



APTC AGED CARE PLUS PILOT: EVALUATION FINDINGS

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EVALUATION FINDINGS

This paper sets out the key findings of an independent evaluation of the APTC Aged Care Plus Pilot which took place in 2022. This was one of two pilots exploring how to increase the number of PALM aged carers with the Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing). This paper should be read in conjunction with the paper *PALM Aged Care Training Pilots: Summary of insights from pilot evaluations*.

The Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) and the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) worked with a PALM labour hire Approved Employer (AE) to set up the pilot with two separate cohorts of 40 students each. Each group of 40 workers participated in two phases of training:

- **Phase one (weeks 1 – 12)** was delivered at the APTC aged care hub in Suva which includes two simulated aged care training rooms. The course consisted of theory-based and applied learning activities, and assessment.
- Two weeks for pre-departure training, travel to Australia, and on-arrival orientation facilitated by the AE.
- **Phase two (weeks 13 – 22)** consisted of a supervised work placement in a Host Employer's aged care facilities (in nine locations) to learn and be assessed for the practical skills required to complete the Certificate III. Students and their workplace supervisors were supported by an Australian-based APTC trainer/assessor.

This two-phase approach is referred to as a blended training arrangement. This report provides findings about the students from the first cohort who participated in this blended training.

About the carers

Forty Fijian students (37 females and three males, ranging in age from 22 to 60 years of age) were selected by APTC from a pool of 60 applicants in early 2022. Applicants were required to have completed an aged care or other care giving course from a training institution registered with the Fiji Higher Education Commission. Nearly three quarters of the students had completed a course of three to six months' duration. One recruit had caring experience from supporting elderly family members but had no previous experience of paid employment prior to arriving in Australia. In addition to becoming familiar with working in an Australian aged care workplace, the carer had to learn about employment matters and routines which complicated their transition into the carer role.

The AE visited APTC in early June 2022 to conduct job interviews with the pilot students and graduates from a previous APTC aged care course. All 40 pilot students were recruited on the condition they successfully complete phase one of the course and attained the Certificate III during the supervised work placement. Thirty-eight of the forty carers completed the qualification (two carers were dismissed by the AE for inadequate performance and returned home).

Arrangements for the supervised work placement

Over the duration of the supervised work placement, the pilot carers were required to undertake practical tasks for assessment and complete a series of modules in a work placement logbook, with completed activities signed off by the Host Employer's workplace supervisor. The Australian-based trainer supported the carers (via two in-person visits, online training sessions, and one-on-one support) to

complete their assessments and logbooks, and undertake workplace observation assessments to ensure the carers were on track to complete in the 10-week timeframe for phase two.

The arrangements for the supervised work placement, agreed between APTC and the AE, were as follows:

- The placement would be undertaken over a 10-week period to consolidate learning, add workplace context to previous topics learnt, and be assessed.
- A carer coach or “buddy” would be allocated to each Fijian carer to mentor them in the workplace.
- A workplace supervisor who is a registered nurse (RN) would be allocated in each facility to oversee the carers’ progress and sign off carers’ logbooks. The Australian-based trainer would liaise with the designated workplace supervisor in each facility to monitor the carers’ progress and address any issues that might arise during their training.
- At APTC’s and PLF’s request, the carers were rostered on morning and afternoon shifts (no night shifts and overtime) while completing their placement to ensure that the carers had sufficient time to focus on their assessments and did not feel under too much pressure to study and work.

There was a breakdown in communication between the AE and the Host Employer and/or within the Host Employer about some of these arrangements. This breakdown led to some facilities not having a designated workplace supervisor for the Fijian carers or if they did, it may not have been a formalised role. While some of the Host Employer’s facilities knew about and were receptive to the pilot, others were not.

AE’s perspective

The AE’s feedback on the pilot was largely positive. One of the main benefits of the blended training arrangements for the AE is its ability to draw on APTC’s assessment of the suitability of individual students for aged care employment, including their aptitude to learn in an Australian context and their attitude to work.

The AE noted that while the theory component of phase one of the blended training arrangement adequately prepared the students for their work placement, there were concerns that the carers were not as well prepared for the realities of living in Australia.

Host Employer’s perspective

The Host Employer deemed the pilot to have been a success for its organisation, noting that the majority of carers “*hit the ground running*”. In general, the carers were described as being “*enthusiastic, respectful, caring and hardworking*”.

At the facility level, some gaps were identified in the carers’ skill level requiring training. These included practical manual handling skills, safety procedures, and training in dementia and associated behaviours. The Fijian carers’ quiet and generally reserved nature was noted. Soft skills such as carers’ communication with other staff and clients and the need to show initiative to undertake tasks were identified as areas requiring further attention.

Carers' perspectives

Phase one: Suva-based training

Carers reported that the 12-week Suva-based training gave them the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to start their work placement in Australia. Carers hold APTC's aged care head trainer in very high regard as a teacher and mentor. The aspect of the course that was enjoyed most by students was learning how to use technology-based equipment that is unavailable in Fiji, such as electronic hoists and other mobility aids.

Phase two: supervised work placement

Host Employer

Carers' feedback on the 10-week supervised work placement was mixed. The carers' experiences differed depending on the facility in which they were located and the supervision arrangements in place. Evidence of this variability was provided in the carers' comments on their workplace induction. While some carers received a comprehensive induction, carers in some facilities voiced concerns including: the induction was not thorough enough (e.g. two hours' duration); clearer explanations needed to be given on the tasks to be completed during each shift and how to complete timesheets; more information was required on how to handle residents who had contracted Coronavirus and the use of PPE. Carers described management/staff in a few facilities as not welcoming or friendly.

Carers appreciated the support provided by their work buddies who were allocated to them for three weeks. (This period is based on the length of time for local RTO students to complete their 120-hour placement). Some carers asked for their buddy's support to be extended - in some facilities, it was extended by a week.

Carers identified a range of useful skills learnt during the work placement. The most commonly cited were: client care and safety (e.g. when bed bathing, handling and feeding clients); how to use specific equipment such as hoists; and communication skills when liaising with other staff and with residents.

During their work placement carers were moved around the wards, often daily, preventing them from getting to know residents and become familiar with their individual care needs. When asked how the supervised work placement could be improved, carers said being on the same ward for at least a week before being moved would help them to provide better care to residents.

Support from APTC Australian-based trainer

The carers' feedback on the support provided by the Australian-based trainer during the supervised workplace placement was unanimously positive. Carers spoke of the trainer's helpful approach during her two in-person visits and regular online sessions, and her easy accessibility via phone at other times.

Through her regular contact with the carers, the trainer became an informal wellbeing support person for the carers, fielding both work and non-work-related queries from the carers (e.g. queries about accommodation). Carers were aware that the AE was their primary point of contact for welfare issues, but some preferred to speak with the trainer. She passed any wellbeing concerns on to the AE.

Carer accommodation

The carers live in private rental properties arranged by the AE across nine locations in groups of two or three. Overall, the carers reported being satisfied with their accommodation, and particularly liked having individual bedrooms rather than having to share with others. The rental properties were easily accessible to work (e.g. a 15-20 minute walk).

The fortnightly rent paid by individual carers is very variable due to high housing demand and rents in some areas – the lowest fortnightly rent is \$260 per person, and highest is \$500 (the average fortnightly rent is \$340).

Changes for future carer groups

APTC and the AE have already made or are planning changes for future student/carers groups, including the following.

APTC

- The AE/Host Employer will be encouraged to have a formalised workplace supervisor role and to appoint designated supervisors.
- Prior to the PALM carers arrival, the Australian-based trainer will meet (on-line) with the nominated workplace supervisors to work through the logbook assessments, so they understand the assessment requirements for the carers.
- Efforts will be made to improve regular communication between the Australian-based trainer and Facility Managers/workplace supervisors. This will ensure that if there are concerns about an individual carer's competence or performance, they can be dealt with in a timely manner.
- The initial work placement session between the Australian-based trainer and the carers, and the detailed explanation of the logbook, will be delivered online, rather than in person.
- More time will be scheduled for the trainer's in-person visit to the carers towards the end of their supervised placement to ensure there is adequate time to assess and support the carers with completion of their assessments and logbooks.

Approved Employer

The AE advised that the lack of adequate supervision arrangements in some Host Employer facilities was partly due to the turnover of RN staff. Newly appointed RNs were not necessarily briefed about what was expected of them during the Fijian carers' placement. The AE has implemented the following changes to address this issue.

- A PowerPoint presentation has been produced that new RNs can read, explaining their role in the supervision process.
- The AE and Host Employer are communicating more regularly to ensure the facilities have the requisite arrangements in place.
- The AE and Host Employer have appointed four points of contact at each facility, each of whom are briefed on the supervision arrangements, to ensure institutional knowledge is not lost in the event of staff turnover.

Replicating the blended training arrangements

Replicating the blended training arrangements involves the following.

The workplace

- Ensure managers, workplace supervisors and buddies are culturally competent when working alongside PALM carers. Understanding how the cultural practices of different Pacific nations may influence carers' ways of interacting with other staff and residents is essential. This is particularly relevant for female carers. For example, in Fijian culture women are expected to behave in a quiet and reserved manner. In an Australian workplace this may be misinterpreted as carers lacking confidence, being uncommunicative or ambivalent about their work.
- Ensure comprehensive induction processes are in place for PALM carers. Carers are not only new to working in an aged care facility but also to an Australian workplace.
- Allocate workplace buddies for the length of time required for carers to become familiar with workplace routines and to build their confidence about working with residents.
- Provide extra support for carers who have had no previous formal employment experience.

Supervised work placement

- Create a formalised workplace supervisor role and appoint designated supervisors.
- Put processes in place that will withstand turn-over of work placement supervisors.
- Roster carers on day shifts (no night shifts and overtime) during the supervised work placement to enable carers to have time to complete their study.
- If a facility has concerns about an individual carer's competence or performance, this information should be relayed to the Australian-based trainer in a timely way. Concerns can be addressed via a training plan to ensure the carer's successful graduation.
- Wherever possible, allow carers to remain on the same ward for at least a week before being moved to another ward to enable them to get to know individual resident's care needs.

Labour hire AEs

- Confirm that the Host Employer has the infrastructure required for the supervised work placement in the individual facilities in which the PALM carers will be working, and monitor carer progress during the placement.