



A second chance at employment

Some employers might put people who have criminal convictions or who have exited prison in the 'too hard basket', but Jesuit Social Services' Employment programs don't give up on people.

"We follow the Jesuit ethos 'everybody is worth helping'. It doesn't matter the criminal history - how recent or distant. It doesn't matter whether their employability or communication skills are low. As long as they are willing to engage in the program, we will do our best to assist them," says Rob Auger, Operations Manager for Jesuit Social Services' Employment Programs.

"We believe very strongly in multiple chances as well. Provided the person is taking forward steps and working with us to address the barriers that are holding them back from employment, we're always willing to give them another shot."

Alongside people who've had contact with the justice system, programs support other groups who often experience barriers to getting a job, including young people in out-of-home care, asylum seekers and people with refugee backgrounds, and others from CALD backgrounds.

The Victorian Government supports some of these initiatives offering tailored support to each participant - whether it be increasing their confidence so they can find work themselves, building interview skills, improving resumes, or placing them into work with organisations Jesuit Social Services has pre-existing relationships with.

"We look at employment as the final step to independence. But other things have to be in place first," Rob says. "Participants may come directly from Jesuit Social Services' own justice programs, but if participants need help in other areas before they're ready for work - such as housing or mental health support - the program connects them to the support they need. And once a participant has gained employment, Jesuit Social Services continues to provide support such as troubleshooting workplace issues or connecting them to training to facilitate their career development."

Rob says a big part of the work is helping employers understand that our participants are ready and willing to work. "We support participants to advocate for themselves - to show employers that they've learned from their mistakes and are ready to put them in the past and take the next step."

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Employment is more than just a job

For 45 years, Jesuit Social Services has worked with people who face barriers to engaging in mainstream society including the experience of unemployment. We know that when people cannot find suitable work, they struggle to get other parts of their lives back on track. That is why, through our range of employment programs, we work with marginalised people to get them ready for work and then connect them with employers and create pathways to employment.

Many of the people we work with have experienced significant challenges to accessing employment, including people who have had contact with the criminal justice system and people from newly arrived communities. Once we support people into work, we remain connected with them to provide wrap-around support and ensure they have every chance to flourish.

Employment is more than just a job – it's a pathway to becoming a productive member of society.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of our employment programs and the difference they make to the lives of people we work with - like Maya who has been supported into a role as a Project Engineer with our Melbourne Water Pathways Program. For Maya, who arrived in Australia from Sudan in 2015, having secure employment means she can give her children a good education and dream of buying a home.

You will also read about some of the work Jesuit Social Services is doing through our Worth a Second Chance campaign, including facilitating a recent roundtable discussion about supporting young people with justice involvement into work and the valuable role that employers play in giving jobseekers a second chance.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Jesuit Social Services.

Sally Parnell
Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services

A second chance at employment

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"Some of our participants have had a lot of doors closed on them and know their options are limited. I like to think - and we see this quite often - that if you give a person the opportunity to shine, give them the skills and show them some understanding, that person will want to show loyalty to the work."

While much of our work is supported by funds from the Victorian State Government, a lot of our efforts supporting participants into employment is not. We rely on support from our donors to be able to continue providing these services.

Mustafa's second chance

"I was a door knocker for solar panels. I was a team leader. I did that for a couple of years. It was really good until I went downhill. Once I got over my hiccups with justice and my mental health, I really wanted to get back into work, but a lot of the prerequisites for employment were a criminal check. That was always in my head and stopping me from thinking that I could secure employment. It made me feel like I couldn't be part of society and just giving up and just staying on Centerlink for the rest of my life.

The people that [partner] with Jesuit Social Services, who hire people with a past involvement with justice, saw me for who I am today. They asked me briefly about my past, but weren't judgmental at all. They made me feel like a normal person who deserves a second chance and I'm forever grateful. It gave me so much hope I was over the moon.

I work on the roads of Melbourne, keeping pedestrians safe. Doing traffic management control around roadworks. It's rewarding. I feel like there's hope - I have faith and I feel organised and productive and I feel a part of something bigger than me. Like a part of a team."



Federal Election 2022 platform: A blueprint for a just recovery

The Federal Election result in May this year showed that people living in Australia want to see action on key issues including climate change, gender justice, and reducing poverty and inequality.

This election came at a critical point in our history. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many pre-existing social and economic issues in Australia to the fore, from housing stress, to poverty, family violence, and insecure employment. As an organisation working with some of the most disadvantaged members of the community, we have witnessed firsthand the disproportionate impact of this crisis on already marginalised people and communities.

However, responses to the pandemic have also proven that while these issues are complex, they are not beyond resolution. For example, the increase to JobSeeker meant that some of our participants, for the first time, were able to afford necessities such as medication and warm clothes. We have witnessed the collaboration of private and public sectors to implement evidence-informed measures that increased the level of mental health support, boosted income, and provided housing for people experiencing vulnerabilities. While these measures show that a more just and humane society is possible, many have been temporary and only provided short-term relief.

Much like COVID-19, climate change is disproportionately impacting marginalised people and communities, including the people we work with. Our participants are more at risk of bearing the brunt of the current and long-term impacts of climate change because of where they live, their income, age, health conditions, disabilities, or where they work. As we continue to respond to the pandemic, it is therefore critical that we do not lose sight of the co-occurring climate crisis by ensuring our approach is grounded in principles of ecological justice and equity.

Jesuit Social Services' Federal Election platform, A blueprint for a Just Recovery, draws on the organisation's 45-year history of advocacy and action to provide recommendations across a range of interconnected social policy areas including youth justice, mental health, affordable housing, ecological justice, gender justice, and immigration and settlement. Since the Election, Jesuit Social Services has shared this platform with almost 30 Members of Parliament.

Some of Jesuit Social Services' key recommendations for the new Federal Government include:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 across all states and territories
- Establishing a 10-year national strategy on housing and homelessness
- Increasing funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities
- Progressing the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people articulated in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, particularly through constitutional recognition of the National Indigenous Voice to Parliament
- Funding research and evidence-based programs to address the complex root causes of family violence
- Ending the punitive approach toward people seeking asylum by ending offshore processing and ensuring against prolonged and arbitrary immigration detention

Jesuit Social Services continues to advocate for resources, policies, practices and ideas that reduce inequality, prejudice and exclusion and that, ultimately, reflect a more compassionate and just Australia.

Justice in Jobs: The importance of employment to youth in the justice system

worth a
second
chance

Finding work with a criminal record is fraught – and often, maintaining employment in complex and changing circumstances can be even harder. Yet evidence and experience show many justice-involved job-seekers are motivated workers, capable of making the most of opportunities when given a chance. And employment and training provide the stability, purpose and resources young people need to move away from the criminal justice system and onto a better path.

But how can employers safely and practically manage the opportunity of hiring someone with a criminal record? How can workers and peers support young people to secure and maintain employment or training, amid challenging circumstances? And how can we, as a community, meet our responsibility to ensure marginalised young people aren't left behind?

We put these questions, and more, to our group of experts in this youth justice roundtable conversation, which is adapted from the Justice in Jobs webinar we held in July 2022.

Meet the panel



Rob Auger
Operations Manager –
Employment Services,
Jesuit Social Services



Anoushka Jeronimus
Director –
Youth Law Program, WEstjustice



Cheryle Landolina
Industry Stakeholder Manager –
Major Projects and Construction,
Jesuit Social Services



Jes Wikaira
Intensive Support Worker –
Jesuit Social Services

The Conversation

How effective is having a job in helping young people move forward with their lives without returning to reoffending?

Cheryle Landolina

With one of our employers the reoffending rate is zero. Nobody has gone back and reoffended and the retention rate has been very high.

Jes Wikaira

Two of my young people who were employed full-time this year have completed their orders and stayed out of reoffending. So there is opportunity, all the time, for that to happen. But it takes a number of things, like having good relationships in the community. Then long-term, once they get into the routine of being employed, that opens up other opportunities for them; exposes them to other peer groups, and to other positive activities in the community. It really is a positive pathway if they can get onto employment or education.

Eighty per cent of adults leaving prison face unemployment, and unemployment rates are even higher for younger people. What's stopping people from having employment upon release?

Anoushka Jeronimus

WEstjustice's Youth Employment Program did a report called Ignorance Is Not Bliss. One of the findings was that young people aren't being equipped with the right knowledge or tools to be ready for work. They didn't have the skills going in. So, the idea that they're going to miraculously be ready to get a job, having spent time in custody? No.

We found that a lot of young people who can get a job are subjected to workplace exploitation – cash-in-hand work, being in conditions that aren't ideal – and then they're reluctant to say anything, because they feel lucky to even get a job.

One of the other things that we talk about is youth unemployment. That rate is higher for young people from multicultural backgrounds. Part of that is the fact that their parents are also finding it difficult to attain work. Part of being job-ready is role modelling, and knowing what to do, knowing what to ask, knowing how to self-advocate, and because their parents haven't had those opportunities, they then are not able to have those opportunities.

“Young people aren't being equipped with the right knowledge or tools to be ready for work.”

Jes Wikaira

Integrating back into the community is one big thing for young people. For many of them, they've come from circumstances, gone into custody, and when they've been released have gone back into the same environment with all the same issues. So, it's really about reconnecting back into the community.

“So it's really about reconnecting back into the community.”

Working with employers who hire people with criminal records, what concerns do they have about their employees?

Cheryle Landolina

One of the concerns is how it would impact on the business: will other people find out about it? We encourage them to keep confidentiality so that people can be judged on their own merits. And they've got to take that leap of faith and give trust, and often that's returned if they do. I think services like ours have a big role to play. And then maybe have a chat to the employee about barriers or discrimination people experience – have the conversation, like, is past history even relevant to their job? Somebody was charged with an offence in the past, but they have made amends. So, is it relevant?

“They've got to take that leap of faith and give trust, and often that's returned if they do.”

Sometimes it's not only the employer who has an issue with someone's criminal past, but other staff in a workplace. How do we, as a community, overcome that attitude, to enable people to move forward with their lives?

Anoushka Jeronimus

I think the best way to start is by actually asking what the barriers are. It makes sense that people have concerns and fears and reservations. So, there's a question about whether we can meet in the middle, and whether we can support them to overcome it. Because if we're talking about helping young people be job-ready in custody, then it's about continuing that work to help employers, and also staff, to accept and understand young people who have been involved in the system, and breaking down barriers, and understanding what those barriers may be to begin with.

“It makes sense that people have concerns and fears and reservations. So, there's a question about whether we can meet in the middle, and whether we can support them to overcome it.”

Rob Auger

You can't let what you've done in your past define who you are today. We have to keep at it and keep them feeling hopeful. And hopefully, you can remove a few of the obstacles along the way, so that each step they go, well, 'I got a job'. That's a start. Giving hope to that person is probably the biggest thing we can do.

“We have to keep at it, and keep them feeling hopeful.”

Hear more of this discussion at jesuit.social/justice-in-jobs

Worth A Second Chance podcast returns

In the first episode of our relaunched podcast, Liana Buchanan – the principal commissioner at the Commission for Children and Young People in Victoria – discusses her office's role in scrutinising conditions inside detention facilities, the harm caused by 'tough-on-crime' media narratives and some of the effective practices within Victoria's justice system she wants to see protected.

"In Victoria, we are fortunate that we actually do quite well at diverting children and young people out of custody," she told us.

"Compared to other parts of the country, we have relatively low rates of young people in custody. But on the other hand, what that means is those children and young people who do end up in youth justice custody are more likely to have particularly complex needs, particularly significant experiences of trauma, or other factors that are going to mean the kind of effort that needs to go into supporting those young people – working with them to understand the drivers of their offending, providing the right sophistication of response – all that is needed at a pretty high level."

As we head towards a Victorian State election later in 2022, Worth A Second Chance will continue to foster a more positive narrative about effective and humane approaches to hold young people to account for their actions and to support them down a better path. In our podcast, Ms Buchanan touches on the importance of a more positive public narrative.

"Our settings have improved, our centres have improved, but the system still has a long way to go. I'm incredibly fearful that the narrative will return to this punitive, tough on kids, 'law and order' kind of approach. And we know that doesn't work – that if you look to punish and apply an intensely security-focused approach to young people, it absolutely backfires."

"If you look to punish and apply an intensely security-focused approach to young people, it absolutely backfires."

Worth A Second Chance is a community campaign calling for a more fair, humane and effective youth justice system.

Listen to Liana Buchanan's episode here:

jesuit.social/wasc-podcast

Find out how you can be involved in the campaign by visiting worthasecondchance.com.au



Liana Buchanan - Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People in Victoria.

The Worth A Second Chance Podcast



Episode 1: Liana Buchanan

Principal Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People in Victoria

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA)'s National Week of Prayer and Action

We can build a better future right now, together, wherever we might be.

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) is about compassion for people seeking asylum.

Co-convened by Jesuit Social Services and Jesuit Refugee Service Australia (JRS), CAPSA is an alliance of individuals, organisations, schools and parishes from across the Catholic community who advocate for fair and humane treatment for people seeking asylum in Australia.

Each year, CAPSA holds a *National Week of Prayer and Action (NWPA)* to engage the Australian Catholic community to take-action and stand in solidarity with people seeking asylum. NWPA 2022 will run from Sunday 25th September 2022 (World Migrant and Refugee Sunday) to Friday 30th September.

Join us on Tuesday 27th September as we come together for CAPSA in Conversation, a webinar on how you can:

- support people seeking asylum in your own community, and
- take practical steps to advocate for issues affecting the lives and futures of people seeking asylum and refugees.

Further details on this year's National Week of Prayer and Action, including information on how to register for the webinar, can be found online at: capsa.org.au/nwpa_2022

Maya makes a life in Melbourne

In 2015, Maya moved to Australia from Sudan to join her husband, who had arrived in Melbourne as a refugee. They shared a flat with her brother-in-law and his family and lived in one bedroom with their newborn baby.

As a result of her living situation, Maya was constantly stressed, and suffered from periods of depression. She felt ashamed to be living off support payments. In Sudan, she had been a senior engineer with an MBA, and she was frustrated at her inability to find work in her field.

Maya contacted Jesuit Social Services' Settlement team for assistance finding accommodation for her family. The team helped Maya, her husband and their daughter move into a flat of their own. This was a positive step for Maya – but she still found herself struggling to find employment.

A lack of local experience and networks are major barriers to overseas-born engineers finding work. Research from Engineers Australia indicates 47 per cent of qualified migrant engineers were unemployed across Australia in 2021.

Maya knew Jesuit Social Services provided employment programs and so, she contacted our Jobs Victoria Employment Service team. She was paired with an experienced Employment Mentor, who helped her prepare a cover letter and resume, and practice interview techniques. She was then referred to a job with the Victorian Level

Crossing Authority, where she successfully navigated the recruitment process.

Maya worked on the level crossings for six months while her Employment Mentor continued looking for opportunities. Maya was referred to our Melbourne Water Pathways Program – a joint initiative between Melbourne Water and Jesuit Social Services, which employs people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have experienced significant barriers to employment in their field. Now in its fourth year, the program offers opportunities across Melbourne Water including in IT, asset management, major capital projects and process engineering.

Maya was successful in gaining a two-year opportunity to work as a Project Engineer on Melbourne Water's major projects team. A lot has now changed for her.

"The quality of my life has changed. I have a good income. I can put my daughters through childcare. I can plan to give them a good education. I also hope to be able to apply for a bank loan to buy a house. This is my dream; to secure a house or a flat for my daughters."

When Maya was asked what the support from Jesuit Social Services meant for her, she did not hesitate.

"It has meant a life for me."

New website coming soon.

We've been working on a new website. Keep a look out for it coming soon.

While the website will look a little different, donating online will remain the same.

Simply click the 'Donate' button at the top right hand side of website to be taken to our secure donation form.



Please make a donation today to give people like Mustafa a second chance to rebuild their lives.

Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

I would like to make an ongoing monthly gift of:

\$

(Please specify amount)

I would like to make a one-off donation of:

☐

\$75

☐

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☐

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