



# Women Matter

News from McAuley Community Services for Women

## A message from CEO Jocelyn Bignold



**'Cold and scary' – these were the powerful words of one woman when we asked her to describe what it was like to be homeless.**

We gathered stories of women who've known the loneliness and fear of homelessness, for a submission currently being conducted by a Victorian Parliamentary Committee. Women brought to life what it's like to sleep rough, or stay in seedy motels right next to others who may be violent or mentally unwell, or to be turned away when asking to spend the night in a police waiting room when there is nowhere else safe. They spoke of huddling next to a restaurant coolroom each night, fearing that each set of car lights you they was their violent husband tracking them down, or sleeping in a car in a McDonald's car park with their teenage son, who is sitting his VCE exams.



Women told us: 'You're tired all the time'... 'You're unsafe and can't trust anyone'... 'You try to be invisible'. One woman was unaware, while she was homeless, that one of her children had died.

These harrowing stories are all the more difficult to hear because we believe we have answers and McAuley's solutions could be adopted and replicated, preventing much of this devastating human and community cost. All the women we spoke to, who have backgrounds of significant trauma, are now doing better and feel they actually have a future – because they were able to get the right help through McAuley.

Our submission, and the Deloitte evaluation, are on our website [www.mcauleycsw.org.au](http://www.mcauleycsw.org.au)

Their stories confirm that just providing accommodation won't be enough - it's the support, and the help with legal problems, or health issues, or reconnection with their children, that is essential for longer-term recovery.

The value of this approach has been further validated by an analysis by Deloitte Access Economics, which showed in most cases, each dollar spent by McAuley was saving the community the other costs that are incurred if women with complex issues remain unsupported. Deloitte said: 'For women, starting their journey with McAuley with no income, no job, mental health concerns, trauma, and escaping violence, this is an astonishing result for clients as vulnerable as those included in this study.'

Our submission also shows how and why family violence is now the biggest single contributing factor to homelessness, accounting for 44% of requests for help. Inadequate responses when a woman leaves violence – unsuitable motel accommodation, and an inability to return home safely – are a large part of the problem. And of course, it's the fact that family violence is still so prevalent that is the biggest problem of all.

We don't seem to be progressing in shifting the stubbornly intractable rates of violence in our community: more than one woman a week (61 in 2019) murdered, and an increase of more than six per cent in family violence incidents in Victoria.

These are confronting figures – and they show how much is still to be done, and why your support in 2020 remains absolutely crucial if we are to keep making a difference to the lives of women and children.



Jocelyn Bignold,  
Chief Executive Officer

# Rave reviews for our education program: children give it a big thumbs up!

Educational problems can easily arise for children affected by family violence. Our education program uses volunteer tutors to help keep children engaged in their schooling. There's been enthusiastic feedback from the children themselves; many are from different cultural backgrounds and are enjoying learning that 'boringness' is a word...and where the West Coast Eagles come from!

We recently asked the children who are involved in our tutoring program how it's going for them. Their enthusiastic responses showed that they are having fun and connecting with their tutors – as well as learning some new things.

- My tutor comes to our home. We meet every week and we play games and write and read. I have learned about Aboriginal people and I like to play maths games. (Aged 6 years)
- I have learned to put words into my dictionary and I like to play Snakes and Ladders. (Aged 5 years)
- I like to make up words and I learned that boringness is a word. (Aged 8 years)
- My tutor is a good teacher. We play games and sometimes read. I have learned English and I would like to read, speak and write English. (Aged 13 years)
- I would like to learn about robots. (Aged 6 years)
- My tutor helps me do stuff that I don't know. She mixes up the things I don't like with the things I love which really helps me. We meet every week and we share our feelings. I have learned to do multiplication and art at the same time. I like to use counters when I get stuck on Maths questions. (Aged 9 years)
- My tutor helps me so much with my Maths and she is really kind. We meet every week and we do any homework that I haven't done. I have learned how to work with ratios and how to solve equations. I like to read fantasy books. (Aged 14 years).



My tutor is very funny. We meet every week and we learn a lot and play games. I have learned about where the West Coast Eagles are from and I like to answer quizzes and play AFL. (Aged 12 years)



Our tutoring program relies on volunteers. Visit our website to find out more and how you can become a volunteer tutor.



# Jocelyn Bignold, OAM

Our CEO Jocelyn Bignold was honoured with an Order of Australia medal in the recent Australia Day awards.

Jocelyn, who has led McAuley since its formation in 2008, said that she was delighted though humbled by the recognition.

'There are already so many amazing people working for the good of our community - including McAuley's staff, Board, volunteers, donors and supporters.

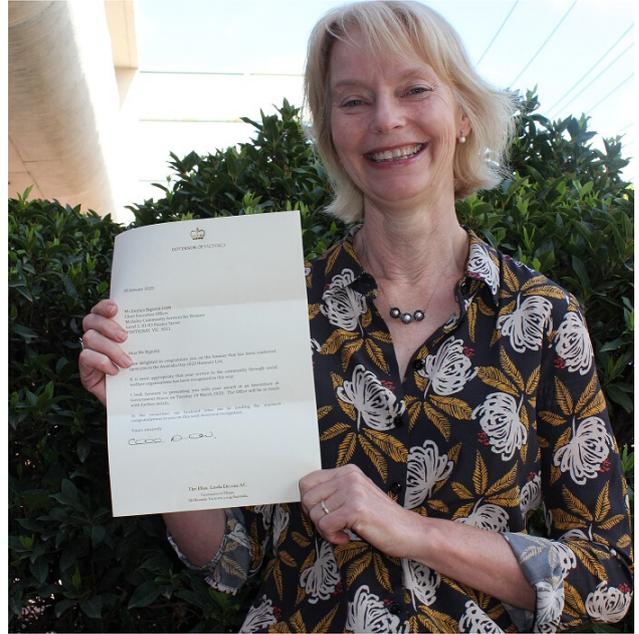
'I've realised though, how special it is for us - it's recognition of our work at McAuley.

'The more I have the opportunity to speak on behalf of McAuley the more I am able to say how our teams put good ideas into practice, backing innovation with hard work, experimentation and constant improvement.

'This award is really about everything McAuley Community Services for Women has achieved, and everything we have dreamed of together to make the lives of women and children safer and better.

'The Sisters of Mercy, back in the 1980s, dreamed of 24-hour support for women and children leaving family violence. Our Board dreamed of a state-of-the-art building for women who were homeless, realizing that dream when we opened McAuley House. Staff dreamed of Court Support 4 kids and infant-led practice, women dreamed of McAuley Works, volunteers dreamed of the garden.

'Many of these are firsts in Australia, and I know we won't be done with our dreams until homelessness and family violence are eradicated in our community.'



## McAuley urges a rethink on the Federal Government Religious Discrimination Bill

We have joined with other faith-based organisation to urge the Federal Government not to proceed with a Religious Discrimination Bill which would allow discrimination that in our view would harm the people we are supporting.

Together with Anglicare Victoria, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Jewish Care Victoria, Sacred Heart Mission, and Uniting Vic.Tas, we said that 'Religious organisations such as ours have demonstrated that it is possible to uphold the religious faith on which our work is founded - providing services to anyone who needs them - while at the same time respecting the diverse faith of our workforce, volunteers, clients and residents.

'We are proud of the work we do. We believe a divisive national conversation about whether people of faith should be able to discriminate against people of no, or different faiths, is not in the national interest.

'It is our view that religious freedom must be balanced against the rights of the people.' (Full statement is on our website).



Chair of the McAuley Board Sonja Hood said: 'This recognition is well deserved, and testament to Joce's extraordinary leadership both within McAuley and the sector more broadly. We are all delighted to see her celebrated in this way'.



# Community Christmas: a joyful occasion



Our 2019 Christmas celebration was bigger and better than ever.

Children were welcomed to McAuley House alongside their mums, bringing a sense of joy to a lunch with about 100 people in attendance. A spirited choir led Christmas carols, accompanied by some enthusiastic percussion from the children as they awaited a visit from 'Mother Christmas'.

The event wouldn't have been possible without our tireless volunteers and the generosity of Fare share, Foodbank Victoria and, PFD Foods with beautiful salads and desserts purchased from our long time supporters and donors - Small Graces café, Footscray.



## Yes, homelessness shouldn't be the safest option

### My details

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### I would like to donate (All donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

\$25     \$65     \$150

\$550     My choice \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Monthly gift

I would like to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ each month (min \$15)

(Charged to credit card on 1st day of each month)

Cheque (Made out to McAuley Community Services for Women)     Visa     MasterCard

### Card number:

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Please send me information on:

Workplace Giving     Remembering McAuley in my Will     Becoming a volunteer     Catherine Circle

### Please send to:

McAuley Community Services for Women  
 Reply Paid 91406, Footscray, Vic 3011  
 T: 03 9362 8900 E: fundraising@mcauleycsw.org.au

I do not wish to receive information from McAuley Community Services for Women

Thank you for your generosity

