

Submission 29. Success Works Partners Inc

I am the Chair of the Board of Success Works Partners Inc. Success Works Partners, a for-purpose association incorporated in NSW, is built on the premise that access to meaningful paid employment is a human right and is essential to breaking the cycle of disadvantage as well as reducing reoffending (recidivism) rates.

Success Works supports women with a criminal record to build their resilience, skills and employability so that they can present themselves to an employer who sees their skills and potential and not the criminal record. Discrimination kills confidence and initiative. We work to stop discrimination on the basis of a criminal record.

Aboriginal women comprise 37.5% of women in custody compared with 3.4% in the wider community. These percentages are reflected in our cohort.

We partner with the NSW Pathways to Employment program, a program of NSW Corrections. We know that women, on release from custody, choose to seek support from a service which is unrelated to their custodial experience and, significantly, is staffed by women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.

At Success Works we have a comprehensive program designed to break down the barriers to employment for women with a criminal record through employer engagement, mentoring and resilience support, training and advocating for change. Our model not only seeks employment outcomes but prioritises important stepping stones to meaningful work. These goals are reflected in our Job Readiness Workshops, one-to-one support from staff with lived experience and our Employer Engagement Program which breaks down the discrimination barriers to employment for women with a criminal record, by creating the demand from employer partners. Wrapped around this supply and demand chain is our unique Mentoring Program, where mentors support the women to build essential confidence and resilience prior to applying for and securing a job. This support is continued once they commence employment and through the early months of employment. All of these activities build employability, self-belief and resilience skills and lead to employment outcomes for these women.

Success Works began as a pilot program of Dress for Success Sydney in 2019 and became a stand-alone organisation on 1st July 2022. The efficacy of our model has been proven over several years, despite years of insufficient resources, and we are already achieving good outcomes for this cohort of single mothers and women without a household income. In the past 6 months, Success Works has placed 44 women into jobs with 46% of women in our program placed into employment within 6 months of registering. We achieve these outcomes through creating empowered and job-ready candidates via workshops, one-on-one support and mentoring and providing personal links to our established employer partners, who see their skills and potential, and not their criminal record. Research shows access to paid employment reduces reoffending (recidivism) rates, however these outcomes could not be achieved without a suite of supportive measures that Success Works provides at each step of the employment journey. Our commitment to research and innovation is reflected in our evaluations: Signalling Success: Evaluation of the Success Works Pilot Program (2021) and Female Ex-Offenders, Discrimination and Work: The Role of the Success Works Initiative Report (2020). (These reports were emailed to PRF in the EOI stage).

“Having employment has helped show my son that he can trust me again. I am working and doing normal things, which means that I am giving him security and also providing for him. Having a job

makes me 'normal' rather than going through my previous behaviour. When I was going through addiction I was not present for him. I couldn't hold down a job and wasn't there for birthdays, Christmas etc. Work has been a positive impact on my mental health and allowed me to feel connected to others. This makes it easier to connect with my son because I am happier. Having financial independence has allowed me to have the freedom to make my own decisions, as well as repair relationships with my family. I have just signed my own lease, have a bedroom for my son and will now have custody half the time. I have furnished the apartment with my savings. I feel like my success is due to the support from Success Works. They gave me confidence to feel worthy of a job."

Louise, mother to a son aged 10.

Our staff who work closely with our candidates have undertaken preparation for working in a culturally sound manner and have worked to establish links with First Nations support organisations. We advocate that employment preparation and placement services must be offered through partnerships with organisations who, themselves, employ women with lived experience and partner only with workplaces that agree to not discriminate on the basis of either their criminal past or on their First Nations status. We are the only organisation in Australia with this mission and we want to see funding actually directed to where we know it is effective.