



## Demand for women's justice mentoring service doubles in the face of COVID-19

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New South Wales-based community organisation Women's Justice Network (WJN) has experienced a fifty per cent increase in referrals to its mentoring program for women since mid-March, when NSW introduced physical distancing measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The increase in women being granted bail is welcomed and has significantly reduced the number of women held in custody. For some women this has meant release to unsuitable housing, including temporary accommodation such as caravan parks, cheap hotels with many women released forced to return to home environments where domestic abuse is prevalent.

WJN fears that there is more behind the increased demand for its mentoring services than meets the eye, with Victims Services NSW statistics showing a greater than 10 per cent increase in the number of domestic violence client referrals, with 13,767 in total being received by NSW Government's Safer Pathway services state-wide in March 2020 compared to last year<sup>1</sup>.

"The increase in demand for the Women's Justice Network's mentoring services for women affected by the criminal justice system is cause for serious concern," said WJN CEO Gloria Larman. "Nearly 90 per cent of women accessing our services have already experienced some form of domestic violence, and in the current pandemic environment this figure could worsen."

"Our services are in demand more than ever before, with the team problem-solving through innovative solutions to offer mentoring services over live streaming apps such as Facetime, and conducting mentoring sessions over the phone, rather than in-person," said Ms Larman.

Despite the increased demand and our ongoing efforts, the forced postponement of some of our fundraising initiatives because of COVID-19 means that it will take at least 12 months to fill the funding gap. WJN will also have to stand down half of its workforce by September 2020.

Over the past 12 months, WJN's programs across metropolitan Sydney and the Central Coast, including Healing from Within and the Youth Mentoring Program have helped 103 women and girls during the last financial year.

The Women's Justice Network Advisory Panel comprising 8 women with lived experience of the criminal justice system continues to inform our work. The vibrancy of this group and the Board's

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.womenssafetynsw.org.au/impact/article/domestic-violence-client-numbers-increasing-in-nsw-but-service-s-still-havent-received-any-extra-funding/>



support of its initiatives help ensure that WJN's work continues to embrace diversity of insight and perspective as well as being tailored to the specific needs of women who have been in prison. The Advisory Panel has a major role to play in enabling WJN to realise its ultimate objectives: allowing women and girls affected by the criminal justice system to live free from violence, benefit from adequate living standards, be treated with dignity and respect, and be empowered to secure and preserve their individual rights.

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