
Change can be a daunting process.

But it doesn't mean it's a bad thing, and yes, it's not always a good thing either. But change is on the horizon, and you can read more about what changes are coming in this update.

If nothing changes, nothing changes

In 2018 bail reforms were introduced that were intended to target serious violent offenders. This was in response to the tragic incident in Bourke St in 2017 where six people were killed and many more were seriously injured. The perpetrator was on bail with significant offences, and it was noted he was "prone to extreme forms of violence with escalating behaviour".

Victoria's bail laws were changed and became the toughest in the country, making it more difficult for repeat offenders to get bail. It has since been well-documented that these bail reforms have disproportionately impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and women experiencing disadvantage. The laws led to an increase in the Victorian prison population for people on remand, yet to face court, and caused unnecessary harm. Women are being denied bail, not because they pose a risk to the community, but because they themselves are at risk – experiencing family violence, homelessness, poverty and social disadvantage, often leading to contact with the legal system.

Many advocates have been seeking a repeal of these laws ever since, and it unfortunately came to a head following the death of Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman Veronica Nelson whilst in custody in 2020. Coroner Simon McGregor's findings handed down earlier this year recommended sweeping changes and labelled the bail laws 'a complete and unmitigated disaster'.

In mid-August the Victorian Government introduced a new bill to parliament to amend the Bail Act, and it is currently being debated in Parliament. The reforms being introduced are seeking to balance the needs of prioritising community safety with recognising that the existing laws have failed to protect our most vulnerable, further criminalising them rather than addressing the drivers of offending.

Veronica Nelson's family have been advocating for the implementation of "[Pocum's Law](#)" which provides a best practice model for bail reform. The full implementation of Pocum's Law has widespread

support across the sector. Earlier this month, WAM joined colleagues from the Aboriginal, legal, family violence, health, human rights, and community services sector on the steps of Parliament House to call for Pocum's Law to be fully enacted, so that what happened to Veronica Nelson never happens again.

Recently, I posed the same statement to someone: **So. let's not change anything and nothing changes.**

This was in response to an argument in opposition to the upcoming referendum. This person was adamant that having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament is not needed, not all First Nations people wanted it, and there wasn't enough detail to change the Constitution.

Improving health, wellbeing and life outcomes for First Nations people in Australia has been a longstanding challenge; the gap in health status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains unacceptably wide.

But if nothing changes, nothing changes. The referendum is firstly about recognition of First Nations people and their 65,000-year connection to this land in our 122-year-old Constitution.

It is also about having representation on matters that relate to First Nations people; if there is no representation or advice then we continue to have the same approach to addressing problems and issues that have been harming First Nations people since colonisation.

The voice isn't a silver bullet. But it's an incremental step in a different direction that can create positive change.

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





What the WAM team have been up to

We are continuing the work on our Diversity and Inclusion policy, and with guidance from Minter Ellison and advice from Pride in Diversity, we've finessed the wording to describe who we work with:

Empowering cisgender and transgender women and non-binary people to create positive change.

It's a small change, but one that we believe means a more inclusive approach to our work.

Join our WAMily – Recruiting Mentors

In July we held another volunteer training session, and we welcome: Cassandra, Dianna, Maddi, Priyanka, Rachelle, Shashi, Sally and Xiaoke to the WAMily.

There are another group of candidates progressing through the last stages of screening this month, and we have two more Volunteer Training dates left for this year:

- Frankston 11th & 18th October
- Metro/CBD 1st & 8th November

If you or someone you know would like to get involved, please contact us at volunteer@womenandmentoring.org.au

Join our WAMily – recruiting a key team member

It's a bittersweet moment where we farewell an extremely valued and dedicated member of the team, as our beloved Mary Latham has decided to retire in early 2024. However, this is an exciting opportunity to invite someone new into the fold to support our growth trajectory. We are seeking a part time Manager, Finance & Operations to join our growing team and more information about the role can be found [here](#).



Lived Experience Peer Group – seeking new members

The Women and Mentoring Peer Group is a small group of women with lived experiences of criminal justice who gather fortnightly in a non-judgmental zoom meeting in which we give our time to support and encourage one another. It is a safe place, where women can be their own voice and share their story.

Peer mentoring is based on the idea that criminal behaviour is often influenced by who we have close contact with, and instead we aim to create positive peer connections. Many women who have walked the justice system road have been survivors of family violence, and don't always have a supportive network.

As the facilitator of the group, I aim to not only encourage everyone with their goals, aspirations and dreams ...but to give rise to the possibility that they become the owners of their own history. I believe every woman has a voice – some just need to be empowered to use it.

We aim at being flexible with meetings and address issues or topics as they arise. We discuss current issues in the media on criminal justice system as well as address barriers members are experiencing. The group encourages open communication and respects each woman's opinions, particularly as the women make important changes in their lives or choices. The support we provide one another is vital for empowerment and growth.

The group is welcoming to all cisgender and transgender women and non-binary people to feel included, heard and supported. Our group is needing new members and I encourage anyone who may be interested to contact me for a confidential chat.

- Cathy Campesato
peergroup@womenandmentoring.org.au



Goals & Outcomes

In the period between July 2022 and June 2023, 31 women participated in match reviews where women were asked to comment on progress towards achieving their goals. There were 109 goals identified in this period, and almost two-thirds of the goals related to Health & Wellbeing (19%); Employment & Training (18%); Offending & Legal Matters (15%); and, Managing Finances & Debt (13%).

Of the 109 goals 74% were fully or partially achieved with women who only stayed in the programme for less than six months or early closures as the main reason for not a fully achieving their goals. 19 women also celebrated match graduations in this period, with three women completing their community corrections orders, and nine women indicated all of their legal matters were resolved. Eight women indicated a major positive change in their life, five reported a moderate positive change and four women reported slight positive change.

There will be more to read on the outcomes of our work in our Annual Report due out later this year.

Observations from Peer Supervision

Throughout our student placement at Women and Mentoring, we have been given the opportunity to attend peer supervision meetings. In these meetings we have been able to meet some of the current volunteer mentors and hear about their experiences.

This has been such a great opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the commitment, empathy, and kindness each of the mentors possess, and to see how dedicated they are to supporting the mentee they are matched with. The peer support meetings provide a great way for the mentors to discuss their current relationship with their match with the rest of the group which allows them to gain insight & receive advice from other mentors who are drawing from their own experiences.

Attending these meetings have not only shown us how supportive the culture is here at WAM, but also highlighted how dedicated the mentors are to supporting their match. We understand that mentoring relationships have their ups and downs, and self-care might not be a priority.

Self-care refers to establishing behaviours that promote personal well-being. It is a commitment to looking after your body and becoming attuned with its needs. This can mean exercising more, getting more sleep each night, or doing anything you enjoy that is beneficial to your health. The benefits of self-care are endless, as engaging in mindful activities and focusing on relaxing activities can help strengthen

In September our Mentors will have the opportunity to attend professional development on the topic of professional boundaries and self-care. This is an important topic for our mentors and staff to have a deeper understanding of the limits of their role, and how to develop good self-care practices as we support women with complex histories.

WAMily Movie Night

At WAM, we love our Movie Nights, and in August we held our second event for the year. Thank you to our friends, supporters, staff, Board members, and mentors who joined us to see the heart-warming *The Miracle Club*. A special thanks to those who purchased a **Pay It Forward double pass** so we can provide the opportunity for some of our mentoring matches to enjoy an outing at the cinema together too.

self-determination and contribute to reducing stress and anxiety.

WAM acknowledges that engaging in a mentoring relationship can be emotionally tiring on some, and thus, prioritising self-care may be a helpful way to re-focus the mind and body.

Therefore, we thought it would be a great idea to create a care pack for the volunteers and their matches, which includes some nourishing recipes, and mindful activities such as yoga and meditation. These activities are a great way to embrace some time alone and re-charge but can also be an experience that our mentors and their match can share together.

We hope this gesture reminds those in our mentoring program that we are thinking of them, we are proud of the achievements they are making together, and most importantly to put some time aside for self-care.



- Olivia & Rachel, Placement students
The Care Pack assembly line