



## Building a just society

Back in 1977, Jesuit Social Services was born (as Four Flats) to respond to a real and important need. It was apparent that young men were exiting prison into homelessness with little support and no prospects of a job.

A quote by then Pentridge Prison Chaplain, Fr John Brosnan, became a guiding principle for our fledgling organisation. Fr Brosnan said: 'Three things I have noted are needed by someone leaving prison: a place to live that is decent, a job they can handle, and lastly, and most important of all, friendship.'

The early work of Four Flats focused on just that. It provided a decent home, support to find and keep work, and a relationship that could be relied upon through thick and thin.

As Jesuit Social Services has grown over the years, we have kept true to these roots. Our justice work has expanded to include people across the life span. We are focused on keeping them out of prison wherever possible. If detention is necessary, we work with people on their release to provide housing and connection to family and community.

In addition, our dedicated education, training and employment programs have expanded to support some of these most marginalised job seekers prepare for work, find a job and manage the challenges they face in taking up new responsibilities and moving towards increasing independence.

Over time, the organisation's initial focus on people in the justice system led us to address other problems, including mental illness, substance abuse issues and homelessness.

Through all of this work we have sought not just to address immediate needs but to influence long term change through sharing our knowledge and the experience of our participants with government and other decision makers. It has led to innovation in service delivery and significant policy changes over many years.

There is, of course, much more still to be done.

Men and boys make up around 93% of the prison population. In fact, many of the challenges we confront as a society are due to the behaviour of men and boys – not all men and boys, but too many. After almost 45 years of working to address these challenges, in 2017 we established The Men's Project. Our goal was to support boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence and other harmful behaviour.

We recognised that as a community we rely too heavily on the justice system as a blunt tool to address men's violence and anti-social behaviour after harm has occurred. We wanted to do more to stop the harm from occurring in the first place and support the growth of respectful and loving relationships.

The Men's Project has three pillars: to undertake research in order to learn more about the attitudes and values that result in violence and harmful behaviour; to design, trial and evaluate targeted programs that intervene earlier to reduce harm and repair relationships; to foster discussions and help change community attitudes that drive harmful behaviour.

We're proud of this work and the role we are playing in helping keep women, children and the wider community safe by supporting boys and men to break free from rigid and damaging ideas of masculinity and to be their best selves.

In this newsletter, you will read more about our work and we hope you will join us on our journey.

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## Supporting boys and men to flourish

This edition of our newsletter is a bit different. We've told you a little bit about the work of The Men's Project before, but I wanted to take some time to share more with you about our journey to this point, the ambitions we have for this work and the projects we have underway.

Jesuit Social Services has a long history – almost 45 years – of working with boys and men who are in trouble and causing trouble. This dates back to 1977 when we provided a home, friendship and support for young men leaving prison who tended to cycle back into custody soon after being released.

From that day to now, we have accompanied and supported thousands of people – men and women – who are struggling with a range of problems. Because of our commitment to support those caught up in the criminal justice system, overwhelmingly our work is with men. After all, they are responsible for 95% of reported acts of violence, and they are overrepresented in both youth and adult justice systems. We also know that men are overrepresented in other telling statistics. For example, six out of eight people who suicide on an average day in Australia are male. And the tell-tale signs are apparent much earlier – 80% of students expelled from school are boys.

At Jesuit Social Services we want to see the violence and harm stop. But more than that, we want to see boys and men flourish.

Achieving this goal will take time, commitment and resources. As a society there is much to do and, through The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services is determined to play its part. We have already started to carry out robust research to build our understanding of what's driving the harmful behaviour of boys and men. We are developing and testing interventions to hold men and boys to account while supporting them to change. And we have initiated numerous conversations across the community to explore and challenge the beliefs and attitudes that underpin this behaviour.

The time to do this work is right now.

We recently celebrated International Women's Day in the shadows of accusations of rape and sexual abuse in institutions that should be setting the standard for respect. These revelations follow years of reports of widespread abuse across sectors – health and welfare institutions, the church, sport, the legal sector, schools. It's a stark reminder that as a society we have a long way to go, but I am heartened that together we have started the journey. I thank you for accompanying us at Jesuit Social Services as we play our role in helping to build a more just society.

Your support is crucial.

Julie Edwards  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## Opening the Man Box

As we embarked on our journey with The Men's Project, we were keen to understand more about the drivers of violent and anti-social behaviour and to contribute a significant piece of research to the field.

Our first research project was *The Man Box* – a study of 1,000 young men (aged 18–30 years) about the pressure they feel to conform to a rigid and narrow idea of masculinity and the impact this pressure has on them and those around them. It was the first study of its kind in Australia.

Broadly speaking, the research found that around two-thirds of young men have, since they were children, felt a pressure from society to conform with a view of a 'real man' as one who acts tough, is always in control, is the primary bread-winner, has many sexual partners and never shows vulnerability.

Our study went a step further and measured the health and wellbeing of men who either endorsed or rejected these rules about being a 'real man'. The findings were stark.

Those inside the man box (men who endorse the rigid rules) were twice as likely to have considered suicide in the past two weeks, fourteen times more likely to have used physical violence in the past month and twenty times more likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman in the past month.

This research has informed ongoing work for The Men's Project in developing training for teachers, sport coaches and other adults in mentor roles so they can help break open the man box for boys and demonstrate a wider variety of positive ways to be a man.

You can read more about *The Man Box* findings here:  
[bit.ly/man-box-tmp](https://bit.ly/man-box-tmp)

## Winning hearts and minds through COVID-19

Like many of our programs, The Men's Project was forced to change the way it worked to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020. It successfully adapted its *Unpacking the Man Box* sessions for online audiences, delivering training to over 1,700 teachers and students in over 250 schools, while also partnering with two councils to deliver its Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) training.

Matt Tyler, Executive Director of The Men's Project, recognises that while the move online has presented challenges, it has also created opportunities. "If COVID hadn't occurred, we wouldn't have had the reach we have now because we would have been in the mentality of going out to venues to deliver training. When presenting online, we can't achieve the depth of engagement we can when presenting face-to-face, so while we have focused on awareness building rather than more intensive skill building work, we have seen a significant increase in our reach."

The impact of the *MoRE* and *Unpacking the Man Box* training is shown by a teacher's feedback, who noted, "I can model a more positive sense of masculinity more often and I'm now encouraging kids to call out poor behaviour so that it becomes normal for them to do this."

Raising the capacity of the whole community to identify and challenge unhealthy masculinity is a key goal of the training delivered by The Men's Project. Matt says, "This is a

community initiative. If each person who came across a boy using *Man Box* behaviours nudged them a small way, our boys and men would be more equipped to show up as their best selves, leading to safer communities as well as improved well-being for men and boys themselves."



Matt Tyler, Executive Director of The Men's Project

## The Men's Project partners with Just Voices

The *Just Voices* Speakers Program is a Jesuit Social Services program that brings inspiring speakers from diverse backgrounds, communities and cultures to classrooms, workplaces, community and church groups, public events and festivals.

The Men's Project collaborates with *Just Voices* to raise awareness, start conversations, and promote positive behaviour change around issues of masculinity in our society.

With this approach, speakers from diverse backgrounds can speak authentically of their lived experience – as someone who has experienced family violence, had body issues or mental health problems, or has not fitted into the traditional masculine stereotypes, for example. This has proven to be extremely powerful and engaging for audiences.

Paul Zappa, General Manager of Primary Prevention and Community Engagement for The Men's Project, notes how this collaboration has been particularly effective. "*Just Voices* enables The Men's Project to showcase its work and promote healthy masculinities to a wider audience. With speakers presenting on their own experiences, often looking back over difficult times in their lives, we've been able to do valuable and meaningful work in these sessions."

If you are looking for an engaging speaker for your next event and want to hear from someone with lived experience in relation to challenging social issues, then *Just Voices* could be just what you are looking for. Contact Danielle Sherry on (03) 9421 7600 to discuss the range of speakers we currently have working with us or visit [www.justvoices.org.au](http://www.justvoices.org.au) for more information.

## Our recent policy work in gender justice: Advocating for interventions to address service gaps

There is a growing awareness around the world that to prevent family violence we must shift the attitudes and behaviours of those already using, or at risk of using, violence. There has been some progress in this space but there is a long way to go and many opportunities for early intervention are currently being missed.

Two problems we are particularly focused on at Jesuit Social Services at this time are adolescents using violence at home and child sexual abuse. Most recently, we advocated for interventions to address service gaps through submissions to two consultations: the Victorian Law Reform Commission's (VLRC) consultation on *Improving the Response of the Justice System to Sexual Offences*; and the Victorian Government's consultation on its *Youth Strategy Discussion Paper*.

Our submission to the VLRC recognises child sexual abuse or accessing child exploitation material online is almost exclusively perpetrated by men. We highlight the need for a continuum of responses to sexual offending, including preventative programs and targeted post-sentence/prison support services, as well as carefully implemented restorative justice programs where appropriate.

We recommend trial or expansion of several programs aimed at preventing and addressing sexual offending and use of violence by adolescents, as follows:

- *Worried About Sex and Porn Project (WASAPP)* – an online help tool for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours.
- *Stop it Now!* – a phone helpline and website to support adults desist from child sexual abuse and viewing child exploitation material online; and parents, family members, and professionals who encounter child sexual abuse.
- *Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs)* – a circle of trained, carefully selected volunteers who help people re-integrate into the community post-prison and desist from offending.
- *RESTORE* – a pilot program, based at Melbourne's Children's Court, trialling restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence.

Jesuit Social Services also contributed a submission to a new *Victorian Youth Strategy* due to be released in late 2021. Our submission argues that in order to achieve the best outcomes for young Victorians, there is a clear need to address the root causes of violence by supporting boys and young men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, where they can develop loving relationships free from violence.

This argument is informed and supported by our *Man Box* research and a follow up research project, the *Adolescent Man Box*, which seek to build understanding about the prevalence of rigid, stereotypical masculine norms and the impact these can have on adolescents, men and the community around them. This research has informed our own practice and is being used to build workforce capacity within other organisations.

Specifically, The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services has used the research to develop training to support role models who regularly interact with boys and men, so they can challenge limiting and harmful *Man Box* stereotypes and promote respect and equality e.g. the *Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)* program, as well as specific interventions to promote positive social change and healthy masculinities, reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, and improve men's wellbeing and relationships.

### Links

- Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's Consultation on *Improving the Response of the Justice System to Sexual Offences*: [bit.ly/vlrc-sub](https://bit.ly/vlrc-sub)
- Submission to the Victorian Government's Youth Strategy consultation: [bit.ly/vgys-sub](https://bit.ly/vgys-sub)



## Unpacking the Man Box creates safe spaces for boys to become their true selves

The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services developed the *Unpacking the Man Box* training package for schools and community groups in response to findings from several rounds of *Man Box* research conducted since 2017. The training explores the pressures on boys and men in Australia, while actively promoting healthy masculinities, respect and equality at school, home and the wider community. Last year the sessions were delivered to over 250 schools across Victoria.

Nina\* participated in the *Unpacking the Man Box* training last year after beginning a new role as Wellbeing Leader at her school. The session's focus on breaking down harmful gender stereotypes with her students strongly resonated with her because at the time she was experiencing the negative behaviour of a young boy in her care.

"One thing that struck me straight away in the session was the idea that 'the behaviour you walk by is the behaviour you accept,'" says Nina. "I could see this type of behaviour but had not thought to see what is behind it and driving it as the root cause."

Oliver\* was highly academic, yet was suffering low self-esteem at school. He began manifesting his negative feelings through anger and frustration as he thought these were the appropriate emotions for a boy to express. He felt like he was always in trouble and therefore began to disengage from his schoolwork.

Oliver believed if he shared his thoughts and feelings he would be perceived as 'weak' and this gendered stereotype meant his behaviour became aggressive, with him using derogatory and disrespectful language towards his teachers and classmates. "He started to believe that he had to be strong and fight and that he couldn't show any weakness.

But this masked who he really was: a sensitive, empathetic and caring individual," says Nina.

The *Unpacking the Man Box* training gave Nina the insight that Oliver was showing signs of being in the 'Man Box' and that the traditionally punitive response to Oliver's negative actions was harming him. She sought to change the approach to a positive one of modelling respect to promote healthy behaviours for Oliver.

Nina was able to create a safe environment for Oliver to talk about and explore a healthier version of his masculinity while also keeping him accountable for his actions. His self-esteem flourished and he now understood that it was okay to be his true self.

Nina recognises that as teachers "we are good at building relationships, but we don't always have those difficult and uncomfortable conversations because we don't want to break those bonds." Since the training, the conversations she and the other teachers have with their students are intentional, relational and are keeping both them and the students accountable in a positive way.

**\*Not their real names**



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Nina supported Oliver to challenge his Man Box behaviours

## An Update on our work in NSW

The Willmot Community Hub is part of Jesuit Social Services' Western Sydney program and works with local people, organisations, businesses and government to partner with and strengthen communities in the heart of Wilmott. The Hub does this by facilitating a number of groups and events with the community, including a weekly breakfast, afterschool program and seniors' group.

Due to physical distancing restrictions last year, The Hub was unable to hold most of its in-person programming. Older members of the community felt the effects of this in particular as, for many, being part of the seniors' group was the only regular social interaction they had. This group enjoyed activities such as fitness classes, bus trips and social gatherings.

Despite much anticipation after a year of being apart, their planned Christmas lunch was unable to go ahead last December due to the re-introduction of physical distancing measures in Sydney.

With the easing of restrictions this year, however, The Hub made Christmas happen in February. With the help of parents from Willmot Public School, The Hub brought its senior community back together again for a celebratory, festive lunch – Christmas crackers and all! The community members volunteered to prepare the roast lunch, decorate the table and serve the meal.

The mood was joyful as this group of friends shared stories over good food in a much loved, shared space. Monique Perusco, Manager of Social and Community Services in Western Sydney says, "The seniors in Willmot have a great spirit and they are always keen to come together to celebrate, share news and acknowledge those who are no longer with us. We ate, laughed and planned our next get together."

The Hub is looking forward to continuing to welcome all community members back for more important bonding moments like this. You can find out more about the Willmot Community Hub and other work we do as part of the Western Sydney Program by visiting [www.jss.org.au/westernsydney](http://www.jss.org.au/westernsydney).

## Planning a just recovery for the Northern Territory

In February, Jesuit Social Services co-hosted the third event in the Northern Territory Climate Justice series. *Our Jobs, Climate and Community* forum brought together over 50 delegates from environment groups, Aboriginal organisations, unions and community sector organisations. The forum shared ideas around rebuilding the economy on foundations of care for people, country and climate, instead of on the continued over-dependence on extractive forms of economic development.

Facilitated by Dr. Amanda Cahill, CEO of The Next Economy, the two-day forum included presentations on key reform ideas including: work by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT on a new approach to remote economic development and job creation, to replace the failed remote employment and community development service; a presentation by Thomas Mayor, National Indigenous Officer for the Maritime Union of Australia, highlighting the importance of structural reform for self-determination through the creation of an Indigenous voice to parliament (a key pillar of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, alongside treaty and truth-telling); and discussion of sector-based case studies that create meaningful jobs where

they are needed most – for example, through remote housing maintenance, ranger programs and Indigenous-led health and social care services.

Expressing our commitment to ecological justice, Jesuit Social Services continues to take this work forward with our partners across the Territory, where together, we are leading the country in building partnerships across sectors to take a transformative approach to addressing the climate crisis – working towards building a more just society in the process.



Participants in the Our Jobs, Climate and Community forum

## Staff Profile – Susie Moloney, Executive Director – Centre for Just Places

Susie Moloney recently joined Jesuit Social Services as the Executive Director of our new Centre for Just Places. The Centre will provide leadership in national research, advocacy and capacity-building in addressing inequality and social injustice through place-based approaches.

Prior to joining Jesuit Social Services, Susie worked at RMIT for over 15 years, most recently as Associate Professor of Sustainability and Urban Planning. Susie says one of the factors that shaped her decision to join Jesuit Social Services was that "the organisation has been focused on ecological justice for some years, and I was really interested in the fact that this focus is closely connected to building a just society. This aligned with my own work exploring the connections between ecological and social justice. You can't deal with one without the other. For example, we know that climate change is impacting health and well-being and for those already experiencing disadvantage these impacts are disproportionately severe. Bridging together the work of environmental and social justice is so important. I think this is a relatively new space and it is inspiring to see such leadership from a social change organisation like Jesuit Social Services speaking about ecological justice, which will be at the foundation of the Centre for Just Places."

Susie sees the role of the Centre for Just Places as being "a place that brings people together. There is a lot going on in Australia and globally that can be characterised as place-based work to tackle entrenched social disadvantage. There is still a lot to learn about what works, what doesn't and why. We see an opportunity and a need to bring leaders, practitioners, researchers and their lessons together so that we can share them, elevate them and advocate for them. This includes learning from and enabling communities leading place-based action in different parts of Australia.

"One element will be to learn from the work Jesuit Social Services has been doing for many years in places like Western Sydney, the Northern Territory and parts of Victoria – to shine a light on it and elevate it as different examples of place-based approaches. We'll be drawing on the *Dropping Off the Edge* research and learning from the evidence that is brought to bear from that work around place-based disadvantage to advocate for change.

"The setting up of this Centre and the work that the centre will do aligns strongly with Pope Francis and *Laudato Si*, acknowledging that we have to change the ecological and the social. The two are critical and you have to do them together."

*The Centre for Just Places gratefully acknowledges funding received through Gandel Philanthropy and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety.*



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Susie Moloney is the Executive Director of our new Centre for Just Places




## Upcoming Events

Due to COVID-19 restrictions we were unable to hold our Annual Dinner fundraising event in March this year.

In place of this, we are currently developing a series of online and in person events to take place throughout the year. The events will provide an opportunity to come together, hear from distinguished speakers and support the ongoing work of Jesuit Social Services.

We will be in touch soon with more information.



**The Men's Project is constantly developing and expanding its approaches to shifting attitudes about what it means to be a man in the twenty-first century.**

**Please make a donation today so that we continue to deliver the specialist training that will help communities understand and promote healthy masculinities.**

### 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**

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