

Happy International Women's Day

On a day that celebrates the achievements of women, at WAM we also acknowledge and thank the women who volunteer as mentors and provide their support and expertise – Thank you!

With an increased demand for our service, we need more mentors to support the women referred to our program. Invite someone along to one of our [Volunteer Information sessions](#) and help us recruit more mentors.

Over the last few weeks we have seen various media provide some insight to women's experiences of the criminal justice system.

Many of you may have seen ABC's 4Corners episode (and if you haven't, I urge you to take a look on iView), following the lives of three women as they exit prison. This episode highlighted some of the significant challenges in securing accommodation, reconnecting with family and friends, finding employment and being able to live independently and freely. It was particularly touching to see the support provided to one of the women by her mentor, from the NSW-based Women's Justice Network.

Two weeks prior to that episode, ABC's The Drum hosted a panel of experts discussing the contributing factors to woman in the justice system. The prevalence of family violence, homelessness, alcohol/drug misuse, and mental illness is far greater amongst women who have contact with the justice system than those living freely in the wider community. There are important mental health and psycho-social differences between women in prison and women in general. As Debbie Kilroy, from Sisters Inside, pointed out *"we have to stop relying on the prison industry as a default response for government to address the social issues in our community"*.

Research indicates that women in the criminal justice system have significantly higher incidence of mental health disorders, including schizophrenia, major depression, substance abuse disorders, and anti-social personality disorders. There is often a strong inter-connection between victimisation, trauma, mental illness and substance abuse for women offenders. Building pro-social connections within the community and engaging in positive

Other events coming up are our [WAM Movie Night](#) and our [Law Week](#) presentation.

Read on and find out all the details.

activities are a key feature of working successfully with women offenders.

In '[Strengthening Connections: Women's policy for the Victorian Corrections System](#)' (2017) it states that we *"cannot underestimate the role that personal relationships have on reducing re-offending and achieving an offence-free life"*. Corrections Victoria and Justice Health have guiding principles that emphasize pro-social relationships and community connectedness, particularly in post-release planning and reintegration.

Through a formal mentoring relationship, WAM supports disadvantaged women charged with a criminal offence to navigate the complex justice system, develop protective factors that change behaviour, and build social connections to deal with the underlying issues that may have contributed to their involvement in the justice system. WAM empowers women through our mentoring program to achieve their individual goals and reduce negative risk factors for improved life outcomes.

This year we have already received 25 referrals for women who are identified as needing additional support, and we are well on our way to supporting 80 women this year. However, we need more mentors to achieve this goal.

Who do you know that would make a good mentor? In the words of our participants, our mentors are good listeners, non-judgemental and are genuinely there for them. See details at the end of this newsletter for upcoming Mentor Information Sessions.

- Tricia Ciampa, Executive Officer
tricia@womenandmentoring.org.au

FRIENDS OF WAM MOVIE NIGHT

Join us to watch this Icelandic tragi-comedy, **Woman At War** about Halla, a community-minded choir leader who leads a double life.

As the anonymous "Mountain Woman", Halla is a passionate undercover environmentalist causing major disruption to the aluminium smelter. However, when she learns her long-awaited application to adopt a child is finally successful, she is all the more determined to take a final stand against industry before heading to Ukraine to fulfil her dream of becoming a mother.

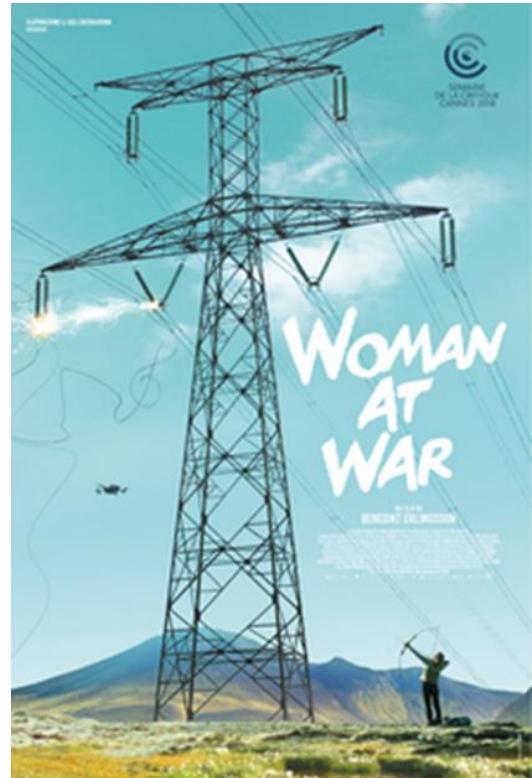
When: Wednesday 10th April ~ 6.30pm

Where: Cinema Nova, Lygon St, Carlton

Movie Tickets from \$20, and you can include refreshments at an additional cost.

Purchase tickets here:

www.eventbrite.com.au/e/57959911656



WELCOME TO OUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

We are pleased to announce that Amanda Thornton has been appointed to the WAM Board, filling the vacancy that arose when Ann Polis retired last year.

Amanda is known to us as a member of Melbourne Women's Fund, a giving circle whose vision is a better life and future for women and families of Melbourne. In 2015, we received their signature grant, which funded our expansion to Sunshine Magistrates' Court.

Amanda currently works as Trust & Foundation Coordinator at Sacred Heart Mission. She has previous experience in other fundraising roles and the arts, and she volunteers as Co-Deputy Chair of the MWF Grants Committee. And Amanda has formal qualifications in the arts, as well as in social investment and philanthropy. All of which makes

her wonderfully qualified to join WAM at this time and help us as we seek to grow and expand our operations further. We warmly welcome her to WAM, and look forward to working with her.



"I'm really looking forward to working with everyone and helping to grow support for WAM's very important work."



With recent attention in the media given to women's experiences of the criminal justice system, this year our theme is discussing how the justice system has been created for men, and to protect the community, however women are becoming the unintended victims.

"Justice for all... just not women" will highlight some of the law changes over recent years that have marginalised women.



This year's event will be held on Wednesday 15th May from 5.30pm. More info to come, please check our Facebook page, Linked In or the Law Week website in the coming weeks.

LAWWEEK 13-19 MAY 2019

Law Week is a seven-day community festival of information sessions, court open days, tours, mock trials, debates, panel discussions and much more designed to broaden the community's understanding of the law and the legal system. Law Week is proudly presented by the Victoria Law Foundation.

Find out about other Law Week events at: www.lawweek.net.au

THE UNIVERSALITY OF MENTORING

The magic that happens at Women and Mentoring is not unique. In fact, what happens here is very commonplace. Relationships just like those between program participants and volunteer mentors take place all over the world, between women of all ages and cultures. They've been happening forever. And they're the key to forging a more gender-balanced world.

Mentoring can be a tricky thing to understand. When people in the wider community hear about WAM's work with women, the focus goes immediately to assumptions around women and criminality. Their eyes widen. 'Ooh', they hush, 'that must be so... hard'.

The women who come to WAM are also often unable to put their finger on what exactly it is that they want from a mentor. While some women have a specific area of need in mind, others will speak of a broader desire for connection, to become more of a part of the community. One participant identified that while she had a suite of professionals she was involved with; her family and social community is made up solely of other people who use illicit substances. She is at the point where she wants to reduce her drug use, but at the moment can't imagine what participating in a world outside of

that might look like – or as she put it "I don't really know what straight people do, no offence".

For women, social isolation hurts. Men who choose to use violence against women wield isolation as a weapon, intentionally disconnecting women from one another. Women talk, they empathise, they recognise distress. Women present one another with alternatives. Women help one another to feel confident.

It can take a woman a lot of courage to put herself out on a limb in the hope of forging a new connection. While a little solitude from time to time might be celebrated, it can be embarrassing to admit to feeling alone. Anxiety can rear its head, that awful beast that dictates a sleepless night spent running through potential scenarios is a prerequisite to meeting someone new. With women so often criticised over their appearance, anxiety can play out as a fixation over what to wear, too much makeup or not enough. Self-sabotage is not uncommon, it is much easier to simply not show up.

But, once we get there, and that connection happens, the magic begins. So what exactly is that magic? What is mentoring?

You probably already know. Think of the impact that your own mentors might have had on you – whether you’ve called them that or not. You might have called them your friend, or your colleague or supervisor, maybe mum, sister or Aunty. One mentor for me stands out. At face value, we are quite different - we are vastly different ages, come from different countries and cultures, and we have different interests. We connected at first through humour and terrible television. As we got to know one another better she began to gently push. The magic was that the bond we had formed allowed her to see things in me that I was blind to. When I would accuse her of inflating my ego with her Oprah-esque energy, she would double down. Her encouragement was unrelenting. She encouraged me to step outside of my I-don’t-do-public-speaking comfort zone. Over time, with her support I found the confidence to do things that I had never imagined.

Mentoring is happening between women all the time, right now. It happens in workplaces and universities, in coffee shops and sports clubs. It happens in churches and nightclub toilets, craft groups and kitchens. It can even happen while simultaneously chasing children around a playground. Supportive connections between women, building one another up.

If you understand what mentoring feels like, it is easy to realise the everyday magic that happens at WAM. Change takes time, and a mentor understands this. Really getting to know her participant and helping her to visualise how an alternative future might look. They are on the journey together. When the participant has made an achievement, however insignificant it might seem to an outsider, she knows that her mentor will understand what it’s taken for her to get there and be proud.

WAM isn’t unique in and of itself. It is simply the conduit for enabling and then supporting these rich bonds between women. In the early stages of the relationship, the focus is simply on meeting and getting to know one another. Over time a future plan is formed and the mentoring pair gets involved in more targeted activity towards the participant’s goals. When a relationship comes to its end there is an opportunity for both parties to reflect, and many choose to maintain a friendship beyond the program.

Mentors also regularly meet with one another, forming relationships in a supportive group setting. This experience of sharing information and ideas is transformative, as new mentors pick up learning and confidence from more experienced mentors throughout their mentoring journey and contribute to the knowledge and understanding of others.

Women supporting women is something to be celebrated, and there’s no better day to recognise it than International Women’s Day. This International Women’s Day has a call to women asking “How can you help forge a more gender-balanced world?” The answer can be found in the connections we make with one another. When we are together, we are powerful. We can achieve things we haven’t even thought to think of yet. So this International Women’s Day, take the time to reconnect with the women who have been supportive of you in your past, value the wonderful rich connections that you have with other women right now, and to embrace any opportunities to connect with women.

- Gen Anderson, Intake & Assessment Coordinator
intake@womenandmentoring.org.au

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION SESSIONS - Find out what it takes to become a volunteer mentor at WAM by attending an Info Session.

Frankston Info Session

Wednesday 13th March, 5.30pm

For more info, contact Sarah

frankston@womenandmentoring.org.au

Western suburbs info Session

Tuesday 2nd April, 11am

For more info, contact Sharlene

volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au