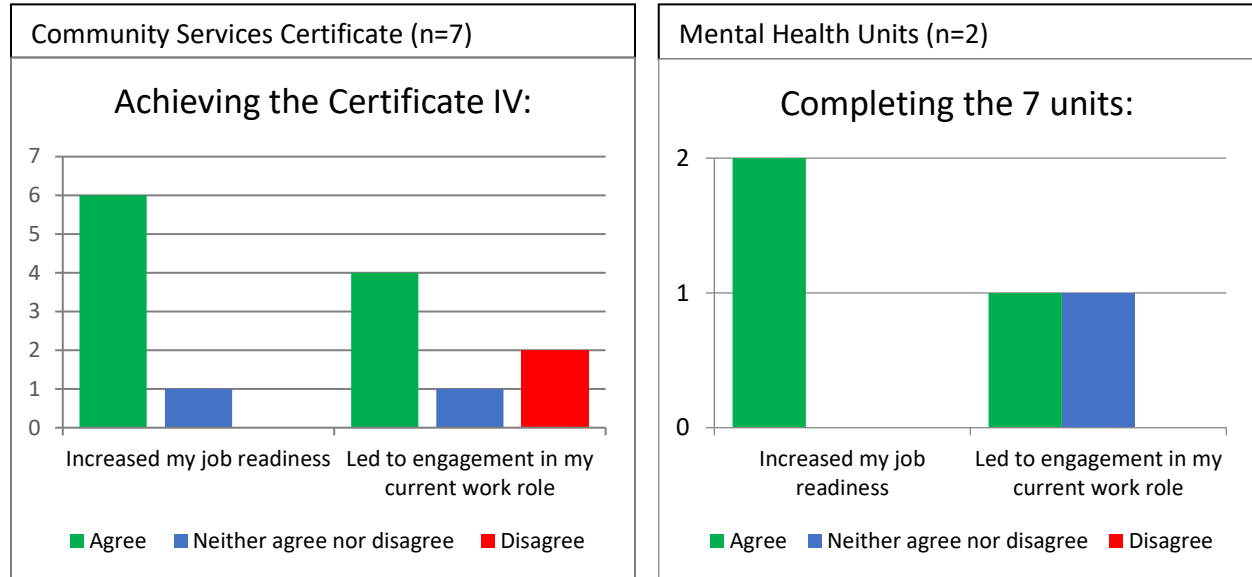
Question 10 and 11 together demonstrate that 60 percent of Community Services program participants and all of the Mental Health program participants are engaged in or are interested in being engaged in the sectors related to the programs. This clearly demonstrates that both programs are contributing to workforce development in their related sectors, which is a key purpose of the ConnectGroups' programs.

On the other hand, 40 percent of Community Services program responders are neither working in these related sectors, nor seeking employment in these sectors. This suggests that this significant portion of responders didn't complete the Certificate IV for employment purposes, but to improve their Support Group leadership and Support Group functioning.

Job Role Section

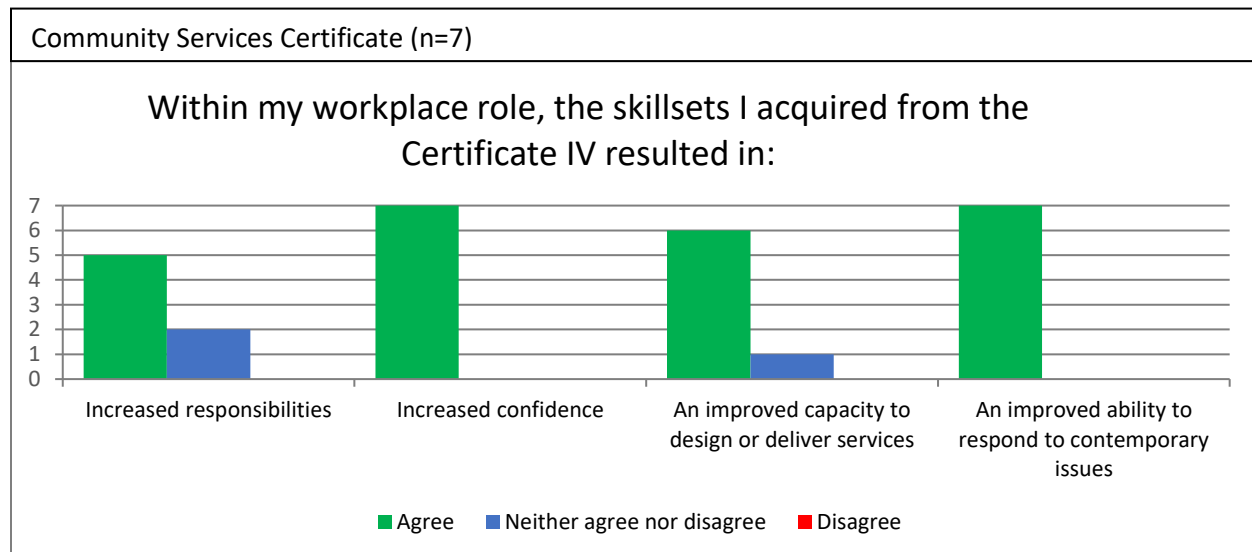
Participants were only taken to this section if they indicated in Question 10 that are employed in the community services/human services/mental health/AOD sector.

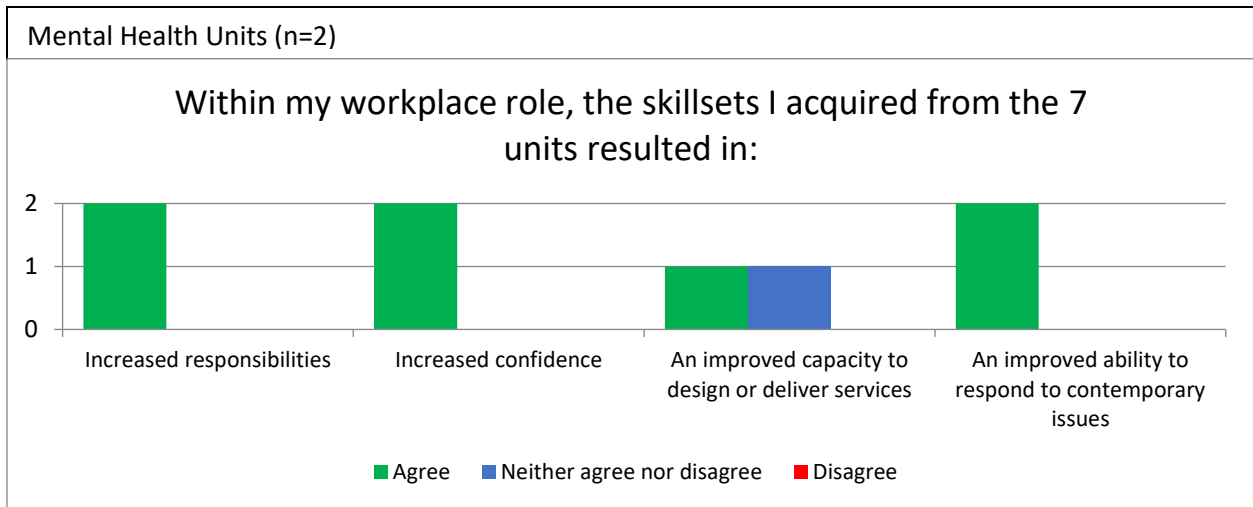
Question 12



These results show that participants from both programs overwhelmingly felt that the programs increased their job readiness, which achieves a key aim of ConnectGroups' programs by contributing to workforce development in related sectors. It is also excellent to see that five participants in total used their Community Services or Mental Health qualifications to achieve their current work role.

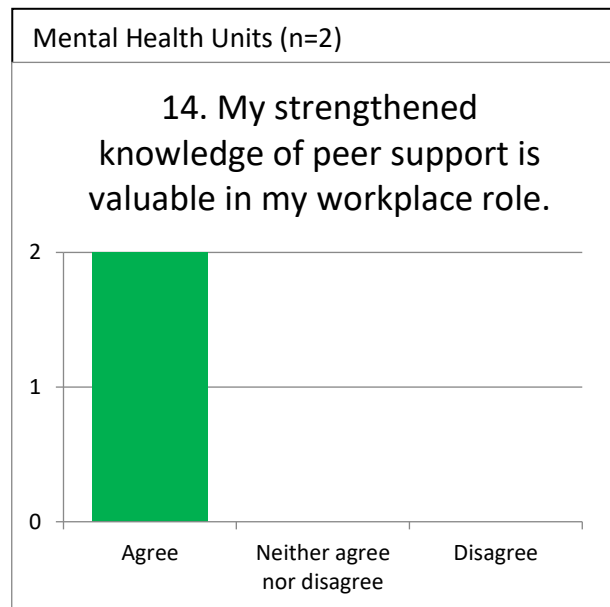
Question 13





These results are again very positive. Combined with Question 3 and Question 4 from the Support Group section of the survey, it is clear that both the Community Services and Mental Health programs have greatly improved participants' confidence and abilities to respond to contemporary issues in both the workplace and within Support Groups. However, when combined with Question 6, results still show that participants are struggling to translate their skills into new or changed *services* in both their work and Support Group roles. This suggests that the content of both programs needs to be linked more closely to practical improvements to service delivery within both Support Groups and the workplace.

Question 14



Question 14 delivers more strong results, further demonstrating the positive impact both Certificate IV programs are having in the community services, human services, mental health and AOD sectors.

Comment Section

Question 15

Question 11 and Question 14 took all participants here, to an open-ended, non-compulsory question. A few minor spelling and punctuation errors have been corrected for ease of reading, and a few key statements have been bolded. One comment and the name of a Support Group have been omitted to ensure participants' privacy.

Community Services Certificate (n=18)

Please enter any comments you have about the Certificate IV scholarship program.

Comments from surveys completed online:

*Lena was a brilliant mentor and I learned a great deal in the **supportive environment** provided by ConnectGroups. Thank you for the opportunity.*

*I found it very helpful and friendly and supportive and I am sure that it has been very helpful for me and those who I am supporting so thank you very much for the opportunity to do this study. **I really enjoyed the experiential learning.***

*I give my services for nothing. **Doing the Cert IV has enabled me to run our group more efficiently. There is no comparison between the group we had before and the group we have now.** Now it is much better - and still evolving.*

*This was a very useful training. **I have been able to use the skills I learned across both my volunteer work and paid work.** I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to do this certificate.*

*The certificate IV gave me more **confidence**. I'm so pleased I was part of the scholarship.*

*Having been given the opportunity to complete the Cert IV has given me much more confidence for my role as president of [my Support Group], and also in my role as a facilitator. I believe that I have gained more confidence and abilities which have **given me a better understanding of what is required for my roles within [my Support Group].** The areas that were covered such as building relationships, diversity, legal and ethical, rights of clients, mental health issues, planning group activities and meetings were so helpful for [my Support Group]. For myself I am so pleased that I had this opportunity to participate and found that I really did enjoy attending each session. **Our TAFE lecturer was excellent** and it was wonderful to meet others from various support groups.*

A wonderful experience and opportunity.

*This program helped me achieve so much and even though my support group is not running anymore **it has led to me working in the disability sector** and loving my job supporting others.*

*It was very well delivered and very useful. I have left that support group now, however I know **the skills will be useful wherever I go.***

*Thank you to ConnectGroups for offering this scholarship. **It has enhanced the way I work in our support group,** given new ideas, mechanisms to facilitate good group sessions and promote communication between members. **It has helped me grow as a support worker in my job.** And the **financial ease** of not having to fund it myself, when our industry is not paid the best was something that helped us also. Thanks once again.*

Overall it was a very enjoyable, informative course. There was lots of help and support along the way, thank you.

Notes from surveys completed over the phone:

<p><i>The participant thought the Certificate IV was fantastic and very useful, and they found ConnectGroups to be very accommodating. However, due to the participant's chronic illness, they said they had to spend four days in bed after each day at the Certificate IV class, and their worsening health led them to stop leading their Support Group shortly after completing the Certificate. They said that if they weren't unwell, they would be answering many questions in this survey differently and would be seeking employment in the community services or human services sector. They also mentioned that another member of their Support Group applied for the Certificate IV scholarship at ConnectGroups in order to be able to replace the participant as leader, but a second person from the same Support Group wasn't allowed to receive the same scholarship.</i></p>
<p><i>The participant emphasised that, for those with more lived experience rather than formal education, the program was a great opportunity for formal education with like-minded peers. They said it was a good environment and liked the low number students and the more practical learning done through role-playing and workshopping. They especially liked the teacher, Lina. They also liked that costs and time commitments were minimised, as they said they couldn't have done it otherwise. They said the program gave them a sense of hope and encouraged them to continue learning.</i></p>
<p><i>The participant said they were grateful for the opportunity and really appreciated the networking and resources.</i></p>
<p><i>The participant wanted ConnectGroups to know that it is now an NDIS requirement for Support Group leaders to have at least a Certificate IV to receive funding, so the participant really appreciated the program.</i></p>
<p><i>The participant said the lecturer was great.</i></p>
<p><i>The participant said that the Certificate IV training increased their confidence and gave them a voice. They also said they gained a greater understanding of the needs of other people and how to talk to others.</i></p>

All the comments left in answer to this question were positive. Multiple comments mentioned that the program had improved their Support Group, including by increasing their confidence and communication abilities and by giving them new ideas. Many participants praised the lecturer and the learning environment as being friendly and supportive, and two participants expressed their gratitude for the financial support. Two others mentioned that they are no longer involved with their Support Groups but that the skills they learnt from the program have been very useful in other areas.

Mental Health Units (n=3)

Please enter any comments you have about the 7 units towards a Certificate IV in Mental Health program.

All comments for the Mental Health program were made online:

***Sad about not being able to complete this cert.** I will try and navigate to complete the other units. A big thanks to you all that made this happen.*

*Recognition, validation & enhancement of my lived experience. Equipped with greater **confidence** & gained **deeper understanding**. Learning experienced with fellow peer-students. Opportunity to further personal development, higher education and **broaden scope in volunteer/work participation**.*

*Unfortunately I was unable to complete all 7 units due to conflicting personal and work obligations. The lecturer and ConnectGroups liaison were very encouraging, **supportive** and helpful. It was a very **enjoyable** learning environment.*

While two participants here were disappointed at not being able to complete more of the Mental Health Certificate IV, comments about the program were still very positive. Participants again mentioned their increased confidence and praised the supportive learning environment.

2016 Service Evaluation Comparison

Survey	Cycles	# Units	# Survey responders
2016 - Community Services program	2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	6	14
2020 - Community Services program	2017, 2018, 2019	15	20
2020 - Mental Health program	2017, 2018, 2019	7	3

In 2016, a survey and evaluation of ConnectGroups' Certificate IV program was undertaken, surveying people who had participated in the program since 2013. At that point in time, the program consisted only of six units towards a Certificate IV in Community Services.

Some of the questions from the 2020 surveys discussed in this report were mapped onto the questions from the 2016 survey, in order for the results of the surveys to be compared. In general, the comparison of the surveys presented below indicates that ConnectGroups' Certificate IV programs have continued to make effective contributions to Support Groups and employment in relevant sectors over time. However, the detail and specificity of the 2020 questions compared to the broader nature of the 2016 questions appears to have allowed participants to be more discriminating and expressive when completing the 2020 survey. These differences between the surveys means the results are not perfectly comparable, but some comparison is still useful.

Contributions to Support Group leadership roles

Survey	Question #	Question	Agree %
2016	3.1	The units of competency completed added value to my role within my Support Group	92.9
2020 Community Services	3.1	Achieving the Certificate IV increased my confidence as a Support Group leader	95
	4	Achieving the Certificate IV provided me with the skills to respond to the following contemporary issues within my Support Group*	85
	5	Achieving the Certificate IV allowed me to bring improved practices to my Support Group in the following areas*	83.3
2020 Mental Health	3.1	Completing the 7 units increased my confidence as a Support Group leader	100
	4	Completing the 7 units provided me with the skills to respond to the following contemporary issues within my Support Group*	100
	5	Completing the 7 units allowed me to bring improved practices to my Support Group in the following areas*	72.2

*The results to these questions are averaged from across the different issues/areas mentioned in each question

The 2020 survey of the Community Services program yielded similar results to the 2016 survey in terms of improvement to participants' leadership within their Support Groups, with all answers receiving between 83.3% and 92.9% agrees. The 2020 survey of the Mental Health program did even better in two out of the three questions.

Contributions to Support Group effectiveness

Survey	Question #	Question	Agree %
2016	3.2	The units of competency completed increased my knowledge to more effectively work within my Support Group	100
2020 Community Services	6.1	As a result of the skills I acquired from the Certificate IV, my Support Group is functioning more effectively	80
	7	Following my completion of the Certificate IV, my Support Group has had a greater impact on its members.	75
2020 Mental Health	6.1	As a result of the skills I acquired from the 7 units, my Support Group is functioning more effectively	66.7
	7	Following my completion of the 7 units, my Support Group has had a greater impact on its members.	66.7

The results from all three surveys demonstrate how all the Certificate IV programs contribute to Support Group effectiveness. The 2020 surveys do show a lower proportion of agrees than the 2016 survey here, but this can be at least partially attributed to the more specific nature of the questions.

Contributions to peer support within Support Groups

Survey	Question #	Question	Agree %
2016	3.3	The completed units of competency strengthened my experience of peer support	100
2020 Community Services	3.2	Achieving the Certificate IV strengthened my peer support skills	95
2020 Mental Health	3.2	Completing the 7 units strengthened my peer support skills	100

These questions are all directly comparable, and they demonstrate that the Certificate IV programs have very consistently delivered great improvements in peer support among Support Groups.

Contributions to employment

Survey	Question #	Question	Agree %
2016	2.1	The units of competency completed contributed to my post-program employment	57.1
2020 Community Services	10	Are you currently employed in the community services or human services sector?	40
	12.2	Achieving the Certificate IV led to engagement in my current work role	20
2020 Mental Health	10	Are you currently employed in the community services sector or the mental health and AOD sector?	66.7
	12.2	Completing the 7 units led to engagement in my current work role	33.3

These results suggest there has been a slight decrease in the number of participants using their Community Services qualifications to contribute to their employment since 2016. As previously discussed when analysing Questions 10 and 11 in this report, a significant amount of participants who took the 2020 Community Services survey appear to have completed the program to benefit their Support Group, rather than to contribute to their employment.

Meanwhile, the data indicates that the Mental Health program has contributed to employment at a higher rate than both the pre-2016 and the post-2016 Community Services program. However, such a finding should take into account that the number of people who have participated in the Mental Health program so far is much lower than the Community Services program, so the results from the Mental Health program survey may not yet be generalisable.

Contributions to workplace roles

Survey	Question #	Question	Agree %
2016	2.2	The units completed are being used in my current workplace	71.4
2020 Community Services	13.2	The skills I acquired from the program resulted in an improved capacity to design or deliver services*	85.7
	13.3	The skills I acquired from the program resulted in an improved ability to respond to contemporary issues*	100
2020 Mental Health	13.2	The skills I acquired from the program resulted in an improved capacity to design or deliver services*	50
	13.3	The skills I acquired from the program resulted in an improved ability to respond to contemporary issues*	100

*Only participants employed in relevant sectors were asked these questions

The 2016 survey question about the contribution of the Community Services program to participants' workplace roles was asked to all participants, whereas the 2020 surveys only asked questions about workplace roles to participants actually employed in the relevant sectors, making the data harder to compare here. Still, the results of both surveys clearly demonstrate the relevance of the Certificate IV programs in the workplace.

Key Findings

This section summarises the main findings of the 2020 surveys, highlighting in particular the combined percentages of agrees given by Community Services and Mental Health program participants in answer to some of the key survey questions. In general, the 2020 surveys prove that the Community Services program and the Mental Health program are both (1) increasing capacity in the Support Groups sector by upskilling leaders and facilitators to better support their members; and (2) contributing to workforce development. However, there are a few small weaknesses that could be addressed to further improve Support Group leadership, and there has been a slight downward trend in the workforce development of the Community Services program since 2016.

- Both the Community Services program and the Mental Health program have greatly improved participant’s confidence and peer support skills within their Support Groups and within their employment in related sectors.

Completing the program:	Agree %
Increased my confidence as a Support Group leader	95.7
Strengthened my peer support skills within my Support Group	95.7
Increased my confidence in the workplace	100
Strengthened my peer support skills in the workplace	100

- Both programs greatly improved participants’ abilities to respond to contemporary issues within their Support Groups and within their employment, with the only exception being that Community Services program participants weren’t as certain about their abilities to respond to AOD issues within their Support Groups.

Program	Completing the program provided me with the skills to respond to the following contemporary issues:	Agree %
Mental Health	Mental wellbeing, AOD issues, conflict, crisis, relationship-building, capacity-building	100
Community Services	Mental wellbeing, conflict, relationship-building	95
	Capacity-building	90
	AOD issues	45

Support Group-specific findings

- Since participating in the programs, the majority of participants’ Support Groups are functioning more effectively, having greater impacts on their members, and experiencing increases in membership.

Completing the program resulted in:	Agree %
More effective Support Group functioning	78.3
Greater impacts on Support Group members	73.9
Increases in Support Group membership	56.5

- Over **80%** of participants from both programs agree that they have brought new practices to their Support Groups in all areas, except for social media management and financial literacy, which received only **39.1%** agreement.

Completing the program allowed me to bring improved practices to my Support Group in the following areas:	Agree %
Communication; Health and safety; Group facilitation; Mental health literacy; Responsible behaviour within the group; Advocacy; Debriefing	>90
Group management/coordination; Collaboration and networks; Good governance	>80
Financial literacy; Social media management	39.1

- The majority of participants have *not* brought new or changed services to their Support Groups, suggesting that there is a missing link between the acquisition of skills and practices, and the actual implementation of services.

As a result of the program:	Agree %
My Support Group is delivering new services	39.1
My Support Group has changed the way it delivers services	43.5

- 82.6%** of participants agree that they are transferring key skills from the Certificate IV programs to other members of their Support Groups.

Employment-specific findings

- 40%** of Community Services program participants are currently employed in the community services/human services sector, demonstrating the program's contribution to workforce development. However, **57.1%** of participants in the 2016 survey stated that the program contributed to their employment, suggesting there has been small downward trend in the workforce development of the Community Services program since 2016.
- 40%** of Community Services program participants are neither employed in the community services/human services sector nor seeking employment in these sectors, suggesting that many participants completed the program only to benefit their Support Groups, rather than to contribute to their employment.

Employment status of Community Services program participants	Percentage
Currently employed in the community services/human services sector	40
Currently seeking employment in the community services/human services sector	20
None of the above	40

3. **66.7%** of Mental Health program participants are currently employed in the community services/mental health/AOD sector, and the remaining **33.3%** are interested in gaining employment in these sectors, indicating strong workforce development.

Employment status of Mental Health program participants	Percentage
Currently employed in the community services/mental health/AOD sector	66.7
Currently seeking employment in the community services//mental health/AOD sector	33.3
None of the above	0

4. Both programs collectively led **21.7%** of participants (5 people) to become engaged in their current work roles.

Recommendations

1. Learning how to respond to AOD issues should be given more time and emphasis within existing Community Services Certificate IV units.

Only 45% of Community Services program participants agreed that the program had improved their ability to respond to AOD issues, while all other issues measured received over 90% agreement. This demonstrates that AOD drug issues should be given more attention in the Community Services program.

2. Basic social media management skills should be integrated into the “Use communication to build relationships” unit (CHCCOM002) from the Community Services Certificate IV.

Only 39.1% of participants across both programs agreed that they had brought new practices in social media management and financial literacy to their Support Groups, while all other practices measured in the surveys received over 80% agreement. Financial literacy is an incidental requirement for most Support Groups, but effective social media practices could bring benefits to all Support Groups, including by expanding Support Groups’ abilities to reach and remain in contact with people in need of their services. Basic social media skills should thus be incorporated in the Community Services Certificate IV to improve the online presence of Support Groups.

3. The gap between the acquisition of skills and practices, and the actual implementation of services within Support Groups should be addressed in both the Community Services and Mental Health programs.

The 2020 survey indicated that both programs have greatly improved the skills of Support Group leaders and the practices leaders have in place within their Support Groups. However, the majority of participants from both programs indicated that they have not implemented new or changed *services* within their Support Groups since completing the programs. Practical methods for service implementation should thus be taught more explicitly within both programs.

4. Include the following questions in future End of Program Evaluations:

a. *Do you hold any tertiary qualifications besides this Certificate IV qualification?*

b. *If yes:*

i. *What are the qualifications?*

ii. *Why did you complete a further qualification via ConnectGroups’ Certificate IV program?*

The results from Question 2 of the 2020 survey indicated that most Community Services and Mental Health program participants had completed other tertiary qualifications prior to completing the ConnectGroups Certificate IV program. Adding some follow-up questions in the End of Program Evaluation survey would allow for a better understanding of this finding: by completing the ConnectGroups programs, are participants building on or filling holes in their knowledge from prior qualifications related to community services or mental health, or are they seeking a career change, or are they simply aiming to improve their Support Group leadership? This information would contribute to ConnectGroups’ understanding of how their Certificate IV programs add to workforce and Support Group development.