

## **MEDIA RELEASE: Cost-efficient mentoring project is keeping women out of prison in Victoria**

*Mentoring program aimed at addressing issues that lead to re-offending has produced improved recidivism outcomes and offers a cost-efficient solution to the current state prison and corrections system*

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Study shows 30% improvement in rate of recidivism for women who are mentored**
- **Mentoring program provides ongoing relationships that foster positive change**
- **Program costs only a fraction of current prisons and corrections expenditure**

Women and Mentoring (WAM) recently celebrated ten years keeping women out of the justice system by launching its 2021 Evaluation Report at the Melbourne offices of Minter Ellison. The report is a three-year study of the impact of WAM's work mentoring women who have encountered the justice system to get their lives back on track, reduce recidivism and address the issues behind their offending.

“Over the past three years, just 13% of WAM mentees reported re-offending which is more than [30% lower than the Victorian state average](#). This is an amazing achievement for women who face complex challenges and have experienced significant social and economic disadvantage, before they begin their mentoring program relationship,” said Tricia Ciampa, WAM Executive Officer

In addition to producing lower rates of recidivism, WAM's mentoring program also offers a crime prevention solution that delivers better economic outcomes, at a time of rising costs for the prison system.

“Our report demonstrates that WAM is an effective and cost-efficient crime prevention initiative that addresses the root causes of reoffending – rather than just the symptoms alone”.

Issues such as homelessness, family violence, mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, trauma from abuse, and poverty contribute to women's offending. Often these issues also play a role in creating barriers to engagement with services.

With Minister for Crime Prevention, Corrections and Youth Justice Natalie Hutchins, Shadow Minister David Southwick, and Members of Parliament Fiona Patten and Tim Read in attendance, guests heard from mentoring pair Sammy and Louise who shared their personal stories. Their 12-month relationship has seen a transformational change from a powerless situation of extreme disadvantage to one of a better life that is full of promise for Sammy, and her children. It is this life-changing outcome WAM strives to achieve for every mentee who is supported by a screened and trained volunteer mentor.



Over the past 10 years WAM has matched and supported over 170 women in mentoring relationships, made numerous referrals, offered social support, created positive change, and helped criminalised women address issues that have led to their offending.

Unfortunately, over the same period, the number of women who come into contact with the justice system and Victoria's prisons [increased dramatically](#). Although there is significant State funding going into [expanding women's prisons](#) and comparatively smaller amounts towards rehabilitation programs for women exiting prison, WAM's focus is to keep women out of the justice system in the first instance.

The cost of keeping a person in prison per day in 2019-2020 was \$323 (\$118,059 per year), and the cost of Community Corrections per day is \$47 (\$17,096 per year).

"For just \$20 per day we can provide the support of a trained and screened mentor who offers practical assistance, social connection and encouragement to help a woman change her life and keep her out of the justice system," said Ms Ciampa.

To access the full evaluation report, please visit WAM's [website](#).

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#### **About WAM:**

WAM was established in late 2009 as a pilot project working with the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in Collingwood, based on a research paper 'Justice and Community Support for women' (Dr. Sue Davies & Donna King, 2008). This paper identified that if vulnerable women were provided support in the early stages of contact with the justice system, they would have better outcomes.

Over the past 10 years WAM has grown to become an independent charity organisation working across six Magistrate court precincts. Referrals are received from government and community agencies such as: Victoria Legal Aid, community legal centres, the Courts, Corrections and several other support services in the health and justice sector.

WAM provides an efficient and cost-effective way to provide early intervention and crime prevention support to women who have been charged with a criminal offence. It helps to get lives back on track, keep families together and make a real difference. It also utilises the social capital within communities to break down barriers and foster social inclusion and integration.

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