

City of Greater Bendigo

EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS:
INSIGHTS FROM THE COMPASS PROGRAM



Introduction

The City of Greater Bendigo (the City) is located in central Victoria on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung country and offers all the benefits of a large city in a thriving regional centre.

The organisation delivers more than 65 services to a community of 126,000 people, a figure expected to grow to nearly 200,000 people by 2050, and employs almost 1100 people, 58% of whom are women.

In an era marked by significant disruption, major regional growth as more people move out of metropolitan areas and unprecedented change in almost all respects, the City of Greater Bendigo is shaping a future that is both inclusive and visionary.



Developing women's leadership skills is very important at City of Greater Bendigo as it demonstrates the commitment to gender equality and the benefits women bring to leadership roles within the organisation.

Compass participant





With a significant role in the broader region, central to this mission is the recognition of the indispensable leadership capabilities women bring to the organisation and the community. The City's dedication to cultivating women leaders has found expression through Dattner Group's Compass Leadership Program, and this report aims to illuminate the profound impact it has had on those who have participated, and the organisation at large.

The City first began sending women to the program in 2016, as they wanted to ensure that there was local, quality leadership programs to support the region and be accessible to the staff.

Since then, some 50 women have taken part, traversing many an obstacle – not least of which, a pandemic, which saw the program shift online. Eight years on, the program, along with those at the City who champion it, continues to drive positive change for all.

This case study was commissioned in August 2023, to acknowledge this commitment and, most importantly, take a step back and examine the impact on the participants, the City, and the community of long-range investment in this kind of development.

Toni Lyons Coordinator Organisation Development, City of Greater Bendigo and Zoe Dattner Director, Dattner Group.



Women need to have support to take up leadership roles - it still does not come as natural as it does for men. And to access that potential. I sometimes say to my husband, 'how has humanity survived this long without the input of women?' And maybe we are where we are because women were excluded?

Compass participant



About this Case Study

This case study features the voices and stories of ten women who were interviewed, and survey data from an additional 14 participants. This represents around 60% of women at the City who have completed the Compass Flagship program.

What follows are the main themes that emerged from the interviews when participants were asked the following questions:

- What remains the most memorable thing about Compass for you?
- Do you believe developing leadership skills in women is important. If so, why?
- What impact on your career has this leadership development had?
- What impact on your organisation/community?
- What impact on your personal life?
- What did it do for you in terms of levels of engagement and connection to your organisation?
- What is next for your leadership development?





In Summary

We invite you to explore the Compass program's long-term partnership with the City of Greater Bendigo and the transformative journeys of the City's women leaders. Their experiences exemplify the value of investing in women's leadership development, and a vision of sustainable constructive leadership.

The interviews revealed the following common themes.

Investing in Empowerment and Confidence Building:

The Compass program has emerged as a beacon of empowerment and self-assurance for women in the City of Greater Bendigo. Through a blend of self-reflective exercises and skill development, participants have discovered their voices, honed their decision-making abilities, and emerged as more confident advocates for change.

These newfound qualities permeate not only their professional lives but also their personal journeys, fostering more holistically assertive and resilient leaders.



An Uplifting Experience of Self-Discovery:

One of the most memorable facets of the Compass program has been its profound effect on self-awareness. Participants now possess a deeper understanding of their strengths and areas for growth. Armed with this knowledge, they are more equipped to make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and lead with authenticity.

Catalysing Positive Change:

Participating in Compass has spurred women to break free from their comfort zones, to confront challenges with renewed vigour, and to embrace newfound responsibilities. This shift in mindset and approach has translated into more innovative thinking and a willingness to navigate uncharted waters.

Building Supportive Networks:

A robust network of women leaders has blossomed within the City because of Compass. This network serves as a platform for mentorship, ideas exchange, and mutual support.

The bonds forged within this network support women to thrive and to contribute positively to the organisation's progress.

Fostering Values-Driven Leadership:

Compass has imbued women leaders with a values-driven approach to leadership. Aligned with their core values, they make decisions marked by integrity and ethics, fostering a sense of shared purpose and unity within the organisation.



In Detail

What for you was the most memorable thing about Compass?

Voice and Communication:

Participants mentioned that one of the most memorable takeaways from Compass was finding their voice and learning to communicate more effectively.

They gained confidence in expressing their opinions and engaging in courageous conversations, both at work and in personal relationships.

Addressing Anxiety and Self-Assurance:

Some participants highlighted the positive impact of Compass on addressing anxiety and building self-assurance, particularly in male-dominated environments. They felt more capable of backing themselves and speaking up.

LSI Self-Discovery:

The Life Styles Inventory (LSI) work stood out as a memorable aspect of Compass. Participants found value in the self-awareness it provided, even if it revealed challenging aspects of their behaviour.

The ongoing support, such as triads and webinars, helped them navigate and improve upon these insights.



Being More Assertive:

Many participants, especially those in male-dominated areas, emphasised the importance of being assertive. They became more aware of how they come across and were proud of their ability to stand up for their beliefs while remaining aware of their communication style.

Ongoing Impact:

The enduring impact of Compass was a common theme. Participants noted that even years after completing the program, they continued to apply the lessons learned, particularly related to values, self-awareness, and understanding others' perspectives.

Alignment with Professional Goals:

Compass helped participants align their personal values with their professional goals. They found it useful for understanding what motivates them and for setting strategies to achieve their objectives.

Personal Strategy Map and Values:

The personal strategy map and values component of Compass were particularly memorable. Participants found these tools helpful in reminding them why they were pursuing their current paths and providing a visual representation of their professional development.

Mindfulness and Self-Control:

Some participants mentioned practicing mindfulness and self-control as part of their Compass experience. These practices helped them manage their reactions and make more thoughtful decisions in various situations.



Before Compass, especially at work, I didn't think it was my place to have an opinion or challenge an idea. And then after Compass I thought, no I have a voice, I can be a part of this discussion.

I had wanted to do it for a long time but there was a guilt factor around taking myself away from the frontline. I'm totally different with my staff now. I recognise that you can get very pigeonholed in the way you work, you're like solo practitioners, you can get a bit 'cosy corner' or boring, but development like this is a bit of shake up out of the comfort zone.

They're amazing women in amazing roles with a lot going on, study, work, parenting - you don't realise there are other women in leadership positions going through same thing.



I'm more aware of when people aren't getting the opportunity to speak, because dominating personalities can dominate the conversation... I've been there and been the person [who is] being talked over.

[I'm still] with my Triad. These two women, one's in Sydney and one's in Melbourne and here I am in little old Bendigo. And we catch up and see how we're going with our jobs, see how things are going, reaching out and growing that network of good strong leadership...

If we had have just done [LSI] in a one-off workshop I would have said, 'you're wrong', and I would have kept doing the same thing. But with this you can look at it a second time, then go and talk to some trusted people about it and a month later you're in a much better head space.



Do you believe developing leadership skills in women is important? If so, why?

Not surprisingly, all participants believe developing leadership skills in women is important. The following describes the common responses as to why participants believe this to be so:

Gender Equality and Challenging Gender Stereotypes:

Participants emphasise the importance of challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. They feel that women often tolerate behaviours they shouldn't, and they believe women should assert themselves and recognise their intelligence and capabilities. Likewise, participants acknowledge that gender equality is not just

about representation but also about equipping women with the skills, techniques, and confidence they need to succeed in leadership roles. It's about leveling the playing field and addressing gender-specific challenges.

Empowerment and Confidence:

Developing leadership skills is seen as a way to empower women to take on leadership roles both at work and in their personal lives. It helps women feel more comfortable, confident, and empowered to balance family and work expectations without guilt.

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome:

Participants mention imposter syndrome as a common challenge for women. Leadership development programs like Compass provide validation and confidence to women, helping them overcome self-doubt and imposter syndrome.



Reflective Self-Improvement:

Leadership development encourages participants to reflect on themselves and their leadership styles. This self-awareness is considered crucial for personal growth and effectiveness as a leader.

Embracing Diverse Leadership Styles:

Participants advocate for recognising and valuing different leadership styles, including those typically associated with women. They believe that diverse leadership styles can lead to more enjoyable and effective teams. Women are seen as bringing unique qualities such as nurturing, compassion, and vulnerability to leadership roles. These qualities are believed to lead to better outcomes for everyone, not just the individual leader.

Building Supportive Environments:

Supportive managers, honest feedback, and a culture that values growth over perfection are seen as valuable outcomes of developing women's leadership capabilities.



Leadership development adds value to everything around women and if women can lead and be given the space, they empower everyone else, they elevate everyone else around them. Generally speaking, women are able to bring a sense of nurturing and compassion and vulnerability to the role. Better outcomes for everyone not just the individual. Will see themselves as supporting not just 'leading' people



A lot of the time women just feel like they should tolerate stuff. With my girlfriends I listen to the behaviours they're tolerating and I wonder, why? Surely we're smarter than this. Equality and equity aren't the same. You can employ women so there are as many as men, but that's not enough. Developing the tactics and skills and techniques to manage themselves is what balances the field better.

You can have a man and a woman in same position and the stress and dilemmas that women face that men don't... the leadership development is what balances that. I appreciate the opportunity to do it - it's something that I wanted to do not necessarily because I wanted to climb the corporate ladder, but to develop leadership skills and be viewed as a leader within my team.



Being more brave and courageous, to be able to speak up because I know that I know my stuff, but when you have a more 'knowledgeable man' who's been around the traps, you don't always stand up.

Many women already have the skills and knowledge to lead but because it's a gendered space, they don't give themselves the credit they deserve. Leadership courses give them the language to describe what they're already doing.

What impact on your career has this leadership development had?

These themes, listed in order of comment frequency, highlight the positive influence of leadership development on participants' professional growth and contributions in the workplace.



Increased Confidence and Self-Awareness:

Participants noted a significant boost in confidence and self-assurance after undergoing leadership development.

They felt more confident in managing tasks, negotiating processes, and making improvements in their work. This newfound confidence also translated into a clearer sense of career direction and self-awareness.

Enhanced Networking and Support:

Many participants highlighted the value of the cohort and network established during the leadership development program. This network provided a platform for meaningful conversations, mentorship opportunities, and support. It also helped them navigate challenges and gain confidence in their abilities.

Permission to Be Vulnerable:

Participants emphasised the importance of creating a safe space for vulnerability, which they found in the leadership development program. They appreciated the opportunity to be open about their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

Improved Performance and Effectiveness:

Leadership development has led to participants feeling less pressured to perform and more comfortable with learning opportunities.

They became more open to feedback, engaged in transparent decision-making processes, and were more effective in their roles.



Overcoming Imposter Syndrome:

Many participants reported a significant reduction in imposter syndrome after completing the leadership development program. They recognised that everyone starts from a similar point in their leadership journey and gained confidence in their abilities to progress in their careers.

Greater Contribution and Volunteering:

Participants felt empowered to contribute more actively to their workplaces and communities.

They volunteered their opinions, worldviews, and values in discussions, rather than just accepting assigned roles. They also became more willing to enter wider discussions where they believed they had a contribution to make.

Career Advancement:

While not a primary theme, some participants mentioned that they experienced career advancement as a result of their increased confidence and abilities gained from the leadership development program.



Recent progression to a senior role was [a result of me] talking to my supervisor about not feeling challenged, wanting more opportunities. It was a really productive conversation because I got to act in a lot of different ways.

My coordinator was at my graduation and that changed the dynamic between us again, made him aware of the challenges in female leadership.



Made me more able to open up when being in a room with all men, being able to discuss things and ensure everyone's heard equally. If I point something out about a safety feature that's useful for women it's 'Oh, we hadn't thought about that before, that would be helpful'. A lot of different areas now, where you know you're being heard.

What impact on your organisation and/or community has leadership development had?

Completing Compass has had a positive impact on both the City and the community, by promoting open and honest conversations, overcoming fear and conformity, enhancing networking and collaboration, and increasing community engagement.

Confident and Passionate Individuals:

Participants are now more confident and passionate about their roles. They care deeply about their work, leading to increased motivation and productivity. This positively affects the organisation and community by having dedicated and enthusiastic individuals.

Empowered and Honest Conversations:

The program has fostered a culture of open and honest communication. Participants are more willing to engage in discussions without fear, and this has improved the quality of conversations, making them more productive and inclusive. This empowerment leads to a more balanced and diverse set of voices being heard, resulting in better decision-making and outcomes.



Increasing Diversity of Thought:

Participants have become less fearful of voicing their opinions and ideas. They feel more comfortable challenging existing ideas and are less likely to conform to the status quo. This promotes innovation and diversity of thought.

Increased Networking and Collaboration:

Completing Compass has encouraged participants to network and collaborate more effectively. This extends beyond the program and benefits the organisation and/or community by fostering stronger connections and partnerships.

Greater Community Engagement:

Some participants have broadened their perspectives on community engagement and are -

better equipped to support various groups within the community, leading to more effective community outreach and development efforts.

Enhanced Leadership and Support:

The program has created a pool of individuals who are better prepared to take on leadership roles and support others. This leadership development contributes to a more supportive and empowered community and organisation.

Value and Recognition:

The organisation's provision of Compass is seen as a valuable gesture that recognises and identifies potential leaders. This recognition instils confidence and motivates participants to excel in their roles.



You're going to have confident happy people in roles that they love and are passionate about. How can that not impact the community positively when you've got people who care about what they're doing and feel backed in their decisions...? The conversations have changed so much since Compass. Nothing that's not off the table to talk about. All extremely open and honest with each other. It's the best working group I've ever been in.

I'm more confident to go with my own ideas. I have a fairly good grasp of what the rural community needs, and I can't find any holes in my knowledge. The hole that I had was the confidence in my own ability to trust myself that my ideas were good ones. And now I'm putting on workshops that people come to, get a lot of value out of, trusting myself that I'm doing a good job of that.



Being part of a football and netball club, I was in on the committee for a couple of years until we got a female VP and to me that was like, ok we've taken that next step. Before that, I felt extra pressure to represent women, and when I did step back it was because I felt exhausted at having to go up against the male leaders so much. If we could have more women to share that around, the burnout factor wouldn't be there.

It comes back to where they see themselves in supporting others. They acknowledge they don't need to hold all the answers and they can see themselves as support for whoever is in the community, so that leadership style by default is passed on to community.



I have an elevated sense now of how I need to step up and lead [the community] to a better outcome, more than I would have. It's about how I can take that skill and do some development with the community to do what I've learned to do. It's broadened my scope within the role and will impact how I interact with that community.

Impact on personal life of leadership development

The impact on participants' personal lives is palpable. In addition to those outcomes already described, participants note that it has improved communication and provided tools to navigate both personal and professional challenges.

Participants have gained a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships, resulting in more fulfilling and balanced lives.

Increased Confidence and Self-Awareness:

Participants expressed a significant boost in confidence and self-awareness. They felt more capable of handling personal challenges and had a better understanding of their own behaviours and contributions to conflicts.

Improved Communication and Relationships:

Completing Compass led to better communication skills and improved relationships in personal life. Participants reported being more aware of their communication styles and having more open, honest conversations with family and friends.



Emotional Growth and Vulnerability:

Participants learned to be more emotionally open and vulnerable with their families, allowing for healthier expression of feelings and emotions. They felt better equipped to address personal issues.

Better Time Management and Boundaries:

Participants became more conscious of their work-life balance, enabling them to set boundaries and prioritise what was most important in their personal lives. This led to improved time management.

Impact on Family Dynamics:

The impact of Compass extended to family dynamics, as participants reported being more present, understanding their roles better, and making better decisions regarding their relationships within their families.

Introspection and Self-Reflection:

Completing Compass encouraged introspection and self-reflection, allowing participants to understand their flaws, strengths, and personal histories. This introspective work was seen as essential for professional development as well.

Confidence in Personal Decision-Making:

Participants reported feeling more confident in their personal decision-making processes. They were better equipped to evaluate and assert what was acceptable in their personal relationships.

Role Evaluation and Support for Others:

Completing Compass prompted participants to evaluate their roles within their families and relationships. It also encouraged them to provide support to other females and promote gender equity.



I actually feel like a completely different person after Compass, if I'm honest. I was going through some hard personal stuff ... Learning to be vulnerable with family, to let them know how I was going - I'm much better now. If anything's ever wrong, I can actually talk about it...

I look back at that person I was and think what a scared little individual you were.

What did it do for you in terms of levels of engagement and connection to the organisation?

Participating in Compass has positively impacted women's levels of engagement with, or connection to the City of Greater Bendigo:

Valued Investment:

Participants appreciated the City's investment in the Compass program, viewing it as a clear demonstration of the organisation's recognition of their worth and potential. The financial commitment to training was seen as a positive signal that the City is eager to help employees identify areas for improvement and co-create paths for development.

Building Connections and Networks:

Completing Compass led to the formation of connections and networks among participants. This included social gatherings, catch-up lunches, and continued interactions with fellow Compass alumni, fostering a sense of camaraderie and support.



Alignment with Organisational Values:

Participants believe that the City's investment in their personal development demonstrates an alignment of values. They see the City as a place where their contributions are valued and where they are encouraged to succeed.

Promoting Gender Diversity:

Compass was seen as a tool to promote gender diversity within the City. Participants noted that the program empowered women to step up into leadership roles and encouraged the City to support women in various positions.

Initiation of Support Networks:

Compass participants initiated support networks, such as women's leadership groups, learning lunches, and coffee roulette. These networks were seen as valuable resources for addressing challenges and opportunities.

Empowerment and Morale:

Participants felt empowered by the City's investment in their development. This empowerment contributed to increased morale and created a positive atmosphere within the organisation.

Recognition of Women's Potential:

Compass was credited with acknowledging and unlocking the potential of women within the City. Participants observe more women in leadership positions and a shift in the organisation's mindset regarding what women can bring to the table.



Backing Organisational Culture:

The City's support for Compass was seen as a reinforcement of its culture. Participants believe that the City's actions demonstrate a commitment to its values, particularly regarding gender equity and the development of its employees.



When I hear about the next cohort I make an effort to know who it is and check in and say let's check in when you're finished. I love that they're investing in this. I don't even know how to describe how much of an amazing impact it is. You can tell if someone's done it.

Created a nice little sisterhood. The group I did it with catch up for lunches, and you go straight back into that language and that vibe that was in the room.

If we can get more women and more of those vibes in the office that would be amazing.



It's not a small amount of money, so automatically, if the council's saying yes you should do this, then it's saying 'there's value in you' - that's so good just from the start.

One of the things I love the most is that the council is so supportive of training. Very positive and easy to identify things you want to work on, what's the best way to do that, and for a path to be co-created about what that looks like.

When an org invests in its people it means they want to keep them and they value learning, in whatever way that looks.



I did one other leadership course and it was all about organising your day, technical tools and exercises, and while all helpful, no way did it have the same impact as Compass. Understanding yourself, your personality character... far more valuable as it all underpins your behaviour. Far more valuable than a series of technical tools which doesn't get to the bottom of who are.

What next for your leadership development?

Clearly, participating in Compass has had a deep and meaningful impact on many of the women who have taken part over the years.

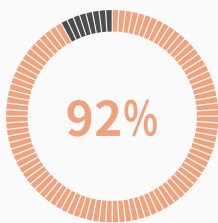
While many of them continue to reflect on what they learned, some have their eyes on further development, while others feel that their current positions are the result of their leadership development efforts and this contentment has led to a sense of fulfillment in their work.

This cohort of women aspires to lead, facilitate, and advocate for their ideas, whether within their organisations or in external roles. Balancing work and personal development is a consideration, but they are motivated to continue their leadership journeys.

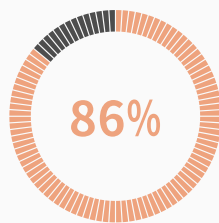


Results from Short Survey

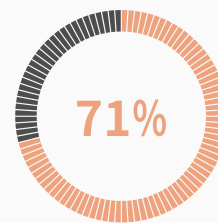
In addition to the interviews, 14 Compass alumni at the City, spanning programs from 2017 to 2023, completed the short survey. This data reveals that overall, 60-80% of the participants experienced some or significant personal and professional transformation in their leadership capabilities at home and at work. Some highlights from this survey are below:



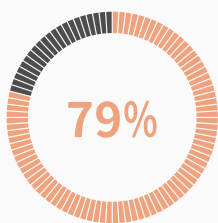
92% of women reported their leadership capability at work had increased (of which 36% reporting a significant increase)



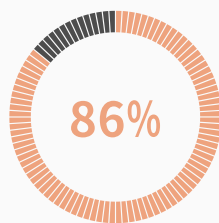
86% of women feel more able to deal with conflict or challenging situations.



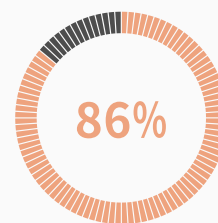
71% of women feel completion of the Compass program increased their career development



79% of women report feeling Compass transformed their internal narrative around what they are capable of achieving



86% of women feel more assured in being able to influence for the greater good



86% of women believe the City supporting women into Compass shows that the gender equity is a high priority

DATTNER GROUP IS COMMITTED TO CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF LEADERSHIP, FOR THE GREATER GOOD.



CONSULTING

We support leaders at all levels in a time of significant transformation in the practice of leadership.

We build a deeper sense of self, a considered perspective of others and a comprehensive sense of the context in which the practice of leadership operates.



COMPASS

Women leading in significant numbers may be the single most sustainable proposition we have for the future.

We build courage in women to be visible for a sustainable world.



COACHING

We unlock skills in leaders to become deeply self-aware, guided by values, driving purpose and sustaining constructive relationships.

To understand what we do at Dattner Group, please look at our website
www.dattnergroup.com.au