



Royal Commission
into Family Violence

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOCELYN BIGNOLD

I, Jocelyn Bignold, Chief Executive Officer of 18 Robertson St, Kensington in the State of Victoria say as follows:

- 1 I am authorised by McAuley Community Services for Women to make this statement on its behalf.
- 2 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 3 McAuley Community Services for Women made a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in May 2015. I refer to and adopt that submission. Attached to this statement and marked **JB-1** is a copy of the submission.

Current role

- 4 I am currently employed as the Chief Executive Officer of McAuley Community Services for Women.

Background and qualifications

- 5 I have over 25 years' experience in community development, policy development, management and advocacy.
- 6 I have worked in many areas of community services including aged care, children and adults with chronic illness, adults with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities, children in residential care, adults and families experiencing homelessness, imprisonment and family violence. I have had extensive collaborative involvement with government and other non-government organisations to improve policy responses and service systems designed to support those in need.
- 7 I have the following qualifications:
 - 7.1 Diploma of Business (Governance) from Chisholm TAFE;
 - 7.2 Graduate Diploma in Policy and Human Resources from RMIT;

7.3 Bachelor of Arts, Community Development from Victoria University; and

7.4 Diploma of Youth Work, Phillip Institute of Technology (now RMIT).

McAuley Community Services for Women

8 McAuley Community Services for Women (**MCSW**) is a ministry of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (**Sisters of Mercy**). MCSW was created in 2008, when the Sisters of Mercy joined two of its long-running services – McAuley House (formerly Regina Coeli) and McAuley Care (formerly Mercy Care).

9 MCSW provides accommodation, support and advocacy for women and their children who are homeless, primarily as a result of family violence or mental illness. It currently supports around 650 women and children each year through our wrap around accommodation and support, with an 80-bed capacity. We are Victoria's largest women only integrated family violence and homelessness service and we are the only service in Victoria that welcomes women every day, at any hour or the day or night, into safety.

10 MCSW's mission is to provide accommodation, services, advocacy and support for women who are homeless and their accompanying children, who experience family violence. Through its services, MCSW is committed to advocate for a better, safer and more just society.

11 To date it has offered three programs for women and their children to help them rebuild their lives:

11.1 McAuley House, which provides welcoming accommodation for women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and supports them on their journey towards independence;

11.2 McAuley Care, which provides 24-hour crisis accommodation as well as refuges for women and their children escaping family violence; and

11.3 McAuley Works employment program, which helps women to secure meaningful employment, increases their ability to support themselves financially and raises employer awareness of the impact of family violence in the workplace (this is currently under review, as discussed below).

- 12 Common to all women with whom MCSW works are multiple barriers to maintaining or finding employment. Supporting women experiencing family violence in relation to their employment needs has emerged as a priority for MCSW.

McAuley House

- 13 This facility in North Melbourne is for women who are homeless. They come in extremely physically and mentally unwell, often with long histories of family violence. It is typical for those women to talk about years of family violence; for example, 22 years of working in small business, scavenging in rubbish bins, 25 years of being hounded out of accommodation and never being able to hold down a job because as soon as she is found she is hounded out again. Those are the sorts of stories we hear at McAuley House.
- 14 A typical stay will be between 6 to 9 months, maybe 12 months, sometimes 2 years depending on how ill the woman is, how much confidence she has lost, how much skill she has lost. It is about regaining health, self-esteem, dreams, vision of the future – without violence and without fear.
- 15 There are two central referrals points for McAuley House. We are part of the homelessness system. Women will be referred through homelessness services. We are also part of the mental health system, which women will be referred through.
- 16 We also have referrals from hospitals and through word of mouth. In McAuley House children can't stay with their mothers. We have access to transitional accommodation (some owned by the Sisters and some owned by the state (to which we have priority access)). Women can move through McAuley House and if they have children, could move to transitional accommodation. Commonly women who come to that facility have children staying with fathers because the mother has been unwell, or else their children are in the care of child protection.
- 17 While they are in the service, it is not just somewhere to live but rather there are other supports in place. We have a case management program. Every woman on site (every tenant) is linked to a key worker. She will develop a case management plan with the key worker. The only mandatory requirement is working towards permanent housing, because it is not a permanent housing facility. After that, it will depend on exactly what she needs. This might be educational, vocational, social, voluntary work or employment.

- 18 We have a full time social recreation program – we do things from tai chi to meditation to walking the dogs at the lost dogs’ home, to movie nights, to knitting – whatever women say they want to do. We do a lot on conversational skills – we run structured conversational skills discussions, because women don’t have many experiences to draw on for conversation.
- 19 The other important thing about the social program arises from the fact that women are often estranged from family, including adult children, because of their experience of family violence. They have often never discussed what has happened. Adult children think that their mothers have just been poor parents. If they do something like Puffing Billy or a trip to the zoo it means that women are able to build conversations with children and grandchildren and have an encounter that is not based on trauma but based on shared positive experiences. It is a soft entry back into the relationship.
- 20 McAuley House is accessible seven days a week. We will typically have 30 women coming back for birthdays (we do a monthly celebration of all birthdays). We also have approximately 30 women coming back at Christmas time – some women will leave and go to family for Christmas Day. Others come to us because the pressure is too great to go to family on Christmas Day but might be able to go on Boxing Day, for example. We really are an alternative community. The beauty is that if someone is living with a chronic mental illness, and they are in a bedsit and not coping, feeling like the walls are caving in, they can come to us on a Saturday afternoon and relax, talk to the other women and do a bit of knitting. It is a community hub. They can go home the next day. If her medication needs to be adjusted she can have a residential stay for up to a month, go to hospital during the day and come home to a hot meal. In every instance we make sure their long term housing is preserved.
- 21 For example, there was a woman who moved from us to public housing. The residence had accommodated drug dealers before. The very night she moved in she was broken into by four masked men with baseball bats. She was back at our facility the next morning with a cup of tea. If we weren’t there, she would be lining up at the IAP point looking for alternative accommodation and with no one supporting her.
- 22 One of the strengths of our system is that while women might move down the line in terms of how intensive their support is, they can always come back if they need to; they are not excluded from the community just because they have somewhere to live. In any given year we work with around 650 women and children, about 30

of whom will need long term support. That depends on their needs; they will contact us when they need to. Some will come and stay for two weeks every year, others will be there every week.

- 23 Women need a lot more than just somewhere to sleep. There is a lot more to supporting women experiencing homelessness than just the bed they sleep in. We are adopting (a version of) the US concept of housing first. All of the women who come to us say they want their own place. When they come to us they are unwell and don't feel confident to move into their own housing immediately. We believe the system needs to be able to accommodate a range of options and ours is one of those.
- 24 We see women coming in after trying to manage their homelessness themselves until they can't anymore. For example, one woman who comes to mind lived in her car for seven years. She managed her homelessness and didn't think of herself as homeless until she lost her car. Often the women we meet live very isolated, poverty stricken lives. They don't have a lot of opportunity to speak to their own family, or to even have experiences to give them a breadth of things to talk about. They often have lived fear-filled lives and have eroded self-esteem. They don't have any starting points. We have initiated a program called "Cake and Conversation." The women will have a topic; often we will have a guest speaker, sometimes the women will choose a topic themselves. It is a facilitated conversation. We will have a topic to talk about that is a little bit removed from their daily experiences.
- 25 The other really successful program is called 'about me'. This focusses on the woman – their dreams, aspirations, and goals. One woman that comes to mind – her goal was to finish the tattoo on her arm. That means she was motivated to save money for the tattoo. In the process she was also sponsoring endangered tigers in another country. Then of course that means we get to see where their strengths are and what their dreams are and work on those.
- 26 It is necessary to build those sorts of skills because most women want to participate in the community, they want to feel confident to participate in the world, they want to be able to talk to people. They want to overcome their fear and learn skills to get by in the world and be included.

Family violence and the workplace

Why family violence is a workplace issue

- 27 Violence against women is not a private matter. It does not occur in a vacuum. Two thirds of women who report family violence with their current partner are in paid employment.¹ Consequently, family violence is a workplace issue for the women themselves, their colleagues and their employers.
- 28 The following are key ways that family violence can affect the workplace.
- 28.1 Family violence can impact upon women's attendance at work. Women who experience family violence in the home may require unplanned leave after actual or threatened violence. Women may also be absent from work as a result of having to attend court dates. These women may also be unable to attend work intermittently because their partner has removed or destroyed their work clothes, or their method of transportation.²
- 28.2 Abusive behaviours can occur at the workplace. Abusive partners can still harass the victim in the workplace, as women are vulnerable there given that most work occurs at set times and locations. For example, the abusive partner may repeatedly call or email their victim at work, or follow the victim to and from their work premises. If women form relationships within the workplace that become violent, then harassment, abuse or assault can occur both at home and in the workplace.³
- 28.3 The effects of domestic violence can also be felt across a workplace. Co-workers' productivity can be reduced if they attempt to shield the victim from harassing calls. Co-workers may also take stress leave and other unplanned forms of leave if they feel intimidated by their colleague's abuser. Managers and other colleagues may choose to look for other forms of employment if they feel their safety is threatened.⁴

¹ Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project (2011). *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Employee, Employer and Union Resources*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, NSW.

² Swanberg, J and Logan, T (2005) 'Domestic Violence and Employment: A Qualitative Study' *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10" 3-17.

³ Calaf, M. (2003). 'Breaking the Cycle: Title VII, Domestic Violence, and Workplace Discrimination', *Law and Inequality*, 21: 167- 191.

⁴ Karin, M. (2009) 'Changing Federal Statutory Proposals to Address Domestic Violence at Work: Creating A Societal Response by Making Business a Part of the Solution' *Brooklyn Law Review* 74: 377- 428.

- 29 In MCSW’s experience, women experiencing family violence who were employed when the violence occurred were often at risk of losing their employment, due to the violence following them into the workplace. Some women were stalked or harassed at work by their violent partner and others were unable to work due to the stress experienced because of the violence. Other women were fearful of returning to the workplace because the violent party would be likely to look for them there. Many did not feel confident enough to ask the employer for flexible working arrangements, including time off work, and saw their resignation as the only option available to them.
- 30 The Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project recently found, “women who are subjected to domestic violence have a more disrupted work history, are on lower personal incomes, have had to change jobs [more] frequently, and are very often employed in casual and part time work.”⁵
- 31 Moreover, a range of studies have shown that women who experience disrupted work histories can become dependent on welfare payments, and as a result, may feel forced to remain in or return to an abusive situation in order to maintain secure housing and financial security.⁶ Ultimately, a woman can become entrapped in a cycle of unemployment and violence.
- 32 We also know that family violence results in a cost to the economy of approximately \$13.6 billion every year (as per the report published in 2009 by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children titled ‘The Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children’).
- 33 After hearing that the cost of violence to the community was estimated at \$13.6 billion the National Australia Bank did an analysis which showed that this is equivalent to two years of their profits and the work of 35,000 employees over that two year period.

How employment can secure better outcomes for family violence victims

- 34 It has been increasingly demonstrated that for victims of family violence, employment is a key pathway to escaping violent relationships. Sustained periods of employment can provide financial security, independence, social networks and

⁵ Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project (2011). *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Employee, Employer and Union Resources*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, NSW.

⁶ See, for example, Access Economics (2004). ‘The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy’ Part I and Part II, funded by Australian Commonwealth Government under the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence and

increased self-esteem.⁷ It can also provide feelings of greater control and more power.

- 35 Having some form of income means a reduced need for government services and supports. The woman is less likely to become homeless. There are also better intergenerational outcomes and experiences. I have heard women on many occasions express the view that having a job was their “ticket out of a violent relationship”.
- 36 We know that women who are employed are less likely to be in relationships with violent partners, and women who are in relationships with violent partners are more able to leave if they are financially independent.⁸
- 37 Based on the available evidence, and my experiences with women coming through MCSW’s programs, I believe that secure and long-term employment is critical to reducing incidents of violence against women.
- 38 It is in this context that MCSW set up its employment and employer education program, McAuley Works.

McAuley Works

- 39 McAuley Works was set up in 2010 in direct response to demand from women using MCSW’s crisis and accommodation services, to help them to secure jobs and access training. Most of the women that we see want to work but they are excluded from the workforce. Sometimes they are actively discouraged by Centrelink because they don’t have job search obligations and meet the requirements for a pension because they have young children. They are told “you don’t need to put yourself through work because you have young children and you are eligible for certain allowances.” They are legitimate exemptions we would pursue in other circumstances. But what we are being told is that women see the job as their way out of family violence.
- 40 There are two aims to the program. The first is an intensive employment program that assists women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, primarily as a result of family violence and mental health issues, to secure meaningful

⁷ Rothman, E., Hathaway, J., Stidsen A., and de Vries, H. (2007) ‘How employment helps female victims of intimate partner violence: A qualitative Study’ *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12, 136-143.

⁸ Barret Meyering, I. (2012) “Making economic Advocacy “Core Business”, Research & Practice Brief 3, Australian Family and Domestic Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC), January 2012, pp3-5.

employment and increase their ability to support themselves financially. The second is an education program for employers, titled 'Engage to Change'.

- 41 In 2012, MCSW commissioned a paper to investigate the body of knowledge that existed in Australia and overseas at that time in relation to family violence, employment and the workplace, titled 'Violence Against Women: A Workplace and Employment Issue - a position paper.' Attached to this statement and marked **JB-2** is a copy of the paper titled 'Violence Against Women: A Workplace and Employment Issue - a position paper.'
- 42 The McAuley Works program was then evaluated in 2012 for the ten month period from July 2011 to April 2012 by the Research and Evaluation Unit of the Australian Community Support Organisation. Attached to this statement and marked **JB-3** is a copy of the Evaluation Report titled 'McAuley Works Evaluation 2011 – 12'.

First arm: intensive employment program

- 43 The employment arm of the program ran for approximately four years, funded by community and philanthropic support. As at the end of June 2015, MCSW was forced to stop recruiting women for the program due to insufficient funding.
- 44 The program was intensive and personalised, and focussed on job readiness to help women secure jobs and support themselves and their families financially. The program was free for the women, and included, depending on the needs of the particular woman:
- 44.1 resume preparation;
 - 44.2 interview training;
 - 44.3 referrals for interviews;
 - 44.4 securing recognised vocational qualifications;
 - 44.5 job seeking skills;
 - 44.6 obtaining work experience;
 - 44.7 referrals to an organisation called 'Fitted for Work' to be provided with work-appropriate outfits;

- 44.8 matching with a case worker for assistance with related issues including court appearances and child care arrangements; and
- 44.9 post placement support.
- 45 Generally MCSW staff would travel to an agreed location in which it was safe to meet the woman, such as a café or a public library. The staff member would take along a laptop and the assessment would begin at that initial meeting.
- 46 The eligibility criteria for the program included being a woman; having experienced family violence, homelessness or a risk of homelessness; and wanting to work.
- 47 An example of a woman who participated in McAuley Works is a client who initially came through McAuley House. The client had experienced some mental illness and in fact, at the time I reviewed her file, had received five different diagnoses of her mental illness from various doctors. At the time she became involved in the McAuley Works program, her only source of income was the Disability Support Pension (**DSP**). She had previously been employed but had difficulty managing herself in a work environment and was frequently dismissed from jobs. She wanted to find employment and in particular, wanted to pursue a career in the dramatic arts.
- 48 The employment team worked with this client to equip her with two different resumes; one was the 'dream job' resume (for a job in the dramatic arts field) and one was the 'today job'. The team worked with her around managing her behaviour, using public transport, how she was going to deal with conflict in the workplace – essentially, job readiness. They also worked with her on how she could obtain her aspirational job. She was able to keep her dream alive while simultaneously keeping herself fed and paying the bills. The client ended up in full time employment, no longer receiving DSP and managing her own accommodation, and has continued to do so to this day. I think this is an amazing result for a woman whose sole income would have otherwise perpetually remained the DSP.
- 49 The model used in the program was one of supporting women, rather than reverse marketing (where the job is brokered for the woman through MCSW dealing with the employer). This meant that the potential employer was not aware that the woman applying for the job had been assisted by MCSW.

- 50 The women would present with a variety of past experiences of employment and levels of education or qualifications. Quite a few wanted to trial casual work to see how they would manage. The length of time the women remained employed depended on her history of working, how she was managing children, any disability and her risk factors around family violence. It was often about dipping a toe in the market and there were no restrictions on how many times a woman could use our service. It would not be uncommon for a woman to return for three different jobs over a couple of years.
- 51 The kinds of jobs the women took up were very individual and included, for example, jobs in retail, aged care, child care, administration and financial services such as accounting. We found a lot of large employers were interested in having conversations, but it was the small to medium businesses who actually employed people.
- 52 There was also a separate stream of women who went into further training, mostly vocational education.
- 53 In terms of overall outcomes, as at the end of the 2013/2014 financial year, 201 women had been referred to McAuley Works. Of those, 134 women found jobs. Currently, 90 of those women are still in jobs. 88 women accessed Vocational Training and Education programs. 45 women are no longer receiving Centrelink payments. Overall, taxpayers saved an estimated \$1 million.

Second arm: employer education

- 54 The second arm of McAuley Works is an education program titled 'Engage to Change', which aims to educate employers and staff about family violence, its impact on business and what can be done to support women experiencing violence.
- 55 Our experience with women seeking employment through McAuley Works, and the research we undertook in around 2012, inspired the creation of the employer education program, as we realised that there would be much greater opportunities for women to remain employed, if only their employer was aware of the circumstances the woman was experiencing. There is large scale misunderstanding about family violence in general. However, as I set out above, it is a problem affecting many workplaces.
- 56 For example, a woman might tell her employer she needs a day off to go to court. What she won't know, and what the employer won't know, is that in court that day

there will be between 50 and 70 matters to be heard. As a result, the police will be given a pile of intervention orders and it might take three weeks for the perpetrator to be served. She doesn't know when the intervention order will be served, she doesn't know what the perpetrator's reaction will be. She will be closely monitoring her phone to see if there is any change in his behaviour. If his text messages stop, what does that mean? If they escalate, what does that mean? Does she need to get her children, does she need to get home before dark, is he going to kill her pets, will he come to her workplace? She is at work, because it is safer to be at work, but she is struggling to focus and is not functioning normally. She becomes part of a system that has its own timelines; things will happen that are outside of her control and it is not her fault.

- 57 The employer needs to understand that supporting the woman in her experience of family violence is not just about giving her a day off to attend court.
- 58 We saw from direct experience the potential of employers to be able to make a significant difference to women's experiences of family violence and to lessen the flow-on consequences. In many ways the program is about consciousness raising. This means that every conversation with employers is an education opportunity. It also means that there is a long period of time in selling the program, because even as we discuss the program, many questions arise about family violence.
- 59 Our aim is to ensure that women don't need our program because they haven't lost their jobs in the first place, (and are less likely to become homeless).
- 60 We have been trialling this kind of program for many years, to the point where it has been developed to a sufficient standard that we were able to offer it to employers on a fee for service basis. We were very keen to ensure the program was self-sufficient. The program, in its current form, commenced on 1 July 2014 and combines practice wisdom with expert training to provide business leaders, human resources managers and staff with a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of family violence on the workplace, and what can be done to prevent it.
- 61 It covers how to recognise family violence, identify risks to staff, respond effectively and know where and how to refer women for help. The program includes face-to-face interactive training sessions tailored to the company's needs and a 20-minute e-learning package about the impacts of family violence on the workplace and what can be done to prevent it.

62 The program costs \$1,500 for a 90-minute training session. The e-learning tool is costed on a sliding scale depending on the number of employees in the business.

The importance of programs like McAuley Works

63 Family violence crisis services clearly play a vital role in supporting women and their children. They assist women by providing counseling and support services in regards to their experience of violence, housing and, where relevant their social security needs. However, family violence services are not funded to support women in relation to their training and employment needs. This requires specialist skills and knowledge regarding the intersection between family violence, women's employment and their financial independence.

64 Just as family violence services are not experts in employment issues, nor do employment services have the critical skills and expertise required to support women experiencing family violence in the context of their employment needs.

65 In addition, it is MCSW's experience that the services central to employment – namely, Centrelink and Job Services Australia - are not aware of the employment and training needs of women who experience family violence and often do not appear to take into account the complexity of family violence and how this may affect women's ability in their search for long-term, secure employment.

66 Programs like McAuley Works, which offer long term, individualised and intensive support, are important in assisting women in gaining and maintaining secure employment which will lead, I firmly believe, to reduced experiences of family violence.

Funding of McAuley Works

67 The funding for McAuley Works has been patchy and uncertain. The program ran for just over four years and was funded in various ways during this time. The first set of funding was received in 2010 under a 14 month contract from the state government Department of Innovation and Regional Development. In its first year, we also received some funding from the RE Ross Trust, a philanthropic organisation. In its second year, it was funded through another philanthropic organisation, the Helen MacPherson Smith Trust. In its third year, it was funded by the federal government through the former Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (**FaHCSIA**). We received trust

funding in the program's fourth year, again from the Helen MacPherson Smith Trust.

68 We haven't been able to negotiate a consistent funding stream through state government. Around 2013 we were invited to tender for some state government funding which had been quarantined for women's employment, but it was ultimately given to a larger organisation. From my perspective, the state government doesn't seem to want to fund employment programs as it is seen to be a federal responsibility.

69 However, we have been having trouble getting to the right people to obtain the necessary funding in federal government. As a result of this lack of funding, as I stated above, the employment arm of the McAuley Works program has been forced to cease. This was an excellent program with great results, but it is unclear whether it will be viable into the future.

70 From year to year we are unsure of our funding streams and the amount of funding we will receive. The impact of this funding uncertainty is that we are forced to retrench staff, we lose good programs and we are unable to invest in evaluations. From what I can see, both state and federal governments increasingly want organisations to leverage funding from corporates or philanthropic organisations. MCSW raises 40% of its income itself. These are issues that impact on organisations working in the family violence space, but also the not-for-profit sector more generally.

Funding issues overall

71 Overall, I think there is a lot of good practice in the family violence sector. In order to continue the good work that is being done, we need investment in solutions of family violence. The good practice should be picked up and spread across the state.

72 One of the problems I see in respect of funding is that, as a community, we swing between prevention and response and there is a lack of integration between the respective systems. We know that we have to invest in prevention because family violence is dangerous and it kills women and children. However, we also know that we need to improve our response to family violence once it has occurred. For example, depending on the research, the breach rate of intervention orders is as high as 96%. However, prosecution for those breaches is extremely difficult and in many cases no consequences for the breach are imposed. Enough money to fund

good strategies and policies and programs at both the prevention and response points is necessary, and it is needed over a reasonably lengthy period of time.

- 73 We also need diversity in the size and scope of organisations which are funded. Integration ought not mean a corresponding loss of speciality understanding and it ought not mean monolithic organisations. MCSW, for example, is a smaller organisation which offers extremely valuable responses to and support for women and is one part of an overall response.
- 74 Frankly, we need both a net increase in resources and a greater security and predictability of funding. There needs to be longer term, recurrent funding for programs that have been shown to work.



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Jocelyn Bignold

Dated: 13 July 2015