

"Since there is very little good that can be accomplished, or evil avoided, without the aid of money, we must look after it in small as well as in great matters."

Catherine McAuley

McAuley Works Employment Program An Evaluation

Funded through The Catherine Circle



McAuley Community
Services for Women
A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

McAuley Works

McAuley Works Employment Program is aligned with the mission and values of McAuley Community Services for Women.

Our Mission

- › Our mission is to provide accommodation, services, advocacy and support for women who are homeless and, women and their accompanying children who experience family violence.

Our Vision

- › Through our service, McAuley Community Services for Women is committed to advocate for a better, safer and just society.

Our Values

- › McAuley Community Services for Women is committed to:

Hospitality
Compassion
Justice
Community

In our daily encounters, we offer women the opportunity for empowerment in their lives.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
.....
Introduction	4
.....
About McAuley Works	5
.....
Methodology	6
.....
Ethical Considerations	7
.....
Demographics	8
.....
Results	8
.....
Key Findings	9
.....
Discussion	10
.....
Conclusion	12
.....
Recommendations	12
.....
References	13
.....

This evaluation was funded through the Catherine Circle. The Catherine Circle is a giving circle made up of people who are passionate about supporting McAuley Community Services for Women and its work with women who are homeless as well as women and children experiencing family violence.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Financial independence has been confirmed to be one of four vital social factors for women to achieve to successfully leave family violence behind them (Breckenridge et al 2016). While women remain financially dependent on violent men they are less likely to leave them (Postmus 2010), however men who use violence often demonstrate controlling behaviours that ruin the chances of sustained employment for women (McFerran et al 2011). Without sustained employment women who have left a violent relationship are more likely to enter the homelessness sector (Steen, McKenzie & McCormack 2012).

Background

In response to these issues, from 2011 until mid 2015, McAuley Community Services for Women (McAuley) ran McAuley Works, a successful employment support program for disadvantaged women, many of whom were victims of family violence. Clients were placed in worthwhile jobs at a greater rate than government-funded programs could manage. Job placements were preceded by weeks, or even months, of case-managed personal and professional skill building. Women were referred from other family violence or community support agencies and up to 30% of clients came from McAuley House.

In 2016 McAuley was funded to renew the McAuley Works program and to support this renewal information was sought from previous clients 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.

Results

- Fifty-five per cent were employed, 30 per cent in continuous employment;
- 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 < 26 weeks;
- Best things: Increased confidence from 1:1 support, practical work-readiness skills, being fitted out with work attire and being accompanied to interviews;
- Least helpful things: few jobs available that matched clients limited skills, and program closure;
- 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.

Conclusions

The McAuley Works program achieved both job placement and job outcome* rates that exceeded published JobActive rates (Jobs Australia 2013), and this for women with multiple barriers to employment due to their social disadvantage. Ten of 35 respondents sustained full time employment indicating their potential for financial independence, however the majority were in part time or casual positions and still reliant on government financial support. While it is acknowledged that any employment can provide an improved sense of stability and purpose in a time of instability (Kleimaker 2012), the chances of financial independence, and the protection that affords from continued social and health disadvantage seems unlikely for this group who are more likely to be primary carers, and employed in lower paid, menial roles with reduced job security.

* Defined as being 26 weeks or more

Introduction

Australian research has confirmed that for women to have a chance to successfully leave family violence behind them, four main social factors must be achieved:

- Women's safety must be maximised;
- Improved coordination and / or integration of support service responses;
- Homelessness must be prevented; and
- Enhanced economic security achieved. (Breckenridge et al 2016)

While women remain financially dependent on violent men, they are less likely to leave them (Postmus 2010). A common controlling behaviour of men who use violence is to try to ruin the chances of sustained employment for women by tactics like hiding the car keys, demanding child care from them at no notice, harassing them at work (McFerran et al 2011). This can be in addition to occasions when women are forced to take unplanned leave while recovering from episodes of physical violence.

Unemployed women are at greater risk of family violence; employment helps to keep women confident and their self-esteem high, helping to counteract the effects of psychological violence.

Without sustained employment women who have left a violent relationship are more likely to enter the homelessness sector, joining some of the most disadvantaged of our society (Steen, McKenzie & McCormack 2012).

The Catherine Circle funded this evaluation to gain insight into the effectiveness of the McAuley Works employment support program on the longer-term employment and prospects of financial independence for previous McAuley Works clients.

About McAuley Works

McAuley ran McAuley Works, a successful employment support program for disadvantaged women; many of whom were victims of family violence from 2011 to 2015.

Clients of the original program were placed in jobs at a greater rate than government-funded programs could manage. Job placements were preceded by weeks, or even months, of case-managed personal and professional skill building.

Women were referred from other family violence or community support agencies, some of whom may not have been allowed, or able, to work for many years; 30% of clients were referred from McAuley House.*†

The McAuley Works programs used a number of methods to assist women into work, including small group sessions that focussed on confidence and self-esteem building, to work (or study) readiness that might include interview skills, and CV writing, to being provided with appropriate interview and work clothing. Fitted for Work provided the clothing.

The overwhelming success of the program was noted by Deputy Commissioner Tony Nicholson for the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015:

“I will say that the results that you achieved are really quite remarkable and far superior, as far as I am aware, of anything that the Commonwealth Government’s employment services have achieved for similar cohorts. So, it is very, very significant.”

In 2015 McAuley could no longer continue to financially support the program regardless of the considerable success achieved at enabling women to begin on a path to financial independence, so the program was wound up.

In 2016 McAuley was funded by Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) to develop a new employment support program. The new women’s employment program used greater employer involvement from the beginning.

† McAuley House provides medium term supportive accommodation for McAuley clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to family violence and / or mental illness.

Methodology

The methodology used was a mixed methods approach with quantitative and qualitative data gathered from telephone interviews with contactable previous clients who had provided their contact details to McAuley for follow up.

The objectives for the research were to establish for previous clients:

- Their employment status and history;
- Their current state of financial independence;
- Their housing affordability;
- The most effective aspects of the program; and
- The least effective aspects of the program.

Ethical Considerations

A risk benefit analysis was undertaken by relevant staff at McAuley to ensure that the benefits to the future program development gained by the feedback from the previous clients, did not outweigh any possible risks to the client. The aim of this analysis was to ensure that any risks were either so low as to be negligible, or could be minimized by the research design.

University approved telephone research protocols were used to develop an appropriate approach and questions for the client group considering ethical issues related to:

- The clients being previously in unequal relationships with staff from McAuley Works;
- Their personal safety; and
- Their possible needs following contact from McAuley staff, client confidentiality and consent.

As such it was decided that eligibility criteria would exclude previous clients whose situation was unknown or considered potentially unsettled. In addition:

- All contact would be by phone from a phone number unrelated to McAuley or McAuley Works in order to give added protection to women who might be in a situation where their phone calls are being monitored.
- An added safety measure was that initial contact would be via anonymous text with an 'opt out' option ie 'Text NO if you are not interested in participation' rather than by a letter of invitation.
- Care was taken to ensure that respondents were aware that they could stop the interview at any time, miss questions if they were uncomfortable, or withdraw from the survey altogether and withdraw their permission.

- Assurances were given that their responses would be kept anonymous.
- On-site availability of a qualified Case Manager to provide support for any respondent upset by either the questions or the contact from McAuley.
- Contact details for regional support services on hand to provide to any respondent upset by either the questions or the contact from McAuley.
- The telephone interview tool and process were developed as an iterative process between the researcher and experienced case managers to ensure ethical and safety issues were appropriately considered. The process involved the initial text with a week allowing for clients to text NO, and then contacted by phone.
- An initial pilot group of prospective respondents was selected to test the process and refine the survey.
- The remaining cohort was divided into six groups, with an initial text sent a week prior to phone contact unless they responded as not being interested in participation.

Demographics

Of the 35 respondents, at the time of involvement with the original McAuley Works program, all were unemployed and had a history of either, family violence, homelessness, mental illness, or a combination of these factors. Most of the respondents were mothers, often with children under their sole care, and typically two thirds of the clients of McAuley Works are part of the culturally and linguistically diverse population.

Results

Of 204 registered past clients, 90 were contacted and 35 completed a telephone questionnaire. The research highlighted that the McAuley Works program achieved both job placement and job outcome rates that exceeded published JobActive rates (Jobs Australia 2013), and this for women with minimal expectations of employment due to their social disadvantage.

Ten of 35 respondents sustained full time employment indicating their potential for financial independence, however the majority were in part time or casual positions and still reliant on government financial support.

A large focus of the original McAuley Works program involved one on one meetings between the employment support staff and clients to ensure that an individualised approach was taken to adapt to the employment needs of each person. This aspect of the program was the most appreciated by past clients and is the significant difference between it and many other employment support programs and agencies.

The respondents' comments suggest that the increase in confidence fostered through a one-to-one approach is the main reason that respondents who faced considerable barriers to employment, could find work.

McAuley Works was committed to assisting women find meaningful jobs that aligned with their aspirations. Achieving the best match was often difficult at the entry level.

Key Findings

Of the women who completed a telephone questionnaire:



Fifty-five per cent were employed, 30 per cent remain in continuous employment;



Two thirds are currently working with average 24.5 hours, and three studying;

55%

Jobs in Aged Care, Community Care and cleaning are most common;

1/2

Half would like to find some or different work; and



Most women were working from 4 hours/week to full time with the average of 23 hours; and the majority 15 hours of more;



Two thirds want information about the renewed program.



Jobs were held from four weeks to almost four years with average almost two years. Three women worked less than 26 weeks;

Discussion

<p>Limitations of the research</p> <p>Participant number</p>	<p>The project attained a respectable 39% questionnaire response rate from the contactable past client cohort, and a 24% overall response rate, (anywhere from 5 – 40% is expected when a survey cohort consists of customers or members of an organization, Ray 2015).</p> <p>What is disappointing however, was the number of past clients who were not contactable (n = 54;37.5%) although not surprising considering the known attrition associated with long time frames.</p>
<p>Housing Affordability</p>	<p>While housing related questions were included in the Questionnaire, this proved a difficult topic to address, given the complexities of individual housing circumstances.</p> <p>Consequently, information was recorded on an ad hoc manner and is not accurately recorded in this report.</p>
<p>Employment Status and History</p>	<p>Half of the questionnaire respondents (17 past clients), indicated that they were directly supported into employment, with 30% of them maintaining continuous work since that time.</p> <p>These figures are consistent with the placement rate identified in the McAuley Works program analysis from 2104 (59%), indicating the representative nature of the respondent cohort. Further, the placement rate of 55% is better than the 49% JobActive employment support model. (Jobs Australia 2013).</p> <p>It should also be noted that at the time of the survey almost two thirds of the respondents (22 past clients) were actively employed, suggesting that while immediate employment might not always result from participation in the program, participation may have indirectly supported this outcome.</p>

**Financial
Independence**

The number of hours worked per week is far greater than Centrelink's assessment of their capability to work (e.g. NewStart Allowance requirements: 0 – 8 hours or 8 – 16 hours). It is suggested that this increased capability to work occurs, in part, due to the way in which the McAuley Works program addresses the barriers to employment experienced by women who are disadvantaged in the job market. The practical support such as transport to interviews, and holistic support such as access to appropriate interview clothes (provided by Fitted for Work) were all offered by McAuley Works in contrast to that offered for example by the JobActive model of employment support.

Encouragingly there were 10 respondents (29%) who were working full time as compared with 19% recorded in the 2014 McAuley Works analysis.

Unfortunately, however, women who are working at less than full time capacity are likely to be working in more menial employment, and less likely to make headway into full time employment with the associated financial security. While this remains the status quo, the opportunity for financial independence and the protection it affords from continued social and health disadvantage is unlikely.

Conclusion

The McAuley Works program increased confidence in women by providing support, practical work-readiness skills, access to work attire and being accompanied to interviews. On the other hand, the survey also revealed that there were limited entry level positions available.

Overall, while it is acknowledged that any employment can provide an improved sense of stability and purpose in a time of instability (Kleimaker 2012), the chances of financial independence, and the protection that affords from continued social and health disadvantage, seems unlikely for women who are primary carers, and/or employed in lower paid, menial roles with reduced job security.

The evaluation has enabled McAuley to establish sound evidence from which to support and improve the new McAuley Works program.

Recommendations

- Future research be undertaken to analyse how program participants can withdraw from government income due to gaining employment.
- The renewed program must continue supporting women to find more meaningful sustainable employment through education and training opportunities, enabling them to attain financial independence.
- The ability of staff to address the complex needs of program participants was challenging - monitoring of emerging trends in needs might assist program development in the future.

The evaluation has enabled McAuley to establish sound evidence from which to support and improve the new McAuley Works program.

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