

The Women's Spirit Project

Inspiring Women, Empowering Women, Transforming Lives

Learning from the Transformation from a Chrysalis to a Butterfly!

The Women's Spirit Project (WSP) fills a gap in the social services sector for the provision of support to disadvantaged women. It is designed to empower vulnerable women so they can transform their lives by increasing their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The 2019 pilot program recruited 17 vulnerable women from Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula who participated in a 20-week program, delivered over six months from November 2018 to June 2019.

To ensure that the outcomes from the pilot were captured, WSP Founder Jodie Belyea engaged the services of Monash University, Faculty of Education (Peninsula Campus) staff, Associate Professor Ruth Jeanes and Lisahunter PhD to evaluate the pilot.

The evaluators, in consultation with the WSP Working Group, conducted surveys, individual interviews, participant observations and focus groups. The research involved all 30 women participating in the project - participants, mentors and working group members.

This document provides a summary of the outcomes of that evaluation. It measures significant improvements in the health and wellbeing of not only the participants, but of all those involved. Finally, the evaluation provides recommendations for improvements in program delivery which will be implemented in future programs.

"I see the Women's Spirit Project as helping women take the first step to help themselves ... to get the strength and courage to take the next couple of steps."

PROJECT OVERVIEW

COMPONENT 1: Engagement, Fundraising, Planning and Development

- 19 x monthly working group meetings
- 2 x 5 hour mentor training sessions
- 1 x Project Launch attended by 90 guests in September 2018
- 4 x 4 hour trek planning meetings
- Recruited 17 vulnerable women to participate in the project and 13 mentors and working group members
- Raised \$160K in funds and in-kind donations
- Developed program content including enlisting the support of experts for specific sessions

COMPONENT 2: Program Delivery including Three Day Trek

Twenty week program delivered over six months including:

- 15 fitness sessions covering walking, cardio, yoga, Zumba and Body Art
- 20 personal development sessions covering:
 - Mindfulness, Mediation, and Tapping
 - A guided cultural walk
 - Nutrition
 - Learning and behavioural styles
 - Communication skills and team work
 - Mandala-making and mind mapping
 - Goal setting
 - Trek preparation
- The three-night, four-day trek from Frankston to Cape Schanck
- Celebration event planning sessions
- Two evaluation sessions
- The provision of child care every Sunday

COMPONENT 3: Celebrate, Review and Transition

- Celebration event attended by 120 people.
- Transition working group made up of three participants, two mentors and one working group member who organised five walks post program delivery
- Finalisation of “Our Story So Far”, documentary and Monash Evaluation Report

“I’ve actually joined a lot of groups and I’ve worked in many community agencies and I think what was unique from the beginning was that we all felt safe; we felt like we could be who we are and be our real selves. And for me that was the difference.”

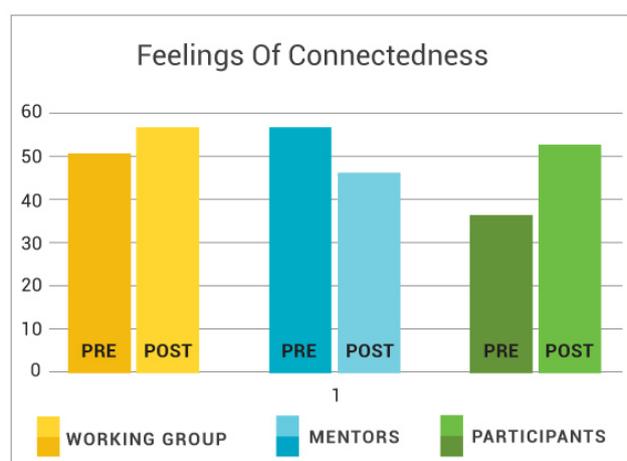
ACHIEVEMENTS

Across 15 months the pilot project’s achievements have been numerous and outstanding, with many firsts for the community and the State. Including:

- The significant commitment of 22 women who volunteered their time and delivered the project in under 12 months.
- Engaged 30 women from all walks of life as participants, mentors and working group members
- Recruited 17 vulnerable women to participate in the 20 week program
- Completed the 70km trek from Frankston to Cape Schanck over three nights and four days with support from a team of six working group members/volunteers – a national first
- Raised in excess of \$160,000 through in-kind and financial sponsorship including:
 - \$50k from the Victorian State Government’s Pick My Project grant
 - \$58k from local businesses
 - \$52k in-kind from Monash University towards the evaluation
- Increased the protective factors in the lives of participants including:
 - Increased fitness, health and wellbeing
 - Improved mental health, self-esteem and resilience
 - Enhanced parenting skills including engagement with children in fitness, health and well-being activities
 - Greater connectedness to family and community
 - Expanded social connections and support networks between participants

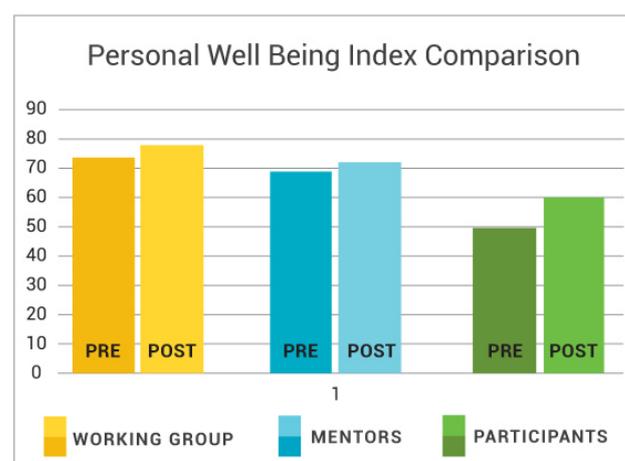
The survey data, interviews and focus groups point to enhanced feelings of connection, self-esteem, resilience and self-respect and a greater capacity among some women to negotiate their position and assert themselves within their everyday lives. As would be hoped, gains were more pronounced for the participants, as compared to mentors and working group members.

FIGURE 1



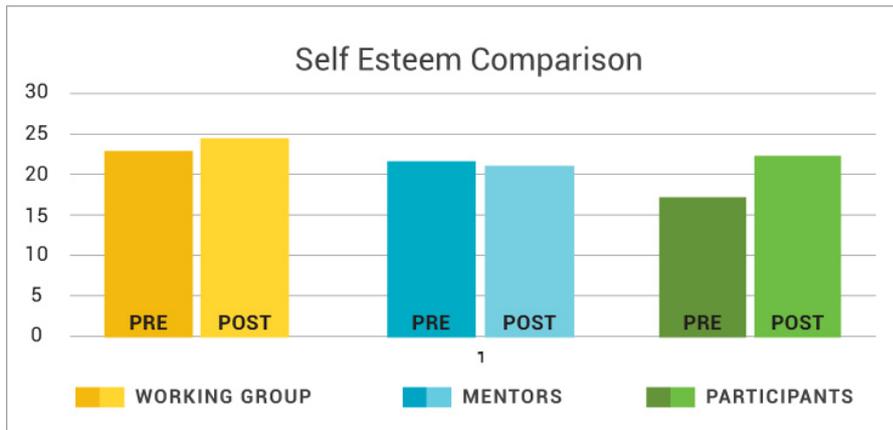
Feelings of connectedness – to the land, community and body – **increased for all groups**

FIGURE 2



All groups experienced an increase in personal wellbeing measured across various dimensions of their lives.

FIGURE 3



“I’ve had a rough time in my own personal situation but I’ve held together. . . (because) my mindset is so much stronger. I couldn’t have paid for something like this.”

FIGURE 4

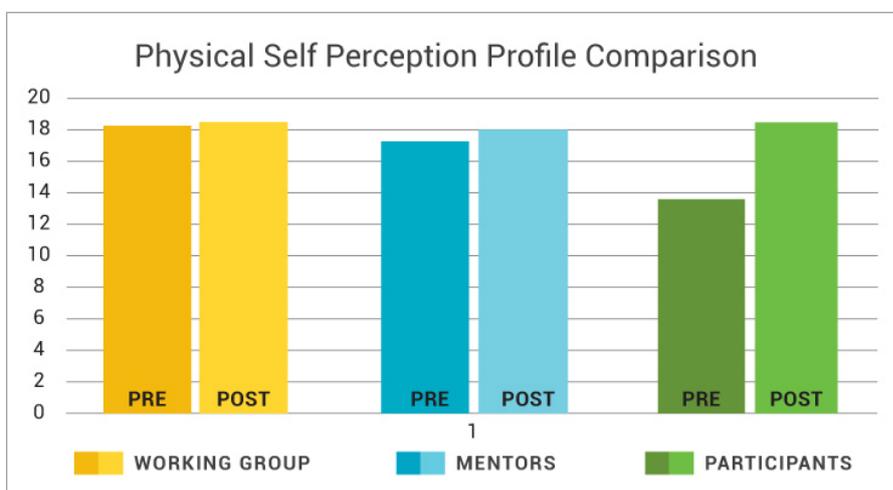
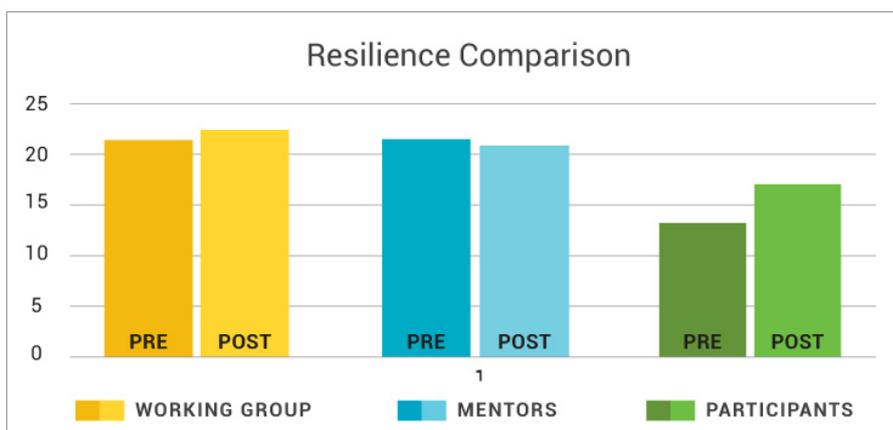


FIGURE 5



“I’ve been seeing the same counsellor for thirteen years, and I’ve not seen her since November, because I just manage things better. . . I can fix this. I don’t need to run to others.”

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Maintain focus on fitness, health, wellbeing and outdoor activities
- 2 Retain inclusion of a four-day trek as the peak experience
- 3 Continue to embed activities that connect to Country and understandings of Aboriginal health and wellbeing
- 4 Consider increasing duration of sessions from three hours to four hours to facilitate full content delivery, to ensure time is available to increase participant involvement and feedback and to facilitate connections and relationships within the group
- 5 Deliver comprehensive mentor training, processes and support structures including appointing a Mentor Coordinator
- 6 Increase the opportunities for participants to work through session content with mentors to ensure understanding and embedding of learnings into life outside of the program
- 7 Implement greater pedagogical variety including pedagogies that allow greater participation and discussion about social constraints that impact women so that they can be addressed
- 8 Develop a Governance Committee responsible for strategy, fundraising, promotion and networking including participants of the pilot as members
- 9 Secure funding to adequately resource the program operations and delivery of the project
- 10 Employ a project manager to oversee the operations of the project
- 11 Engage pilot participants in the co-design of future projects
- 12 Acknowledge that though volunteers are an important element in the model, delivering a project of this nature is not readily achievable solely on a volunteer basis in the long term
- 13 Maintain community involvement through fundraising and communication of outcomes
- 14 Maintain the strong professional and personal networks and relationships which made the pilot project possible and contributed to the achievement of significant outcomes in the 15 month period
- 15 Maintain the connections to the local business, academic, community and health sectors in order to create a place-based, grass-roots solution to a local issue

WHERE TO NEXT

- Formation of a Governance Committee
- Secure funding to employ a part-time Operations Manager to undertake fundraising, to network and to promote activities for 12 months. **Estimated cost:** \$40,000
- Research and secure an auspice organisation for the project for 18 months
- Facilitate a walk from Melbourne to Parliament House in Canberra to create awareness of the need, value and importance of the project
- Raise \$1 million to deliver three programs over 3 years in 3 communities for 300 women across the Frankston Mornington Peninsula from 2020 to 2022

“ I just thought that when you get to 40, life stopped. To see everyone over 40 doing it (exercising). It just amazes me. It’s blown me away. I thought I might not be able to do anything, and then I did the trek and now I know I can.”



Acknowledgement

This report was developed by Associate Professor Ruth Jeanes and lisahunter PhD from Monash University (Peninsula Campus).

Thank you to Dr lisahunter (*Lead Co-investigator*), Associate Professor Ruth Jeanes (*Lead Co-investigator*) as well as Research Assistants Dr Elke Emerald, Jade Warner-Benedetti and Dr Georgia McGrath.

Thanks also go to the Women's Spirit Project Tribe – participants, mentors and working group members.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land of the Southern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne and Mornington Peninsula including the Boon Wurrung / Bunurong people and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. The authors acknowledge that sovereignty of this land has never been ceded and we are committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our work.

Reference

Filling a Gap for Significant Gains:

Wellbeing, Connection And Empowerment In The Pilot Program Of the Women's Spirit Project, 2019
Summary Evaluation Report, August 2019.

Find Us



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