



SUBMISSION · JUNE 2026

Submission to the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children

Submitted by

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About GOGO Foundation

GOGO Foundation is a South Australian charity established in 2017. Our core program, the Inclusive Work Program (IWP), is a 9-week trauma-informed, place-based prevocational program for women with complex, intersecting barriers to employment. IWP Plus provides additional ongoing relational mentoring, advocacy and barrier removal after program completion, continuing until each woman's life stabilises and she moves into safe, sustainable employment on her own terms.

Since 2021, we have supported 148 women.

72%

survivors of family, domestic & sexual violence

39%

involved with the child protection system

63%

long-term unemployed (over 5 years)

18%

identify as First Nations

19%

English as a second language

GOGO Foundation made two written submissions to the South Australian Royal Commission into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (August and September 2024), and gave evidence to the enquiry. Our work is referenced in the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Report (August 2025, Chapter 6, *Meeting the needs of victim-survivors*, page 501).

This federal submission draws on that evidence, on our own outcomes data, and on the voices of the women we work with, who have generously shared their experiences so that systems can be built that work better for others.

OUR OUTCOMES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

51% of IWP graduates are in employment or career-focused study within 6 months — against a national Workforce Australia benchmark of just **11.7%** for the same cohort.

We offer this submission not as observers of the problem but as practitioners and people with lived experience who have co-created something that works — and who believe the Second Action Plan is an opportunity to make that work available to far more women.

PRIORITY AREA 1

Victim-Survivors

The gap between crisis response and recovery is where women are lost.

By the time a woman walks through the doors of GOGO Foundation she has not only survived trauma — she has survived a complicated, often retraumatising system. She has told her story over and over to services that didn't believe her, didn't act, or simply ran out of funding. As one of our graduates, Michelle, described it:

“ 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 retraumatising yourself over and over again.

— MICHELLE

And when systems fail repeatedly, women stop expecting anything different:

“ *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.* ”

— MICHELLE D

The universal needs we have identified across 147 women are not complicated: kindness, respect, trust, and a listening ear that results in action. What is complicated is that almost no service is funded to provide these things consistently, over time, without a clock ticking, an imminent exit or completion date.

Women experiencing violence from family members are falling through the cracks entirely.

Our Royal Commission submissions highlighted a community of women that policy and services are largely invisible to: women experiencing violence perpetrated not by intimate partners but by family members — brothers, fathers, sons, mothers, sisters, daughters. While it is still gendered violence, the support systems that exist are designed primarily for intimate partner violence. These women are ineligible for many services, unseen in much of the data, and have literally nowhere to go. This keeps them in a cycle of trauma and chaos that can last decades.

We shared the example in our Royal Commission submission of a woman referred to us by a job provider because she was unemployed and had never worked. She was 48 years old. On day three of our program, she arrived carrying all her most important possessions and her 14-year-old daughter — she had seized the opportunity of coming to GOGO to finally escape an unsafe home. She had children removed by the Department for Child Protection over the years. She had an unsafe childhood. She was 48 years old, and this was the first time anyone had sat with her and helped her find a way out. 48 years is a very long time to wait for the love and care she deserved.

This is not an outlier. This is a pattern. The Second Action Plan must explicitly address the needs of women experiencing family violence that does not fit the intimate partner violence framework.

What makes the biggest difference.

In our experience, the recovery journey for women who have experienced family domestic sexual violence (FDSV) follows a sequence that should never be shortcut:

- 1 Safety.** Women need to know they are safe, and that their children, immediate family, extended family and pets are safe. Nothing else is possible until this is established.
- 2 Emotional & physical health.** Kindness, dignity, respect. Continuity of mental health and wellbeing support — not a referral to a phone line, but a real relationship with a person who does not disappear when a funding period ends.
- 3 Confidence, agency, voice.** The capacity to advocate for themselves, understand their rights and that social systems are there to serve them. An understanding of her resilience and strengths, then time in safety and wellness to imagine a safe and stable future.
- 4 Economic inclusion.** Employment, study, participation. The financial independence that breaks the poverty trap and makes it genuinely possible to stay safe.

The mainstream system — including employment services — tries to start at step four without steps one through three. It doesn't work. Our model starts at step one and moves through the sequence at the pace each woman needs.

How violence actually shows up – and why the mainstream system cannot see it.

For the women GOGO supports, long-term unemployment is not a labour market problem. It is a trauma response. Understanding this is the prerequisite for any service response that actually works.

The women we work with carry histories that include domestic and family violence including coercive control, financial abuse, and custody disputes; childhood abuse, neglect including medical neglect, and trauma; having been removed from their families as children; disrupted and limited education; sexual trauma; exposure to suicide among family and friends; complex grief from the loss of parents, children, and loved ones; substance abuse or exposure to it; current unsafe housing including living with an abuser or in a domestic violence shelter; incarceration; intergenerational trauma; and the chronic physiological state of fear, hypervigilance, and stress that these experiences produce.

These are not background factors. They are present, active conditions that shape every moment of a woman's day — including, and especially, her capacity to engage with work, training, or services. This is what it looks like in practice, and what employment services are not equipped to recognise or respond to:

- **Survival mode.** The persistent fight/flight/freeze state makes it genuinely difficult to concentrate, plan, or complete tasks — not because a woman is unmotivated, but because her nervous system is managing a survival load that leaves little capacity for anything else.
- **Hypervigilance to authority.** Heightened sensitivity to authority, criticism, or workplace dynamics — a consequence of coercive control — can appear as reactive, defensive or difficult behaviour. It is neither. It is a learned protective response to environments where authority meant danger.
- **Eroded trust.** Trust issues developed through years of being let down by parents, partners, services and systems mean engaging with employers, teams or support workers is genuinely threatening. The reluctance is rational, not obstructive.
- **Inconsistent attendance.** Emotional overwhelm produces inconsistent attendance and sudden disengagement — the very things that trigger penalties under mutual-obligations frameworks, and that get women labelled non-compliant by the system designed to help them.
- **Safety comes first.** Safety concerns override all other priorities. When a woman does not know if she will be safe tonight, work is not her priority. This is not a character failing — it is the correct response to her circumstances.
- **Cognitive fatigue.** Cognitive fatigue from chronic stress reduces the ability to retain information, follow instructions, or manage workload. Women who present this way are often assessed as low capacity. They are not. They are exhausted from surviving.

The mainstream employment services system was designed for people whose primary barrier to work is a skills gap or a job-market mismatch. It was not designed to address the impacts of trauma, domestic violence, social isolation, and chronic disadvantage. GOGO's IWP and IWP Plus were designed, by women with lived experience, to respond to exactly this.

WHAT THE SECOND ACTION PLAN SHOULD PRIORITISE · VICTIM-SURVIVORS

- Long-term, adequately funded recovery pathways that span the full journey from crisis to economic inclusion.
- Continuity of mental health and counselling support — a woman should not lose her counsellor because she has left crisis accommodation.
- Trauma-informed practice as a mandatory standard across all services that interact with victim-survivors — employment services, housing, income support, and child protection.
- Explicit recognition of women who are, or have, experienced family violence from non-intimate-partner perpetrators as a distinct and underserved cohort.

PRIORITY AREA 2

Prevention & Early Intervention

Economic independence is both a prevention strategy and a recovery tool.

Women who are economically dependent are less able to leave violent relationships and more likely to return to them — not because they want to, but because the alternative is poverty, homelessness, and the loss of everything. This impossible decision is highlighted in *The Choice: Violence or Poverty* (Anne Summers AO PhD, July 2022). Economic inclusion is therefore not only a recovery outcome. It is a protective factor. The Second Action Plan should name it as such.

GOGO's model demonstrates this directly. When women rebuild safety, wellbeing, confidence, skills, social connection and economic identity, they become more resilient — not just to unemployment, but to the conditions of vulnerability that violence exploits.

71%

report increased social connection at program completion

81%

report increased confidence in getting a job

70%

report increased personal wellbeing

Social connection is protective. Isolation is one of the primary mechanisms through which coercive control operates. Our graduate Crystal described what this looks like in practice:

“ Keeping me involved in the IWP has given me such an inner and career boost. After the work immersion day last week, I arrived at work to emails from both the CEO and General Manager. To be noticed by the top executives is pretty huge for me. The chance to give back to the program is a real life example of how one good deed leads to another, and I'm so proud to share my story.

— CRYSTAL

This is prevention. A woman with a job she is proud of, a professional network, and a sense of her own capability is harder to isolate and control.

Technology-facilitated abuse is an emerging and underaddressed barrier.

Women experiencing stalking, image-based abuse, and online harassment face very real barriers to applying for jobs, maintaining a professional presence, and engaging in online training. The intersection of technology-facilitated abuse and economic participation is not currently addressed in service responses. The Second Action Plan should include specific guidance on this.

Examples experienced by participants at GOGO include being hacked and electronically stalked; hidden video camera recording and surveillance; hacking of email and social media accounts; fear of phones being encrypted; listening devices; and partners taking phones and not allowing them to have phones.

WHAT THE SECOND ACTION PLAN SHOULD PRIORITISE · PREVENTION & EARLY INTERVENTION

- Name economic independence as a primary prevention strategy, not only a recovery outcome.
- Fund specific, accessible support for women whose path to economic participation is blocked by the lasting effects of coercive control — so that poverty is never the reason a woman stays or returns.
- Explicitly address technology-facilitated abuse as a barrier to wellbeing, safety and economic participation.

PRIORITY AREA 3

Children & Young People in Their Own Right

The women GOGO supports are often the children the system failed.

39% of GOGO's IWP participants have past or current involvement with the Department for Child Protection. Many grew up in households shaped by violence. The intergenerational nature of what we see every day is shocking. The 48-year-old woman described above had had children removed by DCP over the years — and yet had never received adequate support herself. The system intervened in her family repeatedly without ever intervening in her life.

Investment in women's recovery is investment in children's futures. Services that support mothers are services that support children. The Second Action Plan must ensure these are not treated as separate systems.

Children need their mothers to be safe, emotionally and economically stable, and supported. Programs like IWP and IWP Plus — which stabilise women's lives, build their confidence, and connect them to economic participation — are some of the most powerful child protection interventions available. They should be funded as such.

WHAT THE SECOND ACTION PLAN SHOULD PRIORITISE · CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

- Treat mothers' recovery and children's safety as one issue, not separate issues in separate systems.
- Fund the economic inclusion of mothers as a powerful child protection intervention.

PRIORITY AREA 4

People Who Use Violence

We have no specific expertise to share under this area.

PRIORITY AREA 5

System Integration & Workforce

The most urgent integration need is the connection between FDSV and employment services.

These two systems operate in almost complete separation — despite the fact that, for the women we support, the pathway out of violence runs directly through the pathway into economic participation. This is evidenced by Workforce Australia agencies being the largest referrer of women to GOGO Foundation.

One of the key criteria for eligibility for IWP and IWP Plus is a desire to work, as a means to achieve financial independence. Other referral partners include Women's Safety Services, Migrant Women's Safety Services, Aboriginal Women's safety services, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Child Protection, neighbours, family members, Mob, social service providers including drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, and Corrections and offender rehabilitation services.

The federal government's employment services reform is the most significant structural opportunity in a decade to address this. Stream 3 Intensive Services is explicitly designed for people furthest from the labour market and calls for delivery by community organisations with trauma-informed capability and strong local presence. GOGO Foundation is one of those organisations.

First we earn women's trust, through a non-disciplinary approach to attendance and engagement. We lead them with kindness, not punish them for non-conformity. We create a genuine connection where they feel safe and heard and respected, and then, and only then, do we ask for vulnerability and insight into their most challenging barriers. By doing this we preserve their dignity. We then work together, alongside women, to address and remove barriers while building agency and confidence, and reducing overwhelm, embarrassment and shame.

We work with a multitude of other specialist services, but we do not refer women to other services. We connect them, we attend appointments, sit alongside them, help them articulate their needs, help them understand their rights and responsibilities, and demonstrate working toward successful interactions and outcomes. We remain until women have built their capacity to self-advocate. This distinction matters enormously. A referral to a phone number is not support.

“ I wanna thank you and Sarah for loving me, supporting me through my dark time, believing in me when I couldn't, and showing me what I am capable of achieving. Thank you for teaching me how to love myself.

— NICOLE

“ Thank you for giving me hope in my life again.

— BETH, EARLY IN HER PROGRAM

This is what system integration looks like from the inside. It is not a coordination framework or a referral pathway. It is a person who shows up.

WHAT THE SECOND ACTION PLAN SHOULD PRIORITISE · SYSTEM INTEGRATION & WORKFORCE

Embed FDSV-responsive, trauma-informed support within Stream 3 Intensive Services. Specifically:

- 1 Direct commissioning of specialist community organisations.** Organisations like GOGO have proven models that work for the women they serve. Engage us, and organisations like us, directly as Stream 3 delivery providers.
- 2 Apply specialist community organisation models.** If larger national providers are required for scale, engage community organisations through alternative mechanisms (sub-contracts, franchising, advisory) so they can deliver the full range of services and advisory required for whole-of-person outcomes.
- 3 Fund the full recovery-to-employment model.** Recovery and healing, modern work skills, workplace rights and responsibilities, VET support, job securing, post-placement mentoring, and ongoing advocacy to protect job retention. The system funds job placement — not the conditions that make placement possible or sustainable.
- 4 Trauma-informed practice as a workforce requirement.** All workers in services interacting with victim-survivors, including employment services, are educated in trauma-informed responses and resourced to support clients well.

- 5 Continuity of care across service transitions.** Women must not lose their trusted support person when they move between crisis, housing and employment services. GOGO's model of continuous relational support until it is no longer needed is the standard the system should work toward.
- 6 Outcome measurement that reflects recovery.** Measure sustained employment (a job that fits needs, preferences and caring responsibilities), wellbeing, housing stability, social inclusion, and progress in further study toward a career goal.

OTHER AREAS OF ACTION

Economic abuse must be explicitly named and resourced.

Economic abuse — the control, sabotage and exploitation of a woman's economic resources, opportunities and participation — is one of the most effective tools of coercive control and one of the most persistent barriers to recovery.

Women arrive at GOGO with no, or very disrupted, work history; mostly in financial stress and reliant on Centrelink payments; with little experience of managing their own finances beyond fortnightly budgets; several with destroyed credit histories; debt in their names they either did or did not personally accrue; many having experienced abuse of the parenting payment system; many having had to hide or surrender their money.

These are not individual failings. They can be the direct consequences of violence. GOGO regularly uses its own limited discretionary funds to cover the cost of identity documents, certifications, and basic living needs that economic abuse has stripped from women — where the Employment Fund provided to Workforce Australia from DEWR is unavailable, does not comply, or women are ineligible. We have had to fundraise to cover these costs. This is not sustainable, and an inappropriate gap for a small charity to fill.

The Second Action Plan should include a specific focus on economic abuse — recognition, documentation in service data, and the development of specific, funded service responses that address its distinctive and lasting impacts. The Action Plan should also support the parenting payment reforms legislation proposed by Single Parent Families Australia (SPFA).

The voices of women with lived experience must shape the Second Action Plan itself.

Our South Australian Royal Commission submissions were prepared with a focus group of IWP and IWP Plus graduates — women who have lived these experiences and chosen to share them to improve systems and services. Their voices are in this submission. They should be in the design of the Second Action Plan, and in its implementation, evaluation, and review.

“*What helped me was someone in my organisation having personal experience with DV who recognised when I was experiencing it, and then encouraged me to seek support and gave me the confidence to speak to authority about it. If that person had not had lived experience they may not have recognised the signs or known what to do.*

— GOGO STAFF MEMBER

GOGO Foundation approached two of our graduates with significant experience of FDSV to apply for the lived experience reference group for this Second Action Plan, but the time-limiting factor of the 24 June deadline was insufficient for us to support the women to apply. The application itself needed time and support to complete. It needed to be simpler and with a longer time frame to get the real voices of lived experience to respond. These women needed services like GOGO to provide time to sit and support a response. The design, implementation, evaluation, and review of the Second Action Plan should be shaped by lived experience voices, and adequate timelines and support should be provided to ensure women with significant barriers have the opportunity to contribute.

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.

— ALYSSA

Thank you. I am good now. Please share what you do with others who so need your love and care.

— LISA

GOGO Foundation thanks the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to contribute to the Second Action Plan. We are available for further conversation, to provide additional data, or to participate in targeted stakeholder engagement. Our Royal Commission submissions are available on request.

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