



Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We work with the most disadvantaged members of the community, providing services and advocacy in the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

Ms Jenny Macklin
Chair – Skills for Victoria’s Growing Economy
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Level 4, 2 Lonsdale Street
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Dear Ms Macklin

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the *Skills for Victoria’s Growing Economy* review.

INTRODUCTION

The significant health and economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for some time. As an organisation working with some of the most disadvantaged members of the community, we are acutely aware of the disproportionate impact of this crisis on already marginalised individuals and communities. For people on the margins, life before COVID-19 was already tough. As the Review’s Issues Paper recognises, before this crisis, 13.2 per cent of Victorians lived in poverty; an estimated 650,000 adults were at the lowest levels of literacy; and the youth unemployment rate, at nearly 11 per cent, was more than double the overall rate.¹ This crisis has also exacerbated issues such as the high rate of casual employment in Australia, with many people without paid leave or in insecure work. We are resolved to continue working alongside communities, across sectors and with governments to support those people for whom this crisis threatens to compound existing inequality and disadvantage.

We welcome the Victorian Government’s action to date on addressing the economic impact of COVID-19, including the Working for Victoria initiative² to connect people with job opportunities and the training they need, as well as additional funding for training.³ The Government’s resourcing of such initiatives will be vital in the State’s economic recovery.

Our submission focuses on the key foundational learning pathways that are crucial for the people we work with, including pre-accredited training and accredited foundation skills training, as well as the important role played by the Skills First Reconnect program, an initiative assisting the engagement into training, often for the first time, of many people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For many people facing significant barriers to social and economic inclusion, entry into foundational training is the beginning of a pathway to meaningful employment. The submission also emphasises the importance of strengthening the Victorian Government’s employment services, such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN), as well as building partnerships with industry to create opportunities for people struggling to get into work in order for the full value of our investment in training for people from these backgrounds to be realised.

¹ Skills for Victoria’s Growing Economy Issues Paper, 2020, https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.vic-engage.files/2215/8621/6823/Issues_Paper_Skills_for_Victorias_Growing_Economy_accessible.pdf.

² <https://www.vic.gov.au/working-victoria-information-jobseekers>.

³ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/skilling-up-victorians-to-get-through-the-coronavirus-crisis/>.

PRE-ACCREDITED TRAINING PATHWAYS

Through the pre-accredited training provided by Jesuit Social Services in Victoria, participants gain the essential foundational learning and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to formal accredited training and employment. In our experience, this is a vital entry point for many people who may have a low-level of educational attainment or face other barriers to inclusion. A key aspect of pre-accredited training is its flexibility, with no prerequisites for entry ensuring it is accessible for all. For some people, this form of training is their first such opportunity in many years.

We know that people in pre-accredited training who transition to accredited training are more likely to attain their qualifications compared to the average Victorian VET student. According to the Department of Education and Training, 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.⁴ In comparison, the average Victorian VET completion rate is 47.3 per cent.⁵

We see pre-accredited training as part of a genuine pathway to employment. Many participants who complete pre-accredited training ultimately find work, including through our Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) program.

In our training programs, we teach practical, hands-on vocational skills in parallel with employability skills, including building participants' awareness of workplace culture, confidence, communication and conflict resolution skills. Our pre-accredited training offers a window into particular industries, such as aged care or trade-based jobs, and a pathway to get there. These courses are devised in response to industry need, which helps ensure direct practical relevance and connection to existing employment opportunities. The demand for our employment oriented pre-accredited training courses is high, however the funding available for this training has not kept pace with the level of need, as evidenced by the inability of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board to provide the level of funding needed to meet the community demand identified by Jesuit Community College.

CASE STUDY: DINA

Since leaving Ethiopia for Australia as a young teenager, Dina's passion has always been to work in health services, and eventually become a nurse.

After working in hospitality as a short-term option in order to send money back to her mother in Ethiopia, Dina began to struggle. She faced constant rejection when applying for jobs. She needed a break.

Dina connected with Jesuit Social Services' Community College and was supported to develop a long-term plan to enter the health services field. She enrolled in 'Ready Set Aged Care', a pre-accredited training course designed to prepare people for future work in residential Aged Care in Australia.

Importantly, the course provides a clear pathway to employment. Those who complete the course are shortlisted to meet with an Aged Care employer for an interview and three work experience shifts.

The next step, which Dina has taken, is an 18-24 month traineeship consisting of permanent, part-time employment with a reputable Aged Care residential facility while undertaking a Certificate III in Individual Support (Aged Care) through RMIT.

Dina has now been in her placement for over 6 months and is heading for her long-term goal of becoming a nurse.

This opportunity, she believes, has been life-changing.

⁴ 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>

⁵ Ibid.

Pre-accredited training should be better recognised, valued and resourced in Victoria. Without a pre-accredited training pathway, we would not have been able to assist scores of participants to increase their skills, confidence and engagement with workplace training and, ultimately, to support their transition into work. We call on the Victorian Government to increase funding for pre-accredited training programs through the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, to further support often highly vulnerable people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.

SKILLS FIRST RECONNECT

Skills First Reconnect is a critical program to support people who have left school early to be able to engage with accredited training as part of a pathway to employment. Disadvantaged people often need support to identify, access and participate in the training programs that are right for them. Through Skills First Reconnect, Jesuit Social Services' staff proactively connect with potential training participants. The caseloads of our Skills First Reconnect team are small, enabling staff the time required to effectively engage and provide practical, individual and holistic support to participants.

This support includes co-developing an individual learning plan that sets out the person's aspirations with clear steps to achieve them, career mentorship, and connection with other services as needed. It also includes the kind of practical support that is often overlooked, including supporting participants to enrol and access essentials such as a myki card for transport, a laptop, internet and funding for the associated costs of training that may otherwise be a barrier.

Jesuit Social Services sees Skills First Reconnect as a crucial initiative to identify and support people with low levels of educational attainment into training as a first step toward meaningful employment. We call on the Victorian government to recommit to provide, expand on and fund Skills First Reconnect over the long-term.

CASE STUDY: HANNAH

Hannah was referred to the Skills First Reconnect program in September 2019. Severe social anxiety had meant she did not continue school beyond year 9.

A Jesuit Social Services' case worker informed Hannah of an upcoming short course, Café Operations. Although she did not see hospitality as a long-term career, Hannah wanted to further her employability skills and was keen to enrol.

Over several weeks, Hannah and her case worker continued to meet and discuss the course. The more they met, the more Hannah felt comfortable to discuss her anxiety and it emerged that she had rarely left the house outside medical appointments in the past 18 months.

For Hannah, enrolling in the Café Operations course was a big step. Attending the first day was another. With ongoing support, she did all this, and almost immediately her progress was obvious. Not only was she excelling in the course work, she was helping others.

The building of literacy and numeracy skills, embedded in the course, is a key aspect of its success. So too is the small class size, which enables the trainer to effectively support and mentor participants with significant barriers to learning. On graduation day, with her mother in the audience, Hannah asked to make a speech. She was confident, humorous and articulate, and her mother was thrilled. She thanked the trainer for "giving me my daughter back".

Following completion of Café Operations, Jesuit Social Services continued to support Hannah, who volunteered in the next iteration of the course as a formal assistant. Recognising her enjoyment in helping others to learn, Hannah is now undertaking a Certificate III in Education Support, including a work placement.



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JOBS VICTORIA INITIATIVES

It is vital that the kind of foundational training pathways outlined above are linked with employment opportunities. For disadvantaged jobseekers in particular, the government has a key role to play. This includes using levers such as the Social Procurement Framework to create jobs for Victorians facing significant barriers to employment through the Government's social and infrastructure expenditure. The Out for Good pilot initiative, which supports 50 young people who have had contact with the justice system into jobs in the construction industry – which Jesuit Social Services is a part of – is one such positive example.

For vulnerable people out of work, the effectiveness and value of the training system is only realised when it helps them get a job. For this to happen, it needs to be strongly linked to the Victorian Government's employment services system. Current initiatives under Jobs Victoria, such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN), have enabled providers such as Jesuit Social Services to support people into jobs who face significant barriers, including past justice involvement, mental-ill health or other complex needs. For this cohort, the kind of tailored, flexible and long-term support able to be provided both through pre-accredited and foundation skills training, and then through their engagement in JVEN programs, has been crucial. JVEN, with its focus on supporting the most disadvantaged, stands in contrast to the compliance-focused nature of the federal employment services system.

Jesuit Social Services is advocating for sustained funding for Jobs Victoria initiatives such as JVEN. We welcomed the \$8.8 million commitment in funding for Jobs Victoria in the 2019-20 Victorian Budget. However, we continue to call on the Victorian Government to expand investment in these initiatives and commit to recurrent funding over the long-term to support disadvantaged Victorians. This is now even more important in light of the economic hit that the COVID-19 crisis is inflicting.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY

The training system as a whole should be flexible and responsive enough to work with employers and industry to identify job opportunities and needs and tailor skills training appropriately. Through this approach, training is aligned with real job opportunities and links are fostered between employers, training providers, governments and other support services.

Jesuit Social Services has successfully partnered with a range of employers through our Corporate Diversity Partnerships program, which supports people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who have skills and qualifications but, for a range of reasons, including systemic discrimination, are struggling to obtain employment. Through this model, we support people into customised, paid internships which are developed in close consultation with the respective partner companies, offering pre-employment training, including building soft-skills and awareness about workplace culture, and ongoing post-placement support and mentoring.

This program not only performs a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of people from diverse backgrounds, but also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers, improving workplace cultures and diversity, and building cultural awareness.



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We believe that businesses can, and should be encouraged to, play a more active role as an enabler of social inclusion, in partnership with governments and community organisations such as Jesuit Social Services. Further investment in initiatives that promote social leadership among business and collaboration across sectors would help open employment pathways for people facing barriers to work. Targeted training and support services for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities should be resourced and tailored appropriately, to equip people with the skills and attributes they need to access job opportunities and to maintain employment.

CORPORATE DIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

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 person; 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.

This program is built on the success of 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. More than 500 participants have graduated from AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney since its inception in 2009 and more than half the alumni are still working at NAB.

Thank you for taking our views into consideration. We would welcome any further opportunity to engage with the Review and to provide further information about our programs.

Yours sincerely

Sally Parnell
Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services