



First Nations learners' experiences with foundation skills courses — support document

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This document was produced by the author(s) based on their research for the report *First Nations and migrant learners' experiences with foundation skills courses*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's Portal: <<https://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

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Introduction

Purpose

This support document accompanies *First Nations and migrant learners' experiences with foundation skills courses* and provides more detailed information on the First Nations cohort. It is divided into the following sections:

- 'First Nations case study' provides a more comprehensive account of the case studies held with First Nations learners across far northern Australia.
- 'Quotes from First Nations learners' consists of a table with quotes from First Nations learners matched with particular topic areas and includes the quotes from the main report and case study write-ups in this support document, as well as additional quotes from participants.

First Nations case study

In this project, focus groups and interviews were held with 15 First Nations participants in three very remote regions across far northern Australia during October 2024. The participants were people who had begun a foundation skills course but not completed it. Most of the training was in workplace skills, such as learning to use a computer, communication in the workplace and working with others.

Table 1 below provides some background information on the participants.¹

Table 1 Background information on First Nations participants

Demographic characteristic	n
Gender	
Male	4
Female	11
Age group	
20–24 years	6
25–29 years	2
30–39 years	1
40–49 years	4
50–59 years	2
Previous qualification level ¹	
Certificate I to IV	4
Diploma	1
Bachelor's degree	1
No qualification	8
Did not answer	2

Note: 1 A participant could have more than one qualification.

While the participants spoke different languages at home (mainly the local native language and some English), they have not been differentiated in table 1 to help protect the anonymity of participants. There were also varying cultural norms were identified across the case study sites. The similar themes emerging from the case study locations demonstrate that they may have broader applicability to other First Nations learners living in remote locations.

It should be noted that program coordinators and facilitators were present during all focus groups and interviews. These people provided on-the-ground knowledge from their experience, and, as they were already a trusted person to the participants, they made the participants feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences and ideas. One First Nations focus group had a local First Nations co-facilitator who had also previously completed foundation skills training, and, in some instances, they brought their own experiences to the discussions. Most quotes are from the First Nations learners, although it has been made clear if a quote or idea originated from a program coordinator or facilitator.

¹ It should be noted that two participants in one of the First Nations case studies had not actually participated in foundation skills training but in other VET training. Their input is still included in the research as their perspectives on training are relevant to foundation skills training and were corroborated by participants in other case studies. One of these participants holds both the diploma and bachelor's degree shown in table 1, and the other participant has one of the certificates I to IV, thus skewing the data on previous qualifications slightly.

Motivations

One of the key research questions for this project is to understand the reasons or motivations for students enrolling in foundation skills training and whether they chose to do the course themselves or were required to do it, for example, by employment agencies, mutual obligations for Centrelink payments or other government requirements, family members, employers or other influencers.

How learners first heard about the training

Most of the First Nations foundation skills learners who participated in the research project had become aware of the course through other people, such as a training program coordinator telling them about the course or hearing about it through work.

I found out about the course through [program coordinator].

Yeah, supervisor [unclear] tell me.

There were also a few instances where people just turned up on the day.

I just showed up.

When I just came in and out, just looked and I was wow, this could be fun, yeah.

Another means for finding out about the foundation skills training was through advertisements.

I saw a poster.

While it seems some First Nations peoples may be targeted through work or program coordinators to participate in foundation skills training, there are also instances of incidental discovery, whereby people have walked past on the day and seen the room set up and decided to join.

The choice to study

Overwhelmingly, for First Nations participants, the choice to undertake foundation skills training was their own. They may have heard about the training from the program coordinator, but it was their decision to undertake the course, as demonstrated through the following quotes:

Do it myself.

No, I chose it by myself.

I want to do it.

Of the people spoken with, only one said that their decision to participate was influenced by the program coordinator but they gave it a go despite not being sure about it. Once in the course, the participant liked what they were learning and was happy with the decision to enrol. This is shown in the following exchange:

Program coordinator: I was kind of influencing to do it to increase his digital literacy skills. At first, when [participant's name] and I were just having that conversation this morning. It was like he didn't really know what was happening in the pre-enrolment phase. He just trusted me to guide him to do the course to be able to increase his LLND skills.

Facilitator: So how did you feel once you started, [participant's name]? Were you glad that [program coordinator's name] encouraged you to do it?

Participant: Yeah [nodding head too].

These First Nations foundation skills learners had autonomy over their decision to enrol. While there may have been some encouragement to enrol, no one was forced into the course, and they had ownership over enrolling.

Reasons for enrolling

The most popular reason given by First Nations participants for enrolling in a foundation skills course is to learn new skills. They were particularly interested in learning about computers and some of the reasons given included having a computer at home or to avoid having to ask family for help. They also wanted to learn skills that would help them with daily activities and tasks. The following quotes represent their desire to learn new skills:

Like, sometimes I use on my phone, but I'll see how it's going. I was looking at on the Facebook and I saw AFL — all the uniforms. Then I press it. I'll say, maybe I'll try this, see if it's going to work instead of ask[ing] my family members to help me. Sometimes they feel cranky and say, no, you need to go see [unclear] so they can help you for doing course training for computers. I did that, but I'm waiting for two weeks. That's the important — I need to learn more for computer training, yeah.

I was trying to learn something else to become more smart.

Yeah, like I want to learn how to fix the payment for the family, and how to make stories and putting into the memory card, memory stick.

Because I like to do computer training.

Because I want to learn more English and learn more about computer skills.

New skills.

How to use the computer and knowing about the hardware and software, the difference.

First Nations learners also participate in foundation skills training to help them to achieve other study or career goals. They have goals like running their own businesses, becoming qualified professionals or going to university.

You'll get work.

I do want to do [profession removed].

Hopefully, one day I can be a qualified [profession removed].

Yeah. Office manager.

Other reasons provided by participants for enrolling in foundation skills training include:

- wanting to get a certificate

We get to get a certificate for doing the course.

- accessing food (food is often included with training)

Sometimes people might come to the course because there is a food issue at home and that the course in two weeks will have lunch provided every day. So that could be the first initial motivation towards attending the course. Then after that, an engagement with the lecturer or the trainer, assessor and myself, they go, hang on.

(Program coordinator)

- having a reason to get out of the house

It was something interesting because I was at home and wasn't doing much. It got me out of the house.

While some people have quite inspirational goals, other reasons may seem arbitrary to observers. Nevertheless, they are valid reasons for the learners and provide them with the motivation to begin foundation skills training.

Intentions

This research project was also interested in finding out from learners whether they had intended to complete the training when they first enrolled, as well as whether they intend to return and complete the training. Participants were also asked whether they think it is important to complete training and whether they would like to undertake any additional training.

Generally speaking, the focus groups and interview participants stated that they started the foundation skills training with the intention of completing it. They also believe that it was important to complete training: participants were directly asked if they thought it was important to complete foundation skills courses and most responded 'yes' or nodded their heads. Most were interested in coming back and completing the training: participants were directly asked if they wanted to complete and most enthusiastically responded 'yes'.

I love training, for which ones I picked, I have to finish that and maybe then next.

However, living in remote areas, where trainers fly in to deliver training, means that they need to wait long periods before the training is offered again; for example, some participants began their training in September 2024 and needed to wait until a yet-to-be-determined time in 2025 for the trainer to return.

[The trainer] is going to come back next year. We don't know when yet. (Program coordinator)

This makes it difficult to know when learners will have the opportunity to participate in the training again and complete.

Additionally, some participants also expressed a desire to pursue further education. For some, this was to further enhance the foundation skills they were learning, but for others this was more occupation- or career-focused. One participant listed all the things he would like training in:

More learning English. Concrete. Fence. Driving. That's what I want to – forklift course. Yeah, ride-on mower course.

As previously mentioned, some participants are interested in pursuing professional careers.

Yes, I do want to do [profession removed].

Hopefully, one day I can be a qualified [profession removed].

Having the opportunity to study foundation skills in their remote communities is providing a stepping stone in helping these First Nations peoples to pursue their career goals.

Barriers to completion/attending training

Here, the interest is in understanding why the learners' training intentions were not realised: what prevented them from attending training or what forced them to withdraw from the training.

Personal reasons

When it comes to barriers, personal reasons are the most frequently mentioned by First Nations learners. This includes having family commitments or issues,² such as children to care for; being too sick or tired to

² Family issues defined by a program coordinator: 'Just so we just know, family issues could be anything from looking after sister's babies or grandmother, elderly people to even the [Spoken in an Indigenous language] stuff of domestic violence and those types of things as well. So when we say family issues, it's a plethora of a lot of things together.'

attend training (including being pregnant); and just being too busy with life in general. This is shown through the quotes below:

Busy all the time ... Busy with everything ... Serve this community, look after this community.

Just to look after my kids. That's why it's getting hard for me to look after them. Earn enough, go work, go back home, look after kids.

I have to sometimes stay home with my little one.

When I sometimes feel pain on the back of the bottom ... and I take Panadol and maybe go back to bed for a little while.

Because I was feeling sleepy, weak.

I got pregnant.

There's not many childcares here. Most of the time they're full. At the moment, my son — he's in Year [level removed]. He's having food problems at school.

Family issues.

Couldn't hold it down due to lifestyle and mum duties.

These personal reasons are inevitable and are widespread for all different learners, not only First Nations peoples. However, the remote location where these learners live and the irregular nature of the foundation skills training mean it is not easy to resume the course quickly or in a timely manner to complete.

Lack of transport

A lack of transport was mentioned by First Nations participants in all three case study areas. The suggestion of transport as a barrier to attendance was met with nods of agreement by other participants. Most of these people do not have their own transport and do not live in town centres. Sometimes, program coordinators will transport learners so they can attend training. In other instances, participants mentioned hitchhiking into town to attend training. When asked if public transport was an option, the respondents noted that it was quite expensive — \$20 for a round trip, much higher than the amount paid in metropolitan areas. These ideas are expressed in the following quotes:

Transport.

Sometimes I [unclear] my stepfather ... Sometimes I have to ask [program coordinator].

Taxi. Taxis here costs around about \$50. Sometimes, they charge us \$70.

If I don't pick [participant's name] up and [participant's name], then they would have to hitchhike into town as well. Their situation is the [non-First Nations workers in resource industry] would pick them up to get a ride into town. Also, what's — something that's really good that's happened so far is there's a bus that is operating out [participant's name] way, town bus. It's \$10 one way. So that's \$20 return for the day. So for her and [participant's name] to get in, it would cost them \$40 for the day.

If you're claiming ABSTUDY or Centrelink or anything like that, \$40 a day is a lot of money.

(Program coordinator)

Cultural reasons

Culture is important for First Nations learners and will take precedence over training, as demonstrated in the words of a participant below:

I would possibly say cultural things. So doing cultural stuff would be our first priority and then to participate in study.

Some of the learners cited Sorry Business as the reason for not being able to attend training.

So funeral is one, attending our relatives' funerals. Because we have to be within our clans to get through those process and have to finish it within the culture.

Sorry Business. Out of station.

Work-related reasons

Another barrier to training mentioned by participants was the need to go to work; for example, one person was called into work as they needed a driver:

But when — I should come here for training, but clinic called and said there's no driver, that's why it's busy.

[Participant's name] was just saying that there was no one else as the driver ... so often she has to stop other things that she's doing to help with the driving, to pick up people. (Program coordinator)

Apart from the lack of transportation, as highlighted by participants, these barriers are not necessarily situations that can be prevented or overcome by changes to the provision of foundation skills courses. However, they are compounded by the remote location, the infrequency of courses and cultural expectations.

Supports to help with completion/attending training

Equally important to understanding barriers is identifying the supports that could have assisted these learners to complete their foundation skills training. The following are the suggestions raised by the learners, and in some instances, elaborated on by program coordinators.

Ways training providers can offer support

These suggestions by participants highlighted the potential support that could be offered by training providers to enable learners to attend training continuously. It is important to note that the implications arising from implementing such supports, for example, funding, have not been considered.

Providing transport

Not surprisingly, given that challenges with transport was regularly mentioned as a barrier to attending training, providing transport to training was mentioned most often in focus groups and interviews. The suggested support ranged from the local trainer picking up learners (something they currently do but are limited to the number of seats in their vehicles) or having some sort of minibus or community bus to collect learners.

Need to be picked up

If I don't go out and collect people, no one would most probably turn up to be here today. We're just discussing that. I think I need a bus now [rather] than a ute. (Program coordinator)

I think the most important is transport is to change.

Offering creche or allowing children at training

Another recurring theme was the availability of childcare or offering creche.

Sometimes training support by childcare.

Having courses that are relevant to here and childcare.

There's not many childcares here. Most of the time they're full. At the moment, my son — he's in Year [level removed]. He's having food problems at school.

However, a childcare centre may not necessarily be the most suitable option. One participant indicated that it was requirement for the parent to stay with the child at the centre.

Well, so far what I've seen with childcare is – they recently brought up FaFT, Families as First Teachers. So for that position, you have to be able to attend the childcare with the child. Because nowadays up here, it's – that thing is happening. So I think, therefore, ... that could be one thing that [participant's name] is struggling with. She's doing her studies, but then also, she can't just leave her son alone at childcare because she has to be ...

Additionally, some children do not like being left in the care of others.

They can't trust anyone ... Wherever I go they cry. That's what makes me unhappy ... I've got to be with my kids and look after my kids.

Because of this, having the option of care at the training organisation, whether it be a creche or the ability to have the child in the classroom, is a big enabler for people to be able to attend training. There would need to be some consideration of the impact on other learners of having children in the training room.

Other support suggestions

More than one participant suggested that providing food at training could help entice people to turn up each day for training and improve completion. One participant also suggested that some sort of financial support or incentive could also improve attendance and completion.

Give food or money.

Food [other focus group participants nodded in agreement].

Support from outside sources

Some suggestions for supports are unrelated to the training provider. The first is seeking more support from the workplace to enable learners to attend training. Participants highlighted that they needed to explain to their employers that they wanted to do the training and when it is held to ensure that they are not called into work on those days.

For next year, I need to let my boss know that I must go to training full-time.

Other suggestions that help support attendance at training include:

- **Learning with a friend**

Program coordinator: Do you think it was easier for you to do the course because you were both there together?

Participant: Yeah.

Second participant: Yeah.

- **Receiving support from family members, including being able to look after children**

When I like to see my other family member, when I talk to them, that makes me comfortable so I can come to training.

Training experience

The research was interested in hearing from First Nations peoples about their experiences with foundation skills training. This included the course content, trainer, delivery and other aspects of the course, particularly those they enjoyed. When asked directly whether they liked the course, learners described many positive experiences with the foundation skills courses overall, as demonstrated below:

Yeah, happy with that.

Yeah, it was exciting ... Good to learn many ways, you know?

I liked the course.

Course content

When asked about the content of the foundation skills course, participants responded that they thought it was good. They liked what they are learning and found that they learnt new skills, which they could use in their day-to-day life, as well as for work.

They particularly emphasised being able to use computers for online shopping, gaining more confidence in filling in online forms and creating posters.

Typing.

Typing. Make files.

I like how they teach us to use the computer. Also, when we did the course, teaching us and showing us how to take messages and have – what kind of words, the right words to use ... Email or phone messages, and how to reply to phone messages.

How to make posters.

Learning the software.

I would say it did help me a lot with a lot of things, like filling out application forms and stuff like that. So far, what I've experienced is – the skills that I did my Cert. I with is – I started doing online shopping. Pretty much internet and social media to get around with PowerPoint, Excels.

What I liked about the course is learning communication and having to act upon the right behaviour towards people and in workplace.

[In relation to government services], instead of waiting hours, you can just go online and it's over and done with.

One person mentioned that they would also like to learn more about workplace safety as part of the course. The course covered a variety of different workplace skills, such as using computers, code of conduct etc. so it may be that they were not at the course when this was covered.

Safety, office area.

The trainer

Participants were very positive about the trainers and found them to be very experienced. Comments included:

I reckon he was good and happy.

He's a good man.

Good, yeah.

The only slightly negative comment related to the trainer clicking too quickly through items on the computer when showing learners how to do some computer tasks. The learners indicated that they had asked the trainer to slow down, which the trainer did.

Explained too fast. He didn't go slow.

[Laughs] click here, yeah, whoa. Slow down.

Talk slow [unclear] ... Yeah, that's what [I] said to him.

Understanding of culture

Given the rich and diverse nature of First Nations communities across Australia, the research project was interested in understanding whether First Nations learners felt that the trainers understood their culture and, if so, how the trainers demonstrated this.

There were mixed responses from the learners about whether trainers understood and respected First Nations culture. Some suggested that they used pictures displaying both non-Indigenous and First Nations peoples in course materials. The trainers also tried to use some First Nations words, but they were not applicable to the local area's language.

Presented below are some quotes from participants when directly asked if they thought the trainer understood their culture:

Not much.

Yes.

Yeah.

Sometimes.

It was all right. Yeah.

For example, we had our lecturer before from [name of organisation removed]. He was ... talking about [a different First Nations area] and their culture and all that stuff. [Location areas removed to maintain anonymity]

I'll just give you an example what [participant's name] was talking about. The lecturer would come in ... [and] he will call them ... a term that's not used here ... So that could make people upset or disengage. Because there's another stereotype there that's being used. (Program coordinator)

This is potentially an area where improvements could be made and some ideas from the First Nations learners on this issue are presented in the section, 'Ideas to improve training', on page 15.

Delivery

The way in which the courses were delivered varied by location. In two of the case study areas, the courses were generally delivered as a block, for example, 10 full days over two weeks. In these areas, learners mostly liked this arrangement, although some thought training would be better in the morning to avoid the hot afternoons, as shown below:

Morning or night-time.

In the morning.

Morning.

In the other location, a trainer would fly out from the closest capital city and conduct block training over a two-week period at the beginning of each term. The local program coordinator would then facilitate the students' learning across the remainder of the term and arrange to have the trainer also available through video-conferencing once a week for questions. When questioned about attendance over the two-week block periods, the program coordinator mentioned that Mondays and Fridays had low attendance.

We find initially here ... that Mondays and Fridays are very hard days to engage with studying or [work]. Because it's directly after a weekend and before a weekend. So we find that our attendance rates are pretty much Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursdays. (Program coordinator)

To boost attendance, one option would be to have the trainer on site for a three-week block, with training delivered only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. This could result in higher attendance across all days of the course, although other considerations such as increases in costs for accommodation, trainer's time and so on could come into play.

Another issue in the remote area in which the case studies were conducted is that the trainers are often brought in for a short period to deliver the training (for example, two weeks), after which they may not return to run the course again until the following year.

The First Nations learners showed a preference for face-to-face learning and were not open to online learning, as demonstrated in the exchange below:

Program coordinator: Do you like it that people come into [town name] and do face-to-face [learning]?

Participant: Yes.

Given that most were actually learning computer-based courses, they may not have the digital skills or resources for participating in online learning.

Other experiences

Attending training is also often an opportunity to build social relationships with other learners and people within the community, as described below:

The other students. So the peers, the building relationships with other students, which is nice.

(Program coordinator repeating a response from a focus group participant that was inaudible)

Learners also appreciated that they received a certificate at the end of the training, if they made it through to completion, as expressed by the following participant:

We get to get a certificate for doing the course.

Ideas to improve training

The First Nations learners who participated in the focus groups and interviews provided ideas on how foundation skills training could be improved for people in their community and for First Nations peoples more generally. These suggestions could also be extended beyond foundation skills courses to VET training more broadly. Note that these ideas are not presented in order of importance and potential constraints, like funding, have not been taken into consideration.

Community-specific cultural induction for trainers (including yarning circles)

It was repeatedly mentioned across the First Nations case study areas that trainers should undertake a cultural induction in the local community before they begin delivery of the training. This approach would offer an opportunity for the trainer to learn more about the unique cultural norms and some of the distinctive terminology used in different communities. Trainers would be able to learn about issues in the community and begin the training with a better understanding of community needs. Below are some examples of this idea expressed by participants:

Maybe our — one of our lecturers should do their courses with cultural experiences and learn our ... cultural stuff before they come in.

I think it's the do's and don'ts and what's appropriate to say and what's not appropriate to say. I think that's what we've found with a lot of our lecturers here — that they've come in with a very down south

mentality. It's very – what we would call a ... white way. There's no contextualisation with the actual culture itself.

(Program coordinator)

It would be good if the course – the people who are doing the course – actually standing in front of you – if they did a course here – one of us showed them. That way, before they come here and – just to get the feel of what's their environment. It goes both ways.

Yeah. Because it would help them. It would help. I'm just thinking about their side, too. I'd be scared to come into a community where all this stuff is going on. That just leaves them with, I just want to do this and get on with it, they have no heart in what they're trying to teach us. Just ... I think it was a big thing.

Yeah ... induction.

Another suggestion was to begin each foundation skills course with a yarning circle, as described in the quote below:

We've got to sit down and get to know each other. Like I said, we might know each other – but the backgrounds – in this environment – in the teaching environment ... Or communicate – the icebreaker. And don't think because they're adults that they know where you're coming from. I always say, we Indigenous people learn differently ... but when you come into a learning environment with adults, the first thing – you sit down, and you yarn. You start that yarning circle. Once you start that yarning circle, that person will open up to you. They might be quiet at the beginning but once you start talking about family and connection ...

This could be a way for the trainer to learn about the individual learners and their needs, as well as the local culture. It could also help to build rapport early on so that learners feel more comfortable in the classroom and with the trainer.

Culturally appropriate training facilities

In one case study area, the need for culturally appropriate training facilities was highlighted, in particular, the capacity to learn outdoors. These First Nations learners struggle to remain inside a classroom all day while learning. The availability of more outdoor learning spaces or the ability to learn on Country (for example, learning while fishing) could encourage more First Nations peoples in the community to participate in training.

For – to do, instead of doing indoor studying, we would be more likely to do learning on Country, going outdoor ... studying outdoors.

Other participants in the focus group were asked for their views and they all agreed enthusiastically.

Facilitator: Does that just feel better for people being outdoors? It's more – would prefer – do you all feel that way? [Lots of nods].

Participants elaborated on why they preferred to learn outdoors and what learning on Country looks like to them, as demonstrated in the quotes below:

Normal people don't really like sitting down on the chair for approximately two to three hours, which – that's why we do outdoors pretty much.

Well, when I think about learning on Country, it's more like bringing out laptops out from the country [outdoors], sitting down under a tree. Doing studies and paperwork while you're out in the fresh air.

Additionally, how learning on Country could be facilitated was expanded on during the focus group by the program coordinator, who works closely with the First Nations learners in the community:

So out on Country facility not a donga [transportable building], but something like a nice little, maybe, just a training centre that's got a veranda around it, has an empty space in the middle, a little bit of a kitchen. Nothing too [inaudible] but is out bush or along the beach somewhere, built somewhere like that. It's kind of a combined facility that RTOs and universities can use to do out-on-country facilitation.

...

There is no facility built that's culturally appropriate for education – for adult education that makes adult education enjoyable.

So I can come in here, and I can go, come on guys. Let's pump out an assessment and then let's go fishing. It's kind of still – well, if we had that education facility that's culturally appropriate, then we could go out and go, okay. So while you guys are cooking breakfast, come on [participant's name], let's go and flick a rod with – go and grab a spear and see if we can get some stingray. We'll spend an hour before class doing that. Then we'll come back. Then we'll do a bit of study [work]. We'll do a few assessments and a module, read through something. Then at lunchtime, we'll go out. We'll all go in the mangroves and collect mud mussels.

...

You guys have got all these career centres and all that, but they're very [white]. The feedback we get is people want to learn on Country but then there's no kind of funding there to do that.

(Program coordinator)

Ideally, this concept embraces three elements and extends the suggestions from First Nations learners relating to learning outdoors. These elements, which can provide more structure and permanency to the learning, are:

- a training facility out in the bush or along the beach, surrounded by a veranda, with an empty space in the middle and a small kitchen
- the facility shared between different education providers
- the ability to move between the facility and outdoors while learning, due to the location and amenities of the facility.

Distance learning

To balance the need for the delivery of more regular foundation skills courses while taking account of the learners' preference for face-to-face delivery, it was suggested to participants by a program coordinator that a form of distance learning could be offered, whereby the learners are all still in the one place (that is, classroom or more culturally appropriate facility) and the trainer is live on a big screen delivering the training. The participants showed openness to this way of learning:

Program coordinator: Would you like it if they were on the screen teaching you as well, or not so good?

Participant: Still good.

Program coordinator: Say, if they were [elsewhere], they were on the screen and they could see you and you could see them. Would that still be okay?

Participant: Yeah.

Eliminating the need for the trainer to be present physically in the classroom may allow for the training to be scheduled more often, providing more opportunities for the learners to complete the training. The learners could still be supported by program coordinators in the room. Obviously, other considerations

need to be taken into account, such as the trainer's schedule, budget constraints and whether a minimum number of learners is required and can be achieved.

Two-way learning

Two-way learning was mentioned in a couple of the case study areas as a possible improvement to training and it also addresses the need to learn about local culture. Two-way learning involves non-Indigenous and First Nations peoples learning from each other. It is not only learning about culture but also “perceptions, world views, and laden meanings behind words and symbols” (from a conversation researchers had with an RTO manager). First Nations peoples may interpret a picture differently from non-Indigenous people or place different meanings on words and symbols. Learning together and from each other, involving the sharing of ideas and voices, is important to First Nations peoples and is shown in the exchanges below:

Yeah, two-way learning. [White] learning and [First Nations] learning. [References to local terminology removed to protect anonymity of case study sites.]

Need to know what you doing [white] people and ... what [First Nations] people are doing, know each other ... Learn [from] each other ... Work together. [References to local terminology removed to protect anonymity of case study sites.]

First Nations trainer

The participants in the case study areas expressed a desire to see more trainers from backgrounds similar to their own, noting that this could encourage more people from within the community to attend training. As shown in the following quote, one participant had asked their sister to come along to the training with them, but she refused as she preferred a First Nations trainer:

My sister, ..., she said, ‘what if you want to do this so we can go to a city for doing computer training for course? It's the whole week for four days, from Monday to Thursday. We can start at nine o'clock and finish off at three o'clock’. She said, ‘what about [First Nations teacher]?’ I said, ‘no, this is important that I might learn for doing course training for competent [unclear]. If I knew everything from the [unclear].’

However, it is not clear how to achieve this as it will require First Nations peoples with a willingness to become trainers.

First Nations translator

Another suggestion emerging from the focus groups and interviews is to have a local First Nations person in the room to act as a translator, as demonstrated in the exchange below:

Program coordinator: Yes. Would it have been better if there was an interpreter? So, say if, maybe, [local helper] went in the class, and she helped to speak in your [language] sometimes to try and help people understand?

Participant: Yep, yep [enthusiastically].

The First Nations translator could help to translate training concepts into the local language, which in turn could assist learners to more readily understand concepts.

Community support person

To help encourage First Nations learners to feel more comfortable in the classroom, it was suggested that a support person from within the community could sit in the classroom as well, as shown in the quotes below:

Like have a community [person aid] that can be in that classroom, too.

Maybe – but that’s an important thing – is having someone in the class. Because if the learners don’t have a relationship – a trusting relationship or aren’t confident in approaching the teacher or the other support people, if they’ve got someone who can be like a student advocate who they’re more comfortable with that they ...

(Facilitator, who had also previously done foundation skills course)

That sort of thing has got to be made part of the cultural knowledge as well. They’ve got to be taught that some of these people need that person there. The other thing that we could do is also – someone else – another student in that course who plays that important role with that person so it’s someone that they have a relationship with – like having a best friend at school. It’s like that. It’s someone that they can lean on.

Having someone they know in the room could help the learners to feel more confident in interacting with the trainer and participating in the training. This may only be required at the beginning of a course, as the learners are building rapport with the trainer.

Government-funded bus service

It was suggested by a program coordinator in one of the case study areas that a government-funded bus service could improve access to training:

So we here in [name of location] would love to see a government funded bus service ...

(Program coordinator)

This was endorsed by participants, who confirmed that transport is the biggest barrier to attending training and the most important issue to change:

I think the most important is transport ... to change.

Although this suggestion is more broad reaching than VET training, it is relevant because transport was consistently raised as a barrier to participation. Many First Nations learners do not live in the town centre or have their own transport. Currently, to make it to their training course, they either walk into town, have trainers pick them up, or hitchhike into town. There is a town bus service, but the costs are too high, meaning it is not an affordable option at \$20 for a return trip. A quick search of public transport websites in each state and territory shows that this is much higher than the amounts people in metropolitan areas pay. Taxis are even more expensive, at around \$50 to \$70 one way. A government-funded bus service, or some sort of subsidised bus service, could make public transportation a more accessible and reliable option for ensuring that First Nations learners get to their training.

Additional information

Impact on the community

A recurring theme in the First Nations case study areas was the impact of foundation skills training on the community. Participants believed that learning these skills is important for everyone in the community as they are beneficial to the community in the long term. Moreover, they felt it was important for everyone to have these skills so that more First Nations people could be running businesses in the local community. This ideal of having more First Nations-led businesses and services in the community was repeated across the case study locations. Increasing the foundation skills of the people in the community was considered as the first stepping stone to achieving this, as seen below:

I don't know. It's always been there — maybe one day us as [First Nations] people could run businesses. We running it. Not white people, non-indigenous people running it.

Community support

Kinship is pivotal to First Nations culture, and, unfortunately, the extent of community support for foundation skills training was only asked at one of the First Nations focus groups and only one person responded with their experience, as seen in the quote below:

Not many Elders or family or people in the community were helping me through my studies. Probably support from my workplace and just the people at home were my main support until I finish.
Everyone's different.

One the program coordinators present during the focus group has noticed a shift in the views of the community around training in the three years they have lived there. The First Nations peoples used to view it as a 'tick and flick' exercise so they could work, but now they recognise the importance of foundation skills training:

So three years ago, no one really knew what it was. No one really wanted to do the hard work towards it or work on their current LLND skills. Now we've seen an increase of people wanting to learn and wanting to increase their LLND skills and go, okay, well that's important because that helps me in a two-world approach.

(Program coordinator)

It would appear that support in the wider community for foundation skills training is growing but the support each individual receives is varied.

Quotes from First Nations learners

Table 2 contains quotes from participants matched to particular topic areas to demonstrate the diverse range of responses and give a voice to more learners. Some of the quotes have already been used in the main document and in the detailed case study accounts in this support document.

Relevant quotes from facilitators and program coordinators have been excluded. Where a facilitator or program coordinator led discussions and participants only gave ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses, these quotes have also been excluded from the table.

Please note that some quotes in this table will appear in more than one topic area. This is an important part of qualitative research of this nature.

Table 2 Quotes from First Nations learners matched with topic areas

Motivations and intentions
Discovery of foundation skills courses
When I just came in and out, just looked and I was, wow, this could be fun, yeah.
I found out about the course through [program coordinator].
Yeah, supervisor [unclear] tell me.
I just showed up.
I saw a poster.
The choice to study
I want to do it.
Do it myself.
No, I chose it by myself.
Reasons for enrolling
Like, sometimes I use on my phone, but I'll see how it's going. I was looking at on the Facebook and I saw AFL – all the uniforms. Then I press it. I'll say, maybe I'll try this, see if it's going to work instead of ask[ing] my family members to help me. Sometimes they feel cranky and say, no, you need to go see [unclear] so they can help you for doing course training for computers. I did that, but I'm waiting for two weeks. That's the important – I need to learn more for computer training, yeah.
I was trying to learn something else to become more smart.
Yeah, like I want to learn how to fix the payment for the family, and how to make stories and putting into the memory card, memory stick.
Because I like to do computer training.
Because I want to learn more English and learn more about computer skills.
New skills.
How to use the computer and knowing about the hardware and software, the difference.
You'll get work.
I do want to do [profession removed].
Hopefully, one day I can be a qualified [profession removed].
Yeah. Office manager.
We get to get a certificate for doing the course.
It was something interesting because I was at home and wasn't doing much. It got me out of the house.
Intentions to complete
More learning English. Concrete. Fence. Driving. That's what I want to – forklift course. Yeah, ride-on mower course.
I love training, for which ones I picked, I have to finish that and maybe then next.
Yes, I do want to do [profession removed].
Hopefully, one day I can be a qualified [profession removed].

Barriers to completion/attending training

Transportation and location of courses

Transport.

Sometimes I [unclear] my stepfather ... Sometimes I have to ask [Program coordinator].

Taxi. Taxis here costs around about \$50. Sometimes, they charge us \$70.

Health and wellbeing/ Personal reasons/ Family commitments

Just to look after my kids. That's why it's getting hard for me to look after them. Earn enough, go work, go back home, look after kids.

I have to sometimes stay home with my little one.

There's not many childcares here. Most of the time they're full. At the moment, my son – he's in Year [level removed]. He's having food problems at school.

They can't trust anyone ... Wherever I go they cry. That's what makes me unhappy ... I've got to be with my kids and look after my kids.

They recently brought up FaFT, Families as First Teachers. So for that position, you have to be able to attend the childcare with the child ... that could be one thing that [participant's name] is struggling with. She's doing her studies, but then also, she can't just leave her son alone at childcare ...

When I sometimes feel pain on the back of the bottom ... and I take Panadol and maybe go back to bed for a little while.

Because I was feeling sleepy, weak.

I got pregnant.

Family issues.

Couldn't hold it down due to lifestyle and mum duties.

Social and work influences

But when I should come here for training, [the] clinic called and said there's no driver, that's why it's busy.

Community commitments and cultural reasons

Busy all the time ... Busy with everything ... Serve this community, look after this community.

I would possibly say cultural things. So doing cultural stuff would be our first priority and then to participate in study.

So funeral is one, attending our relatives' funerals. Because we have to be within our clans to get through those process and have to finish it within the culture.

Sorry Business. Out of station.

Supports to help with completion/attending training

Supports from training provider

I think the most important is transport ... to change.

Sometimes training support by childcare.

Give food or money.

Food.

Need to be picked up.

Having courses that are relevant to here and childcare.

There's not many childcares here. Most of the time they're full. At the moment, my son – he's in Year [level removed]. He's having food problems at school.

External supports

For next year, I need to let my boss know that I must go to training full-time.

When I like to see my other family member, when I talk to them, that makes me comfortable so I can come to training.

Not many Elders or family or people in the community were helping me through my studies. Probably support from my workplace and just the people at home were my main support until I finish. Everyone's different.

Training experience

Overall

Yeah, it was exciting ... Good to learn many ways, you know?

I liked the course.

Course content

I like how they teach us to use the computer. Also, when we did the course, teaching us and showing us how to take messages and have – what kind of words the right words to use ... Email or phone messages, and how to reply to phone messages.

Yeah, happy with that.

Typing.

Typing. Make files.

How to make posters.

Learning the software.

I would say it did help me a lot with a lot of things like filling out application forms and stuff like that. So far, what I've experienced is – the skills that I did my Cert. I with is – I started doing online shopping. Pretty much internet and social media to get around with PowerPoint, Excels.

What I liked about the course is learning communication and having to act upon the right behaviour towards people and in workplace.

[In relation to government services], instead of waiting hours, you can just go online and it's over and done with.

[Would like to learn more about] safety, office area.

The trainer

I reckon he was good and happy.

He's a good man.

Good, yeah.

Explained too fast. He didn't go slow.

[Laughs] click here, yeah, whoa. Slow down.

Talk slow [unclear] ... Yeah, that's what [I] said to him.

Delivery

Morning or night-time.

In the morning.

Morning.

Other experiences

The other students. So the peers, the building relationships with other students, which is nice. (Program coordinator repeating a response from a focus group participant that was inaudible).

We get to get a certificate for doing the course.

Ideas from learners to improve foundation skills courses

Ideas for improvement

Maybe our – one of our lecturers should do their courses with cultural experiences and learn our ... cultural stuff before they come in.

It would be good if the course – the people who are doing the course – actually standing in front of you – if they did a course here – one of us showed them. That way, before they come here and – just to get the feel of what's their environment. It goes both ways.

Yeah. Because it would help them. It would help. I'm just thinking about their side, too. I'd be scared to come into a community where all this stuff is going on. That just leaves them with, I just want to do this and get on with it, they have no heart in what they're trying to teach us. Just ... I think it was a big thing.

Yeah ... induction.

We've got to sit down and get to know each other. Like I said, we might know each other – but the backgrounds – in this environment – in the teaching environment ... Or communicate – the icebreaker. And don't think because they're adults that they know where you're coming from. I always say, we Indigenous people learn differently ... but when you come into a learning environment with adults, the first thing – you sit down, and you yarn. You start that yarning circle. Once you start that yarning circle, that person will open up to you. They might be quiet at the beginning but once you start talking about family and connection ...

For – to do – instead of doing indoor studying, we would be more likely to do learning on country, going outdoor ... studying outdoors.

Normal people don't really like sitting down on the chair for approximately two to three hours, which – that's why we do outdoors pretty much.

Well, when I think about learning on country, it's more like bringing out laptops out from the country [outdoors], sitting down under a tree. Doing studies and paperwork while you're out in the fresh air.

Yeah, two-way learning. [White] learning and [First Nations] learning [References to local terminology removed to protect anonymity of case study sites].

Need to know what you doing [white] people and ... what [First Nations] people are doing, know each other ... Learn each other ... Work together [References to local terminology removed to protect anonymity of case study sites].

My sister, ..., she said, 'what if you want to do this so we can go to a city for doing computer training for course? It's the whole week for four days, from Monday to Thursday. We can start at nine o'clock and finish off at three o'clock'. She said, 'what about [First Nations teacher]?' I said, 'no, this is important that I might learn for doing course training for competent [unclear]. If I knew everything from the [unclear]'.

Like have a community [person aid] that can be in that classroom, too.

That sort of thing has got to be made part of the cultural knowledge as well. They've got to be taught that some of these people need that person there. The other thing that we could do is also – someone else – another student in that course who plays that important role with that person, so it's someone that they have a relationship with – like having a best friend at school. It's like that. It's someone that they can lean on.

I think the most important is transport ... to change.

Additional information

First Nations learners' experiences with cultural competence of trainers and learning environment

Maybe our – one of our lecturers should do their courses with cultural experiences and learn our ... cultural stuff before they come in.

It would be good if the course – the people who are doing the course – actually standing in front of you – if they did a course here – one of us showed them. That way, before they come here and – just to get the feel of what's their environment. It goes both ways.

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Well, when I think about learning on Country, it's more like bringing out laptops out from the country[outdoors], sitting down under a tree. Doing studies and paperwork while you're out in the fresh air.

Impact on the community

I don't know. It's always been there – maybe one day us as [First Nations] people could run businesses. We running it. Not white people, non-Indigenous people running it.

Community support

Not many Elders or family or people in the community were helping me through my studies. Probably support from my workplace and just the people at home were my main support until I finish. Everyone's different.
