

# The Women And Mentoring Pilot Program Evaluation



## A new model to support women charged with an offence

- ♦ The Women and Mentoring (WAM) pilot program created a unique, locally based model to support women charged with an offence
- ♦ The two-year development and testing phase of the pilot shows it has developed a viable model for operation, one that has gained support based on the positive impacts for participants and the reduced reoffending, number of breaches, non-appearances and unprepared appearances. It provides a significant contribution to knowledge about 'what works' in gender-specific crime prevention strategies.

## Positive recognition and support

- ♦ The participants are enthusiastic supporters of the program.
- ♦ WAM made a significant positive difference to female offenders' confidence, coping mechanisms and capacity to respond to their legal matters
- ♦ WAM trained and resourced volunteer mentors to provide appropriate support to the participants, to share their skills and contribute to the wider community
- ♦ WAM gained the support of the magistrate, police and lawyers by providing a referral option that supported the efficiency of the justice system

## A unique form of community-based support for women at a vital time

- ♦ The program responds to the need for new forms of community support for women in the initial stages of contact with the criminal justice system, particularly in the period following the laying of charges and prior to appearing in court. This is often an isolating and stressful time.
- ♦ Women follow distinctive pathways to criminality, and tend to represent a lower-risk, higher-needs offender group than men. The social and economic implications of women's imprisonment are far-reaching. Crime prevention strategies and supports for women are therefore a logical response, and mentoring is an appropriate and empowering support strategy.

## Cost-efficient approach

- ♦ Running the program offers considerable efficiency when compared to the cost of *not* running the program, considering both the resources saved in compliance with legal requirements and the significant expenditure per prisoner. For example, it costs almost \$90,000 to keep a prisoner for one year; if the program prevents two women for entering prison for nine months it has paid for itself.

## Moving from 'pilot' to 'program'

- ♦ To have greater certainty about the robustness of the model would require further time and monitoring of participants. As such, the 'pilot' represents a very strong case for moving to a 'program' retaining this unique model. There is great potential for the pilot to grow, and it now needs to move to a stronger infrastructure base to give it greater strength to continue.

Results from the *Evaluation of the Women and Mentoring Program*, Effective Change Pty Ltd, 2012



Wellington Collingwood Inc.

St Martin's Church

215 Wellington Street (Corner Otter) Collingwood VIC 3066

tel. (03) 9948 8659 fax. (03) 9948 8779 mob. 0428 205 095 email: [wam@thewellington.org.au](mailto:wam@thewellington.org.au)

## **The Two of Us: Women And Mentoring Case Studies**

### **Pauline and Kath**

*Pauline had worked as a medical receptionist for 12 years when a change of management forced her out of her job. A nervous breakdown and health problems followed. She began abusing alcohol and was facing court on serious drinking and driving related charges when she became involved in the mentoring program. She was facing the likelihood of a custodial sentence.*

### **Pauline**

My Legal Aid lawyer advised me to get a mentor because at the time I was having quite a few problems and having trouble getting to my appointments. It's had a huge impact on me. I don't think I could have walked through the whole court process without their help. Without having that support, I would have probably breached (the court order) a few times and maybe have ended up in a worse situation. I've been fine for the last couple of months. The last time I went to court even the magistrate himself said, "I can see a remarkable change...you have really made a big turnaround and I'm very impressed". And therefore, he's given me a Community-Based Order. Kath's there for me. She will often just contact me and take me for a coffee. You know, it's just a good thing.

### **Kath**

I had always done volunteer work in my local community but I was keen to work with the broader community. When I saw the ad for the mentoring program I thought it was something I could do.

I thought if Pauline did some voluntary work, it would be good to show the judge that she's willing to give back to the community, but it would also be very good for her to be doing something for other people, as she sees other people doing for her. She followed up completely independently and went to the voluntary work on a regular basis, which was amazing. When I first met her she could hardly get out of the house and at the end of six months she was going out and helping other people.

### **Julie and Susan**

*Julie was facing court on minor shoplifting charges, dealing with the Department of Human Services in relation to her four-year-old son and coping with Family Court appearances in relation to domestic violence charges against her ex-partner when she was referred to the mentoring program.*

### **Julie**

I was in a violent relationship for six years. I just didn't know where to go, who to turn to. They always say you have to leave but they don't understand it's not always an option when you don't have anywhere to go. I didn't know anything about any of the support networks at all. I had no one I could ask for help. I had a very minor shoplifting charge, which was the result of the family dramas.

I got involved in the mentoring program with Susan and a month into it my partner tried to cut my throat in front of my son and beat me up in front of him and that brought things to a head.

Susan's like a friend, a big sister, but there's no blood relation there and that's made it easier. I couldn't tell my family any of this. She makes me feel mentally more equipped to deal with everything. I'm a lot more positive about it. I think everything will work out.

### **Susan**

I see my role as filling a gap in Julie's life. She doesn't seem to have friends who haven't fallen into the same traps that she has, so I go to court with her. I'm the only person there supporting her. So I think that's my role - just to let her know that she's not alone going through all these dreadful things she has to go through.

The court can impose so many conditions on an individual woman without actually seeing what that does to the rest of her life. She's made a mistake. She got herself a bad guy for a boyfriend, discovered heroin, got pregnant and you know, and her life has spiraled out of control. But I admire her. She's smart, she just needs a couple of breaks and her life will be totally back on track.

The names of participants and mentors have been changed for these case studies.