

GOGO Foundation
Royal Commission into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Submission

Preamble

"People show up for GOGO because we show up for them. And they keep showing up for us because it's a reciprocal, respectful relationship."

- Sarah Gun, Founder and Director, GOGO Foundation

The story of GOGO Foundation began with the beginning of GOGO Events which started in 2000 as a for-profit business. As a successful event management company owner Sarah Gun in 2012 began to question whether the business could do more in giving back to society and the planet.

She began by approaching women's organisations that were working with homelessness and domestic and family violence. She wanted to give the women in these services paid work and help them realise their strengths and capabilities.

The idea was a success, and these women were able to gain valuable skills and experience. They were also able to earn money and a sense of pride and accomplishment. The program was so successful that it became a core part of the GOGO Events business model and the impact it has had on women's lives has been so significant the GOGO Foundation was established.

The GOGO Foundation helps achieve long-term outcomes for women through its Inclusive Work Program, by providing them with opportunities to learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment. The impact of the Inclusive Work Program has been significant. The women who participate in the program report an increase in their confidence and self-esteem. They also report feeling more connected to their community and having a better understanding of their place in the world.

The IWP has been able to provide women with opportunities that they may not have had otherwise. They have been able to develop new skills, gain confidence, and build relationships with others.

Over the last eight years 60 percent of women who have completed the IWP have secured suitable employment within six months. They have taken jobs in diverse roles across banking and finance, the care sector, transport, retail, hospitality, manufacturing, and community services, or have returned to or commenced further training and education.

Graduates of GOGO Foundation's IWP comprises of 12% First Nations women, 19% where English is their second language, 52% have been unemployed for more than 5 years, 56% are mothers (including foster and kinship), 35% have tertiary qualifications (including degrees, masters, certificates) and 65% have no qualifications, with some not finishing secondary school.

While this submission has a focus on family, domestic and sexual violence GOGO Foundation would like to point out that many women who engage with them are not supported by the current crisis system.

While some women engaging with the IWP have lived experience of intimate partner violence we see they are more likely to overcome that situation because they have been eligible for services and are able to move on. However there are a number of women who are experiencing violence that is perpetrated by mostly male family members which includes brothers, fathers and sons.

We would like to highlight that this is a community of women that are slipping through systems. While it is still gendered violence, support systems are not adequately in place to help them to the same level of healing and recovery as women who have experienced intimate partner violence.

It is also important to note that the women referred into the GOGO Foundation have fallen through the cracks in the social support systems that are in place to support marginalised people. Women who are referred to us have multiple and complex needs, and we are often surprised that they have not received the support they deserved.

This submission to the Royal Commission answers questions in the Recovery and Healing section of the Issues Paper. Answers have been compiled from both the GOGO Foundation and a focus group held with women who have graduated from the Inclusive Work Program and continue to be part of the GOGO community.

13. Acknowledging that every victim-survivor will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances, are there universal needs that will arise for all victim-survivors?

“I felt very supported by GOGO Foundation, tremendous help to me in a lot of ways. But some organisations are not so sympathetic. I think maybe because they worked in this area for such a long time, and they have a lot of worse cases, and therefore in their eyes, you know, I'm not.”

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In order to overcome the types of violence our women are experiencing you need to be able to navigate a complicated system. Often these systems are not trauma informed. While we have found the counselling services such as 1800 RESPECT and Lifeline well versed in trauma responses, services that women need to engage to establish needs such as housing, safety and income are less so.

By the time a woman has walked through the doors of the GOGO Foundation into the Inclusive Work Program she has not only had to overcome trauma but also navigating a complicated and sometimes overwhelming system. In this process we have found that women become accustomed to being unheard and are under an expectation of being unable to communicate their needs due to trauma responses. They may not have the language or terminology, data, or time as they are juggling multiple complexities including carer roles.

We have found that women need one place to go to for engaging with services and advice. Here they would receive wrap-around care, someone to help them get the help they need by sitting alongside them and not just a referral to another service phone number.

“You've got to tell your story over and over and over again because people don't listen or don't believe you. By doing that, you're retraumatizing yourself over and over again.”

- [REDACTED]

The emotional impacts of gendered violence are long lasting and we have found the universal needs for women we work with is kindness, respect, trust and a listening ear that results in action.

“Dismissing was a big part of my frustration. Being promised and then being completely disappointed at every single turn. And when I found GOGO, I honestly had no idea how to go on, and it wasn't like a suicidal thing. I just didn't know what to do.”

- [REDACTED]

At the GOGO Foundation we have found community to be the centre of a woman's recovery. Many of our women have experienced isolation either as something self-imposed or imposed on them. They are having to start again with new friendships and networks.

“It was phenomenal, and that really did set me on the path for becoming this amazingly strong woman that I am today. And I'm proud to say that I would not be sitting here talking to you had I not gone through (the IWP) course.”

- [REDACTED]

While the GOGO Foundation provides a community of support which begins with a group of women in the program including our staff and supporters, we know that economic inclusion is also a universal need. In addition to financial empowerment the workplace offers new friendships and social supports where women can grow. By taking women out of unemployment and out of social services we are breaking the poverty trap.

14. What are the best practice approaches to supporting a victim-survivor to recover from trauma and the mental, physical, emotional and economic impacts of violence?

Our answer to this question is simple yet also complicated. It is wraparound support. First and foremost it is emotional - kindness, love, dignity, respect and most importantly acknowledging that they have survived and are still going.

Secondary women need to know they are safe, and that their children are safe. Then will come their physical and emotional health. From there we can empower the women with the skills they need to rebuild their confidence, their agency and find their voice so they are able to advocate for themselves. We can then create a mechanism for them to find the economic inclusion that brings real opportunity to invest in themselves, their dependents and their future.

While we work hard to give women agency and the ability to gain meaningful and safe employment, complicated systems can often get in the way of breaking through some of the barriers in their way.

“Money is very big. Then to get a better job I go to the Department for [REDACTED] and try to see if I can get registered as a teacher here (in Australia). But I just couldn't do it. Because I know they are going to charge a fee to process my documents. I just have this very little sum in my bank. If I pay for that I might not have money to feed myself.”

- [REDACTED]

Often GOGO Foundation finds itself working as a frontline service helping women not only navigate systems but paying for documents. GOGO fortunately has some discretionary funds that can help pay for critical documents including birth certificates, proof of ID documents such as a driver's license; or pays for critical employment requirements such as a First Aid qualification, Working with Children Check (where a fee applies).

Our women also spoke to a need for a continuity of counselling services one they find the right support. This counselling may come from crisis accommodation or some other support system but when they leave that service, they also need to leave that counsellor. After that finding consistent, familiar, emotional and mental health support is almost impossible.

“I went to a therapist who deals with domestic violence, trauma. That's his speciality. And I was really loath to go to a male therapist but I was told he was the best. I spilled my guts for an hour, and then at the end of it he clearly wasn't interested, he told me to go to the hairdresser to get my hair done, paint my nails and I will feel better.”

- [REDACTED]

15. Taking into account your response to the previous question, what best practice approaches are already in place in the domestic, family and sexual violence systems in South Australia?

“I was my case manager's job, work. I felt sad at that. Because I took it very personally, I felt I had been supported, cared for, loved. I really cherished that a lot, and that actually hurt me a little to realise that I was only part of her job.”

- [REDACTED]

GOGO Foundation believes the healing and recovery space in South Australia is struggling to find a best practice system. The model we have created, the Inclusive Wrok Program, is working and we are proud of what we have achieved. Our focus is wrapping around a woman the support she needs so that she sees she is not a case to manage or just another job to do.

“It’s amazing to become such a family and a tight knit community when you go through that trauma. That was one of the best things that I've honestly ever felt. I'm grateful, you know, for all of the things that I've gone through and I've learned so much. But to gain a family like that with the GOGO group, you know, that has changed my life forever.”

- [REDACTED]