



Navigator Case Worker, Annabelle Beckert-Berger

Navigating through COVID-19

Navigator is a program for young people aged 12–17 who, for a wide range of reasons, have disengaged from school. The program aims to work with young people and their families to understand what's going on in a young person's life and address those challenges to get them back on a pathway to learning.

In recognition of the vital role education plays in keeping vulnerable young people connected to community and on the right track, Jesuit Social Services runs this program in some of the most disadvantaged areas across the State.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, we had to re-evaluate the way we deliver services like these that rely so heavily on building strong and trusting relationships between our staff and participants.

While we have been able to maintain face-to-face contact with the majority of our Navigator participants, it has not always been possible.

Annabelle Beckert-Berger is a case worker with our Navigator program who works with Beth. Beth has a range of health concerns and is immunocompromised – making face-to-face contact during this period too risky.

Annabelle has maintained connection to Beth through twice-weekly phone calls and has supplemented these calls by arranging for our Artful Dodgers Studios to drop-off art supplies to help Beth tap into her creative streak whilst in isolation. She has

also provided board games, like Monopoly, that the whole family can play during the evenings.

"Like everyone, we have had to adapt but we've been able to maintain that important relational aspect of our work," says Annabelle.

COVID-19 has made it especially difficult for young people living in vulnerable and disadvantaged households to stay connected to education. Annabelle was able to work with Beth and other support services to ensure that her school provided a laptop and dongle. This not only enabled Beth to continue her learning but, crucially, also meant that she could keep connected with allied health professionals and mental health supports through telehealth appointments.

Once the restrictions have been relaxed further, Annabelle is very much looking forward to resuming outreach with Beth and continuing to support her engagement with school.

In this issue:

The time of COVID-19 Page 3

Vital lifeline for Western Sydney Page 5

Ecological Justice Hub food relief Page 7



Adapting to challenges

This is an extremely challenging time for all of us. I hope you and your loved ones have remained safe and well during this period of physical and social isolation.

For 43 years, Jesuit Social Services' work has been founded on the importance of relationships. Relationships with each other, relationships with people on the margins and relationships with communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these relationships have become more crucial than ever.

We see the importance of relationships with the people we work with who have lost jobs, lack access to secure housing, and are removed from their usual social structures and connections. We see it in newly arrived communities, we see it in people bereaved by the suicide of a loved one and in young people dealing with multiple and complex problems. The demand for services like ours is expected to increase as the impact of COVID-19 is deeply felt for years to come.

Maintaining connection with the vulnerable people and communities that we work with has remained our priority during this time. Some of our programs have continued to provide face-to-face support and others have developed new ways to remain connected, including delivering services remotely.

While we normally focus on one area of our work in each newsletter, I want to share with you some of the work we are doing across the organisation to adapt our approach while maintaining our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable members of our community.

As always, thank you for your support, particularly during this difficult time.

Julie Edwards CEO, Jesuit Social Services

The importance of a virtual studio

How do you adapt an open access studio, which encourages participants to drop in when they like, to an online model as a result of COVID-19?

That was the question facing Artful Dodgers Studios, a flexible and welcoming studio space where marginalised young people can create art and music with the support of experienced artists and musicians.

"The doors to the studios closed in late March and we immediately encouraged our existing participants, and potential new participants, to connect with us remotely," says Angeliki Androutsopoulos, Coordinator at Artful Dodgers Studios.

Remote connection meant one-on-one support via video conferencing, phone or text message. Support included encouraging participants to remain physically active by going on a virtual walk outside together or helping them access Centrelink services and mental health supports.

The Studios have also launched regular 'jam sessions' where participants can join a Zoom session to take part in a collaboration or work on their own projects. Regular online podcast workshops have supported participants to develop their editing, interviewing and hosting skills.

"Like the work the studios normally provides face-to-face, this is important for our participants to remain socially connected and increase self-esteem," says Angeliki.

"For some of our participants, their challenging life circumstances have been exacerbated by COVID-19, so it is vital that they remain connected and feel supported through these difficult times."

Angeliki and her team are so grateful to be able to continue this vital work and look forward to reconnecting with participants in person in the near future.



Jesse Sullivan leads online jam sessions with Artful Dodgers' participants

The time of COVID-19 – Andy Hamilton SJ

Last summer changed our lives forever. The bushfires and the arrival of COVID-19 challenged our easy assumptions that we had the world under control. We had thought we needed only to tweak the controls of the economic engine to keep travelling smoothly.

The bushfires across Australia reminded us that our land was not under control and that global warming would make catastrophic fires normal. COVID-19, a single-celled newcomer to our human world, infected our people, baffled our scientists, disarmed our weaponry against it and dismantled our economy. Its simplicity, mindlessness and singleness of purpose outplayed the intelligence, complexity and ideologies of our society.

If the bushfires and the pandemic called into question our thoughtless view that life could continue as normal, our national response to the threat of COVID confirmed older wisdom on which Jesuit Social Services is built. In calling for social distancing and the closure of workplaces, restaurants and clubs in order to prevent the spread of the disease, it recognised that each human being is precious. Each human life is unique and to be protected. The closing of businesses said that the economy served people and not vice versa. Our work with vulnerable young people at Jesuit Social Services is based on the same conviction that each of them is precious, each of them deserves the chance to live a full life.

When the government imposed the social distancing that has threatened people's housing, income and freedom, it recognised that in society we are all in it together. We depend on other people for our lives and wellbeing. That is why we must keep in mind the good of all people, especially the most vulnerable. The business of government, too, is to serve the common good.

During the time of isolation many Australians were able to feel proud that their own sacrifice served the whole community. They took pride, too, in seeing the generosity and faithfulness of so many people who risked their own health for others' good.

This experience shows that we are much happier and purposeful when we accept our responsibility for the common good. Underlying Jesuit Social Services advocacy for people who are disadvantaged is the conviction that the Government's responsibility extends beyond encouraging economic activity. It extends to ensuring that this activity looks to the common good.

As our society moves out of isolation it will face the even greater challenge of responding to climate change. In doing so we must look first to the persons, especially the most vulnerable, who will be affected by it.



Andy Hamilton SJ

Understanding the impacts of change and working for a better future

Jesuit Social Services has maintained its focus on advocacy in a changing environment due to COVID-19. As governments at all levels respond to the pandemic with measures to bolster support to vulnerable people or curtail the movements of the community for safety, it is essential that we understand the impacts of these changes and ensure the best are kept while those that limit freedoms and rights are wound back as soon as practical.

Jesuit Social Services has quickly moved to establish a range of structures to ensure the experience of our participants drives our priorities and keeps our actions grounded in the lived-experience of the most vulnerable in the community.

These structures include:

1. The formation of an internal 'Communities of Justice' group, led by CEO Julie Edwards, to understand the impacts of recent changes on our participant group and inform advocacy for a post-COVID-19 world.
2. The formation of a 'Friends of Jesuit Social Services' group to draw on external experts across a range of fields to drive big-picture advocacy on universal issues that impact on our communities.
3. The formation of an 'Advocacy Action Group' to:
 - a. provide a structured way for the policy, advocacy and communications team to support programs with any COVID-19 related issues
 - b. record how programs have positively adapted and to document lessons learned
 - c. ensure programs have a clear avenue to communicate COVID-19 related matters for rapid-response advocacy.

Parallel to these new structures, Jesuit Social Services continues to advocate for:

1. maintaining higher benefits for jobseekers; a criminal justice response that keeps non-violent people out of prison and improves outcomes for them and the community; access to support for refugees and people seeking asylum; equity for digital access; appropriate and affordable housing; and an effective and accessible mental health system.

2. participate in sector working groups, including Smart Justice for Young People, Australian Council of Social Services, Victorian Council of Social Services, Making Justice Work, Catholic Social Services Australia, Jesuit Conference of the Asia Pacific and others.

We have continued to make Policy submissions to important inquiries over the past few months including: the *Inquiry into Homelessness*; the *Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian Bushfire Season*; the *Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements*; the *Review into Victoria's Skills & Training Sector*; and a submission on the Australian Government's response to COVID-19.

Jesuit Social Services has always had a strong focus on partnership and coordinated action and we continue to join with others in critical issues. Over the past few months we have:

- endorsed the #NobodyLeftBehind letter campaign to Prime Minister Scott Morrison and key decision makers to ensure people seeking asylum, refugees and other vulnerable groups are included in COVID-19 responses. This letter was led by the Refugee Council of Australia.
- endorsed a joint letter led by Council to Homeless Persons and Domestic Violence Victoria calling on the Government to fully deliver on its commitments to implement all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, including to deliver the social housing supply needed for women to have safe options to escape violence and to recover.
- endorsed a joint letter to government from organisations working in the justice sector on the circumstances of women in prison during the COVID-19 emergency.

At Jesuit Social Services we like to say that we 'do' and we 'influence'. At a time when there is a lot of focus on 'doing', it is critical that we understand the impacts of these actions and influence a future that draws on the best of them and moves swiftly to undo those that may be harmful in the long-run.

A vital lifeline for Western Sydney remains open

Since 2008, the Ignite Food Store (The Store) has provided low-cost, fresh and healthy food to the Mt Druitt community. It also trains and employs local people in retail and provides work experience to unemployed people.

Mount Druitt is one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in all of Sydney. The Store has become a critical part of the infrastructure that means local people can feed their families.

"Our aim is that we can provide affordable food to our customers. Just because people are struggling doesn't mean that they just have to buy generic brands," says Rosemary Peri, Store Manager at Ignite Food Store.

When COVID-19 hit, The Store was one of our services that felt the impact the most. Jesuit Social Services had spent years building up a network of regular food drives in parishes and schools that underpinned the supply of stock for the store.

The introduction of social distancing rules meant these food drives could no longer be held and this reduced the food on the shelves by at least 50 per cent. Keeping shelves stocked has meant purchasing more and more food and that has increased costs significantly.

Jesuit Social Services is determined that the Ignite Food Store remains open as it plays a vital role in the community.

"People know that they can come in with \$10 and get a fair amount of fresh, healthy food and they know that they are always welcome here to get them through to the next pay day or to get them through hard times," says Rosemary.

The Store has established contactless delivery and drop-off services for food donations, and provides hand sanitizer, gloves and masks for customers in store.

Crucially, The Store continues to support the local community by providing groceries and food hampers to local community service agencies and schools.

The Store is remaining open for people to access affordable groceries. Our staff will continue to be there for people who were already in difficult circumstances before COVID-19.



Ignite Food Store Manager, Rosemary Peri

Bereavement counselling delivered remotely

Since 2004, Support After Suicide has delivered vital counselling services and group sessions to children, young people and adults who have been bereaved by the suicide of a loved one.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant Support After Suicide has had to deliver its one-on-one and group services remotely since March.

"We're pleased that we've been able to keep connection with people via phone and Zoom for counselling and groups. It's not the same as face-to-face but it has been working better than we'd hoped," says Louise Flynn, Support After Suicide Manager.

Additional staff have been required to facilitate sessions and provide technical support. Louise says the program has also needed to adapt the way it works with people given the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, and the loss of regular structures and routines.

"For some people, they've found it intensifying the difficulty they're already facing because they can't continue face-to-

face connection or the usual activities that have helped them deal with the grief and trauma," she says.

"For others, it's also been quite triggering in that the feelings of isolation have meant they have not been able to carry out some of the rituals that have been important, for example, on the anniversary date."

Support After Suicide will continue to adapt as restrictions ease and is playing a role in delivering evidence and practical experience to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which will hand down its final report in February 2021.

If you require support following the suicide of a loved one, please contact Support After Suicide on (03) 9421 7640 or visit supportaftersuicide.org.au

The Men's Project work more vital than ever

In 2017, Jesuit Social Services launched The Men's Project, informed by our 43-year history of working with men and boys who are in trouble and causing trouble.

By looking at the root causes of violence and challenging behaviours, The Men's Project seeks to move from crisis to prevention and early intervention; going up-stream to support boys and men to be their best selves, so they can lead healthier lives free from violence and foster positive relationships.

When we engage directly with men and boys, we also contribute to safer communities and better outcomes for the women and children in their lives.

Sadly, COVID-19 has resulted in a spike in family violence and we expect an increase in mental health concerns, demonstrating that the work of The Men's Project is more vital than ever before. In light of the challenges presented by COVID-19, connection and compassion have never been more important. During this time, The Men's Project has moved to delivering our services remotely to support boys and men to flourish and live healthier and fulfilling lives.

This includes delivering training to people that influence boys' attitudes and behaviour on a daily basis – community leaders, including sports coaches, youth workers and teachers. This training will equip people with the language and skills they need to create change in their community around issues of respect and equality.

We've also commenced delivering engaging online learning sessions for students and teachers. These sessions draw on the findings of *The Man Box* research, which explored the attitudes and behaviours of young Australian men. We are delivering these sessions across the state including working with one school in Gippsland to deliver a package of 20 sessions.

The Men's Project is also excited to be launching our *Unpacking The Man Box* report in mid-July, which shows that Man Box attitudes are strongly associated with increased likelihood of using violence, sexual harassment, mental health and binge drinking. In fact, the report shows these outcomes are much more closely linked to Man Box indicators than to other factors such as level of education or occupation. Stay tuned for your invitation to the launch!

Ecological Justice Hub's food relief rapid response program

The Jesuit Social Services' Ecological Justice Hub, based in Brunswick, is a permaculture garden dedicated to both social and environmental justice. It helps build knowledge and skills through practical 'hands on' projects, to strengthen environmental protection and what this means in practice in our homes and in communities.

With the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, staff at the Hub promptly realised that many vulnerable members of the community would not risk venturing out due to health concerns and this would have an impact on their access to nutritious food.

Many local food distribution services had been badly disrupted and lacked produce but our talented in-house chef, Sharif "Johnny" Hasan, saw an opportunity for our team to reach out.

Johnny suggested that the Hub use its organic garden produce, its commercial kitchen and his professional cooking and catering skills to address the issue at hand. The team quickly mobilised and since late April, the Hub has prepared over 250 organic, nutritious, gluten-free, nut-free, vegan meals

in bio-cardboard take-away boxes. Each Tuesday, volunteers drive 30 of these individual meals to people in need within and around Brunswick.

The initiative has given Hub staff and volunteers more time to greet people, talk with them (at an appropriate distance) and check that they're okay. While restrictions continue, the Ecological Justice Hub hopes to continue to ease the burden and offer love and nutrition to those doing it hard.



Ecological Justice Hub Chef Sharif 'Johnny' Hasan

Diversity recruitment program proving successful

The impact of COVID-19 can be felt across all of Jesuit Social Services' programs, including the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program.

The program, established in 2018, seeks to reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community as its workforce undergoes significant expansion.

It is designed to assist and provide support to applicants, including by providing mentoring, support and guidance alongside a 15-week training course to build the skills and capabilities of participants throughout the Victoria Police recruitment process.

Jesuit Social Services joins Victoria Police, the African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services (AAMEYS), Victoria University Polytechnic, AMES Australia, MatchWorks, and Maurice Blackburn Lawyers as partners in the program.

COVID-19 has meant that the current round of over 60 participants are engaging in one-on-one and group meetings via Zoom, and that Victoria Police has adapted its recruitment processes to account for safety measures and social distancing.

The success of the program is reflected by two participants from a previous round having joined the Victoria Police Academy in April – one in a police officer role and one in a police custody officer role.

A total of 31 participants across the three completed program rounds have passed the Victoria Police entrance exam and are at various stages of the recruitment process.

Due to COVID-19, the fourth and fifth rounds of the program have been postponed to June and early 2021 respectively. We look forward to sharing future successes of the program with you.

This crisis has uncovered cracks in our society that have always been there but could largely be papered over or ignored.

For the people we work with, who are often on the margins, these cracks are their lived reality. Now, more than ever, they need our support.

Please join with us as we take this time to re-imagine a more just society and work towards a more positive and connected future.



**Support us to build a just society
where everyone can live to
their full potential**

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** ☐ **\$150**

☐ **\$500** ☐ **\$1000**

☐ **\$**

☐ Please send me information about leaving a gift in my Will.

Contact and payment details

☐ Cheque enclosed **OR** ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard