

# TRANSFORMING LIVES

## Bridging the Gap's PLAN project



### REACHING PARENTS IN NEED

In 2020 Bridging the Gap (BTG) identified a significant gap in services for struggling parents in the Mandurah, Rockingham and Kwinana areas of the Peel region. To address this, the Parents, Learning, Advancing, Nurturing (PLAN) project was created for vulnerable parents aged 18-64 experiencing some of the following: family and domestic violence, homelessness or housing instability, long-term (or recent) unemployment, mental health issues or financial hardship.

Funded by Lotterywest from October 2021 to June 2023, the PLAN project offered **holistic, high-touch case management with both practical and relational aspects of support that transcended traditional service boundaries**. Targeted support was offered to address a variety of needs through a bespoke suite of activities:

- The creation of a Personal Life Plan
- One-on-one mentoring sessions

- Group training sessions
- Referral to support services
- Access to brokerage funds for immediate needs
- Assistance in developing career-ready skills and gaining employment

Two mentors across the PLAN sites provided individualised mentoring, guided by the participants' goals and the mentors' insights, expertise and lived experience. Based on shared understandings of what was required for participants at different time-points in their journeys, mentors could assist vulnerable parents to first address urgent needs, such as paying bills to avoid eviction, then progress towards medium-term and long-term goals in the areas of **mindset and self-development, career development, and life circumstances**.

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI) UWA evaluated the PLAN project, and the key findings are presented below.



### ENGAGEMENT AND REPORTING DATA

Eighty-four vulnerable parents enrolled in the PLAN project, and of these **67 took part in targeted support activities**. Seventy-nine per cent of enrolled participants were unemployed when they commenced the PLAN project, 70% were single parents, and almost half were either homeless, experiencing housing instability, living in a refuge or at risk of homelessness.

Evaluation findings are based on the data collection cut-off of January 2023, at which point 37% of enrolled participants (n=31) had achieved case closure (i.e. achieved their identified goals). Findings capture this group as well as participants who were still working towards goals.

The evaluation drew upon quantitative and qualitative data sources, including: administrative data, surveys, focus groups and interviews. Not all participants were captured in every data source and not all survey questions were answered by the participants. The statistics presented below therefore vary in the number of participants they represent. This is clarified in the footnotes.

### WHAT WORKED?

Data showed strong satisfaction with the PLAN project among participants: **97% of participants who completed the satisfaction form<sup>1</sup> were satisfied with the service they had received in the project.**

Based on evaluation findings, the key activities of the PLAN project that were most impactful and meaningful were the relational support provided through mentoring; the rapid funding assistance to address urgent needs; and targeted training to support progress towards identified goals.



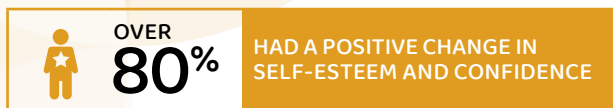
Findings revealed that the PLAN project provided **emotionally supportive, action-oriented and holistic support** unlike anything else available in the community. In many cases, the shifts that occurred in a participant's inner world mirrored positive changes in their material circumstances.

<sup>1</sup>n=36

## MINDSET AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Data showed that the PLAN project was very effective in helping to improve participants' mental health, confidence and self-esteem in a way that enabled them to achieve positive outcomes in other areas of life and feel optimistic about the future.

Of the participants who completed the satisfaction forms<sup>2</sup>:



Of the participants for whom mental health and social connections were identified as priority areas to address<sup>3</sup>:



Of the participants who responded to the respective survey questions at or near completion of the PLAN project<sup>4</sup>:



<sup>2</sup> n=50

<sup>3</sup> Survey question respondents: n=26 and n=24 respectively

<sup>4</sup> Survey question respondents: n=13, n=13, n=12, n=26, n=26, n=26, n=26, n=26, and n=26 respectively



"I grew up not asking for anything. I CAN USE MY VOICE NOW. I had no identity. [PLAN helped with] getting to know me at the deeper level... My little girl says, Mum you're so happy... She's witnessed me going from rock bottom to this." (PARTICIPANT)

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Improving participants' confidence, self-esteem, and mental health, and equipping them with opportunities for training, study and skills-development, or mentorship for finding a job, led to significant improvements in employment for many participants.

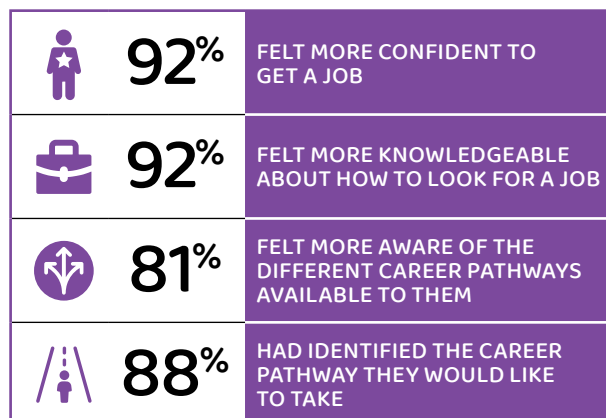
At the time of data collection<sup>5</sup>:



For participants for whom education and skills training, employment and further studies were identified as priority areas to address<sup>6</sup>:



Of the participants who responded to the respective survey questions at or near completion of the PLAN project<sup>7</sup>:



<sup>5</sup> January 2023; note that some clients who were in the process of obtaining employment are not captured in this data

<sup>6</sup> Relevant participants: n=9, n=17, and n=14 respectively

<sup>7</sup> Survey question respondents: n=26







"By the first week [in the project] I knew I needed a job and childcare. By the second week I had written a resume and handed it around... I had 100% confidence in getting results. **THINGS JUST START HAPPENING.** It didn't take long before I had a job, I had my license, [and] my son was in daycare." (PARTICIPANT)

## LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

Working with their mentor, PLAN project participants improved their circumstances in a number of ways. Often this went hand in hand with improved mental wellbeing, a greater sense of stability and security, and greater means of supporting children: for example, by finding secure accommodation, getting a driving license, obtaining a Violence Restraining Order, paying off debts, beginning the process of owning a home, and making a plan for the future.

Creating a better life for their children was a key motivator for many, and the progress that parents made during and after their time in the PLAN project was often considerable.

Of the participants for whom parenting and children, family relationships, housing and finance were identified as priority areas to address<sup>8</sup>:

	<b>78%</b>	HAD A POSITIVE CHANGE WITH PARENTING AND CHILDREN
	<b>67%</b>	HAD A POSITIVE CHANGE IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
	<b>100%</b>	HAD A POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR HOUSING SITUATION
	<b>90%</b>	HAD A POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION

Of the participants who responded to the respective survey questions at or near completion of the PLAN project<sup>9</sup>:

	<b>65%</b>	FELT BETTER ABLE TO ADDRESS DEBT
	<b>80%</b>	FELT BETTER ABLE TO PLAN THEIR BUDGET
	<b>100%</b>	FELT BETTER ABLE TO MANAGE THEIR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

"I was in a FDV situation for 11 years, I just thought that was how life was meant to be until I came here. I felt so comfortable staying in that situation until I walked in here. In the first 3 months of working with [my mentor], I built confidence. I felt confident to leave my relationship. I have so much pride... **I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD BE WHERE I AM NOW.** I'm thriving, my son's thriving."

(PARTICIPANT)



"[Before the program] I felt worthless. I felt like a failure, that there was no hope for me. **THE PROGRAM HELPED ME REALISE THAT I AM COOL, I AM BOSS...** I don't have any reassurance [in my personal life] that I'm on the right track. Then I came here and [my mentor] helped me organise all that. You need to fix the small things first." (PARTICIPANT)

"I would never have enough words to express my gratitude to my mentor. **I FOUND MYSELF, AND SHE HELPED ME GET MY WINGS TO FLY AND OVERCOME THE IMPOSSIBLE.**" (PARTICIPANT)



"**I WOULDN'T KNOW HALF THE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF AND LIFE IF IT WASN'T FOR COMING HERE...** [It's powerful] knowing there's no barrier whatsoever to do the things you want to do, [and] not having to justify it." (PARTICIPANT)

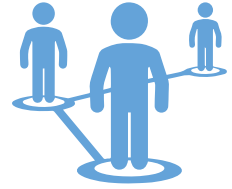
"I'm a single mum and **I'VE NEVER BEEN HAPPIER.** You can't look after anyone if you don't look after yourself." (PARTICIPANT)

<sup>8</sup> Relevant participants: n=7, n=10, n=15 and n=18 respectively

<sup>9</sup> Survey question respondents: n=20, n=20 and n=13 respectively

# GOING FORWARD

The evaluation of the PLAN project highlighted the effectiveness of the project in assisting vulnerable parents as a model for wraparound high-touch case management support. Eight recommendations emerged:



- 1 The PLAN project be continued in the Peel and Southwest region to improve the circumstances and wellbeing of parents and their children;
- 2 Recruitment methods be improved to identify vulnerable individuals who are not already linked in with services, or may not know of any support options available to them;
- 3 That men experiencing FDV as a parent be actively identified and supported as a vulnerable group;
- 4 Additional, tailored support be provided to single parents, CALD parents, Indigenous parents, parents experiencing un/underemployment, and parents experiencing housing vulnerability;
- 5 Where necessary, high-need individuals be co-case managed with other service providers and government departments;
- 6 That there be outreach to communities beyond the Mandurah, Rockingham and Kwinana local government areas, in addition to Pinjarra;
- 7 That access barriers for vulnerable parents who disengage, do not engage at all, or have not discovered the PLAN project, be addressed;
- 8 That barriers faced by enrolled participants to engage in project activities (e.g. lack of transport) be addressed.

The PLAN project evaluation shows that the project is having a positive impact on vulnerable parents and transforming families in the Peel region through an innovative service delivery model. The full report is available to be downloaded online at: <https://doi.org/10.25916/etkd-6n32>

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"It's transformative... The person I was when I came into the project is not the same as who I am now. I feel empowered – there's that inner conviction that **I'M WILLING AND DETERMINED TO WIN THE DAY.**" (PARTICIPANT)



"There was a point before when we didn't have Bridging the Gap or PLAN and I found that difficult. But now that we've got PLAN, **THINGS ARE MUCH BETTER FOR THE FAMILIES IN THIS COMMUNITY.**" (SERVICE PROVIDER)



For BTG to continue providing this vital support to vulnerable parents, urgent funding is needed. If you want to make a difference to vulnerable families in your community, contact BTG's CEO on [kary.macliver@bridgingthegap.org.au](mailto:kary.macliver@bridgingthegap.org.au) to find out how you can make a positive impact today, and for future generations to come.



Project Funded by Lotterywest

[bridgingthegap.org.au](http://bridgingthegap.org.au)