



Report

# ShoreTrack evaluation

Formative evaluation



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This report has been prepared by Think Impact on the instructions, and for the benefit, of ShoreTrack in relation to supporting the understanding of ShoreTrack's social impact. It is not to be used for any other purpose.

Think Impact is a specialist social impact and sustainability consultancy based in Melbourne. Our focus is to support organisations, across all sectors, to manage for better impact.

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# Executive summary

**‘Being at ShoreTrack has shown me that I can learn even though I don’t belong in school. I belong in my community, and I can be whoever I want to be.’ – ShoreTrack participant**

ShoreTrack is a not-for-profit, community-driven organisation that offers a safe space for young people to experience personal growth. They were established in response to many young people being at risk of falling through the cracks in the education and employment systems. They provide support to young people (aged 10–24) that are disengaged from the school system, to develop life and work skills that equip them to re-engage with learning and shape their future pathways into employment or further education. Based in the Nambucca Valley, on Gumbaynggirr Country, on the Mid North Coast of NSW, their vision is to see all young people in the Nambucca local government area (LGA) and surrounds have the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

This report summarises the findings of a formative evaluation completed across 2024 and 2025 of ShoreTrack’s programs, focused on understanding the changes in stakeholders lives and learning lessons to support enhanced program impact. It includes a snapshot of ShoreTrack’s evolving operating context and recommendations.

In 2024, ShoreTrack commissioned Think Impact over two phases of work to support improved impact measurement, the articulation of the social value they created and to identify approaches to enhancing their impact. Phase one focused on developing ShoreTrack’s Social Impact Framework (SIF) and phase two focused on support to implement and embed the SIF in day-to-day operations, culminating in this formative evaluation.

This evaluation involved Think Impact consultants working closely with ShoreTrack staff towards the end of phase two. The methodology involved visits to ShoreTrack’s ‘Shed’, semi-structured interviews with 52 stakeholders (participants, parents, staff, schools and industry), a participant survey and a review of ShoreTrack program data.

The table below provides a snapshot of ShoreTrack achievements and impact in numbers.

**Table 1 ShoreTrack achievements/impact in numbers**

<b>5</b>	Years in operation (established in 2020), entering the fifth year in operation in 2025.
<b>652</b>	Total young people engaged in ShoreTrack programs <sup>1</sup> (2021–25) including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>13 early school leavers employed as trainees at ShoreTrack<sup>2</sup> (2024–2025)</li><li>48 young people undertook the Certificate II Rural Operations/Agriculture across three cohorts 2023–2025 (15 still in training)</li><li>102 young people engaged through ‘Track Back’</li><li>215 engaged through 14 tailored ‘trades taster’ programs (2021–2025)<sup>3</sup></li><li>252 through nine school holiday programs (2022–2024)</li><li>22 primary school aged participants engaged through four ‘First Tracks’ programs.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> The majority of the 652 young people engaged are unique individuals however ShoreTrack estimate up to 10% may have done more than one program.

<sup>2</sup> Eight still working as trainees at ShoreTrack at time of reporting, three transitioned to work, one to further education at TOCAL Agricultural College doing Certificate III and one moved away.

<sup>3</sup> Trades Taster programs have included ‘Girls Can Too’ the one-day-per-week trades taster for young girls (aged 13–16) and the advanced manufacturing program ‘My Next Step’ (For years 9 and 10).

<b>83%</b>	Increased school attendance for participants in Track Back respite programs (2024 cohort).
<b>93%</b>	Of the 30 early school leavers who did Certificate II Rural Operations/Agriculture have transitioned to paid employment (2022–23 and 2023–24 cohorts)
<b>100%</b>	Of participants (2024) <sup>4</sup> who completed the survey reported positive outcomes since attending ShoreTrack including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 93% agree/strongly agree they have developed skills to help them in the future</li> <li>• 92% agree/strongly agree they have a better support network</li> <li>• 86% agree/strongly agree they have improved job-readiness, confidence, self-esteem, increased aspirations, belonging and better physical health.</li> </ul>

## Key findings

‘It’s not just a day job for ShoreTrack staff, they are so passionate. These kids are getting the best start to their working career.’ – Local business owner

- ShoreTrack provides a needed service for young people with complex needs in the region and is responsive to community need.
- There’s evidence of change for the young people across the three key domains where outcomes are sought. This suggests that the young people are more likely to experience enduring change from their ShoreTrack experience. There is evidence of a ripple effect of this change into improved outcomes for families and the community, including local industry and schools.
- ShoreTrack’s organisational values, culture and staff are part of their ‘secret sauce’ and are critical enablers of the impact.
- ShoreTrack’s high-level organisational theory of change has been validated by stakeholders and participants. ShoreTrack has made real progress in building their impact measurement foundations by developing and testing the SIF. The focus should now be on refining it in line with organisational developments and further embedding it across the team and into systems.
- There are some gaps in the understanding of ShoreTrack’s impact. This should be the focus of future evaluation support, particularly around understanding the wider value to society of ShoreTrack’s preventative work (e.g. avoided contact with the criminal justice system). ShoreTrack should also establish systems to more effectively track both the post-program outcomes and trajectory for young people.
- The lack of sustainable, ongoing funding sources has made it harder to consolidate programs, build their model in a sustainable way, and meet demand for their services. ShoreTrack’s decision to establish a school within the ShoreTrack model reflects a move to ensure greater sustainability.

## Recommendation

This evaluation found there is strong evidence ShoreTrack is improving the wellbeing and future pathways (education/employment) for young people across the wider Nambucca region, leading to improved cohesion for their families and communities. They are changing the lives of these young people and their families for the better. ShoreTrack has a strong culture, staff team and good working model. To continue to consolidate their model and deepen their impact, they will need a renewed focus on embedding impact measurement and continued support from funders, partners and the community.

‘I’m so grateful to ShoreTrack and to the school who gave him the opportunity, as ShoreTrack has given him self-belief and has changed his life.’ – Parent of First Track participant

<sup>4</sup> 30 participants (Track Back, Rural Operations and Trainees) were emailed the survey and 14 completed it.

# Glossary

The following acronyms are used in this report:

Term	Definition
Activity	The action and effort undertaken to create change (that is, outcome).
Attribution	An assessment of how much of the outcome was caused by the contribution of other organisations or people.
Beneficiary	People, organisations or entities that are affected, or are intended to experience change, as a result of the activity.
Benefit pathway	An in-depth program logic that explores value flow through understanding early, intermediate and longer-term changes through exploration of cause and effect.
Data	Information collected for reference or analysis.
Domains	The broad areas where change will take place.
Impact	The total sum or effect of change caused by an organisation, program or activity.
Intended impact	A statement of the future impact that the program or activity intends to create.
Indicators	Indicators are ways of knowing that change has happened. Indicators exist to provide evidence for whether and to what extent outcomes are occurring.
Outcome	<p>The change that happens as a result of an activity or output.</p> <p>An outcome can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, direct or indirect, long-term or short-term, social or environmental.</p> <p>An outcome should be described as an end state – what will be seen if the desired change has occurred.</p>
Outcome depth	The extent to which the stakeholders experienced the outcome, measured using indicators. Depth includes positive, negative or no change.
Outcomes framework	An outcomes framework is a tool that outlines what will be measured, and by whom, to enable change to be tracked and managed.
Output	Outputs describe the quantities associated with an activity (e.g. number of people who took part in a program).
Theory of change	This is the starting point of measuring impact. It is outlining how you think the activities you run will lead to change. It tells the story of how stakeholders are impacted by an activity, program or initiative.
Social return on investment (SROI)	SROI is an internationally recognised approach for understanding and measuring the social, cultural, environmental and economic impact of an initiative. It is a principles-based methodology drawing upon accounting, evaluation and social research disciplines.
Social value	Social value is the importance people place on the social and environmental wellbeing of people, communities or places.
Stakeholder	People, organisations or entities that either experience change as a result of the activity that is being analysed or contribute to the change taking place.

# 1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings of a formative evaluation (2024–2025) of ShoreTrack’s programs focused on understanding the outcomes (changes in people’s lives) being achieved by ShoreTrack and lessons learnt. It includes a snapshot of ShoreTrack’s evolving operating context and recommendations.

A formative evaluation was chosen as it was recognised that ShoreTrack is a relatively new organisation that is building towards sustainability. The aim of the formative evaluation is to provide insight to ShoreTrack to enable them to improve and develop their programs for young people. Figure 1 below, provides an outline of the evaluation spectrum.

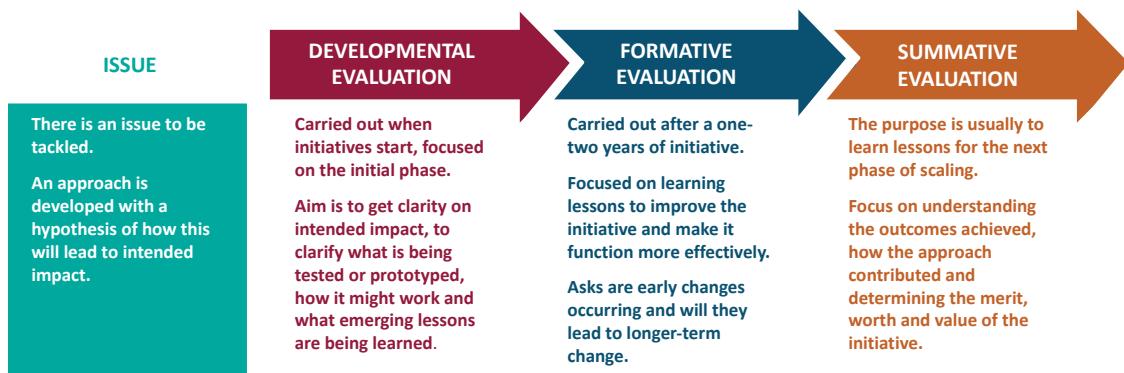


Figure 1 Evaluation spectrum

## 1.1 About ShoreTrack

ShoreTrack was created to break cycles of disadvantage by supporting young people at risk. They are a not-for-profit, community-driven organisation with Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) and Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, guided by a board of eight experienced professionals. Established in 2020, ShoreTrack serves the Nambucca LGA on the Mid North Coast of NSW, from Bellingen in the North, to Kempsey in the South.

ShoreTrack was established because it was recognised there were young people in the Nambucca LGA in the Mid North Coast of NSW that were at risk of falling through the cracks in the education and employment systems. These young people were disengaged from school due to the many challenges and complex needs they faced in their lives, and an education system that wasn’t meeting their needs. This disengagement was frequently leading to homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues, juvenile crime, social isolation and long-term unemployment. ShoreTrack sought to break this cycle of disadvantage.

Established as a community-driven organisation, ShoreTrack provides support to young people (aged 10–24) in the local region to enable them to develop both life and work skills that will equip them to re-engage with learning and shape their future pathways into employment or further education.

ShoreTrack runs a series of programs to support young people, all which are underpinned by their social enterprise – STeps, which provides a real-world learning environment

Whilst carrying out the formative evaluation, ShoreTrack started to explore the potential to set up a new school as an alternative option to the local education system for those young people who struggled to engage in a traditional school setting. As part of this development process, ShoreTrack are actively thinking about how this new school will relate to their existing programs and the social enterprise.

## ShoreTrack's theory of change

ShoreTrack's theory of change, Figure 2 below, reflects the problem, their response and how this leads to changes for young people which in turn flows on to their families and the local community.



**Figure 2** ShoreTrack theory of change

ShoreTrack's theory of change is expanded on in Section 3.1 ShoreTrack's impact, including the specific outcomes that are expected to occur from ShoreTrack's work.

### 1.1.1 ShoreTrack's programs

ShoreTrack has developed a suite of programs that provide flexible access to their services including:

- **Track Back** – a High School Program that lasts for six months for 13–16-year-old girls and boys attending between one and five days per week, depending on their level of need.
- **First Tracks** – a Primary School Program that lasts for 10 weeks for 10–12-year-old girls and boys.
- **Rural Ops** – a Certificate II in Rural Operations which is a 12-month program for 16–24-year-olds who left school early.
- **Specialist programs** – such as the one-day-per-week trades taster for young girls 'Girls Can Too' (aged 13–16) or the advanced manufacturing program 'My Next Step' (years 9 and 10).
- **STeps** – a social enterprise that provides young people with practical work experience, employment pathways and hands-on training. Young people can also progress to paid traineeships, developing industry-relevant skills while working in real-world settings.

As an entrepreneurial organisation, ShoreTrack continues to develop services or programs that respond to local needs within the community.

### 1.1.2 The ShoreTrack Shed

ShoreTrack's programs run out of the 'Shed' which is a large building that provides a safe space for learning the use of trade tools and equipment. It also has space for group learning and socialising, including shared meals. Each morning ShoreTrack staff pick up the young people from around the region and bring them to the Shed. Days typically start with circle work where participants and staff gather to check-in around 'how they are travelling' (0–10 rating), learn about the jobs for the day, get into teams and discuss a point of learning – often health and safety related to the day's activities. The Shed is the base from which teams working in STeps operate from. Their contracted jobs can include fence building, mowing and garden maintenance or metal work commissions.



Figure 3 Pictures from ShoreTrack's shed

## 1.2 About Think Impact

This evaluation was conducted by Think Impact consultants working closely with ShoreTrack staff to understand the change that is occurring for the young people.

Think Impact is a social impact and sustainability consultancy working to create positive change for business, government, philanthropy and the for-purpose sector. Our purpose is to support organisations to manage for better impact.

Think Impact's approach to this project has been informed by both deep experience in evaluation and development work with social enterprises.

ShoreTrack commissioned Think Impact over two phases of work to support improved impact measurement; the articulation of the social value created for funders, employers and partners; as well as to identify approaches to enhancing their impact.

**Phase one** focused on developing ShoreTrack's SIF to better understand and communicate the changes they seek to achieve, and how they plan to achieve this change. It provided a clear link between their activities and their end goal. Key elements of ShoreTrack's SIF included:

- Strategy – The strategy on a page
- Who we are – The vision, purpose and what drives ShoreTrack
- Theory of change – The problem identified and how to solve it
- Outcomes framework – An outline of what outcomes will be measured, tracked and managed
- Implementation plan – An overview of how to collect, analyse and report on progress

**Phase two** focused on ongoing development of the SIF including implementation support to embed the impact measurement foundations into the day-to-day operations. This culminated in this formative evaluation to gain a deeper understanding of ShoreTrack's impact.

## 1.3 Purpose of this evaluation

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to:

- deepen the understanding of the outcomes (changes in people's lives) being achieved by ShoreTrack, including where gaps in impact understanding exist
- to identify lessons learnt and opportunities to improve the programs
- to test and refine the SIF, building impact measurement foundations in a way that could support a subsequent social return on investment (SROI) study.

## 1.4 Evaluation methodology

Across 2024, Think Impact undertook a formative evaluation focused on understanding early changes in stakeholders lives and learning lessons to support enhanced program impact. Evaluation activities included:

- developing a theory of change and outcomes framework (also referred to as the SIF, completed during phase one, early 2024)
- qualitative data collection (March–November 2024) via semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 52 stakeholders including:
  - 17 participants/young people
  - 6 parents of participants
  - 15 ShoreTrack staff/board members
  - 7 school/Department of Education stakeholders
  - 3 industry stakeholders (local business owners who have worked with the young people)
- a participant survey and analysis (led by ShoreTrack with Think Impact oversight)
- data analysis, including quantitative review of program outputs.

### 1.4.1 Enduring impact

In developing ShoreTrack's SIF, one of the early insights gained was that ShoreTrack had developed a suite of programs and services that could be delivering enduring impact for the young people involved.

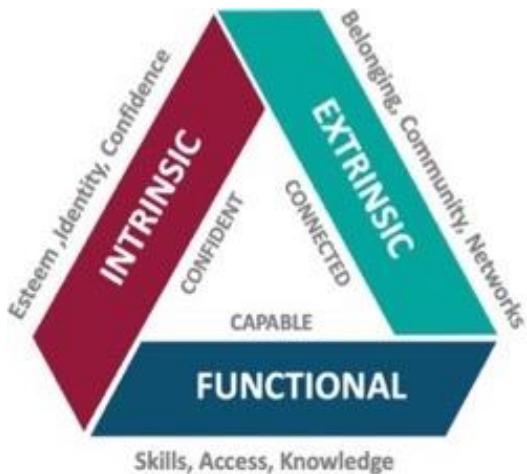
Based on this, Think Impact applied their Enduring Impact Model<sup>5</sup>, outlined in Figure 4 below. This grouped the intended outcomes for young people from ShoreTrack's programs. We identified that

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<sup>5</sup> Think Impact developed the Enduring Impact model in 2015–16 when working in the further education sector. Since then, it has been further refined through application in the school-to-work transitions and employment sectors.

outcomes were occurring for individuals across three outcome dimensions that the model identifies as critical to create enduring change, specifically:

- intrinsic (internally focused 'personal' outcomes)
- extrinsic (externally focused outcomes described as 'connections' in the SIF)
- functional (knowledge and capability outcomes described as 'opportunities' in the SIF).



**Figure 4 Enduring Impact Model**

The evaluation findings section below reports on outcomes across these three domains of personal outcomes, connections and functional opportunities.

#### 1.4.2 Limitations

The evaluation was constrained by the following limitations:

- Interviews focused on participants and families engaged with ShoreTrack in 2024 and early 2025.
- Data was limited for certain outcome areas. For example, findings related to changes for the community (reduced anti-social behaviour) including the government (reduced reliance on welfare and reduced numbers of young people in contact with the justice system) rely on anecdotal data only. Further study is needed to better understand these outcomes. Think Impact's ability to make comprehensive assessments about outcomes for schools was also limited by the small number of stakeholders interviewed and lack of access to data around school retention.

## 2. ShoreTrack's changing context

Across 2024 there were key changes in ShoreTrack's operating context that have influenced their strategy and development of their impact measurement foundations. They are summarised below and are referenced through the report as they relate to findings.

**Table 2 Key ShoreTrack milestones/changes**

Milestone or change	Detail and Implications
ShoreTrack board decision to pursue becoming a special assistance school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In 2024, local schools struggled to fund young people to participate in ShoreTrack programs as the RAM equity funding<sup>6</sup> they had drawn on to pay for disengaged students to attend ShoreTrack was no longer available. This led to a decrease in referrals from schools due to lack of funds.</li><li>ShoreTrack reported 35 young people were referred to them but missed out on places due to the lack of funding.</li><li>This and other sustainability considerations led the ShoreTrack board to decide to pursue becoming a special assistance school as well as continuing the social enterprise to improve ShoreTrack's longer-term sustainably.</li><li>This shift represents a key change that will have implications for the SIF that was developed prior to this, as education system reporting requirements come into play.</li></ul>
Purchase of and move to new shed/site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The December 2024 move to a new site with a larger shed will allow for a range of program improvements including more and improved spaces for learning.</li></ul>
Published first combined annual and impact report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>November 2024 saw the publication of the first combined annual and impact report. This process allowed ShoreTrack to collate output data that was spread across their range of programs.</li></ul>
Hired impact-focused staff member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The mid-year hire of a senior staff member focused on impact has supported the work to implement the SIF.</li></ul>
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations funding and evaluation plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Mid-2024 ShoreTrack's STEps social enterprise secured funding from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' National Priority Fund aimed at reskilling, upskilling and generating employment in regional Australia. The funding came with monitoring and evaluation requirements additional to what had been planned for in the SIF. Extra work was required to adapt to the funder's requirements and harmonise with the SIF.</li></ul>

<sup>6</sup> Through the School Budget Allocation Report (SBAR), the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) delivers budget allocations to each NSW public school based on school context and student needs. The model recognises that each school is unique, and that student and school needs are not all the same. The RAM uses data recognising the characteristics of schools and students to deliver allocations through a base and loadings approach. Needs-based equity loadings and targeted funding are provided in addition to the base allocation to support additional student needs. Source: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/schools-funding/resource-allocation-model#:~:text=Through%20the%20School%20Budget%20Allocation,are%20not%20all%20the%20same.>

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Participant journey map

- Mid-2024 ShoreTrack staff developed a visual to reflect a generalised young person's journey at ShoreTrack. This will need to be refined once the school is established and integrated into a future version of the SIF.

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### 3. Evaluation findings

Evaluation findings are presented below in two sections:

- **3.1 ShoreTrack's impact** which outlines findings about the outcomes (changes in people's lives) being achieved by ShoreTrack including where gaps in impact understanding exist.
- **3.2 The ShoreTrack model** which outlines findings and lessons related to the workings of ShoreTrack's model/programs.

#### 3.1 ShoreTrack's impact

##### 3.1.1 Overall findings

ShoreTrack is providing a needed service for young people requiring an alternative learning environment and is responsive to community need.

- Many young people attending ShoreTrack have multiple barriers to engagement and employment which can include poor school attendance or truancy, disruptive behaviours, expulsion from school, contact with the justice system, poor mental health, neurodiversity (occasionally undiagnosed), disabilities and other family/social challenges.

**'If I wasn't at ShoreTrack I'd be in juvie.' – Participant**
- Participants, their parents and educators interviewed attested to the pressing need for alternative options for young people who are disengaged from school.
  - Young people described their experience before ShoreTrack as feeling lost, not fitting in/belonging, *'doing bad in school and bad at home'*, poor confidence, poor social skills, lacking discipline and getting *'in trouble a lot'*.

**'It's needed, some of these kids are doing it really tough, living below the poverty line. At ShoreTrack they feel valued.' – Local business owner**

- ShoreTrack is responsive to community need working closely with schools in the region and other community stakeholders to identify young people needing alternative pathways.
  - Schools particularly valued ShoreTrack's ability to engage young people (who have multiple barriers to engagement/learning and need alternative learning environments) that they are unable to provide for.

**'ShoreTrack deals with the kids that would otherwise be expelled.' – Educator**

- Bellingen Shire Youth Interagency, the Bellingen Youth Hub and Bellingen Shire Council approached ShoreTrack about taking on a group of young people who were disengaged from school and displaying anti-social behaviour in the town centre. It resulted in an anonymous community member funding five young people to attend ShoreTrack and subsequently reporting the vandalism of Council property had ceased.

There is evidence of change for the young people across all the intended outcomes areas, suggesting they are likely to experience enduring change from their ShoreTrack experience.

- The young people and the parents interviewed described positive outcomes resulting from ShoreTrack's programs across the three enduring impact domains of **personal outcomes**, **connections** and **functional opportunities**.

**'ShoreTrack has helped me in a lot of ways, it showed me that I have potential to work and actually be something. It has changed my life.' – Participant**

- The most common outcomes participants reported in the January 2025 survey were ‘improved skills’ followed by ‘better support network’, ‘have built trusting relationships’, ‘improved aspirations’ and ‘increased confidence’.
- Most respondents (86%) said ShoreTrack had played a big role in the changes they had experienced, with one attributing all the changes to ShoreTrack and one stating ShoreTrack played a small role.

‘Attending ShoreTrack has made a massive difference in my life. It's given me something to do with my days and helped me gain the skills I need to achieve my dream job. Plus, I've picked up life and work skills that I'll never forget.’ – Participant

- The biggest changes reported by participants in the January 2025 survey (a before and since attending ShoreTrack comparison) were:
  - aspirations (feeling positive about their future)
  - job-readiness (feeling ready for work/a job)
  - confidence (feeling more confident in their abilities)
  - identity (feeling more respected for who they are).

‘ShoreTrack builds young people's confidence, unlocks what they want to do, it builds practical/physical skills through task/work focus not a book focus.’ – Youth Employment Specialist, Mission Australia

**One of the keys to ShoreTrack’s success is the achievement of three early changes that then continue through to be key outcomes for the young people. These early changes are having a sense of belonging, building trusting relationships and developing skills.**

- It was identified that a critical factor in the young people achieving these core outcomes was having a safe space to be themselves.
- Many young people attending ShoreTrack reported engaging in the learning activities as the practical nature of the tasks seemed relevant to them, as opposed to their disengagement with more academic learning at school.

‘I've started to learn things here. It makes sense to me to be able to count things as it makes me better at making stuff.’ – Participant

**There is evidence of a ripple effect of outcomes into families and the community including local industry and schools.**

- Parents shared strong observations of changes in their children and the ripple effect on them personally and into their family units. Refer to section 3.1.3 What’s changing for families below.

‘The reduction in stress at home since he started at ShoreTrack is clear. He's less stressed, I'm less stressed. It's better for everyone.’ – Parent

- There is evidence of strong community support for ShoreTrack and a positive community reputation as evidenced through the number of young people referred, the range of working partnerships with schools, industry and other services (e.g. employment service providers), community media coverage and ShoreTrack’s engagement and reach through social media (ShoreTrack Facebook page has 2.1K followers and 1.5K likes, refer below for examples).
- There is also emerging evidence of how the change in young people is having a ripple effect into the community in terms of increased pride in young people, reduced anti-social behaviour and local businesses having improved access to new ‘work-ready’ recruits. Refer to section 3.1.3 What’s changing for the community.

‘[Without ShoreTrack] I don’t know if we’d get the trainees we need or that they’d have the skill level we need. More work-ready young people cuts non-productive time on the factory floor as they know what to do.’ – Senior executive, local industry

- There is also evidence that Schools referring young people also benefit from improved student behaviour, better student attendance, reduced staff stress and improved school reputation. However, some educators also noted tensions related to the costs of funding students' participation at ShoreTrack and the potential negative impact of reduced funding for the school. An Education Department stakeholder described ShoreTrack as having had a big impact across the school system in the Nambucca region. A key indicator they cited was there no longer being young people on the serious behaviour lists (or they are removed quickly as they have ShoreTrack as an option). They contrasted this to many other regions across NSW that have long lists of students with behavioural issues that the school system is struggling to deal with/engage.



Figure 5 Examples of ShoreTrack social media posts

There are some gaps in the understanding of ShoreTrack's impact. This should be the focus of future evaluation support, particularly around understanding the wider social value to society of ShoreTrack's preventative work (e.g. avoided contact with the criminal justice system).

- There is anecdotal evidence of the social value to society of ShoreTrack's work in reducing or preventing negative outcomes. However, further evaluation would be needed to evidence the extent of these avoided negative outcomes and the social value. They include:
  - Avoided contact with the criminal justice system/vandalism: Bellingen Council and local police reported reduced vandalism due to ShoreTrack, and several participants when asked if not for ShoreTrack what might be different in your life, answered '*I would probably be in jail or worse*'.
  - Reduced employment exclusion: Several participants reflected that if not for ShoreTrack, '*I probably wouldn't have a job and wouldn't have the motivation and dedication to be active*'.
  - Reduced need for other social services.
  - Prevention of school dropout: Department of Education staff noted without ShoreTrack there would be more expulsions and truancy. Many participants when asked if not for ShoreTrack what might be different in your life, suggested they would be skipping school or have left school '*with nothing to do*'.
- ShoreTrack has previously considered undertaking a social return on investment (SROI) analysis. This type of evaluation would build their understanding of the change they are creating and strengthen their ability to communicate this social value to key stakeholders.

ShoreTrack should establish systems to more effectively track both the post-program outcomes and trajectory for young people.

- ShoreTrack has end-of-program outcomes data (e.g. returned to education or employment) for various cohorts across different years, however, more limited anecdotal data about participants' trajectories post ShoreTrack, including if and for how long employment outcomes are lasting. A more consistent approach to tracking end-of-program employment outcomes over time and some post-program follow-up with participants will help evidence the depth and duration of ShoreTrack's impact.
- Staff interviewed provided valuable stories and perspectives on participants' life context, on changes in their lives and enablers and barriers to change. ShoreTrack currently have an ad hoc and informal approach to recording their observations, however, it could be enhanced to better inform participant case management and program monitoring, evaluation, learning and (re)design.

### 3.1.2 What's changing for young people

This section explores what is changing for young people in more detail across the three enduring impact domains of **personal outcomes**, **connections** and functional **opportunities**.

There are core outcomes which span the duration of participants' engagement with ShoreTrack in that they are both early changes required for longer-term change but also remain longer-term changes.

- As indicated, one of the key findings from the initial stage of the formative evaluation when developing the SIF was that three of the outcomes (one in each domain) are both early changes that are required to build longer-term change **and** are longer-term changes as a result of the programs. These outcomes are 'a better sense of belonging', 'built trusting relationships' and 'improved skills'.

ShoreTrack's SIF identified the following intended outcomes for young people from their programs.

**Table 3 Intended outcomes for young people**

Domain of change	Intended outcomes for young people:
Personal	• a better sense of belonging
	• improved self esteem
	• improved aspirations
	• a stronger sense of their identity
	• increased confidence
	• better health (physical and mental)
Connections	• built trusting relationships
	• better social connections
	• better support network
Opportunity	• improved skills
	• gained qualifications
	• improved job readiness
	• jobs

Stakeholders interviewed reported change across all intended outcomes. The 2025 participant survey also reported change across all outcomes with the top outcomes being 'improved skills', a 'better support network' and 'built trusting relationships'.

**Table 4 Top participant outcomes (2025 participant survey)**

Domain	Outcome	Outcome mean (5-point scale)	Outcome rank
Opportunity	Skills	4.64	1
Connections	Support network	4.54	2
Connections	Trusting relationships	4.5	3
Personal	Aspirations	4.47	4
Personal	Confidence	4.36	5
Opportunity	Job readiness	4.33	6
Connections	Social connections	4.29	7
Personal	Belonging	4.29	8
Personal	Health	4.24	9
Personal	Self-esteem	4.21	10
Personal	Identity	4.15	11

When asked **what they valued most about their ShoreTrack experience**, over half mentioned the supportive network, trusted relationships/friends, '*sense of community and support*' or ShoreTrack being '*a big family*'.

When asked about **the most important changes in their life from attending ShoreTrack**, participants mentioned many of the intended outcomes, however, the most frequent answer (20%) was their work ethic/sense of accomplishment ('*doing something with my days, better discipline/routine*'). This was followed by developing skills (13%).

Asked about any negatives changes from attending ShoreTrack, most participants said '*none*', with one mention each of '*the heat*', '*seeing friends move on*' and '*silly mistakes*'.

#### Personal domain (focused on internal changes)

**'He comes home with a sense of achievement, really proud of himself.'** – Parent of ShoreTrack participant

Many participants start at ShoreTrack at a low point personally. The changes in the young people's **confidence, self-esteem, aspirations** (feelings about future opportunities), **identity** and **belonging** often start in small increments (e.g. looking staff in the face, confidence to speak) and with time lead to bigger changes. Changes in this 'personal' domain were often most obvious to parents and ShoreTrack staff.

**'It's opened his eyes to the idea "I can still do stuff even though my reading isn't great and I can't spell ... there's things I can do and there's all these jobs I didn't know about." He's got a vision and is working towards something.'** – Parent of ShoreTrack participant with dyslexia and dysgraphia

Participants in the 2025 survey reported **better health** both mentally and physically.

**'[At ShoreTrack] I ate salad for the first time ever in my life and now I eat it almost everyday thanks to Eddie.'** – Participant

Analysed at the indicator level, more participants reported improved physical health (more physically active 86% and eating healthier 92%) than mental health (69% reported improved mental health and being better at staying calm and managing stress). This suggests that while there were big improvements reported in mental health, it remains a challenge for some participants.

#### Connections domain (focused on relationships with others)

**'I value the relationships and the trust the most between everyone and how it's not as much a workplace but more a big family.'** – Participant

The **trusting relationships** and **support networks** are highly valued outcomes by the young people. Many mentioned **feeling respected** at ShoreTrack in a way that was distinct and different to their experience at school.

**'What I value most about my ShoreTrack experience is the sense of community and support. The program has introduced me to amazing people who have encouraged and guided me along the way. This support network has been crucial in helping me grow and stay motivated, which is something I truly appreciate.'** – Participant

The **social connections** young people make at ShoreTrack are with staff, each other and extend into the community/local businesses as they do work experience and meet local employers.

**'I came out knowing tonnes about how business works, I made friends and connections I can call on. I was mentored by older apprentices.'** – ShoreTrack Trainee reflecting on 3 months of industry work experience arranged by ShoreTrack

#### Opportunities domain (focused on practical or functional changes)

Outcomes in this domain take more time and vary depending on the interests and trajectory of the young person. For some ShoreTrack participants the best outcome might be re-engagement with school and staying on to complete year 10 or 12, whereas for others including early school leavers the focus is on job readiness and pathways to employment.

There's a lot of evidence young people are building **skills and achieving qualifications** at ShoreTrack, including life skills, trade skills and formal qualifications<sup>7</sup>.

**'I've learnt more at ShoreTrack in a year than in four years at school.'** – Participant

The 2025 participant survey suggests most participants have **improved job readiness** in terms of understanding what is expected of them in a workplace (86% agreed/strongly agreed), feeling ready for work/a job (86%) and knowing where and how to find information about employment opportunities (79%).

**'When he goes looking for a job, he's already got some skills, he knows he likes the work and isn't going to start an apprenticeship and then quit ... for organisations that put kids [from ShoreTrack] on, they know the kids are interested, have a work ethic and have experience working in a team.'** – Parent of ShoreTrack participant

Employers interviewed also described working closely with ShoreTrack staff – briefing them on needed skills – to ensure the young people were work-ready.

**'The kids knew what they were in for, ShoreTrack didn't send me anyone who doesn't want to work.'** – Local business who offers work experience and traineeships

Data shows young people are transitioning from ShoreTrack into **employment** in part due to pro-active staff collaborations with local industry and job agencies. ShoreTrack have had success trialling work experience pathways with Swale Industries and more recently Express Coaches, leading to traineeships. In 2023, 45% (19 out of 40) young people who were work-ready found work. By the end of 2024, 13 of the 16 Certificate II in Rural Operations participants has found work in the community (81%).

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<sup>7</sup> For example, ShoreTrack has had 31 enrolments in Certificate II Rural Operations/Agriculture (10 completed and 15 ongoing). It also supports participants to gain qualifications in diverse areas including but not limited to lifeguard (17 in 2023), film making (10 in 2023), construction industry white cards (31 completed 2023) and learners drivers licences (14 achieved in 2023)

A more consistent approach to tracking end-of-program employment results will help with understanding the depth and duration of ShoreTrack's impact.

### 3.1.3 What's changing for families

ShoreTrack's SIF identified the following intended outcomes for families from their programs.

Table 5 Intended outcomes for families

Domain	Intended outcomes:
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Families have increased pride in young people</li><li>• Families have improved relationships</li><li>• Families have improved role models for siblings</li><li>• Families have reduced stress</li></ul>

The evaluation found evidence for three of these outcomes including pride in young people, improved relationships and reduced stress. However, any flow-on effect of changes in the young person to their siblings is less clear/would need further study.

*'The Program's so beneficial to everyone. It really does make the whole household more harmonious.' – Parent of ShoreTrack participant*

All parents interviewed expressed pride in their son/daughter – *'it's given him the confidence to act on opportunities. He's found his own motivation, gets up early, I'm so proud of him'*. For some this had a flow-on effect to their own sense of achievement as a parent – *'it's an accomplishment in ourselves to see our kids happy and achieving things'*.

Changes in the young people are also flowing onto **improved family relationships**.

*'He's really good now, he talks to me and his Pop about stuff, tells us about things he's done like building stuff and mowing. I just love ShoreTrack and how they've turned him around. Without ShoreTrack things would have been dramatically different and he'd have been following the local gang.' – Parent of ShoreTrack trainee*

*'Before ShoreTrack we were arguing a lot, he hated school and would go then leave. Now [after attending ShoreTrack for a year, two days per week as well as school] he's achieving a lot, he's grown up, come out of his shell and is more motivated. He's more optimistic, we're not arguing and he wants to do stuff around the house.' – Parent of Track Back participant*

All the parents described the relief and **reduced stress** from seeing their children happier, growing in confidence and self-esteem and with new more positive perspectives on their future pathways.

*'As a parent you spend half your life heartbroken because your kid is sad, struggling or doesn't have the social network ... just to see them happy is such a weight off, they come home [from ShoreTrack] proud.' – Parent of First Track participant*

### 3.1.4 What's changing for the community

ShoreTrack's SIF identified the following intended outcomes for community from their programs.

Table 6 Intended outcomes for community

Domain	Intended community outcomes:
Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community experiences reduced anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• The community has pride in the achievements of ShoreTrack</li> <li>• Schools experience reduced staff stress</li> <li>• Schools experience improved student behaviour</li> <li>• Schools have better attendance</li> <li>• Schools have an improved reputation</li> <li>• Schools have better retention to Y12</li> <li>• Local businesses have improved access to new recruits</li> <li>• Government has less reliance on welfare</li> <li>• Government has reduced numbers of young people in the criminal justice system</li> </ul>

The evaluation found evidence for community outcomes including reduced anti-social behaviour with many stakeholders describing how ShoreTrack is '*keeping them off the streets*' and community pride in the achievements of ShoreTrack.

Bellingen Shire Council's General Manager and local police reported a reduction in vandalism and antisocial behaviour in Bellingen town after key young people not attending school were engaged in the ShoreTrack program.

**‘[If not for ShoreTrack] I would be in town running amok. ShoreTrack is better than school there's so much to learn and do.’ – Participant**

Employers interviewed described how ShoreTrack is helping local industry **find and connect with work-ready trainees and apprentices** and how the STeps social enterprise is creating products they couldn't get elsewhere that add value to their business.

**‘ShoreTrack are making great products with good oversight, product is superb. They've come a long way in a short time.’ – Local employer and social enterprise customer**

The evaluation scope did not extend to analysing outcomes for government, however, it is clear ShoreTrack is supporting young people into work who would likely be reliant on JobSeeker/other welfare if not employed. There is also clear evidence ShoreTrack is diverting some young people away from contact with the criminal justice system.

**‘[If not for ShoreTrack] he would be in a gang and would have had a dramatically different journey.’ – Parent of ShoreTrack participant**

## 3.2 The ShoreTrack model

This section focuses on findings related to ShoreTrack's model/programs including lessons related to how ShoreTrack's model works.

Overall findings are presented, followed by findings specific to key stages in the young persons' ShoreTrack journey, specifically:

- pathways into ShoreTrack
- the experience at ShoreTrack
- pathways beyond ShoreTrack.

### 3.2.1 Overall findings

ShoreTrack's high-level organisational theory of change is solid and has been validated by stakeholders and participants. However, greater clarity is required at a program/service level as their 'suite of programs and services' evolves with the move to becoming a special assistance school.

- ShoreTrack has different programs for young people at different ages/stages. Going forward there may be value in mapping the theory of change and participant journey for each of the key programs to build clarity around the differences in intended outcomes from different programs/services.

ShoreTrack has made real progress in building its impact measurement foundations by developing and testing the SIF. It now needs to be further embedded and owned by a wider group of staff.

- The appointment of a senior impact-focused staff member in 2024 has helped ShoreTrack consolidate its approach to impact measurement, however, more work is needed to embed new data collection tools and continue to refine and implement the SIF. Ring fencing staff time for ongoing implementation of the SIF will be important to ensure gains can be consolidated.

ShoreTrack's organisational values, culture and staff are part of their 'secret sauce' and are critical enablers of the impact.

- Many stakeholders described the passion and dedication of ShoreTrack staff and their ability to develop trusting relationships with this cohort of young people as key to their success. Section 3.2.3 The experience at ShoreTrack, expands on key aspects of their approach that are enabling outcomes.

**'It's the belief they have in kids that makes the difference. The young people have a clean slate, are not labelled and can achieve something at ShoreTrack. The belief in them is crucial. It's a really different experience from school where the kids were really struggling and falling through the cracks.' – Parent of ShoreTrack participant**

The lack of sustainable ongoing funding sources has made it harder to consolidate programs, build their model in a sustainable way and meet demand for their services. ShoreTrack's decision to establish a school with the ShoreTrack model is to ensure greater sustainability.

- There appears to be more demand for ShoreTrack than can be resourced. Some young people reported wanting to attend ShoreTrack more than their funding allowed, and others saw unmet demand wanting '*more programs for kids in school*'.
- One example of this is that ShoreTrack had run a successful holiday program for young people (which helps identify young people who would benefit from ShoreTrack at an earlier stage) but they have not been able to secure sustainable funding for it to continue.

**'There are so many disengaged kids crying out for this. The sustainability of options, funding and the right people is not there.' – School principal**

ShoreTrack's pathways to employment model is evolving and could be better resourced.

- Participants are being supported into work experience and employment, however, it's often work done on the side by staff in addition to their core responsibilities. Refer to 3.2.4 Pathways beyond ShoreTrack (employment or further education) below.

The ShoreTrack brand is strong and the STeps brand for the social enterprise is not as well understood which has potential to create confusion or act as a barrier for potential customers.

- The ShoreTrack brand appears to have a strong reputation in the community and is well-viewed. STeps as the social enterprise brand does not appear to have the same recognition, nor does the

name allude to the services on offer in a way that could attract customers. There would be value in reviewing the names/brand especially with the likely introduction of a third name as the ShoreTrack special assistance school is introduced. A potential option would be for the social enterprise to be called something like 'ShoreTrack Enterprises', which may drive higher customer demand for commercial goods/services.

### 3.2.2 Pathways into ShoreTrack

There is a mix of young people coming to ShoreTrack in terms of the complexity of their needs/circumstances, ranging from teens about to be expelled from school through to primary students with early signs of school disengagement.

In this context ShoreTrack staff do an amazing job. There may be value in identifying priority staff training needs (e.g. mental health first aid, working with young people with disabilities) to continue developing staff confidence and capability in their work with young people with very complex needs.

Once the school is established, ShoreTrack will need to rethink all the early engagement programs to assess whether they are still needed as a pathway into the service.

### 3.2.3 The experience at ShoreTrack

The evaluation identified key aspects of the ShoreTrack way of working that act as enablers of the changes in young people's lives including:

- the ethos around the **young person having a clean slate**, '*no target on their back*' which supports their engagement
- **staff belief in young people's potential**
- **young people being treated with respect**
- provision of a **safe space** to learn
- **mentorship and 'side-by-side' approach to learning** where adult educators aren't like teachers, but rather '*like mates*'
- **practical hands-on task focused learning** – this element really grips and engages young people, and they become more receptive to 'book work'/academic learning when they are first engaged in a practical task.
- **camaraderie/teamwork ethos applied to the tasks**, e.g. 'the mowing crew or fencing team' strongly resonates for young people in contrast to the school experience.

Describing what they valued most about the ShoreTrack experience, one participant said:

**'The support and encouragement not just from the staff but the other students as well and being able to thrive in any area with the confidence. I could lead a team and the trust everyone gave me day to day to do what needed to be done, and I was always included and still am to this day even after parting ways from the ShoreTrack team.'** – Participant

### 3.2.4 Pathways beyond ShoreTrack (employment or further education)

The evaluation found that the ShoreTrack model is evolving in terms of pathways into employment.

The development of a work experience pathway has started. ShoreTrack is seeking to increase their industry partnerships and their understanding of the different needs of employers. The move to the new shed space should assist in broadening these types of partnerships.

ShoreTrack tailors its support to each young person focusing on their interests and their unique journey. Their pathways are not linear and can involve a lot of transitional support. The work to support pathways out of ShoreTrack into mainstream employment is not a highly resourced aspect of ShoreTrack and is often done by the team as a side role. ShoreTrack either needs to identify funding

sources to provide this employment support to young people or develop deeper relationships with other employment service providers that can provide this support.

Internal pathways within ShoreTrack where young people go on to become paid trainees is working well but is also limited by funding constraints and the capacity of the STeps social enterprise to generate income to cover salaries.

**'I want to get a job when I leave here. It has given me that desire ... Yeah, I may need some support to make the transition. I'd prefer that came from ShoreTrack as they know me, they know what support I need.' – Participant**

## 4. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the following high-level recommendations are made. They have been aligned with ShoreTrack's five strategic imperatives.



Figure 6 ShoreTrack strategic imperatives

### **Grow our community impact**

- **Continue to refine the SIF and clarify how both the theory of change and participant journey varies across programs:** ShoreTrack has a strong organisational theory of change and outcomes framework, however, participant journeys and outcomes can vary depending on the program/point of entry/age of the participant. ShoreTrack should continue to map the theory of change and participant journeys for each of its distinct programs. This will provide increased clarity on the target group and intended outcomes for each program and ensure they are understood by stakeholders. Continued refinement of the SIF will be important as a special assistance school (with distinct reporting requirements) is incorporated into the overall model.
- **Track post-program outcomes:** ShoreTrack should adopt a more consistent approach to tracking post-program outcomes (both employment and further educational outcomes), to better understand the depth and duration of its impact. Follow-up with participants after they leave ShoreTrack will help to understand the long-term impact.
- **Better resource the work to facilitate pathways to employment/further education:** ShoreTrack's pathways to employment model is working, however, it's under-resourced. Increasing staff capacity to broker work experience opportunities and expand industry partnerships, will enhance the capacity to transition more young people into employment.

### **Improve sustainability**

- **Continue work to improve the financial viability/sustainability of programs:** ShoreTrack needs to continue building its sustainable funding sources. Incorporating a school into the model will diversify funding sources, however, ensuring ongoing financial support for programs such as the holiday program and general service delivery will be key to sustainability and meeting the local demand.

### **Grow our social enterprise**

- **Revisit the branding strategy:** ShoreTrack's brand is relatively strong in the community. However, its social enterprise brand (STeps) is less well recognised. A review of the branding strategy could help align the names and services for greater clarity and to drive customer demand/recognition. It would also help to connect the new school into the overall model. This should involve rebranding STeps to something more closely related to ShoreTrack (such as ShoreTrack Enterprises) to leverage the established reputation in the community.

### **Improve our organisational capacity**

- **Continue to enhance impact measurement:** While ShoreTrack has made progress with its impact measurement (SIF), more work is needed to embed it within the organisation. The dedicated impact-focused staff member is needed to continue driving implementation of the SIF, ensuring consistent data collection (processes and systems) and refining evaluation methods to track long-term outcomes. Their work would usefully include:

- developing a more systematic approach to harnessing staff perspectives on participants' journeys and outcomes
- ensuring funding proposal objectives and evaluation commitments align with the SIF to avoid duplicate or additional data collection and reporting requirements.
- **Continue to develop staff, building their capability to support a diverse range of participants:** As ShoreTrack expands, ongoing professional development will ensure staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide the best support to meet the diverse needs of participants (e.g. mental health first aid).



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