

Our focus on strengthening relationships with referring agencies has led to an increase in referrals, and we are starting to identify trends in the women joining the program.

We have also been able to increase the training opportunities for our mentors, as we put emphasis on their professional development and skilling up.

And of course, we have expanded to Frankston with the recent appointment of a new Coordinator.

In June I attended the 'Crime Prevention and Communities' Conference, and as much as it was a thought-provoking opportunity to hear from international and local renowned speakers in the criminal justice sector, I was acutely aware of the lack of sessions focusing on women.

Over the ten-year period between 2006 and 2016 the number of women in prison increased by 75%\*. Significant numbers of women who have contact with the justice system present with intergenerational issues relating to family violence, mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, social isolation, trauma from abuse, low education attainment, and poor employment prospects. These issues often play a substantial role in offending that is situational.

It is reported that 87% of women in prison have experienced violence or abuse, and concerningly, rates of other risk factors are similarly high, with 80% of women offenders not having finished secondary school, 75% report having experienced substance abuse disorders, 90% had experienced a mental disorder and over 52% experiencing homelessness\*\*.

A gender-responsive, trauma-informed approach can address the unique needs of females charged with an offence. This does not mean preferential treatment based on gender, rather that it considers the path travelled by many women who do have contact with the criminal justice system.

The impact of being charged and imprisonment has greater consequences for a woman. It may lead to other interventions such as child protection further entrenching families in a cycle of disadvantage. As women generally perform a greater portion of the

Read on and find out what we have been up to so far this year.

caring and nurturing roles in the community, removing them from society often has a devastating impact on their children, relatives and other dependants.

Imprisonment rarely helps to rehabilitate female offenders as the issues underlying their offences are usually not dealt with during their time in prison. Women leaving prison, particularly those serving shorter sentences, are therefore more likely to re-offend.

Recidivism in women is also closely linked to dynamic risk factors such as drug and alcohol misuse; poor familial relationships and poor emotional regulation. Research has recognised that there are eight major criminogenic risk factors that are more closely related to an individual's likelihood to reoffend.

At WAM, we believe that a gender-responsive perspective is crucial in minimizing the harm of women's contact with the justice system and reducing the rate of recidivism. Through engaging in the mentoring program, participants are encouraged to articulate their goals in key life areas that relate to the 'central eight criminogenic risk factors'. Mentors play a crucial part in assisting women to engage with services they need to make a positive change to their lives, providing positive role-modelling, and helping connect women to their local community to reduce reoffending.

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

\* *Victoria's Prison Population 2005 to 2016*, Sentencing Advisory Council

\*\* *Discover why women are committing crime*, 2017, WAM publication

### WAM IN FRANKSTON

Since commencing in July, I have been working hard to promote WAM in Frankston and ensure as many organisations and individuals are aware that we are here. The news spread quite quickly, with social media posts and shares regarding our arrival in Frankston. I'm pleased to say there is no shortage of community support for WAM, from both the community sector and individuals who are interested and willing to put their hand up and find out how they can be involved.

I have attended several meetings, including Impact Volunteering and the steering group for the Living Free project, a program closely connected to ours. I met with the Enhanced Maternal Child and Health team of which there are 16 centres across the Frankston-Mornington Peninsula region, who have welcomed WAM and have identified some potential referrals.

The Mornington Community Information and Support Centre is a one-stop shop for information, support and volunteering, and here I met with the Community Support Worker.

Again, there is keen interest and relief that a much-needed program like WAM is available to women in the region.



To date we've received 12 expressions of interest from potential volunteer mentors, and eight women attended our first information session, along with a lawyer from Legal Aid who was interested to know more to refer her clients. Training for mentors will start in late October and we will be looking to make our first match later this year.

The next phase will be to receive referrals and start connecting with the participants in our program. I am very excited to be a part of WAM in Frankston and to see the continued growth and support to women.

- Sarah Nyssen, Frankston Coordinator  
[frankston@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:frankston@womenandmentoring.org.au)

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### TRENDS IN OUR REFERRALS

The women who are referred to WAM experience a suite of interrelated challenges. Housing instability and drug use have been impacting a significant proportion of the women who have been referred to us this year. This instability presents opportunities for creativity and flexibility in our practice, for example how to allocate a mentor to someone whose address has changed three times in the last three weeks?

The population of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre is at a record high, with reports of bunks and stretchers being brought into small rooms. With the changes to bail that came in of 1st July, a number of women who go through those doors are on remand for short periods of time. Even a small amount of time in prison can be a significant disruption to a woman's life and has a ripple effect on her family and community.

When discussing their history of contact with the criminal justice system, several of the women I have

met over the last few months identify a specific tipping point – the removal of their children. When a woman's children are removed from her care, whether this is done by child protection or by a former partner, it has an enormous impact. The grief of losing her children, the knock to her self-esteem, and the sudden loss of purpose – of something to get up in the morning for – all of these can be contributing factors to drug use and subsequent offending behaviour.

Mentoring is unique because it is a program made up of community members; community members who recognise there is a need to support one another. This means that mentoring can do what other services can't – it can wrap around specialist services and support a woman in a genuinely holistic way.

- Gen Anderson, Intake Coordinator  
[intake@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:intake@womenandmentoring.org.au)

### MENTOR COORDINATOR UPDATE



The Mentor program at WAM has been busy over the past couple of months. We have been undertaking the process of redeveloping and improving our training, and recently delivered it to six new mentors. All this has coincided with new and varied professional development opportunities for current mentors.

The August peer supervision session included a presentation from the women's organisation WIRE. Mentors learnt about the referral process into WIRE and the services offered in; financial literacy, family law information, job readiness, social groups and phone line support.

Current mentors also undertook training delivered by Project Respect in July. Project Respect supports women working in the sex industry, and those who may be the victims of human trafficking. Mentors learnt about; the legislation governing sex work in the state of Victoria, what someone who may be have been trafficked presents like and the referral process into Project Respect.

Cultural competency training was delivered in September through the provision of a City of Yarra grant. The Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health delivered training that developed skills in diversity and multiculturalism, different styles of cultural communication and engaging interpreters when working with program participants.

In October we are hosting 'Three sides of the coin' delivering a theatre performance about the effects of gambling on the community. This will be a unique opportunity that will shed light on gambling addiction, developed and performed by people who have been affected by gambling.

This is not just for our volunteer mentors, but anyone from the wider community, and we are encouraging you to share this information around as we can accommodate many more people in this special performance.

More details on the flyer on the next page.

The training and professional development provided this quarter has enhanced Mentor skill in: working with diverse groups of women who engage in the WAM program, and an enhanced awareness of specialist services within the community, the support these services provide and how to refer participants into such services.

Our next Volunteer information session will be held on Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of October in Caroline Springs. This aims to attract women in the West who may be interested in mentoring, so please share widely.

Click the link below to register your interest: [www.trybooking.com/YKKO](http://www.trybooking.com/YKKO)

- Sharlene Farrugia, Mentor Coordinator  
[volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au)

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Be a part of our online community, either through Facebook or LinkedIn. We often post relevant articles and keep you updated on our news and events.



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**THREE SIDES**  **OF THE COIN PROJECT**  
*Using theatre to create change*



**Let's talk  
about the impact of  
gambling on our community**

**Hear from people with personal  
experience of gambling harm  
and recovery**



**REAL PEOPLE. SPEAK UP. ACT OUT.**

WAM invite you to a FREE performance exploring the effects of gambling on the community. Followed by a Q&A and discussion.

Also hear how WAM supports women in the justice system and how you can become a mentor.

**“ I'd tell anyone I'm an alcoholic before I'd say I'm a gambler. ”**

**When:** Wednesday 17 October | 6:00pm - 8:00pm

**Where:** 'The Green Brain Room' RMIT Melbourne campus  
Building 22, level 7, 330-334 Swanston Street, Melbourne

**RSVP:** By 15 October to Tricia Ciampa, EO  
tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au or 0407 540 995

[www.linkhc.org.au/community-partners/three-sides-of-the-coin/](http://www.linkhc.org.au/community-partners/three-sides-of-the-coin/)

