

The last few months have proven very challenging for everyone in Victoria.

We have all faced an extraordinary time, and as we approach the likelihood of more restrictions being eased, we also look forward to our mentoring matches getting reacquainted face-to-face.

In this edition of our newsletter we share a beautiful story of breakthrough and positive change, along with news from the team.

### The beauty in broken things.

Rather than dwell on the current circumstances, in this newsletter we capture some positive stories and exciting news from WAM, and I wanted to share these sentiments on our current mood:

**Delighted** to advise that our application to the Victorian Legal Services Board was successful, and as such we are able to continue our program through to 2021. With this will funding we will be able to provide greater access to our program and continue our Women's Voices project.

The Women's Voices project is a collection of the experiences of women who have 'graduated' from the mentoring program. These women have achieved many of their goals and have worked towards building their lives away from the justice system. Many of these women no longer require the formal setting of the mentoring relationship, however we know that they will remain in contact with their mentor and continue to share their lives, moving forward.

**Gratitude** for the positive response we received for our mid-year campaign that has proven many people are very much committed to supporting our work.

We have also received funding from the Alfred Felton Bequest to help keep our mentoring matches connected. As we shifted to remote mentoring, we encouraged contact between mentors and participants via phone, text and video chat apps. Some of these funds have contributed to purchasing new phones, topping up phone data and supplying some much-needed material aid.

**Inspired** by the number of volunteer enquiries and applications we have received in the past few months. Our most recent cohort of mentors are just completing their screening and will be ready to match in the coming weeks. You can read more about this on page 5.

**Enthused** by the new voices and building narrative about women's experiences of the justice system. Podcasts such as Rewriting the Narrative by the Living Free Project, and Probono's recent interview with the Women's Transforming Justice group, are examples of the increasing interest in this space. The After Prison Network and The Reintegration Puzzle have a series of webinars coming up in the coming months that further contribute to the opportunity for women with lived experience to be heard.

**Heartened** by the stories and outcomes we are hearing at match reviews. The pandemic has not only increased social isolation and limited access to services, many women have had no real opportunities to work towards achieving their goals especially in seeking employment, reuniting with family or looking for appropriate housing. Despite this, there have been some great breakthroughs with women on the phone for hours after minimal contact, and some wonderful match closures as women have come to the end of the formal mentoring relationship. You can read Lucy's story on the next page.

Recently I was informed about the Japanese art of *Kintsugi*. I admit to having to google it as it was new to me. This is the art of repairing broken pottery with a golden seam to highlight the repair. As there is still much value in the object, the repair is simply an event of life, rather than end of life. The breakage and the repair are part of the history of the object, and as a result there is new beauty to be found.

Much like the women we work with, we see the mentor's influence and support as part of that golden seam as women rebuild their life and create something that is beautiful and has remarkable value.

- Tricia Ciampa, Executive Officer  
[tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au)

### Lucy's story: Resilience and Perseverance

Lucy\* is 31 years old and lives with her husband Pete and his parents in the Mornington Peninsula area. Lucy has a history with the criminal justice system dating back to 2007 when she was 18 years old. Most of her offending has been related to substance misuse and obtaining financial means by deception. She also has a history of driving offences, possession of drugs, robbery and possession of a weapon.

In June 2019 Lucy was released on parole after spending over two years in prison. Nine years prior, Lucy had served a six-month prison sentence followed by 14 months of parole. At that time Lucy gave birth to her daughter while in prison. Lucy thinks her daughter now lives with her mum, but she is not completely sure of this as she has had no contact with her family. Lucy would like to re-establish a relationship with her daughter, after she has 'proven herself' and stayed on the right track.

While in prison Lucy completed a traffic management course, got her forklift licence and also completed a certificate II in Hospitality. However, the most useful and impactful course Lucy completed in prison was one called 'Frame of Mind.' Lucy was one of only 20 participants selected to undertake this course; it helped her deal with her emotions, which she said were a big driver in her drug use. Lucy stated that ***'I don't do drugs now because I don't want to. I dealt with what was making me upset. I now know it is one thing to not use drugs, and another thing to not want to use drugs. I can now sit with my difficult feelings and not use. If I experience anxiety, I know the urge will go away.'***

Lucy started smoking heroin at the end of 2014 when there was significant family conflict. She said things went downhill from there. She got off heroin in prison, with some assistance from counselling. Before she had her daughter Lucy occasionally used ice. She has reported no current drug use and provides regular urine screens as part of her parole.

With a bipolar diagnosis, Lucy was medicated in prison; however, she has not taken her medication since release as she ran out and it cannot be prescribed by a GP. Lucy said she is feeling fine without her medication, and due to the weight-gaining side effects she would like to consider alternatives or stay off medication. Lucy had put on 40kg and this troubled her.



As part of her parole, Lucy volunteers at a community centre where she cooks for the homeless. Lucy enjoys her community work however is looking forward to engaging in paid employment. Lucy would like to earn money and contribute financially as she and Pete are saving for their own home.

Lucy was referred to WAM by her Corrections worker soon after her release. Lucy was very keen on finding out more about mentoring, willing to engage and completed an assessment shortly after the referral was placed. Due to her social isolation and lack of pro-social peers, Lucy was considered at risk of reoffending and relapse. Lucy has poor self-esteem and self-worth, but she is a bright, intelligent woman.

Although very motivated to participate in the program, Lucy indicated she would like to be matched to a mentor for a six-month period. Lucy identified the need for a positive support person and someone to assist her with achieving the positive goals she had around gaining employment, working towards reunification with her family, health and wellbeing, integrating into community and fulfilling her requirements while on parole.

Lucy was matched with a mentor at the beginning of August 2019. They have had regular contact weekly to fortnightly, working on the goals Lucy had identified with the support and assistance of her mentor. At a Goal Review meeting that marked the end of Lucy's initial six-month period Lucy expressed a willingness to continue the mentor match until she has completed her parole.

Feedback from Lucy's mentor has included ***"It has been great working with Lucy who has been engaged, committed and enthusiastic about the mentoring relationship. Lucy has a very positive, motivated approach that resulted in her attaining an ongoing position working at [.....] where she has received very positive feedback. She is very keen***

*to move forward with integrating into the community in a positive way and re-establishing family relationships.'*

Ten months into her match, WAM and her mentor advocated on Lucy's behalf to Corrections in support of the early removal of the electronic monitoring service ankle bracelet as that would only help to enhance Lucy's self-esteem and self-efficacy further enabling her to work towards achieving her remaining goals. Corrections agreed to the early removal of the bracelet and withdrew Lucy's 9pm curfew. This was fantastic news for Lucy, who felt held back by the bracelet, particularly while at work.

After 12 months and at the end of the formal mentoring relationship, Lucy had achieved the following goals:

1. Family relationships: Working on establishing relationship with her mum and daughter. Lucy has committed to continuing urine screens independently at completion of parole.
2. Employment: Went from casual to working 38 hours a week, with responsibility of the online shopping platform, and taking up night shifts.
3. Health & Wellbeing: At match 12 months ago weighed 134kg, now weighs 82kg. Lost weight in a healthy way, through improved diet and exercise.

4. Parole: Completed parole in September, with early removal of bracelet and curfew in June.

At the match graduation meeting, Lucy stated the most important thing that she will take from the experience of mentoring is *'having someone stable in my life to talk to about anything. My mentor didn't pressure me but was there to listen. Also, when I have something good happen, or I achieve something, I have my mentor to share it with. I have learnt a lot of life skills from my mentor.'*

When asked what she found most useful about mentoring, Lucy replied *'My mentor is someone to share good news with, who gives me support with legal stuff, letter writing, and medical information. Just being there for me and having someone to talk to is the most useful thing about mentoring.'*

Lucy is looking forward to advancing her career, getting a home of her own with her husband and working on her relationship with her daughter, which she knows is a long process and one to continually work on. Lucy will keep in contact with her mentor in a less formal way, bounce ideas off her and share her good news. Lucy also plans to speak to others in the future and tell her story, which is one of incredible resilience and perseverance.

-Sarah Nyssen, Frankston Program Coordinator  
*\*name changed to protect her identity*

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## Remote Mentoring

As a volunteer mentor with WAM since May 2019, I have had the opportunity to experience both face-to-face and remote mentoring with two different women. On reflection, I have found both methods to have their benefits and challenges.

Face-to-face mentoring allows the mentor to gain a greater understanding of the emotional wellbeing of the mentee, whereas when you are mentoring remotely, you are solely relying on your ability to tune into their tone over the phone. While face-to-face mentoring is based on a more structured framework, where the mentor and mentee arrange to meet on a particular day and time each week, remote mentoring allows for greater flexibility, where appointed days and times can be altered or adapted to suit both mentor and mentee.

The women we mentor are very likely to suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence, and as a result may be inclined to cancel their face-to-face meetings. One of the factors for cancelling may be due to feelings of discomfort and uneasiness in the presence of others. In this situation, remote mentoring's main benefit allows the mentee to participate and communicate via text and/or a phone call. Even the shortest amount of time spent with the mentee can make a difference, and improve their feelings, mood, or their attitude.

The current pandemic has given me the opportunity to appreciate mentoring from a different perspective. For me personally, I would like to incorporate both methods of mentoring where possible, and thus be able to reach out to more of those women who need our support and guidance.

-Kaylene, Volunteer Mentor



### Connecting throughout lockdown

During the lockdown period the WAM team found participants were extremely isolated as many don't have family or friends to contact them or check in.

The deterioration of some women's mental health due to not having face-to-face contact with mentors or other service providers was very common. Some had not have spoken to anyone for days.

Connecting with someone online is very different to meeting face-to-face, so mentors and participants preferred to use text and phone calls to stay connected. Everyone's world had shrunk, and daily conversations were about COVID-19 which for some increased their anxiety and depression.

WAM staff brainstormed how they could change the conversations to be more positive and constructive. It was agreed that having activities to do with their mentors could create another focus. A care pack was sent out to both mentors and participants eg. have a cup of tea and put on a beauty face mask together to create conversation and maintain connection. A mentor reported *"this care pack arrived at the right time as she had slipped into lockdown depression. Please pass on a huge thank you for the parcel."*

A participant mentioned how lovely it was to receive the care pack and to have people she didn't know think about her during the lockdown.



Themes around gardening, cooking and creative activities emerged from discussions with participants and the Co-ordinators. Having 6 weeks to go until a possible relax in restrictions Activity Starter packs were arranged to be sent out to matches.

Activity packs included recipes for baking to do together while on zoom, with a \$20 food voucher included, colouring in while chatting on the phone, seeds to plant and watch them grow and compare notes, free movement classes to do on-line together, vision boards to make and discuss and finishing with instructions to make scones to celebrate coming out of lockdown.

Age appropriate children's care packs were also sent out. One participant received a pack for her 3 daughters who don't live with her. She was so excited as school holidays were due to begin the following week and she would have something special to share with them. Living with financial strain she wouldn't have extra money for baking, gardening, games and craft activities. She was very grateful for the parcel as this would help to continue to build a stronger bond with her daughters.

Thank you to our supporters and donors who assisted in the creation of these packs, including **Igniting Change, Good360 and our volunteer Gabby!**



-Susan Orr, Intake & Assessment Coordinator

### Staff changes

Mentor Coordinator Sharlene Farrugia has resigned to do a PhD at RMIT. She'll be researching across the themes of women's rights, international law, women's labour and political economy. So, while we're sad to lose Sharlene, we look forward to seeing the outcomes of her research. We thank Sharlene for all her hard work at WAM since early 2016, when she established our second program location in Sunshine.

We're pleased to welcome Joyce Sedunary to the team as our new Mentor Coordinator. In these days of lockdowns and restrictions, we've had to do Joyce's recruitment and induction remotely and we don't anticipate being able to meet her in real life until after the Melbourne lockdown ends. But she has taken all of that in her stride and has quickly become a part of the team.

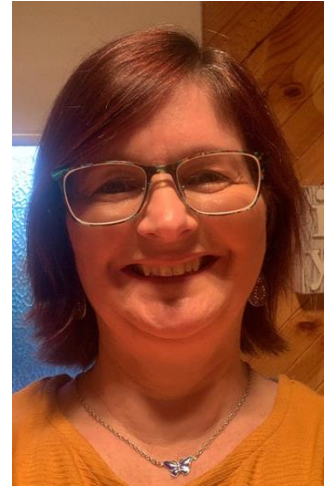
Joyce brings great expertise to WAM from a previous role as Program Coordinator at TRY Mentoring. Prior to that she worked as a Development Officer for St

Vincent de Paul, and she's also been a Team Leader in Customer Service at Central Goldfields Shire Council.

### Welcome Joyce!

*"I am thrilled to be joining the WAM Team and to be working with people who care deeply, value others and inspire me. I feel passionate about the work that WAM does – supporting the most vulnerable and at-risk women in our community. It is an absolute privilege knowing that in my new role I have the chance to connect with, and support, WAM Mentors through their screening process and journey of being matched."*

- Mary Latham, Operations Manager



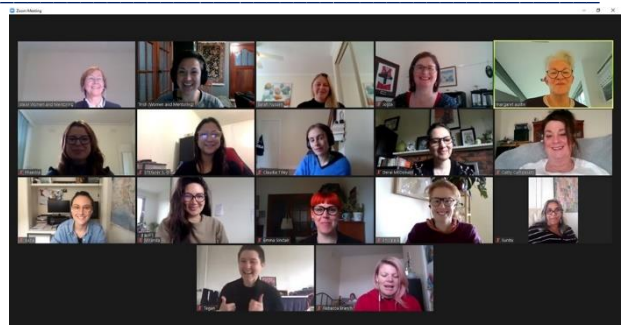
### New Mentors and Moving Forward

It has been a busy time of late adjusting to new ways of working at WAM. Our world is in constant radical change pushing us to re-think, re-frame and move forward so we can continue to support vulnerable women in our communities.

We now know that remote mentoring works – yes it does have its challenges, but it is connecting and providing support for women at a time when isolation is at an all-time high. In light of this, it is vital that WAM continues to recruit and train new Mentors.

We held a Zoom Information Session in mid-August and nearly everyone who attended applied to be a mentor. These new volunteers, plus the volunteer applicants already in hand, meant we had an impressive group of 12 participants eager to be screened and trained!

Our online Mentor Training dates were set for September and staff went into overdrive to adapt our face-to-face training to an online format using Zoom. A shout out to Sarah and Susan for the huge amount of work they did to ensure that online training was still engaging, informative and inclusive.



It was vital that each volunteer had their chance to contribute to their training. The magic of Zoom break-out rooms encouraged discussions in smaller groups and gave the WAM staff the chance to meet the volunteers in a more intimate space.

The upcoming volunteers are a diverse group of women. Age range between 23 to late 50s and a rich mix of backgrounds, work, motivation and life experiences. All are enthusiastic about becoming mentors and open to mentoring face-to-face, remotely or having a mix of both!

Embracing remote mentoring means we can now recruit mentors from previously untapped areas and the option of extending our support to vulnerable women living in rural areas is becoming a reality.

- Joyce Sedunary, Mentor Coordinator