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Happy International Women's Day.

On a day that we celebrate and acknowledge the strong women who have forged careers, created movements, championed causes, and smashed glass ceilings, it is also a day to reflect on the impacts of structural and systemic disadvantage.

Along with an update on our what's been happening at WAM, we also highlight the upcoming changes to the Bail Act that have adversely impacted women.

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It was four years ago that WAM held a panel event as part of Law Week, raising awareness about the adverse impact and unintended consequences of changes to the Bail Act. Back then, and still today, the number of women held on remand, and in custody, is ever increasing. In the period 2009 to 2019 the prison population increased by 64%, compared to 45% for males. And more than half of the women being held in a Victorian prison are on remand, waiting for their charges to be dealt with.

Changes to the Bail Act occurred in 2018 and were a direct response to high profile events and violent offending. Tightening these laws was a mechanism to protect communities, but at times has swept up vulnerable groups, especially those facing charges because of low-level non-violent behaviour.

We know generally men and women have different patterns of criminal behaviour. Women are less likely to have committed violent offences, have less serious criminal histories and are more likely to be criminalised due to experiencing severe social disadvantage.

Thus, these changes to bail and sentencing laws have adversely impacted women, with an increasing number being refused access to bail and parole and doubling the number of Aboriginal women in custody.

A woman's imprisonment, especially whilst awaiting a court hearing, can have a damaging effect on all aspects of her life as she is separated from children and family, there is limited access to support services, she can lose her housing, employment and community connections.

No doubt you are aware of the Coroner's [findings](#) in the Inquest into the tragic death of Veronica Nelson who was held on remand after being refused bail for minor offences. The Coroner identified the discriminatory impact of the current bails laws

**WOMEN AND MENTORING**

Ground Floor, Queen Victoria Women's Centre  
210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, Wurundjeri Country

particularly for First Nations women, and called for urgent reform.

As a member of the Smart Justice For Women coalition, we support the Coroner's recommendation to amend the Bail Act, and welcome the State Government's response to reform the law, to ensure women have access to address their support needs whilst remaining in the community.

Earlier this week, the Attorney General Jaclyn Symes announced the State Government intends to move on bail reform in the coming months, and that "*Remand and custody should be used to keep Victorians safe, not to unnecessarily punish vulnerable community members for minor crimes instead of helping get their lives back on track.*"

Today, on International Women's Day, we more strongly than ever, call for action that takes a gender-responsive, trauma-informed approach that can address the unique needs of women 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 legal system.

We are proud that WAM offers innovative, community-based, early intervention and crime prevention support and takes a woman-centred approach to address criminogenic risk factors.

Today we celebrate our Founding Director [Ann Polis](#), whose belief in people's ability to change their life course if given the right supports enabled her to dedicate so much of her time to building WAM, and addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women in contact with the legal system.

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



## Young Women and Girls program

With federal government funding, WAM has been able to employ a Program Coordinator to focus on building the Young Women and Girl's program in the Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and Kingston local government areas. It was brought about by an identified need for a mentoring program that offered an early intervention approach for young women aged 12 to 24, who are presenting with risk factors and if their needs are not met, they could inadvertently become entrenched within the criminal justice system. These risk factors include, being reporting missing to police, being flagged by proactive policing units, disengagement from school, child protection involvement, significant intergenerational issues and engaging in risk taking behaviours.

The Young Women's Program works in partnership with the Living Free Project run by TaskForce Community Agency which offers intensive case management and assertive outreach by trained professionals to 10-30 year-old women in the South Eastern suburbs. WAM's mentoring program becomes an integral key to offering young at-risk women in these areas support by acting as a step-down program from the Living Free Project, as well as partnering closely with schools, Victoria Police and other community service providers in the region.

There have been three successful matches within the Young Women's Program since October, and it has been heart-warming to see the relationships form between participants and mentors. Catch-ups can be

varied, with activities ranging from writing, and handing out resume's together, grabbing a bite to eat, shooting hoops at a local basketball court, or heading out strawberry picking. Many of the goals highlighted in the young women's program centre around navigating difficult social situations and exploring healthy communication. As the participants' relationship with their mentor strengthen it has been evident, mentors become a confidante and a person to explore how participants would bring about change in the interpersonal relationships in their lives.

The mentors for our Young Women's program play a pivotal role in providing a stable and secure person in our participants' lives, someone who can offer consistent support and be a place to turn when they need. Mentors are aware that pro-social modelling represents an integral part of the relationship they build with the participants and there is an emphasis on our mentors to be patient while remaining persistent as this rapport building stage takes place.

With upcoming March training due to commence shortly, the Young Women's Program looks forward to gaining more incredible mentors to continue to make a meaningful difference in young women's lives across the Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and Kingston areas.

- Cyanna McLaren, Young Women's Program Coordinator



### WAM MOVIE NIGHT

We love our bi-annual movie nights at WAM, with careful selection from our former Chair, and Board Member Sam.

Everyone is welcome to join us! This is a great opportunity to socialise with the team, our board and volunteers, watch an amazing film (100% strike rate so far!) and show your support for WAM.

*To Leslie* is a film Inspired by true events about a West Texas single mother struggling to provide for her son when she wins the lottery and a chance at a good life. Years later, Leslie is living hard and fast at the bottom of a bottle as she runs from the world she left behind. Given a second chance, Leslie comes to face the consequences of her actions, and attempts to make a good life for her and her son. *Note: Rating: R (Language Throughout, Some Drug Use)*

Join us at The Kino Cinema on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> March from 6pm.

Buy your tickets, and pre-purchase movie snacks here: <https://tinyurl.com/WAM-ToLeslie>



## What's On In the 'Rat

February has been an exciting month for WAM Ballarat and March is looking to be just as busy.

We attended the 20th Legal Laneway Breakfast in Melbourne and the inaugural breakfast in Ballarat as the event charity partner. Emily Murphy, Ballarat Program Coordinator, battled the wind to introduce WAM to local legal professionals in Ballarat.

To continue to promote the program, we held a “chat with a volunteer” session at the local shopping centre’s community hub and spoke to many community members. Thank-you Pat for coming down to support the session.

For International Women’s Day WAM will be chatting to the team at Bunnings in Delacombe, then setting up a stand to chat to customers as they walk in. We’ll have a raffle prize kindly donated by Bunnings. We’re super excited to have two new volunteers coming through our March recruitment drive, one in Ballarat and one in Maryborough, growing our WAMily of three, Pat, Sue and Joyce, to a WAMily of five.



Photo credit: Amy Piesse, Legal Laneway Breakfast Ballarat 2023

If you know anyone in or near Ballarat that would be interested in becoming a volunteer, please encourage them to contact Emily, who is always happy to go for a coffee and have a chat about the program.

**Email:** [ballarat@womenandmentoring.org.au](mailto:ballarat@womenandmentoring.org.au)  
**Phone:** [0403 584 015](tel:0403584015)

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## Quotes from some recent Match Graduations

### *What are some of the highlights of your mentoring relationship so far?*

Mentor F: “Building a relationship with [Participant R] and seeing her progress, seeing her self-advocate and when she is in doubt she communicates to create a plan.”

Participant R: “I love having someone support and encourage me, someone to give me the right advice.”

Participant S: “That there are good people out there who can help and will help, I am not alone. I have felt alone my whole life. I have gained not just a mentor but I believe I have found a friend as well. It was motivating to have [Mentor A] putting in the effort, I wanted to do good things and make others proud.

### *What are some of the differences or changes you've noticed about yourself since you began your mentoring relationship? What have you learned from one another?*

Participant R: “Oh I’ve noticed a lot of changes. I have a totally different mindset than before (prior to matching). I used to just think about myself and my teenage daughter, now I’m thinking about my new baby. I’m thinking more in general and being more mindful about things like finances – I have bills to think about. I used to be scared, like I was a small person. Now I speak up and make calls and I get places.”

Participant S: “I have learnt self-respect, and not to be so co-dependent with my partner. I didn’t realise I was before our discussions. I learnt it is ok to take time out for myself, to reaffirm my independence as a person”.

Mentor A: “I appreciated watching [Participant S’s] approach to her situation and observing her strategies and plan. She adopted some self-care, and threw everything at planning for court and putting her best foot forward. It was fantastic to watch”.





### ***If you had not engaged in the program how do you think your life would be different?***

Participant R: “I could have still been on drugs, I wouldn’t have been as organised, my brain was so full of stuff that I couldn’t think straight. The support meant that I could put my thoughts into action”.

Participant S: “I relapsed while in the program, and [Mentor A] picked up on that. She did not judge but raised it with me. I looked at what I was doing, reflected, and re-started my hard work. I didn’t want to waste her time or Taskforce’s time in supporting me. I have been inspired by [Mentor A’s] confidence and have made different choices because of this. I am now out 4 nights a week, yoga and meditation. I make different, better choices.

### ***What have you found to be most helpful when meeting with your mentor?***

Participant R: “Having that social connection outside of family, getting out of the house to meet someone – it was really therapeutic for me, and we would go and sit in the park near my old house and just talk about anything. I get advice from [Mentor F] and support, and she’s always in my corner”.

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## **Board Changes**

We were sad to farewell Anne Rudd from the WAM Board late in 2022. Anne made great contributions to WAM in her five years on the Board. She brought valuable experience as a Victoria Police member, lawyer and prosecutor with experience across the Magistrates’ Courts and the Children’s Court, and in sexual offences and family violence matters. And she helped greatly in improving WAM’s governance structures and in chairing several committees. Anne is now on parental leave, and we wish her all the best with her beautiful twins.

### **We’re very pleased to welcome Amelia Condi and Ingrid Svendsen OAM to the Board.**

Amelia is an experienced leader in social policy, strategy, implementation, outcomes measurement and transformation. She has spent her career working across the ‘for purpose’ and public sectors. She is passionate about social issues and creating better opportunities for individuals and communities alike.



*“I am privileged to be joining the WAM board and working towards such an important goal, supporting women. I am pleased to be able to use my strengths to contribute to the great work of the organisation and am excited to see the program grow and evolve.”*

Ingrid is an international NGO co-founder and experienced non-executive director. She received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2022 for her work with not-for-profit organisations in Australia and Timor-Leste. Ingrid brings to the board strengths in strategy, building board capacity, communications and stakeholder engagement. In her professional life, Ingrid runs her own strategic communications consulting practice, specialising in crisis communication and issues management.



*“WAM’s philosophy of women supporting women is something that sits well with my personal values. I am inspired by the dedication of WAM’s volunteers and the courage and resilience of the women and girls it mentors. I have joined the board to contribute my governance and professional skills to help WAM increase its impact and remain sustainable as it grows.”*