



Parliament of Victoria  
Legislative Assembly  
Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
By email: [jobseekersinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:jobseekersinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au)

9 August 2019

Dear Committee

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers in Victoria.

### [Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do](#)

Jesuit Social Services has over 40 years' experience working with individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage. Our work draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on.

We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion. We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them to reach their potential and exercise their full citizenship. Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the key areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community-building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

Jesuit Social Services' research and advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence participants' lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

### [Addressing entrenched disadvantage](#)

The nature of entrenched disadvantage and social inequality in Victoria must be better understood and addressed. This includes the need for community-led, place-based responses to address disadvantage within communities and promote early intervention and prevention initiatives across a broad range of services. In seeking to assist people to find meaningful work, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to employment that many people face, including those living in disadvantaged postcodes and those people with multiple and complex needs, histories of trauma or abuse, mental ill-health, disability or involvement with the justice system.

Jesuit Social Services' research into locational disadvantage, conducted over the last 20 years, has consistently shown that a small number of communities across the state are experiencing a complex, web-like structure of entrenched disadvantage that limits outcomes and opportunities for residents. This results in a disproportionate incidence of factors such as poor health, unemployment and contact with the justice system.

In Victoria, our [Dropping off the Edge 2015](#) research found that in comparison to the rest of the state, those living in the three per cent most disadvantaged postcodes in the state were:

- twice as likely to have criminal convictions;
- 3 times more likely to be experiencing long term unemployment;
- 2.6 times more likely to have experienced domestic violence; and
- 2.4 times more likely to be on disability support.

Among the 27 most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria, unemployment and long-term unemployment were among the most dominant shared characteristics, alongside criminal convictions, prison admissions and domestic violence.

### **Placed-based approaches**

There is growing recognition that place-based approaches are an appropriate response to addressing entrenched locational disadvantage.<sup>1</sup> Place-based approaches aim to empower communities to develop and deliver local solutions over the long term by bringing together members of the community, community organisations, businesses, government and public services like schools and health centres.

Place-based approaches focus on the causes rather than the consequences of entrenched disadvantage, embracing prevention and early intervention in an effort to resolve issues before they escalate. Individuals and groups work together to design and implement innovative solutions to complex social issues specific to their community, drawing on local strengths, opportunities and goals.

The Victorian Government's place-based Neighbourhood Renewal Program, launched in 2001, was an example of a positive initiative targeted at specific communities that worked across government, in partnership with local residents, businesses and the community sector, and combined social investment, service coordination and community involvement in decision making. A 2008 evaluation of the program found it reduced disadvantage and narrowed the gap between renewal areas and the rest of the state, lowering unemployment, increasing further education qualifications, and raising perceived levels of community participation.<sup>2</sup> Despite these promising outcomes, the Neighbourhood Renewal Program no longer receives funding.

Without a sustained, collaborative, long-term commitment across the government, community and business sectors, there is a significant risk that some of Victoria's most severely disadvantaged communities will continue to 'drop off the edge'. The web of disadvantage can be broken effectively by a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community. This strategy should be:

- **Targeted** – Concentrated to specific areas of the most severe disadvantage (selected by use of a nationally agreed, transparent and shared evidence base).

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service (2019) Place-based approaches for community change: QCROSS' guide and toolkit. Retrieved from: <https://www.qcross.org.au/publication/place-based-approaches-for-community-change-qcross-guide-and-toolkit/>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Human Services (2008) *Neighbourhood Renewal: Evaluation Report 2008*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.

- **Tailored** – Meet needs as identified by residents within these communities and respond to the unique mix of issues they face.
- **Integrated** – Recognising that the web of multiple and interconnected causes of disadvantage cannot be addressed with compartmentalised solutions.
- **Cooperative** – Responses are founded on new systemic, coordinated ways of working that draw together different levels of government and departmental portfolios, integrated community initiatives and social impact investment.
- **A long-term horizon** – A long-term commitment of 20 years to address complex, entrenched disadvantage in identified communities.
- **Community owned and driven** – Community leaders drive the agenda, recognising the strength within communities and work with them to build capacity, generate action, attract external resources, and maintain direction and energy.
- **Engaged at the individual, community and national levels** – Recognising the complex interplay of the individual, their family circumstances, their community, and the broader social, economic and ecological environment in causing and addressing disadvantage.

Critically, place-based approaches must encompass interventions from birth across the life span, such as early childhood, school, mental health, justice and crime prevention. They should be led by, and build the capacities and resources of, local communities.

### **Accessing jobs for disadvantaged communities**

There is a significant opportunity for some of the major infrastructure projects currently being planned or underway in Victoria to achieve positive social outcomes, including job opportunities for people facing barriers to employment and for those in regions experiencing significant social and economic disadvantage.

The Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework, which is intended to embed considerations of social objectives in the government's procurement processes, is a positive starting point. However, there is an opportunity for clearer targets that encourage, support and resource employment initiatives in communities experiencing high levels of social disadvantage.

As one initiative in line with the positive provisions of the Social Procurement Framework, Victoria's major infrastructure projects should be incentivised to employ people from local, disadvantaged communities who are struggling to find work. This would complement the Major Projects Skills Guarantee, which provides opportunities for Victorian apprentices, trainees and cadets on these same projects.

#### **Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Work toward implementing whole-of-government place-based approaches to addressing entrenched disadvantage across multiple domains, targeting the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria.**

- **Establish concrete targets for employment of people experiencing barriers to employment as part of the government’s Social Procurement Framework.**
- **Increase opportunities on Victoria’s major infrastructure projects for people from local, disadvantaged communities.**

### **Introducing a spent convictions scheme**

Many of the people we work with struggle to obtain employment due to their criminal record, which can negatively impact their overall mental and physical well-being. We can’t expect people to turn their lives around if they don’t have access to a secure roof over their head and the opportunity to contribute to society through education and employment.

In Victoria, a legislated spent convictions scheme that would allow people not to disclose old convictions for minor offences is long overdue. Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australia without a legislated spent convictions scheme. Western Australia was the first state to introduce such a scheme in 1988 and all other states and territories, as well as the Commonwealth, have since legislated similar schemes, with South Australia the last to do so in 2004. In Victoria, authority currently rests with Victoria Police to decide whether, and which, past convictions are disclosed when a person applies for a criminal record check.

Jesuit Social Services was pleased to make a submission to the Legislative Council’s Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into a Spent Convictions Scheme in Victoria, which is due to report on 27 August 2019. In our submission, we argued for the introduction of a spent convictions scheme in Victoria to ensure a person’s criminal record does not unfairly impact their ability to obtain employment and fully participate in society.

We know that education and employment are key protective factors against involvement in the criminal justice system and help to mitigate feelings of disempowerment, seclusion and stigma. Recent research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that 54 per cent of people entering prison reported they were unemployed during the 30 days before being imprisoned, and around one in three prison entrants had a high-school education level of Year 9 or below.<sup>3</sup> Our justice programs are based on the belief that all people exiting prison should have the same opportunities as others across society to access employment, housing and education in order to help get their lives back on track.

### **Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Introduce a spent convictions scheme in Victoria to ensure a person’s criminal record does not unfairly impact their ability to obtain employment and fully participate in society.**

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) ‘The health of Australia’s prisoners 2018’, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/prisoners/health-australia-prisoners-2018/contents/summary>

## Providing key foundational support

### Housing and homelessness

As part of approaches to addressing issues of employment for disadvantaged people, it is critical to understand interrelated issues, such as a lack of affordable housing. The availability of safe, secure and stable housing is a major issue for many in our community, but particularly for people with mental illness, alcohol and drug problems, and other complex needs.

In particular, there is an absence of housing options and associated supports for vulnerable young people with multiple and complex needs, including young people who have experienced trauma or who may be transitioning from out-of-home care or the justice system.

Our experience tells us that the provision of public, social, and affordable housing helps build safer and cohesive communities, and that long-term housing can help set a firm foundation for improving well-being and enhancing personal agency – fundamental attributes that make finding and keeping a job more likely.

As a starting point, there must be an adequate supply of appropriate social housing in Victoria. We echo the Council to Homeless Persons' call for 3,000 new public and community housing dwellings per year for 10 years, with 1,500 being one and two bedroom homes for singles, couples or small families.

We also call for the expansion of supported housing options for individuals with multiple and complex needs, and more support for cross sector initiatives (housing-employment services) to create a better integrated response for people in crisis.

#### Recommendations to the Victorian Government:

- **Invest in new public housing stock and increased access to social housing. As a priority, build at least 3,000 new public housing properties each year over the next four years.**
- **Invest in a diversity of housing options for people with multiple and complex needs, including specific housing initiatives for single people, young people, women, and people with experience of trauma, and people exiting the justice system.**
- **Support and resource cross sector initiatives (housing-employment services) to create a better integrated response for people in crisis.**

### Supporting disengaged young people

Education, training and employment play a key and powerful role in addressing many of the overlapping issues facing disengaged and vulnerable people in our community. Disengagement from education can often be the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory into antisocial behaviour.

Jesuit Social Services delivers casework and support to disadvantaged young learners as part of the Victorian Government's Navigator initiative. Navigator works with disengaged learners aged between 12 and 17 to engage with them and their support networks in order to help return them to education or training. Re-engaging vulnerable young people in educational, learning and employment pathways gives

them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. The program's work includes the development of individualised learning and cultural plans, and restorative practice including therapeutic and practical support. Jesuit Social Services welcomed the state-wide expansion of the program in the 2018-19 Victorian Budget.

In Jesuit Social Services' experience delivering Navigator, we have found that young people would also benefit from better coordination between the varying services they interact with. Beginning with the school, coordination should be extending to youth justice, family violence services and child protection. By lowering the age of eligibility for the program to 10, we would be able to intervene earlier with at-risk young people and help strengthen the likelihood of positive outcomes.

**Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Lower the age of eligibility for the Navigator program to 10 years to help enable earlier interventions for at-risk young people.**

**Expanding opportunities for pre-accredited training**

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. We know from our experience delivering pre-accredited training in Victoria that it provides an important stepping stone for people with low-level educational attainment, people who have been out of the workplace or education for some time, people who experience poor mental health or who may be involved in the justice system.

People in pre-accredited training who transition to accredited training are much more likely to attain their qualifications, compared to the average Victorian VET student. According to the Department of Education and Training discussion paper 'Future Opportunities For Adult Learners', of the 29 per cent of pre-accredited learners who transition into accredited training, 64 per cent directly attain a qualification and a further 14 per cent indirectly do so.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, the average Victorian VET completion rate is 47.3 per cent. As the paper notes, these figures are even more notable given that 90 per cent of pre-accredited learners are experiencing disadvantage.

Through the pre-accredited training provided by Jesuit Social Services, participants gain the essential foundational learning and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to formal accredited training and employment. For some people, this is the first such opportunity in many years.

**Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Continue to provide and expand pre-accredited training programs delivered through the Adult, Community and Further Education Board, to support disengaged learners and people needing support to enter or re-enter education and training as part of a pathway to employment.**

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Training (August 2018) *Future Opportunities for Adult Learners in Victoria*, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/adult-learners-paper.PDF>.

## Flexible, relationship-based support

The voices of disadvantaged people need to be listened to in debates about job services, opportunities and pathways. Often this cohort have had things done to them and for them, but not *with them* – which is a factor in disengagement from services and support. The views and needs of the individual person and the broader community of which they are part should be at the center of our responses.

Jesuit Social Services' programs are centered on the understanding that the most effective support for disadvantaged people occurs through building a relationship with a person and taking the time to understand their capabilities, strengths, hopes and aspirations. Many young people we work with won't simply acknowledge that they can't read or write, for example, or seek assistance for it. We should not set unrealistic expectations – for some people, engaging them in meaningful activities in a safe environment is a worthy goal. We should also recognise that some people simply aren't catered for by regular education, training and employment pathways.

Jesuit Social Services Artful Dodgers Studios, established in 1996, is an initiative that offers a welcoming space to engage vulnerable young people with mental illness who aren't ready for formal participation with social workers or health workers, or regular education and training pathways. The program offers a studio space in Collingwood where young people living with difficult circumstances create art and music with the support of experienced artists and musicians. From June 2017 to July 2018,

more than 220 participants from over 26 countries attended Artful Dodgers, engaging in art forms ranging from silk painting, collage and video making to music production and performance.

The Artful Dodgers Studios working model was developed in response to the specific needs of our 'at-risk' participants, many of whom live with concurrent and complex difficulties which contribute to chaotic lives and subsequent difficulty in engaging in appointment-based activities. The Artful Dodgers Studios' sustained engagement model is relationship-based, flexible and centred on the needs of the young person. It is premised on the understanding that building trust takes time and is achieved through a consistent response, respect and the provision of a safe environment.

### 'A place to be yourself': Casper, Artful Dodgers' participant

I first came to Artful Dodgers Studios in 2014. It was a very welcoming, colourful space.

When I first walked in I thought, 'Okay, I have to be here to make art, I have to be really driven'. But it's not about that. It's a place you can go to be yourself.

It seemed like there was always something bubbling in the background – somewhere anything was possible.

It's about the arts, but if there's anything else going on, you're open to talk about it and try to work through it. It's really free-form. When I've been in a rough patch, I've been able to just go in and they're there to talk to.

I feel a bit reserved going out to places by myself. Staff go to a lot of art events – like theatre, the Gertrude Street Projection Festival, and art gallery hops – and I would have been intimidated to go by myself. It's really nice to have people to go with.

I've moved house a lot and changed TAFE courses and friend groups a lot and Artful Dodgers has been a constant through all of that. It's been great to know I have something to rely on. It's definitely a backbone.



#### Recommendations to the Victorian Government:

- **Fund activity-based programs, such as the Artful Dodgers Studios, that provide holistic specialist care and creative activities for the most marginalised young people.**

### Supported employment programs for disadvantaged people

Jesuit Social Services' education, training and employment programs assist people who have had limited learning or job opportunities and face a range of barriers to inclusion. As a starting point, Jesuit Social Services believes that for this cohort of people, the employment and wider human services system needs to broaden its focus from the narrow aim of securing short-term employment outcomes and, instead, support people on a journey to social inclusion that can be measured against a wider range of social markers. We hold that the worth of a person is not limited to their employment status and that civic participation can and should be measured in more nuanced ways.

For people looking to enter or re-enter the workforce, and who face significant barriers to do so, intensive, flexible and individualised training and support may be needed to support the individual, as well as prospective employers. Current initiatives under the Jobs Victoria banner have enabled organisations such as Jesuit Social Services to work closely with individuals to address issues affecting their ability to secure employment and to maintain that employment. This cohort includes people involved with the criminal justice system who already face barriers such as lower educational attainment and higher levels of mental ill-health.

The Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) is an example of an employment services scheme, implemented at the local level, that is working well. JVEN is specifically targeted at assisting people facing significant barriers to employment, with services delivered by specialists such as Jesuit Social Services. Key aspects of the scheme are that it is able to invest the time and resources needed by each individual, to develop and enhance their vocational skills and work readiness, and to secure a suitable work position with an employer. JVEN has

#### Case study: James

As a young kid, James was no different to others his age – he dreamed of the job he would one day pursue. But he found himself on a path where he “just wanted to break rules” and ultimately received a criminal conviction.

“There’s a lot of jobs that I was restricted from that I was aiming for in my teen years,” James says.

“As a little kid I wanted to be a police officer, obviously I can’t do that anymore. I’ve also wanted to be a security guard – I can’t do that anymore”.

James went through a rough patch while he struggled to find work and experienced the stigma associated with his offending as a young man.

“All it takes is someone to tell their boss that he’s an ex criminal and it’s a put off,” he says.

In time, James heard about the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN), run by Jesuit Social Services, which assists Victorians experiencing barriers to employment into jobs, including people with justice system involvement. Through the program, he has now found steady employment.

For James, having a job helps him support his young family.

“It means my son has a roof over his head, it means he has clothes on his back and food in his belly, which is the main thing for me,” he says.

“I can hopefully give my kids things that I never had in my childhood. That’s what it means to me.”



enabled organisations such as Jesuit Social Services to work closely with individuals to address issues affecting their ability to secure employment — their skills, work readiness, and understanding of Australian workplace cultures – and to maintain employment once a job is secured.

Jesuit Social Services is advocating for ongoing funding for programs such as JVEN and Skills First Reconnect. We welcome the \$8.8 million commitment in funding to Jobs Victoria and JVEN, contained in the 2019-20 Victorian Budget. However, we continue to call on the Victorian Government to expand investment in these initiatives, with funding provided over the long-term, to support Victorians experiencing significant barriers to employment.

#### **Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Expand access to, and fund over the long-term, initiatives such as JVEN and Skills First Reconnect, to support people with significant barriers to participation and employment.**

#### **Building social inclusion through corporate diversity partnerships**

Newly arrived people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities often face barriers to employment which can limit their sense of integration into the Australian community. The importance of meaningful work for newly arrived people is significant. Employment fosters broader participation in society, provides a sense of purpose, and creates opportunities for migrants to become contributing members of the community.

Jesuit Social Services believes that the role of business as an enabler of social inclusion should be more actively explored and promoted. This requires moving away from a transactional relationship between business and marginalised people to one grounded in an understanding of the capacity of business to work with organisations and the community.

A key example is our African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP), formed in partnership with the National Australia Bank (NAB), which offers six-month paid work placements, including mentoring and career coaching, to qualified African-Australians. As at the end of March 2019, 424 participants had graduated from AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney since its inception in 2009 and more than half the alumni are still working at NAB. A program such as the AAIP not only performs a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of disadvantaged people, but also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way.

Building on this success, Jesuit Social Services has developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers. We partner with employers to develop a customised paid internship program that creates a life changing career experience for the intern; progress toward business goals for the company; and positive social impact for the community. To date, we have partnered with the Australian Taxation Office as part of their 'Opening Doors' initiative; John Holland, one of Australia's leading engineering contractors; Yarra Valley Water; Melbourne Water; and super fund CBUS.

### **Alumni Experience: Daniel Mabil, John Holland Pathway Program**

Daniel Mabil estimates that he applied for more than 200 engineering positions. Each time, he was rejected.

He came to Australia in 2007 after fleeing war in South Sudan and living for nine years in a refugee camp in Kenya.

Mr Mabil thrived here, and eventually earned an engineering degree from the University of Adelaide.

After finishing his studies he was told he needed work experience. He returned to his homeland and worked on projects including the construction of a hospital ward.

When war once again forced him back to Australia, he was confident his engineering experience would open doors. It did not happen. "When I came back I start applying. But there was no opportunity for me," he said. "It's very frustrating and demoralising."

But for Mr Mabil, there was finally good news. He was recruited as part of an employment program called Pathways, which is run by Jesuit Social Services and engineering giant John Holland.

"We thought we'd take 20 people into a pilot program, and after having the applications [open] for two weeks, we got 450 applications," said John Holland's executive general manager Trevor Hall. "It just opened our eyes to the massive untapped community of engineers out there."

Mr Mabil said that was what so many migrants and refugees in Australia with qualifications want — a chance.

"I know there are many, many migrants... who are dying to gain the opportunity I have now. I'd like to see more people taking my path."

### **Recommendations to the Victorian Government:**

- **Further invest in initiatives that promote social leadership among business, such as Jesuit Social Services' Corporate Diversity Partnerships, to help open employment pathways for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities with high unemployment rates.**



We appreciate the Victorian Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee taking our views into account. We would like to invite members to visit our programs to demonstrate positive outcomes that can be achieved with the right resources and support, and would also appreciate any opportunity to present at public hearings, pending their scheduling.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Sally Parnell'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Sally Parnell**  
**Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services**