



Women's Economic Security Project



Ecstra Foundation 2023 Impact Report

CONTENTS



The workshops have helped me be able to know what to do with my money, how to save it and even plan for my future...



— **PROJECT PARTICIPANT**



Ecstra acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we live and work.

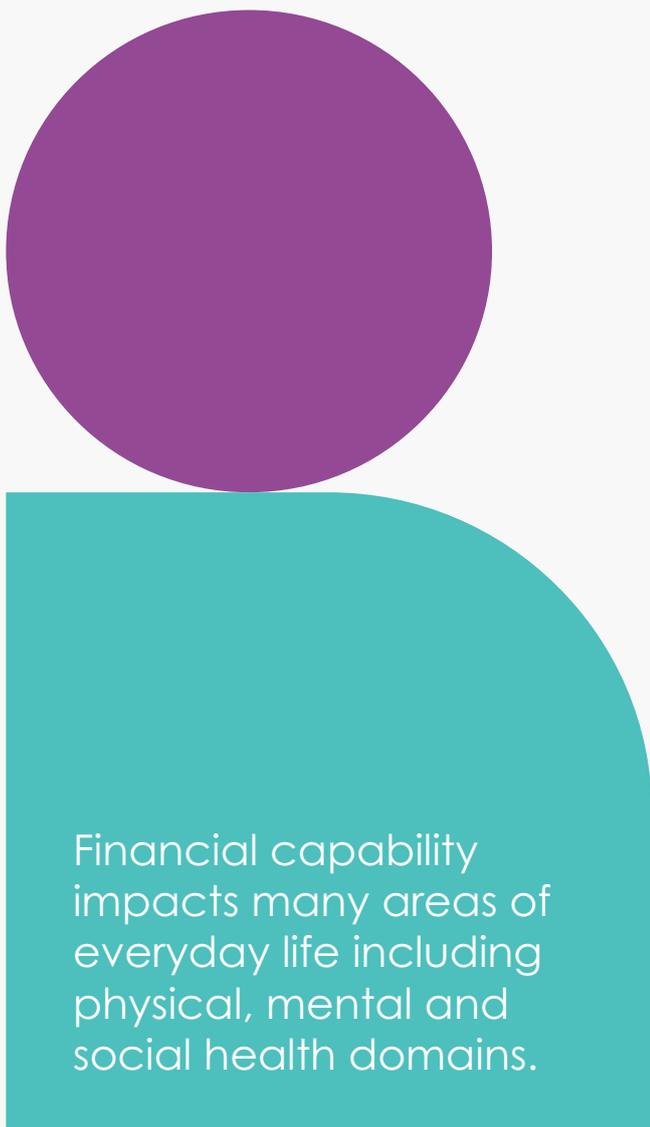
We pay respect to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the continuing connections to culture, community, land and sea of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ABOUT ECSTRA

Ecstra is a not-for-profit organisation committed to building the financial capability and wellbeing of Australians within a fair financial system.

Ecstra works to ensure that more Australians are confident making money decisions today and planning for the future.

This includes creating and supporting financial education in schools, catalysing community financial capability, funding women's economic security and consumer care initiatives, and measuring and sharing our insights.



Financial capability impacts many areas of everyday life including physical, mental and social health domains.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT

Ecstra launched the Women's Economic Security Project to address the barriers to employment, financial participation, and economic security experienced by many women and their families in Australia.

The project aims to empower women by providing them with the necessary support, skills and opportunities to help them take control of their financial futures.

Over the life of the project, Ecstra has awarded 32 grants and worked with 23 partners, with \$10 million in total committed to initiatives across Australia. This includes \$2.1 million committed through Employment and Financial Capability Grants to social enterprises and charities.

These organisations are delivering tangible employment opportunities, often as part of their integrated services. The grants have also ensured the women they work with can access tailored financial capability support when and where they need it most.

Structural barriers to progress persist. This is why the project has also funded research and initiatives to inform policy and systems responses to address the drivers of economic insecurity and exclusion.

This report shares the stories and positive outcomes delivered through the project. It highlights initiatives that address the complex issues faced by women experiencing multiple vulnerabilities.

Thank you to our many grant partners, stakeholders, reference group members and team for your significant input into the publication of this report.

It is encouraging to see increasing interest from funders, government and communities to engage in this area. Committed and sustainable funding is vital to improving economic security, contributing to a more inclusive and financially secure future for women across Australia.

OUR IMPACT

\$10m

grants committed

32

grants awarded



23

partners across
Australia

7670

women directly
supported

Our grants help build financial knowledge, confidence and skills through employment and holistic support services.



Images courtesy of MYSA, Two Good Co and Mettle Women.

Amounts may be rounded in the report. Grants were made during 2020-2023 however reporting and completion dates vary significantly.

OUR APPROACH

Our grants and activities focus on three domains - creating employment opportunities, building financial capability and increasing collaboration. These domains collectively are designed to positively improve economic inclusion and security outcomes for women.

1

CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

HOW?

- Fund organisations that create jobs and provide employment training and financial capability support for women facing barriers to employment.
- Help employment focused social enterprises and non-profit organisations with new approaches and/or scale existing models to create tangible employment outcomes and income earning opportunities.

2

BUILDING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

HOW?

- Support community-led programs to ensure more women access financial capability support at critical points. This includes capacity funding to scale successful approaches that build financial knowledge, confidence and inclusion.
- Fund advocacy and awareness campaigns, promotion of early intervention and direct support initiatives.

3

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT

HOW?

- Partner with consumer and community organisations to identify and address structural barriers to improving women's economic security.
- Invest in research, data collection, and sharing insights to help inform policy and drive systems change.

PROJECT LEARNINGS

Ecstra launched the project in 2020, and the intervening period has seen positive external policy and funding developments that seek to address issues of women's economic security and inclusion, notably:

- greater awareness of economic abuse as a subset of family and domestic violence
- elevation of the need to address the deep structural inequities facing those in the paid and unpaid caring workforce
- the Federal Women's Economic Equality Taskforce convening and publishing its final report, *Women's Economic Equality: A 10 year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy*
- a new Federal focus on "Measuring What Matters" - Australia's first national wellbeing framework, and
- an increase in state and philanthropic funding targeting inclusive employment and economic participation.

Even with these advancements, progress is often slow and there are many outstanding areas to address.

This report shares program specific data and outcomes. It also shares common themes and learnings across the overall project, including:

Embedding financial capability into existing pathways and programs

Providing financial capability workshops in work settings can help participants learn effective practical skills to apply to their own lives. Skills such as reading payslips, choosing superannuation accounts, managing debt and tax basics help develop knowledge and encourage positive money behaviours.

Removing participation barriers

People can engage when support and services are easy to access or co-located. Participation barriers often include travel costs, mobility issues, childcare, or other caring responsibilities.

Customising content to participant needs

Co-designing content informed by the diverse background, lived experience and existing knowledge of participants can lead to greater engagement. Flexible scheduling and adjusting the pace of delivery can optimise learning and completion rates. In culturally diverse communities in-language discussions are essential to ensure inclusion.

Recruiting challenges

Finding staff with financial capability expertise can be challenging. Building partner capacity through accessible resources, in-house training, and facilitation opportunities, or using qualified external facilitators can help address this barrier.

Creating safe spaces

Physical or online spaces where participants feel safe and supported to share experiences and ask questions helps create a positive learning environment. Co-locating services such as legal, financial counselling and health clinics provides comprehensive support, especially for victim survivors of economic abuse who often have intersecting issues to address.

Measuring outcomes

Collecting data and measuring impact is valuable, but can be challenging. Using an impact framework with financial capability indicators, such as Ecstra's tools, will assist the process but adjustments and flexibility may still be necessary.

Funding environment

Community partners face multiple challenges including pandemic related delays, staff shortages and the endemic structural issue of lack of secure and affordable housing available to the people they support.

Flexible and sufficient grant funding that covers the true cost of program development, delivery and evaluation is fundamental to helping initiatives succeed and be sustainable.



The pandemic magnified the pre-existing issues of economic insecurity facing many women in Australia.



1

CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Access to secure, paid employment is a key driver of financial security and wellbeing.

Ecstra is funding organisations tackling workforce participation for women facing barriers to mainstream employment, by focusing on creating training and employment opportunities and providing financial capability support.

Ecstra's Economic Security Project grant partners include micro enterprises, charities, business accelerators and social enterprises working with survivors of family violence and economic abuse, young women in regional areas, First Nations women, refugee and migrant women. These organisations are providing access to employment, training and income earning opportunities.

OUR IMPACT

\$2.1m
grants committed

10

employment focused
social enterprises
and non-profit
organisations

347

women supported
through paid
employment, training
and/or financial
capability support

266

women employed
(full time, part-time
or casual/paid work
experience)

170

women transitioned
to secure, ongoing
employment

255

women accessed
employment training
and/or financial
capability support

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES GRANT PARTNERS

Code Like a Girl

Code Like a Girl (CLAG) is an innovative social enterprise committed to increasing the representation of girls and women in technology and coding and helping to remove barriers to pursuing a STEM career.

Ecstra's grant supports women and non-binary people to enrol in CLAG's National School of Code, which includes coaching leading to opportunities for paid internships, and career pathways.

First Australians Capital - Yinaa Murrnong Ngurrumpaa (Women's Daisy Yam Project)

First Australians Capital is a national Indigenous led organisation that builds investment readiness and designs the right capital solutions for Indigenous businesses to thrive.

This project aims to reinvigorate First Nations women's agribusiness across locations in NSW, Victoria and South Australia by sharing traditional knowledge and practices around the cultivation of native grasses at scale. The project ensures that First Nations women drive the new economic opportunity and directly benefit from its growth.

Food Next Door Co-op

Food Next Door matches under-utilised farmland with newly arrived migrants and refugee farmers to support regenerative farming, growing diverse crops and engaging people from diverse backgrounds to supply food to local households.

Food Next Door Co-op uses a peer educator model and mentorship program to help refugee and migrant women in regional Victoria develop their business and financial literacy skills and have the opportunity to start a food-related micro enterprise or as a co-op employee.

Karrkad Kanjdji Trust

Karrkad Kanjdji Trust (KKT) strengthens women's employment in Indigenous land management through its remote Indigenous ranger programs in the Northern Territory.

KKT directly supports the continued employment of women rangers in West and Central Arnhem Land and their programs provide tailored financial capability support to women in Warddeken–Manmoyi.

Mettle Women

Mettle Women Inc. is a national gift delivery service, employing and training women who are experiencing homelessness as a direct result of domestic and family violence.

Their six-month paid employment program supports WA-based victim survivors into the workforce with training and wrap around holistic support.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES GRANT PARTNERS *continued*

Multicultural Youth SA

Multicultural Youth SA's (MYSA) successful social enterprise model, Miss MYSA Events, provides refugee and migrant women aged from 18 to 30 in South Australia with their first job in event planning and hospitality.

Participants develop a range of transferable work skills and access wrap-around financial capability support, including learning modules on personal finance, tax, superannuation, and budgeting.

SisterWorks Inc

SisterWorks is a social enterprise providing migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women with meaningful pathways of education, employment, entrepreneurship and leadership.

Increasing the production capacity at SisterWork's Bendigo Empowerment Hub is enabling their successful model to be scaled and replicated. This is providing more women with access to paid employment and training, as well as building their confidence, financial knowledge and sense of community.

The Difference Incubator

The Difference Incubator (TDi) provides business modelling and social impact consulting for organisations looking to make a difference for people and the planet.

TDi's Women of the World Project provides refugee and migrant women with vocational training and business and finance skills development, with pathways to business ownership.

The Social Outfit

The Social Outfit provides employment and training to people from refugee and new migrant communities via their ethical manufacturing studio and retail store.

The Thrive Through Employment program provides retail training, work-readiness, and paid employment for young refugee women from Western Sydney, as well as financial literacy workshops and access to retailers and mentors to assist with career goal setting.

Two Good Co

Two Good Co is a social enterprise providing victim survivors of domestic and family violence with meaningful employment and community connections.

The Work Work employment pathways program provides paid employment in Two Good's catering business that includes training, mentoring and wrap around financial capability support.

MISS MYSA EVENTS

Program
**Miss MYSA Events Financial Sustainability
for Young Women**

Grant funding
\$60,000

Keita* was in so much debt that she was frightened to answer her phone. Callers would demand money – but she had none.

Like many refugee and migrant women, Keita, a young mother, had never been taught how to manage finances. But after taking part in this unique South Australian program, Keita's financial literacy soared.

"It's a relief to finally not feel overwhelmed when the phone rings," she says. "I can answer now because I know my finances are good and nobody is angry with me for owing money."

CEO of MYSA Tamara Stewart-Jones says she applied for the Ecstra grant to address key challenges facing young refugee and migrant women.

"Within a lot of refugee and migrant families, the financial responsibilities are taught to, and handled by, the men of the family," Tamara says. "The knock-on effects of this situation can be that young women are in serious debt and with no idea of how to manage money."

MYSA supports the newest arrivals to Australia, which currently includes people of Afghani, Iraqi, Congolese, Liberian, Ethiopian, Sudanese, Burmese, and Nepali backgrounds.

"We support many young people who have been in refugee camps and whose education has been very disjointed," Tamara says. "They face new financial systems and they are expected to support family members in their home countries as well as their community here, which might mean working for free in a family business."



The program took 103 young women aged between 18 and 25 into their first events and hospitality job.

The program included workshops covering issues such as tax returns, superannuation, budgeting, and Centrelink entitlements. The women also learned about cash in hand work, wage theft, and who to approach about pay and conditions in a workplace.

The program also explored the women's phone apps, cancelling unwanted subscriptions, and checking if family members were hiding money in their accounts, and discussed ways to save money, such as buying products on sale, purchasing food in bulk, and accessing food banks.

[Read more about Miss MYSA.](#)

Outcomes to date include:

- **103** women provided with paid employment in MYSA catering business
- **95%** understand basic financial concepts
- **88%** are confident managing money

Since completing the program:

- **27** remain employed with MYSA
- **34** employed in aged care sector
- **18** employed in disability support sector
- **13** employed in hospitality sector

TWO GOOD CO

Program
Work Work

Grant funding
\$265,000

Two Good Co's flagship Work Work employment pathways program continues to flourish, bridging the employment gap for women facing significant barriers.

A cohort of 20 participants joined the structured training program with wraparound financial capability support. Paid employment is provided in Two Good's catering business. Participants are invited to join from partner refuges and homelessness services.

Work Work includes fortnightly workshops focused on building financial knowledge and resilience, job readiness and interview skills.

A workplace coach provides one-on-one support throughout the program and during their job search after completing the program.

Fourteen women have secured paid employment since completing the program, building their economic security and financial confidence.

Alex Nagle, Two Good Co's Social Impact Manager, says collaborating on the project with Ecstra had enabled them to empower the women they employ with the knowledge and skills required to work towards financially independent futures.



You're advocating, you're learning, you're meeting new people. Learning to work again, learning to have a boss again.



— WORK WORK PARTICIPANT



"TWO GOOD TAUGHT ME THAT I MATTER"

xx JEN

Outcomes to date include:

- **20** women employed 15-30 hours per week
- **14** women secured ongoing employment in hospitality
- **12** women completed financial literacy training

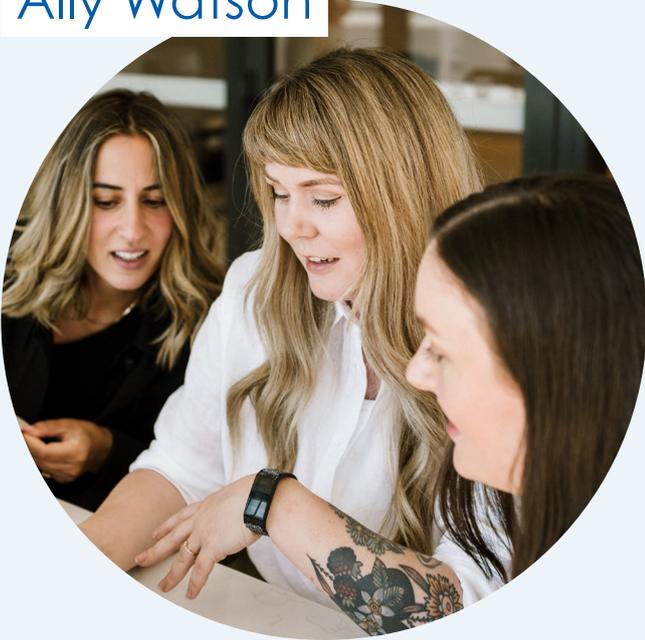
Participants reported:

- **100%** believe appropriate information and training is available to them
- **100%** know where to seek information and guidance on their financial situation
- **85%** now seek guidance when making financial product choices



CHANGE-MAKER

Ally Watson



Helping women build careers in tech

'You can't be what you can't see' is seen by some as an overused catchphrase – but it's never truer than for women in technology.

Despite significant strides in gender equality and inclusivity, a noticeable gap still exists in the sector, with women underrepresented in many technical roles, including software engineering, coding, and programming.

Ally Watson, the founder of Australian social enterprise Code Like a Girl, is a graduate from Glasgow University and excelled in her work as a backend developer but often found herself to be the only or first woman in her workplace.

"I ended up in this industry in a roundabout way," Ally says. "I'd initially wanted to go to art school, but I didn't get in, so computer science and software engineering were my back-up plan - and I found I loved it. As a child of a single mother, and from a low socio-economic background, I couldn't believe that I could earn such good money."

After moving to Australia from Scotland, she organised an event for women in tech, which

evolved into Code Like a Girl, now a social enterprise which is focused on encouraging and supporting more women to pursue careers in the industry.

Code Like a Girl takes a comprehensive approach to bridge the gender gap, training women and non-binary people and connecting them with employers who value diversity and inclusion. Overall, the organisation has placed more than 150 women into paid employment in the field.

In 2021, Ecstra's open grant round provided \$300,000 to Code Like Girl, supporting them to bridge a crucial gap in their School of Code curriculums. The funds were also used to support 30 women from disadvantaged backgrounds to enrol in the newly completed courses, which provided learnings and career support to help participants acquire technical and business skills needed to launch a career in web development and tech.

The program concluded with many of the students applying for paid internships and seeking freelance opportunities.

"The grant also allowed us to help women gain economic security," Ally says. "Every woman has the right to financial independence and employability, and we have now been able to give those 30 women an edge and have their CVs really stand out."

More than 90 per cent of the participants agreed they had a better understanding of the types of tech careers and roles as a result of being part of the program, while all believed they better understood the skills and aptitude required to gain employment in technology.

“
The best thing I learnt from
Code Like a Girl is that
anything is learnable.

— CLAG PARTICIPANT

2

BUILDING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

Ecstra works with community organisations that provide crucial frontline services and financial capability support to women, when and where they need it.

Many of the grants extend over several years, and include initiatives that help migrant and refugee women to make more informed financial decisions, to build their knowledge, skills and confidence.

The grants also support organisations working to address economic abuse by providing direct services to victim survivors, wraparound financial capability supports and co-location of services.

Our funding also supports advocacy for structural and systems change, working with stakeholders across all sectors to improve women's economic security.

OUR IMPACT

\$5m

grants committed

11

grants awarded



10

multi-year grants
awarded

7670

women directly
supported



FINANCIAL CAPABILITY GRANT PARTNERS

Global Sisters

Global Sisters exists to make business possible for women nationwide. They seek to unlock women's potential and support them to overcome barriers to create their own micro business and improve their long term economic security.

Back Her Brilliance provides a roadmap of long term business education, incubation and acceleration support that guides women on their micro business journey. This includes building financial capability through business education courses, expert coaching, microfinance and marketing support.

Women's Health in the North

Women's Health In the North (WHIN) is a Victorian organisation working to eliminate gender inequities and improve outcomes in women's health, safety and wellbeing.

WHIN's award-winning Let's Talk Money financial literacy program uses a bilingual, peer educator/trainer approach. WHIN recruits, employs, and improves the skills of women from diverse cultural backgrounds to deliver practical, tailored money management workshops to women in their own language and community. The program promotes women's decision making and independence.

The Reach Foundation

Reach was founded in 1994 with a vision to inspire young people to believe in themselves and get the most out of life. Now connecting with 40,000 young Australians every year, Reach teaches the skills to navigate life's challenges and aims to create confident and self-aware young people.

Glassbreaker is Reach's pilot financial education program for early career women, supporting them to take control of their financial lives through workshops, access to financial literacy resources, and membership of an online community.

MoneyGirl

MoneyGirl is a financial literacy social enterprise offering courses to give people the confidence and skills to deal with their finances.

With Ecstra's support, the team at MoneyGirl provided the 'First Six Steps to Financial Independence' course free for 100 women from diverse backgrounds who face financial barriers to work and study.

FINANCIAL CAPABILITY GRANT PARTNERS *continued*

Westjustice

Westjustice is a community organisation that provides free legal help in the western suburbs of Melbourne, including on consumer disputes, debt, fines, family law and family violence. They provide free community legal education and undertake law reform activities.

Westjustice's Restoring Financial Safety project is an integrated multi-disciplinary services partnership between Westjustice and McAuley Community Services. The growing service provides legal advice, financial counselling, support, and advocacy for women who have experienced economic and other forms of family and domestic abuse.

Redfern Legal Centre

RLC established the Financial Abuse Service NSW, Australia's first state-wide service dedicated to addressing the interconnected legal issues at the heart of financial abuse.

RLC trains and supervises volunteer solicitors to provide free legal advice and support to people in financial distress. The service mainly assists people with debts accrued through coercion or fraud and family law property settlement.

RLC is an active advocate for policy and law reform to improve outcomes for consumers experiencing family and domestic violence, including the areas of coercive control and financial abuse.

Centre for Women's Economic Safety

Centre for Women's Economic Safety (CWES) raises awareness of economic abuse, advocates for structural and systems change to support women's economic safety and provides crucial support to victim survivors of economic abuse.

CWES's Money Clinics provide independent, factual financial information in a session with a qualified, female, financial specialist who is violence and trauma-informed.

Addressing economic abuse

Our building financial capability grants includes funding for frontline organisations raising awareness of, and addressing issues of economic abuse.

REDFERN LEGAL CENTRE

Program
Financial Abuse Service NSW

Grant funding
\$1.6million

Redfern Legal Centre's Financial Abuse Service NSW is supporting victim survivors of financial abuse through an innovative state-wide service.

Ecstra and RLC's partnership over four years supports their sector leading policy and community education work, integrated with frontline legal advice services.

The centre advocates for policy and law reform to improve outcomes for victim survivors and guides government and industry responses to family and domestic violence, contributing expertise to state and national advisory groups, roundtables, and panels.

RLC also brings together more than 50 organisations through its coordination of the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG), to share their work and collaborate across sectors and states.

In the two years to 30 June 2023 RLC's Financial Abuse Service NSW:

- assisted **485** clients¹
- helped get debts and fines waived for clients totalling **\$411,778**
- **57%** of clients said RLC's help had improved their financial situation
- **45%** reported an improvement in their family wellbeing
- **79%** reported an improved sense of control over their own lives

Financial abuse is a form of family and domestic violence, where money is used as a form of power or control. Financial abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, income or financial capability.

- Redfern Legal Centre

¹ Some clients may be counted twice depending on timing and interaction with RLC on new or existing matters over multiple reporting periods.

WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE NORTH

Program
Let's Talk Money

Grant funding
\$650,000

Ecstra's grant supports the extension and scaling of WHIN's award-winning Let's Talk Money program.

The successful financial literacy and capability building program aims to support the economic empowerment of migrant and refugee women using a tailored, bilingual peer education model.

Seven peer educators from diverse cultural backgrounds have now been employed and trained to deliver workshops in more than 14 languages to over 500 participants. The long-term aim is to share outcomes and replicate the approach in other communities.

The peer educators come from Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Indian, Tamil and Greek cultural backgrounds. They speak Mandarin, Vietnamese, Turkish, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Arabic, and Greek.

Focus group feedback shows that the program increases knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and helps participants develop positive financial behaviours.

Many women reported taking steps to reduce their debt, increase their savings and make better financial decisions. Many had applied their new knowledge and skills in their daily lives and said that the program helped them to understand complex financial concepts in simple terms.



After completing the program:

- **86%** of participants believe appropriate information and training was available to them
- **83%** know where to seek information and guidance on their financial situation
- **98%** report confidence in planning their finances
- **100%** report a good understanding of laws to protect basic consumer rights

“

I am now aware about my legal and financial responsibility when signing as a guarantor or co-borrower.

“

I should not click on any links if a call comes from ATO saying crime is registered against you or giving bank details.

”

— LET'S TALK MONEY PARTICIPANTS

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SAFETY

Program
Money Clinics

Grant funding
\$400,000

Rebecca Glenn founded the Centre for Women's Economic Safety (CWES) to raise awareness of economic abuse as a form of domestic and family violence and advocate for structural and systems change to support women's economic safety.

This service addresses an important gap in the support available to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and assists women, non-binary and gender diverse people who have experienced abuse from an intimate partner or family members.

Money Clinics provide independent, factual financial information in a one-on-one session with a qualified, female, financial specialist who is violence and trauma-informed. The clinics are available in person and online.

Outcomes to date include:

- **175** women assisted

Participants reported:

- **65%** improved understanding of where to access advice and support about money
- **61%** improved confidence in managing money
- **61%** improved willingness to seek information and advice

WESTJUSTICE

Program
**Restoring
Financial Safety**

Grant funding
\$700,000

Westjustice's Restoring Financial Safety project is an integrated multi-disciplinary services partnership between Westjustice and McAuley Community Services.

The service provides legal advice, financial counselling, support, and advocacy for women who have experienced economic abuse. Relying on the evidence from their casework, the project has significantly transformed industry and government responses to economic abuse, and consolidated knowledge about the benefits of multidisciplinary service models in the family violence space. The project is scaling and expanding with Ecstra's support.

Outcomes to date include:

- **117** women assisted
- **49** positive legal outcomes achieved
- **59** clients' financial position positively influenced by a total of \$170,198
- **15** women assisted to leave an inappropriate financial service or contract
- **5** organisations redesign systems, products or programs in response to WestJustice feedback
- **\$292,000** family violence related debt waived
- **\$99,000** compensation gained for victim-survivors

3

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT

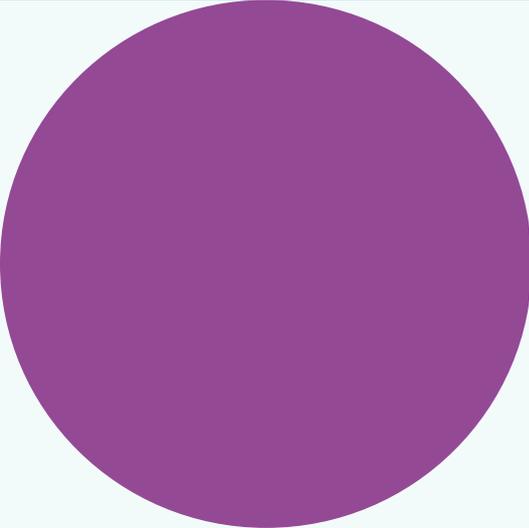
Ecstra partners with organisations working to address the persistent barriers to economic security and inclusion experienced by women and their families.

We fund initiatives focused on advocacy and regulatory reform including research, data and initiatives that support greater collaboration and sharing of insights and outcomes to influence systems change.

OUR IMPACT

\$2m
grants committed

8
grants awarded



10
publications
on gender
and economic
security issues

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT GRANT PARTNERS

ACOSS

Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)'s Gender, Economic Resilience and Employment Project focuses on improving understanding of the impact of poverty, financial exclusion, and economic inequality on women.

The project aims to improve the employment and economic prospects of women, young people and older workers, and to ensure equitable policy responses to the ongoing cost of living pressures and the continued impact of the pandemic.

Grattan Institute

Grattan authored the *Women's Work—The impact of the COVID crisis on Australian Women* report on the gendered impacts of the COVID recession, including on income and women's economic security.

The report makes the case for rewriting the economic playbook to ensure that women are not left behind, including targeted stimulus to female dominated sectors, long term investments in childcare and a focus on the care economy. Grattan has also published a series of reports on gender equity issues.

Financy

The quarterly Financy Women's Index (FWX) measures and tracks financial progress and economic equality across seven key areas including employment and superannuation. The FWX increases gender equality awareness and highlights the importance of gender-lens data in understanding and addressing gendered economic inequality.

Modelling for the FWX is produced in partnership with Deloitte Access Economics, with data provided with the support of the HILDA Survey/Melbourne University and the ABS.

Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG)

EARG shares information to help industry, government, peak bodies and community to identify and respond to economic abuse.

Women's Legal Service Victoria led the formation of the National EARG, which is transitioning to Redfern Legal Centre. The EARG currently works with 50 members and industry to identify economic abuse issues and potential responses and produces reports and research to influence systems change reforms.

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT GRANT PARTNERS *continued*

Financial Counselling Foundation

Financial Counselling Foundation provides funding support to multidisciplinary domestic and family violence services co-located within other services, including community legal services. The recent evaluation supported by Ecstra will contribute to informing policy development and help promote greater collaboration between specialist organisations working in the sector.

WIRE

Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) provides free support, referral and information for all Victorian women and gender-diverse people. WIRE is producing a practice guide for financial service providers, utilities, and consumer organisations to adopt an intersectional lens and inclusive practices in their service design and delivery.

This project aims to counter systemic discrimination and improve financial equity for women, non-binary, and gender diverse people through improved access to appropriately designed financial and consumer services, information, and products.

Global Sisters

Global Sisters exists to make business possible for women nationwide. They seek to unlock women's potential and support them to overcome barriers to create their own micro business and improve their long term economic security.

Global Sisters is co-designing and facilitating access to a suite of custom financial products for women led micro businesses. The project seeks to address the barriers female small business owners often face accessing appropriate and cost effective financial products. This grant builds on the existing multi-year partnership with Ecstra, supporting the Back Her Brilliance suite of programs (see page 15 of this report).

ECONOMIC ABUSE REFERENCE GROUP (EARG)

Program
**Economic Abuse
Reference Group
(EARG)**

Grant funding
\$470,000

EARG shares information to help industry, government, peak bodies and communities to identify and respond to economic abuse.

The EARG works with 50 members and industry to identify economic abuse issues, potential responses and produces reports and research to influence systems change reforms.

Ecstra funds the NSW and Victorian EARGs to lead the coordination of networks sharing policy and practice approaches to addressing economic abuse. The EARGs aim to build a national coalition in all states and territories, now led by Redfern Legal Centre.

EARG survey respondents report:

- **100%** say EARG membership helped increase knowledge, enabling them to better assist clients experiencing economic abuse
- **88%** say the EARG helped improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their organisations' policy input on systemic economic abuse issues
- **100%** say the EARG's input had improved responses by business, government and regulators
- **100%** say the EARG had helped their organisation better collaborate and share knowledge and other experiences with people from other organisations.

ACOSS

Program
**Gender, economic
resilience and
employment project**

Grant funding
\$500,000

ACOSS' Gender, economic resilience and employment project draws on the collective influence of the social sector and expertise of people with lived experience to understand the impact of poverty and financial exclusion.

Ecstra's initial grant during the Response and recovery grant round supported ACOSS' focus on the ongoing cost of living pressures, financial disadvantage and the continued impact of the pandemic.

This has expanded to provide multi-year support for ACOSS' sector leading policy development work directed to improving



Further changes are needed to improve women's economic security across the life course, particularly for low-income women. Women over 55 are also the fastest growing group who are long term unemployed.

— ACOSS



employment opportunities and participation, female economic security and addressing employment services design. This in turn helps inform Ecstra's approaches and understanding of the macro and community level issues that matter to organisations and individuals working to address disadvantage.

CHANGE-MAKER

Carolyn Bond



Four decades of fighting for consumer rights

It was 1978, and bank clerk Carolyn Bond believed she and her housemates deserved their security payment back at the end of their lease.

The landlord disagreed, arguing the walls of the Melbourne flat needed repainting.

“But the marks were just normal wear and tear, so I decided to fight it,” Carolyn recalls. “I was willing to go to court to get back our \$200. In the end, we did get it back. I think they grew sick of all my letters.”

The battle marked the start of Carolyn’s passion for consumer rights, and she soon began volunteering at the Tenants’ Union.

“It was a very different era – our tenancy laws dated back to feudal times and there were few professional financial counsellors who could give advice,” Carolyn said. “Through the volunteering, I soon found myself working with lawyers and on one occasion even served a summons. It was a very exciting time to be involved in helping people fight for their rights.”

Within a couple of years, along with lawyer Denis Nelthorpe (whom she would later marry), Carolyn was part of the group that set up the Consumer Credit Legal Service in inner Melbourne. Carolyn later led the service, and then became joint CEO of the newly formed Consumer Action Law Centre.

For the past seven years, Carolyn has been Project Manager of the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG), which was established in 2016 by several community organisations that wanted to play a part in implementing the financial security recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.



Since then, we’ve been working together to advise businesses and governments how they can change their systems to help customers in financial abusive situations, Carolyn says.



Carolyn considers her work with EARG as among the most important of her career of more than four decades.

She says more than 600,000 Australians (mainly women) experienced financial abuse in 2020 (according to *The cost of financial abuse in Australia* report).

“When I started in this role at EARG, I knew a lot about banking, insurance, and debt but not much about family violence or financial abuse. In the past, we used the term ‘sexually transmitted debt’, but even then, we didn’t really see that as part of family violence or abuse,” Carolyn says. “That has changed now, and we understand that financial abuse is definitely a form of family violence - and it’s a huge issue.”

She said her background in advocating for consumers rights was helpful when coming into the EARG role.

“I can remember a time when banks, insurance companies, and others would not even meet with consumer representatives, but they now take us more seriously,” she says.

Since the Victorian Royal Commission, there have been significant improvements in the way that many businesses, and some sections of government, respond to customers experiencing family violence. Carolyn said EARG was proud to have had input into most of these reforms, including:

Banking: The Australian Banking Association has produced and updated an industry guideline on responding to family violence and referred to it in the Banking Code of Practice.

Insurance: The Insurance Council of Australia developed a guide to helping affected customers and continues to engage with EARG on more complex issues.

Toll roads: Transurban (which has roads in eastern states) now has measures to respond to customers experiencing financial abuse by incurring charges and locking online accounts.

Telecommunications: The industry has produced guidance including staff training and customer safety to assist customers affected by domestic and family violence.

Fines Victoria: Survivors can apply to Fines Victoria to have fines withdrawn if family violence substantially contributed to the offence.

VicRoads: Introduced contact point and processes (including training of staff) to respond to customers experiencing family violence and requiring assistance from VicRoads.



While we have come a long way, there is plenty left to do, Carolyn says.

“We need to ensure the approaches are embedded in businesses and there is ongoing training of staff and reviewing of processes,” she says. “There are also new issues that come to our attention, such as people being company directors due to fraud or coercion - but we are very proud that EARG has played such a significant role so far.”

Carolyn is now preparing to leave EARG and retire – although she will continue with her board and advisory roles across the sector.

While EARG started in Victoria, Carolyn built a relationship with Redfern Legal Centre which then used the EARG name in New South Wales. In recent years, they have worked in partnership to build a national EARG network.

As Ecstra also funds Redfern Legal Centre in NSW, Redfern will continue the national co-ordination role.

“I think it will be quite a seamless move and community agencies will continue to have a forum where they can raise concerns they are seeing in their casework and have that taken direct to business and regulators,” she says.



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