
Progress isn't always linear.

We know that making progress can often be a few steps forward, one step back, shuffle to the left, and repeat. A bit like dance steps. And like dancing, sometimes we need a bit of encouragement to get up and take to the dancefloor.

Our mentors provide that encouragement, cheering women on, sometimes helping them find the beat, and providing non-judgemental support so that women can move to their own rhythm.

Recently we published our [Outcomes Report](#) for the period July 2022- June 2023, our first year of secure government funding through the Early Intervention Investment Framework.

In this infographic we can see how data and measurement form a critical component of our work. It has been a year of significant growth, where we have been able to increase our organisational capacity, recruit and train more volunteers from the community and, fundamentally, empower more women who are in various stages of contact with the criminal legal system to achieve their goals.

This one pager is just a snapshot of what we have achieved, with growth into Ballarat, referrals from over forty services in the health justice sector, and many women indicating a change in their life - but it doesn't really tell the story of the richness of the mentoring relationships and the individual impact for each woman.

Each woman's journey is quite different, and what we do see time and time again, is that their paths are dotted with challenges, accomplishments and change. That is progress.

During their involvement in the program, women are asked to comment on progress towards achieving their goals previously identified at the beginning of the relationship. Over the year there were 109 goals specified and the five main areas of change related to improving: Health & Wellbeing; Employment and Training; Offending & Legal Issues; Friends & Family Relationships; and Finances & Debt.

Some women expressed the desire to find meaningful employment, and considered various training options in hairdressing, traffic control, social work, drug and alcohol counselling and returned to study.

For women who identified that they wanted to address their legal issues they completed a Drug Treatment Order, Community Corrections Orders, finalised outstanding court matters, or completed

behaviour change programs so that they could obtain their license.

Other goals related to starting drug rehabilitation; finding childcare; improving their parenting skills and having children returned to their care; working off fines, reducing debt, or saving money to be financially secure; finding safe and hygienic housing; and learning about self-care and asking for help.

Three quarters of these goals were fully or partially achieved, which is a testament to the drive and commitment of these women.

However, success is not just measured by achieving the perfect outcome. Often success is the incremental change, managing a situation a little better than last time, getting back up and learning from the experience. For some women, success is being able to turn up to an appointment where in the past they may have felt too overwhelmed.

We know how important it is to measure success. Without goals and outcomes, we can't determine what is happening for a woman in their journey, and we can't then measure whether we are creating positive change.

As a team we also have our own goals. In 2024 we want to empower more women through our program expansion. To do this we know we will need to seek collaborative partnerships to raise awareness of our work, for referrals and to ensure women can seek the support they need. We will be focusing on strengthening our volunteer pool in numbers and capabilities through recruitment and ongoing professional development.

We are grateful for your support in helping us and our women achieve our goals this year and look forward to counting on your support in the new year.

- Tricia Ciampa, Executive Officer
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What the WAM team have been up to

Over the past three months the team have been busy, with eight mentoring matches introduced, eight match graduations or closures, along with several goal setting and review meetings.

We appointed Sarah Nyssen, previously the Frankston Program Coordinator, to the role of Program Manager as the team has grown considerably over the past 12 months. This not only recognises Sarah's leadership and offers a career pathway, but this role will provide more support to the team as we continue to grow.

Our annual Staff and Mentor surveys have been conducted, and as we collate the results and feedback, we will be reporting back to our team and mentors in the new year.

Placement student Olivia was tasked with conducting a longitudinal study to understand the long-term impact of the mentoring relationship, particularly after the match had formally ended. Through connecting with women who had left the program in the past 6 months to 2 years, Olivia's report reiterates much of what we gathered in the 2021 evaluation – that having a trusting connection with the mentor has developed and strengthened many protective factors for women. The individual outcomes for the women participating in the interviews were varied but encompassed developing coping strategies, building self-confidence and self-advocacy skills, resolving outstanding legal and child protection issues, as well as returning to work or training. Only one woman reported re-offending, however this was linked to her mental stress exacerbated by her ex-partner breaching a FVIO. We intend to keep building on this study as women graduate from their mentoring relationships, and move forward with their lives.

The team participated in a Marketing Strategy workshop with Small Chilli Marketing. Our priorities going into 2024 will be volunteer recruitment and raising awareness of our work. With more mentors we will be able to support more women, and we also seek to shift the broader community's understanding of gendered pathways to the criminal legal system, and how mentoring and building community connections can be an effective response.

Grants

We have been successful with grant applications to Collier Charitable Trust and Victoria Women's Trust to start developing our Lived Experience Framework. This important piece of work will provide guiding principles on how we engage with our peer group and other women with lived experience of the criminal legal system to underpin our future program design and responses to community needs.

We have also been successful with an application to the Harold Mitchell Foundation to provide support for our Young Women's program, for material aid, match activity funding, and targeted volunteer recruitment in the south east.

Our thanks also go to StreetSmart for our recent community grant to support our regional expansion. Women transitioning out of a custodial setting often struggle with finding their place back into community and may return to unsafe or insecure housing. This funding will assist us in supporting women to address any barriers to engaging with a mentor, which could be topping up their mobile phone credit, paying for transport, and other material aid.

Lived Experience Peer Group

WAM's Peer Group continues to meet fortnightly online offering support, encouragement, empowerment, and friendship through our shared experience of the criminal legal system.

With six women in the group currently, we have welcomed some new members recently, and farewelled some members over the year. After only one meeting, a new member sent this message: *"After our meeting I burst into tears because you were all so lovely. I struggle talking about my situation with my kids for fear of judgment. It felt so good to have you all understand things I've been through without judgment. So, I am extremely*

grateful and for the first time in years, I feel positive for my future".

Recently I attended the "Sisters Inside" Conference in Brisbane, an organisation that assists incarcerated women to better manage life post release. The Conference reinforced how critical the maintenance of family relationships is to women's capacity to reintegrate successfully. We will be incorporating this topic into discussions with the Peer Group to ensure family relationships are flourishing.

- Cathy Campesato

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An update from our Mentor Coordinators

As we head into the holiday break, we are currently onboarding new volunteers from our recent training, and very pleased to see our volunteer pool growing. We are making new matches and providing support for participants and mentors with practical and referrals to legal and other support services in existing matches.

We hear in our peer group supervision the range of issues our participants face resolving fines, negotiating with systems, finding work and training. Mentors share information on challenges they face in their matches, and other mentors offer support and suggestions. Through these discussions we see the wise and kind support our mentors offer to women. The model of mentors meeting regularly to reflect on and share insights from their work helps build wisdom across the volunteer team.

In the most recent supervision sessions mentors heard about the outcomes of the Longitudinal study, a project completed by a student on placement. This study pointed to benefits well beyond the goals matches achieve and which stem from the positive relationships are formed. We saw evidence that participants carry benefits long beyond the end of the mentoring relationship in terms of improved pro social skills and connections, and greater ability to recognise and utilise their own strengths.

WAM wants mentors to know that the relationships they form with participants hold intrinsic value in themselves. For this reason, training this year has

focused on supporting the important work of building good relationships with participants, and mentors have reported that training in areas such as Trauma Informed Practice and Professional Boundaries has been very helpful for their volunteering role.

Heading into 2024, we still need more mentors in the outer West. Recent research on the state of volunteering reflects our experience, the decline in volunteering which existed pre Covid is continuing, and where people are located who are open to volunteering does not always align with where people need support. Clearly the cost of housing is accelerating the trend of women we support being housed in outer areas. Our participants include women in their 70s and girls in their early teens, and across the board housing costs are putting a large stress on many of our women. In some instances, rental costs are more than half of their income, so we are very grateful for the donations we receive which help us help women cope with these significant financial pressures.

We have our first training for the new year starting in February, and we continue to improve the training we provide based on feedback from our volunteers. We are also developing a module of training for volunteers working with the young women's program. We look forward to working with volunteers and community to help our participants achieve their goals in 2024.

- The Mentor Coordinator team

Staff news

We're pleased to welcome Angela O'Toole to the WAM team. WAM is our new Manager, Finance & Operations. She is taking over from Mary Latham who will be retiring as Operations Manager in early 2024. Angela started in November and is based in the office at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre.

Angela is a qualified Nutritionist with extensive experience in community development. With her background in small business management, Angela ran her own business as well as managed several food retail businesses before moving into the for-purpose sector. After moving to Melbourne in 2013 she joined the grassroots food relief organisation Open Table as a volunteer, before stepping up to manage the organisation as it grew. Angela has since worked in local government and neighbourhood houses as well as managing Open Table. More recently, Angela is pursuing formal studies in accounting.



"I am pleased to be joining the WAM team and I look forward to contributing to the organisation's ongoing success and impact."



Our WAMily

At our most recent volunteer training cycle in October, we welcomed to the WAMily: Celinna, Georgie, Kylie, Lucille, Sarah and Bronwyn.

We will be seeking 50 new mentors in 2024, from all over metro Melbourne but especially: Mornington Peninsula, Dandenong, Heidelberg, Mill Park, Melton, Point Cook, inner city, and also Ballarat. If you or someone you know is interested in finding out more, we have an Information Session video on our webpage that can provide more detailed info about role and qualities we look for in mentors.

Thank you to all our volunteers – mentors, skilled volunteers and Board Members - who joined us for our end of year festivities.



We have been able to put together some lovely gift bags for everyone who contributed to WAM this year, with thanks to our generous supporters - Cremorne St Bakers, Pinchapoo, and WoolworthsQV.

Sector News

WAM is amongst members from the community legal sector, community services sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and academia, who form the Smart Justice For Women (SJFW) coalition. As a coalition we are working together to advocate for change to the way the criminal legal system impacts women in Victoria.

The Policy Platform to end the criminalisation of women in Victoria was launched on 7th December with a passionate, insightful and engaging panel of speakers identifying ways of reducing harm through

more culturally safe and trauma-informed responses. You can read the policy platform [here](#).

The final report from the VLSB that focused on Keeping Women out of the Justice System (KWOJS) has been released, detailing all of the projects funded over the 2017-2022 period and their impact.

WAM received funding from the VLSB in this period which was a catalyst for our growth and expansion across metropolitan Melbourne, and precipitated the 2021 evaluation report. You can find the VLSB impact report [here](#).

Christmas Closure – please note the WAM team will be taking a well-deserved break over the festive season. Our office will close from Thursday 21st December, and re-open Monday 8th January 2024. We wish you all the best for a happy Christmas and safe holiday period.



In recognition of all our amazing, **courageous women** and their commitment to believing in themselves and **achieving their goals**, WAM is putting together **festive gift packs** to help them **celebrate Christmas** with their families and children.

To achieve our festive goal, we need your help!

We are seeking donations of vouchers (eg: Big W, Kmart, Target, or Rebel) to include in the packs.

Donate via:
www.givenow.com.au/ChristmasGift