

## Accompanying people on their path to employment

“It feels like I’m more stable now ... It has given me a bit of meaning, and it’s kept me busy.” This is how a young man who had contact with the justice system and lives with a mental illness described the impact on his life of a Jesuit Social Services employment program.

That program was the Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) program – a Victorian Government-funded service providing personalised employment support to long-term unemployed jobseekers and to jobseekers who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. Unfortunately, the Victorian Government has decided to scale back this program, which has propelled Jesuit Social Services to actively explore new ways to find pathways to employment for people who face significant barriers to social and economic inclusion.

Jesuit Social Services has a decades-long history of accompanying people who experience barriers to participation – in employment, in education and in various other settings. We work to develop relationships and trust, and to offer appropriate support for each person’s circumstances.

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## Employment helps people to flourish



For more than 45 years, Jesuit Social Services has worked at the hard end of social justice, with people and communities who, for a variety of reasons, often lack the same access to employment opportunities as others.

This includes people who have had contact with the criminal justice system, people who have disengaged from education or lack practical skills for work, people with mental health problems and people from newly arrived communities.

We believe that all people should have the opportunity to have a job that they can handle, in order to help them lead fulfilling and productive lives and make their positive contribution to society.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of our work connecting people who experience barriers to gaining employment, and our particular approach to helping each individual thrive.

This includes our Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) program, which has supported almost 2,000 people into work in just two years. Unfortunately, the Victorian Government is scaling back this highly successful program. Jesuit Social Services has been advocating for many years for the existence of such programs that provide wrap-around support for people facing multiple barriers to gaining employment. Our commitment to ensuring everyone has such opportunities has propelled us at this time to explore new ways to support people into jobs and help them to reach their potential.

You will also read about the valuable work of some of our other employment programs making a difference.

Jesuit Social Services is a strong supporter of the Voice to Parliament and I am pleased to share with you in this newsletter some of the work we are doing to advocate for a YES vote.

I thank you for your ongoing support towards our big vision of building a just society.

Warm regards,

**Julie Edwards**  
CEO, Jesuit Social Services

## Accompanying people on their path to employment

The JVES program has been particularly successful, and indeed unique, in what it offers. Through this voluntary program for jobseekers, we employ jobs mentors who work with jobseekers to become work-ready and connect with jobs, and employer brokers who work with employers. We focus on being responsive to each person. Some jobseekers are best accompanied by a mentor with lived experience and an understanding of the justice system and its complexities – such as pursuing work while on a corrections order. For others, it is someone with industry knowledge in construction procurement, or someone well-versed in ensuring a culturally safe work environment.



**“They took the time to connect on a personal level to better understand my personal situation.”**

– Employment Programs Participant

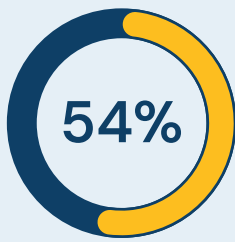
One participant compared the service to current federal programs, describing it as “more personal and more real.”

At times, what a jobseeker needs most is new clothes for an interview or a job, or transport to get to work. The service must be flexible enough, and tailored enough, to be responsive to these needs. One participant said of their mentor, “He gave me vouchers and sent me to get uniforms, work boots and work tops. It helped heaps.”

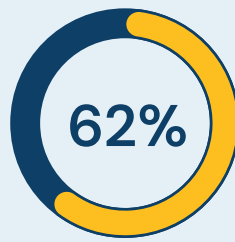
Our staff continue to support participants after they gain a placement in a job. Mentors check in with participants, troubleshoot any further assistance that may be required, and refer participants to additional supports as challenges arise.

We also work with employers, developing partnerships through employment engagement specialists who help navigate the employer’s needs and ensure a right fit with the jobseeker. While existing Commonwealth employment services tend to require jobseekers to seek and accept jobs for fear of implications on Centrelink and other payments, our participants are not pressured to accept jobs, and this creates an incentive to ensure the right role at the right pay is found for each person. This reflects a different set of dynamics between the participant, mentor and employer.

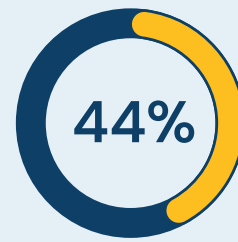
## Employment opportunities leading to ongoing work of six months or more



Placements in construction



Professionals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds



People with justice system involvement

Up until June 2023, our service comprised four different programs: a general program, a construction industry program, a program for professionals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and a program for people who have had involvement with the justice system.

Between June 2021 and June 2023, 1,925 people gained placements in jobs out of 4,500 registrations. Of these placements, 47 per cent turned into ongoing jobs of six months or more. In the various cohorts, 42 per cent of job placements from the generalist program turned into ongoing employment, 54 per cent of placements in construction, 62 per cent of placements for professionals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and 44 per cent of job placements for people with past involvement with the justice system turned into ongoing work of six months or more.

These outcomes compare well to the latest available comparable figures from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (Financial Year 2021–2022) on the proportion of jobseekers who experience disadvantage who gained a sustainable job placement. This proportion was 42 per cent.

Following the Victorian Government's decision to slash employment programs, reflected in the May budget, only our general JVES service continues to operate at this stage – and that only until October 2023. Beyond that date, there will be reduced services for a period of time, and our involvement in delivering these will be subject to the outcome of the current tender process.

Jesuit Social Services' commitment to providing a pathway to employment for people facing multiple barriers remains strong, and extends beyond the current JVES program. Key examples are the African–Australian Inclusion Program, and the current

Corporate Diversity Partnerships program, where we pursue employment opportunities to support people on a path towards a quality job that is sustainable.

We work with each participant to choose an appropriate placement, provide coaching, mentorship, regular check-ins, access to relevant training, ongoing support post-placement and other forms of support as required. We also work with employers to address workplace culture issues, which often needs to be addressed in order for jobseekers to sustain their employment.

The Men's Project, for example, which Jesuit Social Services established in 2017, offers workshops addressing harmful attitudes about gender and masculinity to prevent violence and promote wellbeing. Jobseekers and employers can be connected with these programs as appropriate.

Our new social enterprise, JustWorks Supported Recruitment and Employment Service, is our most recent initiative aimed at supporting disadvantaged jobseekers and supporting employers meet their workforce needs. We bring to this enterprise the same spirit of tenacity and fidelity that characterises the way we work, captured in this quote from one of our jobs mentors:

**"I've just got an outcome for a participant mid-year who was with me for three years, so after three years of hard work with him he finally got a job. That's so satisfying. He still calls me. I will keep in touch with him for a long time. He called me yesterday, just to say hello and how everything was. People are referred to us because we help them."**

## Trainer Tessa empowers participants to overcome self-doubt and find employment



Tessa, Jesuit Community College Trainer

As a Jesuit Community College trainer, Tessa has had the privilege of seeing her former students find employment in many areas including nursing, teaching, administration and the arts.

The employment course supports participants to build the practical skills, mindset and confidence needed to find meaningful work. Tessa's approach combines her knowledge of neuroscience with her own experience of rebuilding her life after domestic violence.

"The participants I work with have all had their self-confidence knocked in some way – they might be older and experiencing long-term unemployment, or they might be a new migrant, or have domestic violence in their past, like me," Tessa said.

"I always say that you can support people with all the skills around writing resumes and cover letters and using technology, but if they haven't got the confidence, they aren't going to get a job. For someone who might already be dealing with anxiety and depression, a job interview has the potential to be terrifying."

Tessa supports participants to develop the practical skills they need to get a job, and she draws on the latest in brain and mind science when she coaches her students. Frequent role-plays are a fixture of her course.



**"I am proud to say that a huge percentage of my students have successfully gained employment and in turn are confident and happy."**

The course has inspired one of her former participants, Carly\*, to start her own business. Tessa has also supported Carly to find casual work acting as an extra, a long-held dream of hers. Carly was even a guest speaker in Tessa's latest course.

Carly said, "Tessa has been the biggest driving force in my life."

Tessa believes that the course isn't just about getting a job. "It's about changing people's overall mindset, their limiting beliefs, and their negative self-talk.

"This is my passion and purpose in life. It adds value to my life to see other people who've gone through adversity like me reinvent themselves and become more confident people."

\*This participant's name has been changed for privacy.

## Police pathway program to help Aboriginal officers serve community

Raza Rind knew from childhood he wanted to be a police officer – inspired by a police officer uncle who would share stories and tips with the then 10-year-old Yamatji boy on camping trips in Western Australia’s rural mid-west.

“He would say, ‘you wear the uniform, you represent the community, not just the force,’” said Raza.

Growing up, the now 25-year-old government worker was already active in his community; supporting peers struggling with addiction and other challenges in the 450-person-strong township of Mount Magnet.

But Raza was unsuccessful in his application to WA Police – instead spending a year in the army before discharging and finding work in warehouse security.

His sister, Laila, who was working as an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer with Victoria Police, found out about the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program that Jesuit Social Services runs in partnership with Victoria Police and Victoria University. She suggested this program to Raza.

The 15-week course supports participants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to navigate the Victoria Police recruitment process, contributing to a more diverse and inclusive workforce reflective of the community the force serves.

The program’s Aboriginal Advisor, Serena Dallen, said the course “was a great way for First Nations students to meet Mob who work in various roles in Victoria Police”.

“The courage and resilience that they had showed throughout the course and now in the application process makes me extremely proud of them,” she said.

“I can’t wait to see them in uniform representing their communities.”

Students attend three nights per week of classes covering core topics in the police recruitment process – including exam preparation, community engagement, fitness, swimming, First Aid, and more – and learn from guest speakers, police mentors, and each other.

Raza said the course was “inspirational,” and an opportunity to become a role model to other Aboriginal young people.



Raza at a recent Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program event

“I would recommend it to anyone in the community, especially young people who are troubled or need guidance,” he said.

“There aren’t many Aboriginal police officers and I see myself becoming one; becoming a role model.”

At the course’s graduation ceremony, Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner, Luke Cornelius, said it was an “extraordinary privilege” to stand before the seven graduates and their families.

“We’ve long understood in policing, and we forget it to our cost, that we cannot police effectively until we represent and reflect the community we police,” he said.

Raza said his father’s experience of discrimination at the hands of police officers helped catalyse his own desire to represent a different experience of policing.

“I wanted to make a better name for the police within the community,” he said.

“I’ve always been interested in helping the community. Instead of having the police look like a tyrant, I wanted to be a figure of authority who brings law and justice, when justice is needed for the community.”

Since its inception in 2018, the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program has supported over 230 students from 56 cultures, with 39 Victoria Police Academy places offered to program participants to date.

A second round of the Victoria Police Aboriginal Diversity Recruitment Program commences in November 2023.

## JVES makes a "dream come true" for Biruk



After over 30 unsuccessful job applications and no luck with a Job Active service, Biruk\* was losing hope and thought of giving up his dreams of working as an electrician.

He had arrived in Australia from Ethiopia at the age of 17, with limited English, no income, and ineligible for Centrelink payments. When living with family didn't work out, Biruk became homeless.

Fortunately, he managed to link in with a youth refuge, was approved to move into temporary affordable housing, and started work in a warehouse. Biruk had a roof over his head and food to eat, and he was grateful, but he wasn't sure what he wanted to do for work.

After a short stint in an accounting course, Biruk realised he is the kind of person who likes to work with his hands. With encouragement from an African community mentor, he completed training to work as an electrician. But a long job search eroded his self-esteem.

Eventually, friends recommended that he connect with Jesuit Social Services' Jobs Victoria Employment Service program, which assisted him with his resume, job search training, and supported him to find work at an electrical company in 2022 – his "dream come true."

Biruk tells us that he is receiving great support from his employer and coworkers. "Getting this job in the career I want has given me purpose, pride in myself and the opportunity to be a good role model for my little brothers. One day I may be able to have my own business, so that I can help others like me," he says.

\*This participant's name has been changed for privacy.

## New job puts Behnaz's analytical mind to good use

Behnaz\* is a qualified engineer but hadn't secured a role in the industry since her previous role as an academic back in 2015. Originally from Iran, Behnaz came to Australia seeking asylum and has struggled to feel accepted in society.

Behnaz's JVES mentor, Gillian, says, "there seemed to be a real cultural resistance to integrating her into society, and there was clearly some prejudice too."

Every job setback further eroded Behnaz's confidence. Gillian explained that "she needed mentoring to find a sense of connection, trust and understanding of her aspirations and challenges."

Over several months, Behnaz was coached and mentored to apply for a wide variety of roles. Once trust was established, she began to open up to other job opportunities – jobs that would help her move towards roles related to engineering. Behnaz started in a manufacturing production role, and then transitioned into a more general business support function. As she became known and trusted within the team, she was able to use her systematic engineering knowledge in ways that improved business and manufacturing processes.

Behnaz has become an integral part of the company, understanding the systemic relationships of different parts of the organisation. She helped troubleshoot issues with operational processes and machinery, making them more accurate and efficient. As a result, Behnaz's self-esteem has grown and she is returning to the happy, confident person she once was.

"She is making changes that optimise output, efficiency and productivity, which is precisely what engineers are trained to do," Gillian says.

\*This participant's name has been changed for privacy.



## Deepening our conversation on The Voice to Parliament

**The Voice is about recognising and respecting 65,000 years of Indigenous culture and tradition for the very first time in Australia's 122-year-old constitution.**

Voice Explained

To learn more, visit [www.yes23.com.au](http://www.yes23.com.au)

Jesuit Social Services supports a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and throughout 2023, we are advocating for a YES vote in the upcoming referendum.

We believe that the Voice will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in determining their own lives and contribute towards shaping a society in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians can join hands together, acknowledging the past and looking to the future.

We were honoured to welcome Amanda Watkinson, who is an Aboriginal woman and former Jesuit Social Services staff member, to speak to staff at our recent All Staff Day in June about what a YES vote would mean for Indigenous peoples and for Australia as a whole.

"If you are here today, you are morally obliged to engage in the conversation about Aboriginal sovereignty and our shared national identity. For me, there is no option. I have to vote 'yes' because 'no' isn't available to me. I can't continue to be a second-class citizen in my country and it's unacceptable for my children.

"We need to hold the mirror up and see our collective identity and reflect on who we are and who we could be. We need to be brave enough to act better than

all the generations before us acted. It's taken us 235 years to get to a place where we're even prepared to have this conversation about the autonomy of Indigenous people, and now we can move forward with an inclusive national identity that restores our right to make decisions about our own sovereignty.

"The Voice is not going to solve all the problems that exist in this country. It is about a commitment and establishing tools. It is about advancing our thinking, and about working together to remove us from the circumstances we are in now.

"Justice sits with you. I encourage you to be the voice of change. Find a way to participate in the conversation in a meaningful way. Be discerning and be courageous. Learn how to be calm in the conversation that is polarising the community. Find out why 'yes' is important and how you can articulate it, whilst being mindful of the impact your conversations are having on Aboriginal people across the country."

At the end of Amanda's reflection, she asked three questions for staff to reflect on about what a YES vote would mean. Staff engaged in rich discussions at their tables using these questions as a guide.

We invite you to consider each of these questions as part of your own journey to understanding the Voice or in conversations you're having with friends and family:

1. Reflect on a time when you didn't have agency. How did being in that position make you feel in the moment? Were you able to express anything about the impact the situation had on you and, if not, what was that like for you?
2. What are you doing in your work and life to help Australia get to 'YES'?
3. How do we imagine a world after 'YES'? What does the world look like for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people? How will things be different?

We have created a dedicated resources page on our website to support and encourage learning about the upcoming Referendum. To access these resources, please visit <https://jss.org.au/voice-to-parliament-web-resources/>.

Jesuit Social Services provides pathways to inclusion for people who experience barriers to education and employment – supporting them to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Our programs are flexible and tailored to be responsive to the unique needs of each participant.



**A job seeker is not a number to me, I know them back to front, I know their story.”**

–Jesuit Social Services employment mentor

#### 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**

**\$**  Other amount

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

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