

# Young Women & COVID Project

*Final Outcomes - 1/11/2021*

When COVID-19 hit, the Working Women's Centre's legal team received a significant number of enquiries from workers who were negatively impacted by the pandemic. We also noticed that employment stats were showing that women and young people were bearing the brunt of COVID-19 related job losses.

This grant funding has enabled us to run a project to elevate the employment experience of SA young women in Covid-19. We have engaged in advocacy, research and engagement about the impacts of COVID-19 on young women. We have also been able to build networks and partnerships, and provide young people with opportunities to influence decision making.

## Young Women's Advocacy Program

Through this project we created a new volunteer program, the Young Women's Advocacy Program. We recruited a team of highly committed volunteers who helped to lead the project. Our volunteers have included: Fiona Fraser, Emma Tooth, Mahya Panahkhahi, Manasvi Muthukrishnan, Amelia Ranger, Meriel Killeen, Flo Martin, Tahlia Moffatt and Matea Hayden. Two project volunteers obtained full-time employment, and the remaining 7 volunteers continue to volunteer at the Working Women's Centre in an ongoing capacity.

Over the course of the project, our volunteers have been trained in change-making, research, anti-racism and allyship, coping with vicarious trauma, social media and graphic design 101, media engagement, effective conversations and strategy through a combination of internal and external training.

The volunteer team contributed to all aspects of the project, including 200+ hours of research on how COVID-19 has impacted young women and the development of a report: *Loss of work, isolation and worry: the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on young women*.



The Young Women's Advocacy Program volunteers

*"This engagement with the Working Women's Centre is what helped me get through the pandemic. It offered me a kind and supportive space to grow and learn. More importantly, I finally felt like I was part of a community that shared the same values as I did, advocating for those groups in society that often go unvoiced."*

Volunteer, Manasvi Muthukrishnan

## *Engagement with young women*

Our engagement with young women through this project focused on **consulting** with young women about their experiences during the pandemic, **educating** young women about employment rights and opportunities, and **supporting them to be heard** by decision makers.

We ran 14 events throughout this project and also engaged with young women in digital and online spaces.

## Consultation

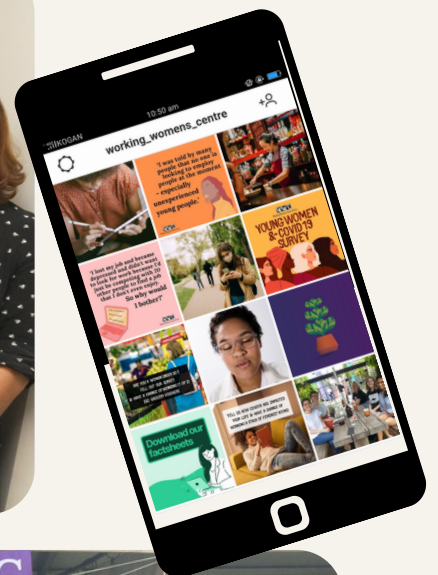
- Online consultation with young women
- Consultation with female international students
- Consultation with young women working in education
- Consultation with young women from a refugee background
- “Our voice, our future” consultation sessions, co-hosted with YACSA to discuss better youth participation in decision-making
- Broad survey of young women in South Australia, gaining 293 responses





# Education

- Webinar: *Young Women & COVID*, featuring 4 young women as speakers
- Instagram Live in partnership with the YWCA about young women and work
- Webinar: *Reclaim the Workplace* about sexual harassment in universities and workplaces
- Stall at a University Orientation Week event, engaging with 50+ young female students
- We created an information sheet about working through a lockdown as a young person
- We created a 42-page report *Loss of work, isolation and worry: the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on young women* which we shared widely with young women and the wider community
- We started an Instagram account to better engage with young women, gaining 1000+ followers on our new Instagram page and reaching 15,938 people via Instagram over the year.
- We created a page for the Working Women's Centre website about young women and the COVID recovery





# Being heard

- We held a Report Launch to share the findings from our consultations, with 80+ attendees
- We hosted three interactive workshops in which young women were able to take action to be heard on issues
- We created a Facebook group for young women interested in employment issues and women's rights and used this as a platform to share information and ideas for creating change



# Communication with government decision-makers and stakeholders

Over the course of the project, our Young Women's Employment Council, made up of our advocacy volunteers and Youth Project Officer, met with government decision-makers to discuss our findings and recommendations. We worked actively to ensure that the experiences of the young women who contributed to the project would be heard.

Our team presented the findings to:

- The Hon. Rob Lucas, State Treasurer
- The Premier's Council for Women
- The Hon. Michelle Lensink, Minister for Human Services
- The Hon. David Pisoni, Minister for Innovation and Skills
- The Office of Vickie Chapman, Attorney-General
- Sandy Verschoor, Lord Mayor of the City of Adelaide

We also met about this project with stakeholders including:

- The Director of the Office for Women
- The South Australian Mental Health Commissioner
- Leaders of the State Opposition
- The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
- SACOSS
- The McKell Institute
- UN Youth
- School Strike 4 Climate
- The Australian Refugee Association
- The Foundation for Young Australians



Our Young Women's Employment Council presented evidence to the State COVID-19 Response Committee.

Working Women's Centre representatives presented about this project at various youth sector meetings, Netfest and a Women's Economic Empowerment Panel. We attended the national Youth Futures Summit, the AMRC Youth Forum, and several seminars related to young people, women and COVID-19.

We also made a submission to the federal government regarding priorities for the 2021-22 budget with regards to young women in the COVID-19 Recovery.



# Broad impact of the project

## *Impact*

Key target outcomes of the grant which funded this project were to conduct advocacy about the impacts of COVID-19 on young people, to build networks and partnerships to improve outcomes for young people and to build strengthened communications between the state government, youth sector and young people related to COVID-19 policy responses.

Over the course of this project, government decision-makers made several significant policy decisions and announcements that were positive for young women and that acknowledged the difficulties faced by young women during the pandemic. During this time, our research and advocacy played a part in informing the state government about the employment-related needs of young women in the COVID-19 recovery.

The state government took leadership in making several policy decisions that were positive for young women, including:

- Providing grants to respond to loss of work in Tourism and the Arts.
- Prioritising spending on healthcare, a key feminised sector, including a mental health care package.
- Providing additional support for domestic violence services.
- Extending lockdown financial relief for workers to cover those on temporary visas as well as permanent residents, addressing a key concern of the female international students who we spoke with.
- Including a priority in the *Women's Leadership and Economic Security Strategy 2021-2024* to 'Boost apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for women and girls.'
- Placing a greater focus on women in state budgets.

## *Increase in awareness through media engagement*

Throughout this project, we have increased awareness of the challenges faced by young women in the pandemic through engagement with the media. The Working Women's Centre took part in more than 10 media stories about COVID-19 and young women, with several featuring interviews with young women who took part in the project. This included both community stories and mainstream media stories by the ABC, the Advertiser and CityMag and an online forum 'Let's Talk' held by the Advertiser.

We also used our own social media channels to share stories and quotes from young women that were shared through our survey.

## *Impact on young women who engaged with the project*

This project also has helped young people to grow their skills in advocacy. A volunteer in the Advocacy Program said:

***"During my time at the Working Women's Centre I have had the opportunity to participate in an array of projects, strengthening my skills in research, strategy and communications. Working alongside like-minded young women has been an uplifting and rewarding experience."***