

Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers

(Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and
Infrastructure Committee)

Submission by McAuley Community Services for
Women



McAuley Community
Services for Women

A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

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Overview: McAuley Community Services for Women

McAuley Community Services for Women supports women and children who have faced family violence and/or homelessness.

We provide safe crisis and refuge services, temporary and longer-term accommodation. We also provide direct support to children who have lived in households marked by violence, and help nurture the confidence of their mothers.

Women across our services can access specialist support via an onsite psychologist, funded through the North-West Primary Health Network, health care from a Bolton Clarke nurse, and the WEstjustice which provides legal advice and financial counselling. Partnerships and collaboration with external agencies are vital in connecting women with this broader spectrum of support.

We use a case management and co-ordination approach, and also focus on the development of independent living skills and social and recreational opportunities.

A preventative model

McAuley understands how beneficial early intervention and prevention is for individuals, governments and the community. We know that we can only meet a fraction of the need, and therefore must do everything in our power to prevent a breakdown in mental health, a housing crisis, further incidents of violence and intergenerational disadvantage. Our support:

- **prevents financial duress and instability.** We work with women directly to assist them to develop pathways to employment and financial independence so that they will be safe (from violence); secure (housed); financially independent (employed or studying).
- **prevents homelessness and further violence.** We house women and children who are homeless, due to family violence. We provide crisis accommodation and temporary accommodation for women at the point of need such as discharge from hospital.
- **prevents further damage to children.** We attend to children's experience of family violence which is different to their mothers and often goes unrecognised. We provide support at courts to enable mothers to organise intervention orders and access their legal rights
- **prevents future youth homelessness.** We work to improve the bond between mothers and children for the prevention of later youth homelessness.
- **prevents re-occurring homelessness.** We provide pathways to employment and education, and ongoing access to social and recreational opportunities. This leads to independence, wellness, permanent housing, and greater financial security. We support women to maintain their housing.

Employment support

Included in our range of responses is our employment service. McAuley Works provides intensive help to obtain meaningful, paid employment for women who have experienced family violence, homelessness, mental and physical illness, or other challenges in getting work.

McAuley Works is presently funded through Jobs Victoria¹ and is working with more than 280 women from metropolitan Melbourne, Ballarat and some other regional areas.

To our knowledge there are no other Australian family violence organisations offering an employment service as part of their suite of supports to get a woman's life back on track.

McAuley Works support model

Women supported by McAuley Works are experiencing, or have experienced, family violence, together with other compounding factors such as being a sole carer, mental health or disability, and a disrupted or non-existent work history.

McAuley Works offers intensive and personalised support with:

- job search support and monitoring
- work preparation including job specific skills training and resume development
- active engagement with employers
- some job matching and placement into employment
- personal support to address non-vocational barriers
- referral to vocational skills training; literacy and numeracy support.

The intended outcomes from McAuley Works are:

- paid employment that is sustainable over the long term
- increased employability
- increased access to support services
- increased likelihood of housing stability
- increased likelihood of financial and emotional self-reliance
- decreased likelihood of dependence on violent partners.

Pathways to McAuley Works

Since commencing in early 2017, 290 referrals have been received from 40 separate referring agencies, averaging around 20 referrals per month.

¹ A version of McAuley Works has run for most of the last nine years, with the current version predominantly funded by Jobs Victoria.

Where possible, we seek to work collaboratively with referring services to ensure other needs, such as housing, are being met.

However, more often than not, these services end their support due to the need to pick up the next person on their list. McAuley Works often has to play a role in co-ordinating the complex needs of women.

Referrals were closed for four months in the second half of 2018, due to unsustainably high case loads of around 100 women per case manager.

Demographics of women taking part

The majority of participants are aged between 25 and 34. The next two biggest age groups are 45 – 54 and 35 – 44 respectively. Most participants are from Australia, with sizable populations from Sri Lanka, India, China and Iran. There are 27 ethnicities represented. Overall:

- 94% have experienced family violence
- 39% are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- 20% have a mental illness
- 14% are homeless
- 12% are sole parents
- 4% are mature age (50+)
- 4% are asylum seekers.

Family violence often causes women to move locations, so McAuley believed it was important to be able to offer this program across the Melbourne metropolitan region. Nevertheless, 41% of participants this calendar year have come from the Melbourne metropolitan western region, reflecting McAuley and partners' base. Sixteen per cent come from the Central Highlands, where McAuley has a presence in Ballarat.

Educational background

The women involved in McAuley Works have a range of educational backgrounds reflecting the fact that family violence doesn't discriminate:

- 4% Advanced Diploma
- 2% Advanced Certificate
- 22% Bachelor Degree
- 27% Certificate
- 22% Diploma
- 2% Doctorate
- 16% other secondary education
- 4% VCE or equivalent.

Employment outcomes

McAuley is contracted to achieve 100 employment outcomes of 26 weeks duration over the life of the contract, with specifications relating to part-time and casual employment. Currently there have been 67 placements.².

A wide range of jobs are sought, typically entry level and in female-dominated areas. These are the roles filled by women placed to date:

- Administration (14)
- Retail (7)
- Support work (6)
- Carer – aged care or child care (5)
- Cleaning (4)
- Cook/food handling (5)
- Customer service (3)
- Hospitality (2)
- Laundry hand (2)
- Teaching assistant (2)
- Warehousing/process work (4)

Single placements: apprentice engineer, counsellor, dental receptionist, fork lift driver, IT, nurse, pattern maker, prison guard, traffic controller.

² Some women have had multiple placements and in some instances, this is because they have had to leave their job because they are located by the perpetrator of the violence against them.

McAuley's responses to issues investigated by the inquiry

1. Social and economic benefits of seeking to place disadvantaged jobseekers into sustainable employment

Financial independence helps women leave violent relationships

There are countless immediate, and longer-term, benefits for the community when women experiencing family violence gain employment.

Foremost of these is that the economic independence and financial security associated with work can be a springboard for leaving a violent relationship.

While women remain financially dependent on men who are violent they are less likely to leave them³. A report commissioned by McAuley found that: 'Women may find themselves in a vicious cycle where their financial independence may be the path to freedom from violence but the violence may prevent them from becoming financially independent'.⁴

The likelihood of other consequences that women typically face when they leave violence – poverty, homelessness, health issues, and effects on children – is also lessened if they can join or re-enter the workforce.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence recognised the connection between financial security and the ability of women to build new lives following family violence, and said: 'Stable housing and employment, and participation in community life, are central to the wellbeing of victims of family violence and to their ability to build a good life for themselves and their children or other family members.'

'The Government must ensure there are individually tailored measures to support victims to recover from the effects of family violence. Depending on their circumstances, this may require support to attain economic security and independence, secure housing, and health and wellbeing.'⁵

Employment mitigates other consequences of family violence

Supporting women to gain employment can also help prevent other associated problems which take a significant social and economic toll on individuals and communities.

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness, with more women than men (64%) presenting to homelessness services in 2017-2018. Family violence was the primary cause in 47% of these presentations⁶.

³ Postmus, J. 2010. *Economic Empowerment of Domestic Violence Survivors*. Harrisburg. VAWnet. <http://www.vawnet.org>

⁴ Violence against women: a workplace and employment issue (position paper prepared for McAuley Community Services for Women by E. Kleimaker, 2012, and available on request)

⁵ <http://files.rcfv.com.au/Reports/Final/RCFV-All-Volumes.pdf> p.20

Family violence also has serious impacts on women's health, contributing to more burden of disease (the impact of illness, disability and premature death) than any other risk factor for women aged 25–44. Mental health conditions were the largest contributor to the burden associated with intimate partner violence, with anxiety disorders making up the greatest proportion (35%), followed by depressive disorders (32%). In 2015–16, the financial cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was estimated at \$22 billion.⁷

Children's wellbeing enhanced

Supporting women to gain employment and leave violence mitigates the risk of an array of potential impacts on children's futures and their wellbeing.

The mental health, education and behavioural development of the 65 per cent of children and infants who are present at incidents of family violence are adversely affected by this exposure. In Victoria last year there were 23,595 such incidents.⁸

In the wake of such distressing events an extensive range of emotional problems and behaviours are known to follow.⁹ Children asked directly about their experiences say they lived with fear, anxiety and dread, and worried about the safety of their siblings, mothers and themselves. They had feelings of shame about their home life, and lacked confidence and self-esteem.¹⁰

For children, there are also positive effects in seeing their mother working; this is a specific driver for some women (such as Jenny in the following case study) who told us she wanted to work to be a 'role model' for her children. Seeing their mother working also conveys to children the message that women's choices are not confined to remaining in a violent relationship, or being dependent on government benefits.

Supporting women who have faced family violence into employment also represents value for money for governments. A few years ago, a similar program operating in Adelaide worked with Social Ventures Australia, a leading Return on Investment practitioner, to analyse the social value that could be created. They found that for every dollar spent in employment support, \$8.31 was created in social value.¹¹

A current evaluation of Jobs Victoria partners, undertaken by The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies, independently audited McAuley Works and found that this work is of importance across the community service system, and its learnings have value beyond the outcomes/payments formula.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) homelessness annual report 2017-2018)

⁷ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>

⁸ Crime Statistics Victoria, 2017/2018: Victorian police data

⁹ Brown, S., Gartland, D., Woolhouse, H., & Giallo, R. (2015). *Maternal Health Study policy brief 2: health consequences of family violence: translating evidence from the Maternal Health Study to inform policy and practice* [Policy brief]. Retrieved from Murdoch Children's Research Institute database

¹⁰ Buckley, H., & Holt, S. (2007). Listen to me! Children's experiences of domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review*, 16, 296-310

¹¹ Social return on Investment: Worknext Job Placement Services (published by Catherine House, 2006)

It described McAuley Works as: 'a very important initiative because effectively it is a "trial of an additional service to assist with employment outcomes", notwithstanding that the Victorian Government does have a policy framework on integrated services. Notably missing in the framework is employment assistance services.

'The McAuley Community Services for Women program is truly experimental....placement difficulties arise simply because victims of family violence are often the principal family care provider; considerations of children and work placements need to have a degree of security....put simply, the fact is overcoming family violence is not an easy task...'¹²

Unexpected outcomes: the most disadvantaged fare best in getting jobs

In 2018, we took a snapshot of McAuley Works' effectiveness, analysing the challenges the women we were supporting were facing. Eighty-six per cent of women were still at moderate, major or critical risk of violence while McAuley Works supported them.

There was a similar picture in exploring their 'job readiness'; 82 per cent had not held a job in more than 18 months, were unskilled, not fluent in English, and also faced other disadvantages such as a mental illness or learning disability.

A remarkable finding was that 85% of the women who obtained employment following support from the program were those living with the most serious forms of violence.

These somewhat unexpected outcomes highlighted women's high degree of motivation and drive, and their determination to find work as a way out of their circumstances.

(See Appendix A for full details)

¹² Conversation with Associate Professor Michael O'Neil, Executive Director, SA Centre for Economic Studies and quoted with permission (the evaluation is ongoing and not due for completion till August 2019).

2. Jobseekers who may be considered as being ‘disadvantaged’ in the labour market and the types of barriers to employment they face

Family violence is a significant barrier to employment

The experience of family violence has usually undermined women’s work histories; it also affects their ability to get work, and retain it.

The evidence is that women with a history of domestic violence have a more disrupted work history, are consequently on lower personal incomes, have had to change jobs more often, and are employed at higher levels in casual and part time work than women with no experience of violence.¹³

Disrupting women’s employment opportunities is often a deliberate tactic of men who use violence. They frequently demonstrate controlling behaviours that ruin the chances of sustained employment for women. Women may have had restrictions on where they can go, their confidence and self-esteem is often systematically attacked, and be at risk of stalking and harassment at their workplace.

A correlation has been found between women’s attempts to enter the workplace and an escalation of the violence. Perpetrators target victims at work to ‘increase their control and compromise the victim’s economic independence...[violence] is motivated by a desire to control the intimate partner, so perpetrators who extend their abuse to the work setting are increasing the number of domains in which they control their partners.’¹⁴

Harassing, stalking, and threatening women at work is also a strategy for getting them fired and increasing their dependence.¹⁵

The experience of women supported by McAuley Works

Ninety-four per cent of the women supported by McAuley Works have experienced family violence. Many are still facing an immediate threat of violence. This has a significant impact on their ability to be ‘job-ready’.

Our case managers often note that such is the chaos in their lives, women initially find it difficult to focus on practical steps they need to take to enter the workforce. More traditional employment support models are ill-equipped to deal with these complexities.

¹³ McFerran, L: ‘Safe at home, safe at work” Domestic Violence workplace rights and entitlement project (2011)

¹⁴ O’Leary-Kelly, A., Liou, R-S., & Reeves, C.) “When the personal is professional : Intimate partner violence and the workplace’. Department of Management University of Arkansas, , Fayetteville, AR 72701, p 5

¹⁵ ACTU Submission to the Senate Finance & Public Administration Committee Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia, 31 July 2014 (page 8)

The experience of violence also has consequences which adversely affect job searching and the types of jobs that are appropriate, such as:

- reduced confidence and focus
- reduced ability to meet appointments – women are often still dealing with court matters, sorting out Centrelink issues, may be couch-surfing, and have reduced childcare options because they have had to move away from their neighbourhoods and family connections
- safety needs – women are still at risk of being contacted or found by perpetrators.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that, though McAuley Works is funded by Jobs Victoria to deliver employment support to women within a family violence support agency, family violence is not a category currently recognised by Jobs Victoria nor is it 'flagged' on the Jobs Victoria database as a barrier to employment.

This raises questions on how to integrate this work across government departments and renders invisible the issue of family violence, as a barrier in itself, to employment

Multiple barriers to job-readiness

As well as family violence, women supported by McAuley are usually facing many other challenges. McAuley Works' situation within the context of a family violence and homelessness support agency enables access to other help with some of these issues.

We can assist women to access family violence flexible support packages for things such as moving costs or security upgrades at their home. Referral to our community legal centre partner, WEstjustice, has meant for some women that thousands of dollars of debt they were carrying due to economic abuse by their partners has been waived. (Overall, the WEstjustice program, funded by philanthropy, has negotiated the waiver of \$400,000 carried by women supported by McAuley).

The availability of this broad range of help means women are more likely to be able to direct their energies towards finding a job. The McAuley Works' approach also emphasises the establishment of a close and trusting relationship with their case manager; empathy and understanding are important elements so that women who've experienced trauma and violence can gain the confidence needed to find work.

Lack of co-ordinated supports

A difficulty noted by our case managers is the sheer volume and number of organisations women involved with McAuley Works have to deal with, all with competing demands.

¹⁶https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Issues_paper_1__Supporting_women_to_find_and_keep_jobs_following_domestic_violence.pdf

Women supported by McAuley Works may have several mandated 'case plans', for example, if they are involved with mental health services, child protection or Corrections. Employment support is often not noted in these plans, and simply dealing with multiple workers is overwhelming for women and distracting in their efforts to find work.

It is also our experience that because of their own heavy caseloads, referring agencies often step back once a woman becomes involved with McAuley Works, leaving our case managers to have to provide support with other issues they are facing. This was not the initial intention of McAuley Works' program design, but has sometimes been essential in the absence of other services.

Job market does not favour the McAuley Works cohort

Over the past few years, the job market has continued a trend of greater numbers of precarious and part-time work. These don't dovetail well with the caring responsibilities of the women taking part in McAuley Works who are also, because of violence, unable to rely on their children's other parent for support..

The increasing number of casual roles also makes it difficult for women to support their families out of poverty. On the other hand, many unskilled roles that become available are full time and blue collar on worksites, not suitable for our cohort.

Women's stories

'Jenny' – how employment support can change a life

'Jenny' left school in year eight. At 24 she had already experienced a life she described as 'chaotic' – marked by a violent relationship, struggles with addiction, and a battle to manage as a single mum to two children, including one with special needs.

To get Jenny job-ready, a McAuley Works case manager helped build her self belief and confidence, assisted her in preparing a resume and practising for job interviews, and supported her to meet and register with a labour hire company that now has an established relationship with McAuley Works.

Through a collaboration with Yarraville Community Centre's Reconnect program, McAuley Works was able to offer Jenny training programs and access funds for petrol and upfront costs for safety equipment and uniform that were required for the job she was offered.

Now that she has secured a job, she has financial independence, and pride in knowing that her work ethic and attitude are so valued that she is the first one to be called for extra shifts.

She has been able to remove herself from a situation of family violence and has new social connections and friendships.

She has an enhanced sense of self and identity, and a new story to counter one of her as a 'victim' of family violence.

She is building strengths which will help her to withstand further challenges that her life may very well throw up.

There had been concerns that Jenny could not care for her children, but they are now seeing a mother who is flourishing.

'It means I am not as stressed and frustrated. I have more energy and patience with my kids and it's helped me enjoy my time with them more,' says Jenny.

The chances are much better that her children will be able to avoid a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

'Tamara': co-ordinated supports make a difference

Being university-educated hadn't saved Tamara, a woman born overseas, from enduring 17 years as virtual slave labor by her violent husband after she came to live in Australia.

When she left the abusive relationship, she owed more than \$25,000 in debts for unpaid utility bills, credit cards, a Centrelink debt, and a personal loan she used to pay for her daughter's tombstone.

Tamara was firstly supported in our crisis accommodation. This, she says, gave her time and space to reflect and recover on the trauma she had experienced, and plan for a new and safe future.

She was then linked to both McAuley Works for employment, and to our community legal service partner WEstjustice. She needed legal help with the debt which was weighing heavily on her mind and making it impossible for her to start afresh.

The debts were all able to be waived after negotiations by WEstjustice, and Tamara was also supported into a new job.

She is also now able to afford to rent, and has been re-united with her teenage son, who had to stay behind when Tamara first left the violence. He is now studying at university.

Tamara made contact with us recently to say: 'I feel like I have my life back.'

'Akanke': not doing everything on my own

Akanke, a young African-born woman, first came into contact with McAuley when due to family issues, she left her home in regional Victoria and came to Melbourne, where, lost and alone, she knocked on the door of our McAuley House. She was 'jumping from couch to couch' with nowhere to stay when she came across our service.

She was put in touch with McAuley Works and linked with 'Fitted for Work', where she was kitted out from head to toe in business clothing, including appropriate shoes and accessories.

Akanke recalls: 'My case manager Lorraine drove to my location, bought me a hot chocolate, and made me feel comfortable. She gave me hope that I wasn't doing this by myself, and she would support me with getting my CV up and running to attract more jobs.'

'Within a week I received six interviews and a full time job.'

'My new job was with an interpreting company. While there I sometimes received calls from McAuley House booking interpreters to help other women get on their feet. It was always emotional speaking with them because that's where I started as well.'

Lorraine says: 'There were so many things going on in Akanke's life, and the first step was about building trust. She needed to settle at least some parts of her life before the efforts to get work could begin.'

'Finding a job made an extraordinary difference in every possible way. You could hear the change just in her voice. Not only did her confidence return; Akanke began making friends and mixing with people her own age.'

3: How well current efforts, programs or activities meet the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers and/or employers looking for workers, and potential improvements

What is working well

The effectiveness of McAuley Works and its approach has been demonstrated through several evaluations over the past nine years. More recently, the program has been audited by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies via a Victorian Government commissioned evaluation, due out later this year.

In 2012: an external evaluation conducted by ACSO looked at the experience of 83 women participating in the program over a ten-month period. (Thirty women had achieved an employment outcome and 41 had received training.)

The evaluation found there was strong agreement between program stakeholders (participants, staff and referring organisations) that its key strength was its personalised relationship-based approach to working with women.

This included the holistic way the program aimed to address both direct employment related needs (e.g. résumés and interview skills) and broader non-vocational needs likely to influence a woman's capacity to gain and maintain employment (e.g. self-esteem, housing, safety).

A key feature of the program model that was strongly advocated for by the program staff was that it aimed to build the confidence of participants and supports them to deal directly with employers, rather than program staff connecting with employers.

In 2013-14: McAuley again reviewed the program. At the time there were 200 women participating. The respondents believed they could not have obtained employment without McAuley Works. Women said the program was:

- personalised: *"not just a number"*
- timely: *"so quick"*
- accommodating: *"always trying to fit (me) in"*
- useful: *"extraordinarily helpful"*
- thorough: *"(I appreciated) all the effort"*, and
- effective: (in relation to the development of individual resumes): *"it gets you in"*.

This review also said: 'McAuley Works responds to current gaps in mental health, homelessness and family violence services. While these services offer quality crisis support, case management and accommodation programs, they do not have the capacity or expertise to assist clients to become work ready, to obtain and maintain employment, to provide post placement support or to liaise with employers to ensure a supportive workplace. Nor do mainstream employment services have the capacity or expertise to provide the necessary support.'¹⁷

In 2016: When McAuley was contracted to renew the McAuley Works program we sought information from previous participants as to their current employment status and history, their level of financial independence, and their opinions of the program they had engaged with. Of 204 registered clients, 90 were contacted and 35 completed a telephone questionnaire. The findings¹⁸ were:

- 55 per cent were still employed, 30 per cent in continuous employment with jobs in Aged Care, Community Care and cleaning most common;
- Work from four hours/week to full time with average of 23 hours; majority 15 hours or more;
- Jobs held from four weeks to almost four years with average almost two years. Three women worked less than 26 weeks;
- Two-thirds currently working with average 24.5 hours, and three studying;
- Half would like to find some or different work; and
- Two-thirds wanted information about the renewed program (*NB: this was just prior to new funding through Jobs Victoria*)

Women said the best things about the program were increased confidence from 1:1 support, practical work-readiness skills, being fitted out with work attire and being accompanied to interviews. The least helpful things were that few jobs available that matched their limited skills, and the fact that the program had closed.

The investigation concluded that: 'The McAuley Works program achieved both job placement and job outcome rates that exceeded published JobActive rates (Jobs Australia 2013), and this was for women with multiple barriers to employment due to their social disadvantage.'

The key themes throughout each report were that women were very keen to work and found our approach suited to their needs while Jobs Services Australia **was not** meeting their needs. This is still the case today.

¹⁷ research by or commissioned for McAuley Community Services for Women – reports available on request

¹⁸ As above

What's not working: JobActive

JobActive is not meeting the needs of disadvantaged job seekers. An ACROSS survey of participants found their approach led to anxiety rather than jobs and that 73% were 'overwhelmingly dissatisfied' with the service. JobActive was seen as 'promoting benefit compliance, not positive help.'¹⁹

Those with caring roles (59%) reported that the providers failed to take adequate account of this (and only 9% said that they did). According to ACROSS, respondents said they felt bullied, that parents with young children were referred to jobs with night shifts, and people in country areas with few jobs were made to apply for 20 jobs a month. Only a minority received good job referrals or the help they needed (such as training, career counselling and wage subsidies) to improve their job prospects. The impact of the treatment of people is having a severe effect on their mental health.²⁰

The Australian Government's Department of Jobs and Small Business's report into the next generation of Employment Services: *'I want to work'* further showed that while 51% of job seekers were women, they only made up 40% of job placements.²¹

JobActive's performance also reflects a policy environment in which, as ACROSS points out, Australia spends less than half the OECD average on employment services, and has among the toughest income support compliance systems and lowest unemployment payments.²²

The implications of these findings are particularly disturbing for the women supported by McAuley Works given their significant disadvantages and the unique challenges faced by their experience of family violence. Our own observations, and what women tell us of their experience, unfortunately confirm the inadequacies of JobActive. We have also noted other areas of inflexibility or inadequate service provision from JobActive which hamper rather than enhance the ability of women we work with to find jobs:

- compliance measures, such as the number of jobs that must be applied for, are at the discretion of Job Active and do not adequately cater for the circumstances of women such as those supported by McAuley Works
- rigid criteria so that if, for example, it is agreed that a participant does not need to apply for work for a specific time-period because of their circumstances, they then may not be eligible

¹⁹ https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ACOSS_submission-on-future-employment-services_FINAL.pdf

²⁰ https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/acoss-calls-for-fundamental-reform-of-employment-services-on-release-of-expert-review-of-jobactive/

²¹ 'I want to work', Employment Services 2020 Report.

https://docs.employment.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_-_i_want_to_work.pdf

²² https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/acoss-welcomes-commitment-to-overdue-reform-of-employment-services-jobactive-but-warns-against-over-reliance-on-automation-and-digital-platforms/

for other benefits such as training or help with necessary clothing equipment (such as safety boots) if a job is offered over that period, without strong advocacy

- long waiting times for contact with JobActive
- extremely large case loads meaning JobActive is unable to provide intensive, individualised, or creative assistance
- Centrelink's own 'expert' medical reports can over-ride information supplied by individual's own practitioners.

In March 2019, following *the 'I want to work'* report, reforms to JobActive were announced. McAuley welcomed the planned new directions which intend to focus on strength-based and holistic approaches to assessing and servicing job-seekers. The emphasis on more flexible activity requirements in place of a standardised figure of 20 employment applications per month, regardless of whether jobs are available, parenting responsibilities and disabilities are also encouraging.

However the concerns raised by ACOSS about some of the new directions are also shared by us:

- the proposed online employment services system pose a risk that penalties for non-compliance could be automatically imposed without any human intervention. This can have unfair and incredibly damaging outcomes for people, such as the Robodebt debacle.
- this may also creating a digital divide in employment services, by isolating those who can't access the internet or use online platforms
- the standard '20 jobs' requirement could be replaced with more intrusive monitoring of activity and behaviour that goes well beyond what people need to do to improve their prospects of paid employment.²³

What's not working: Disincentives to employment

In its 'minimum wage' submission 2017, ACOSS reported that 'a single adult on the Newstart allowance would have gained only \$108 per week (\$7.20 per hour) from working 15 hours a week on the minimum wage. This does not take account of any of the additional costs of working such as transport and clothing'.²⁴

The submission goes on to say: 'The worst work disincentives in our social security system are those affecting people who are seeking employment on Allowance payments working part-time, and second earners (usually mothers) in low and middle income families working part time.

'Disincentives to work part time are of particular concern, given that 30% of Australian jobs, and half of all low-skilled jobs, are part-time.

²³ https://www.acoss.org.au/media_release/acoss-welcomes-commitment-to-overdue-reform-of-employment-services-jobactive-but-warns-against-over-reliance-on-automation-and-digital-platforms/

²⁴ ACOSS: Minimum wage submission, 2017 https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ACOSS-minimum-wage-submission-2016_formatted-docx_FINAL_web.pdf

'Encouraging more people to join the paid workforce, especially mothers, older people, and income support recipients will be crucial in the coming years as the supply of labour dwindles due to population ageing. By improving the rewards for paid work for many of these people – especially those considering part time low-paid jobs, adequate minimum wages can make a vital contribution to economic growth.'²⁵

It's clear that the women participating in McAuley Works have a strong desire to work; removing barriers and disincentives to finding sustainable employment should be the first role of an employment service.

²⁵ https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ACOSS-minimum-wage-submission-2019-FINAL_web.pdf

4: Outcomes of efforts to encourage greater labour participation of disadvantaged jobseekers

Challenges in measuring 'success' for the McAuley Works cohort

The complex needs of the women supported by McAuley Works and the impact of family violence on their job-readiness throw up particular difficulties in capturing and measuring successful 'outcomes'.

McAuley's contract with Jobs Victoria sets outcomes based on job placements and the number of weeks in employment.

McAuley is struggling to meet these outcomes, for a number of reasons,²⁶ and hence is not being paid the full contract. Whilst we believe we will meet the contract targets over its full term (3-4 years), the funding formula applied means that we need to heavily subsidise the program.

Measuring success by job placements and their lengths poses a challenge given the nature of the disadvantages faced by McAuley Works' participants. Women have had to leave jobs because they are found by the perpetrator of the violence and are no longer safe at work. This is then not counted as an 'outcome' though the failure of the placement in no way reflects the effectiveness of McAuley Works or the amount of effort that has been involved in supporting her into employment.

However other reasons are related to our model. McAuley Works 'empowerment model' — in which women are taught how to find their own job and given intensive support to build their confidence and skills — can mean it is difficult to demonstrate that it is 'our' work that has led to a positive outcome if a woman directly approaches an employer and is successful in gaining work.

Whilst we do not suggest we should not be held to our contract, we do believe flexibility within this contract is a must; otherwise community services organisations will not be able to afford to risk working in untested areas.

Narrow focus on outcomes

When a woman achieves employment, there are countless other benefits that are not counted.

Only counting a McAuley Works outcome through a Jobs Victoria measure means the central role of employment in achieving lasting change and benefits in an individual's life is not captured. We would argue that employment, for women with the multiple challenges faced by McAuley Works participants, has significance for many other government departments and policy areas: family violence, homelessness, physical and mental health, and the justice system. The benefits that are being achieved when McAuley Works is able to place a woman in employment will also have positive

²⁶ Some of the reasons why we are not meeting the outcomes are related to slow recruitment difficulties at the beginning of the program and then staff illness, both of which put us behind our anticipated start date.

implications for all those policy areas, yet crucially they are not being measured. Their value should be recognised, which is something that a simple outcomes payment mechanism is unable to do.

Other ways outcomes could be measured

McAuley has developed a program logic framework in conjunction with Deloitte Access Economics; within this we have agreed 'direct' outcomes, 'medium-term' outcomes and 'enduring' outcomes (see Appendix C).

Our 'direct' outcomes are related to our government targets of providing immediate safety and relief from the circumstances women and children find themselves in, namely family violence and homelessness. Our 'medium' outcomes are connected to our goals of sustainable solutions for each individual or family, and our 'enduring' outcomes are what we expect to happen over time as a result of our work (but probably can't prove a cause and effect link).

We have invested substantially in a data base and the skills to underpin this work, and will be able to report annually on our outcomes.

We have core inputs with little variability, such as the number of staff per ratio of clients/ number of beds. Currently we rely on fundraising and philanthropy to test new concepts and undertake advocacy, policy advice and community awareness.

In Victoria, the bulk of client-facing work is undertaken by community service organisations. It is vitally important that we use our frontline experience and first-hand knowledge of women's support needs to inform governments so that they can do their job in leadership and social policy making. **Inclusion of funding to undertake this work would be ideal.**

5: education and training needs to support disadvantaged training transitioning to work

Training providers targeting people who are vulnerable

New training initiatives, GO TAFE and GROW, have been valuable and particularly relevant to the needs of the women involved with McAuley Works. However, we are also aware of unethical training providers targeting extremely vulnerable women. In one rural area McAuley Works has been supporting refugee women with limited education and literacy in their own languages, let alone English. Unfortunately several women have signed up for training with unregulated and unscrupulous providers. Despite handing out amounts over \$3000 which they can ill afford, they have been left with a useless qualification because their fundamental English literacy is so poor that they have no chance of obtaining work in the field for which they are supposedly qualified.

6: Interstate and Overseas Best Practice Models that could be replicated in Victoria

Austria: the only other similar program that we have found

Between 2015 -2018 the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection initiated a social impact bond, 'to offer women affected by violence financial independence by placing them in long-term jobs that (would) allow them to earn a living on the primary labor market as well as to secure/develop existing jobs that pay a living wage so that the affected women will be able to permanently leave abusive situations'.²⁷

The program was remarkably similar to McAuley Works. 'The participating women are given a safe environment in which to anticipate the obstacles they can expect to face as they look for a job that will pay a living wage. They can then become aware of these obstacles and gradually develop stable options for dealing with them. After going through intensive counselling, the women are ultimately placed in jobs that will allow them to earn a living and are also given ongoing follow-up support'.

Their targets were also similar to those of McAuley Works. During the term of the project, at least 75 women from the target group should be placed in:

- a job that is subject to social insurance contributions
- that pays a living wage
- for at least 20 hours per week
- for at least 12 months during the term of the project.

The Austrian project has since been evaluated, although has not been released publically. The Austrian government found that whilst the program did not reach all its social impact bond outcomes (for similar reasons to McAuley Works) it was deemed successful and has received ongoing government funding.

²⁷ <https://www.scheuch-foundation.org/en/perspektivearbeit-austrias-first-social-impact-bond/>

Appendix A: McAuley Works matrix comparing job readiness, levels of family violence and employment outcomes

MCAULEY WORKS

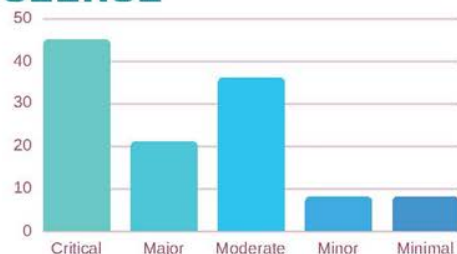
JOBS WORTH DOING

McAuley Works is an intensive employment program, funded by Jobs Victoria, which assists women who have experienced family violence, homelessness or mental health issues to find and maintain employment. These women are facing multiple barriers in their efforts to find and keep work – and yet jobs, independence and financial security are essential if they are to rebuild their lives.

THE CHALLENGES: FAMILY VIOLENCE

We analysed the situations of 118 women taking part in McAuley Works and the severity of the family violence they were dealing with. The largest group - 38% - were facing family violence rated as critical'. In this situation, a woman is still facing the risk of imminent violence and needs immediate protection.

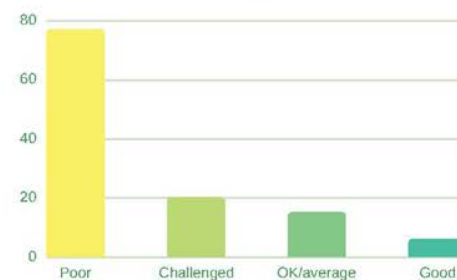
Overall, 86% were still at moderate, major or critical risk of violence.



JOB READINESS

We also looked at these women's employment readiness. A similar picture of significant disadvantage emerged. By far the largest cohort were rated 'poor.' They were unskilled, had not held a job in more than 18 months, were not fluent in English, and had other disadvantages, such as living in a location not close to employment, or had a diagnosed mental illness or learning disability.

82% were 'poor' or 'challenged' in job readiness.



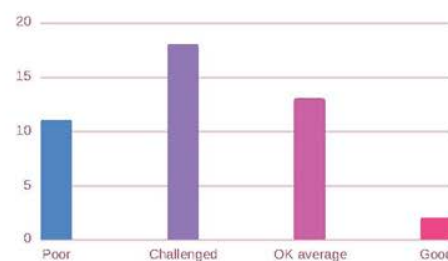
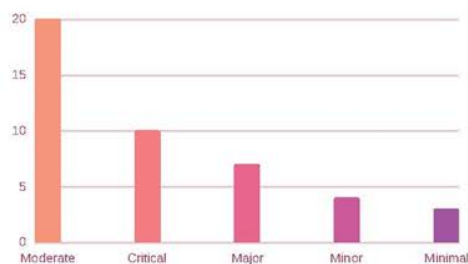
UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

Forty-four of these 118 women had obtained job placements. When we reviewed those who had been successful, the results were surprising.

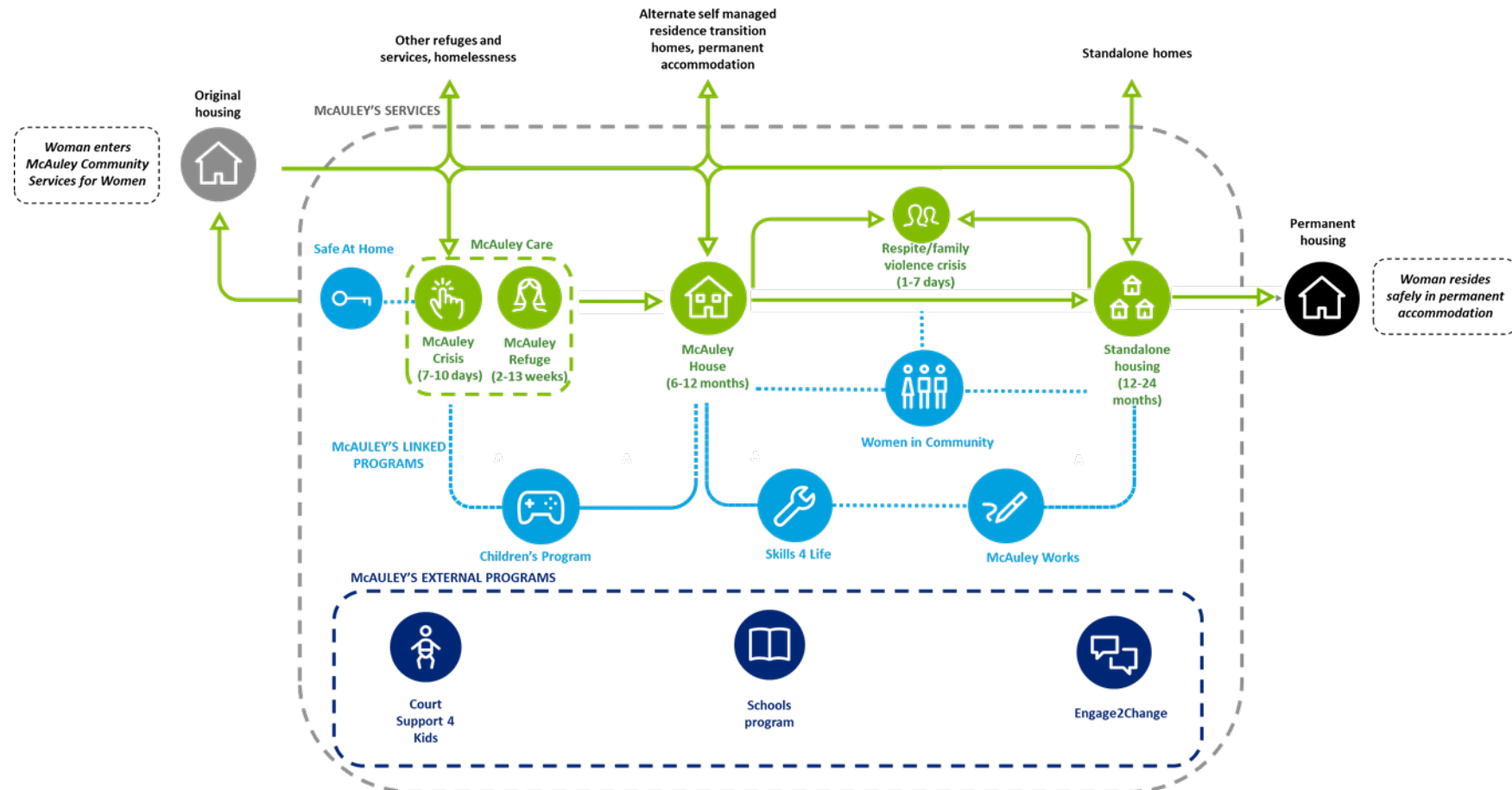
By far the majority - 84% - of the 44 women who were working were living with the most serious forms of family violence.

Another remarkable finding was that women whose job-readiness was rated 'poor' or 'challenged' formed the majority of those placed in work.

66% of the 44 who got work were those facing barriers such as lack of English, mental illness or disability and a lack of recent employment history.



Appendix B: McAuley's service model



Appendix C: McAuley Works program logic

