



MACQUARIE  
University



Grace Papers

# Dismantling the Parental Wall

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Research into the impact of The Grace Papers Empowerment Model*



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# 2020





## About Grace Papers —

We're for equality.

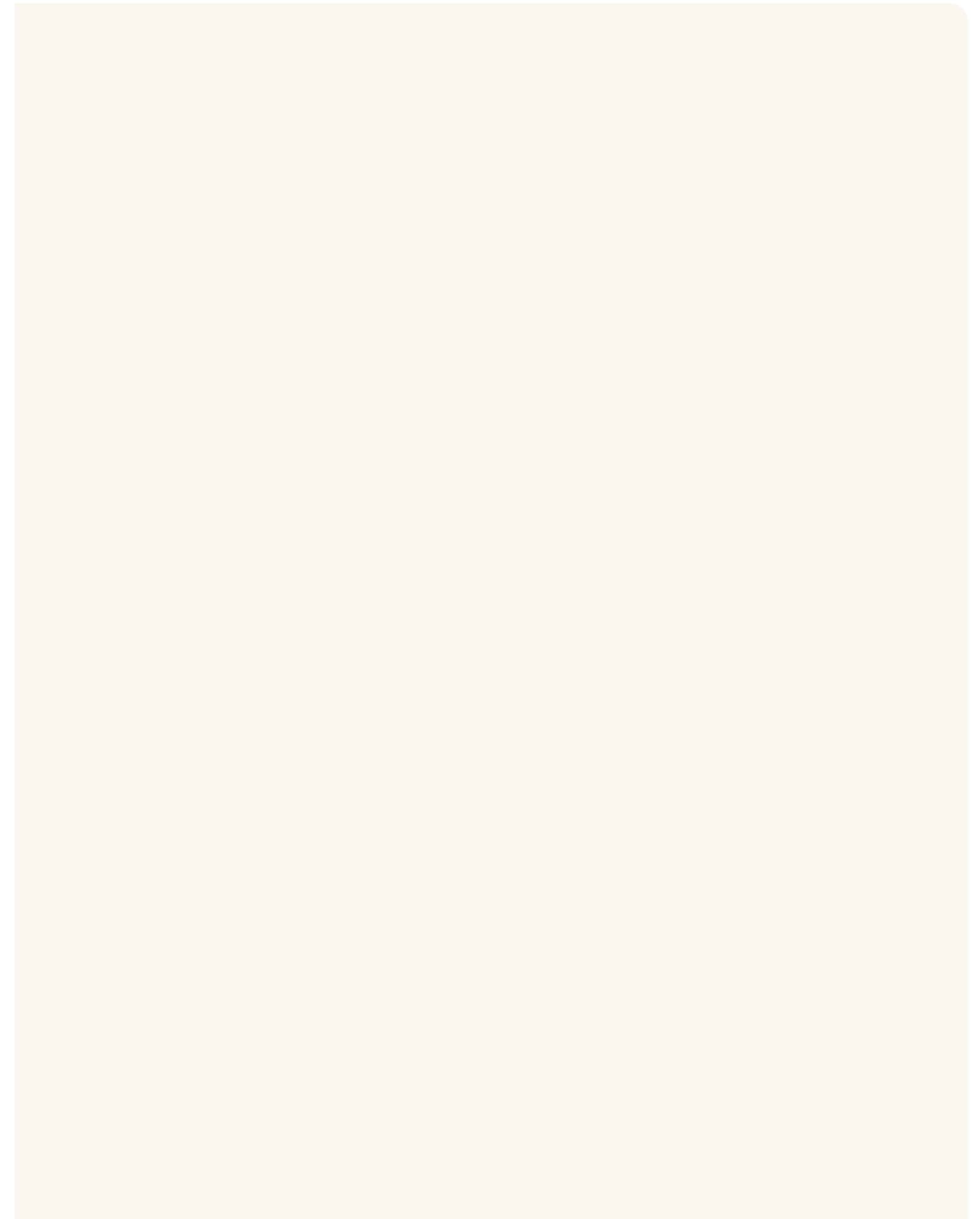
Our vision is for a world in which women and men are equally responsible for the most important decisions made;

Where women can realise their full professional and personal potential without experiencing discrimination;

Where men can be vulnerable and combine career and care without stigma, and a world where work is compatible with the modern lives of families.

For us, that means putting flexibility front and centre.

## Contents —







## Foreword from Prue Gilbert

The path of a working mother may be well-trodden, but is by no means a walk in the park. In fact, it is often riddled with assumptions and discrimination, which is not without serious consequence. With impacted levels of female participation in the workforce, reduced career advancement and limited lifetime economic security, there is an urgent need for change to achieve broad gender equality. Let's also be clear - providing gender equality at every level of an organisation is about much more than ticking a box or feeling good - it has been shown time and time again to be good for an organisation's culture and positive for their bottom line. The business case clearly stacks up.

At Grace Papers, we were proud to work with the Victorian Public Service (VPS) in delivering a program that would directly address these challenges, making way for measurable improvements in women's workforce participation, career advancement and economic security, while also supporting men to access workplace flexibility and parental leave. Our pilot Grace Papers Program - funded by the Victorian State Government - supported over 350 participants across the VPS as they embarked on parental leave, and as you will read in this report, the results were measured and evaluated independently by Macquarie University.

The results speak for themselves. Overall, VPS employees who had access to the Grace Papers Program felt more supported by their employer, more positive about their career trajectory and more confident about juggling their family commitments.

### While we measured against sixteen outcomes, most notable highlights from the program include:

- 70% of participants gained a better understanding of how to initiate, control and manage their career transitions
- 78% of participants felt more confident to approach their manager about career related issues including parental leave and flexible work arrangements
- Participants identifying as LGBTIQ or culturally diverse experienced higher gains from The Grace Papers platform model
- The GPP supported an increasingly positive perception of gender equality policies and workplace culture in the Victorian Public Sector - both for women and men

While most research into gender equality focuses on the problems, this research set out to show us what works. When we empower working parents with knowledge, and equip them with an understanding of

how to apply their agency, they feel more confident in managing not just parental leave and flexibility, but can apply that agency to any career issue with confidence. We can see that the Grace Papers intervention enables careers, parenting and flexibility to thrive.

What's more, the data also told a clear and quantifiable story when it comes to employers, indicating that these interventions empower employers as much as employees, with an urgent need for line manager literacy to address the impact ambition bias has on the careers of those who take parental leave and flexibility.

And while the findings and recommendations in this report are specific to the Victorian Public Service, the data and insights from this project can be applied broadly to other organisations and across industries. With compelling data and evidence at the ready to support their actions.

I am delighted by the results of this program and the opportunity the VPS has presented to pave the way for organisations and employers across Australia in working toward greater gender equality.

- Prue Gilbert, Grace Papers CEO

## The Parental Leave Problem

It is still commonly assumed that women, once they become parents, are less ambitious than men. This gendered assumption, together with gendered expectations, see that 95% of primary paid parental leave is taken by women and 49% of women (and 25% of men) experience discrimination in the workplace throughout their parental leave journey (AHRC Supporting Working Parents 2015).



opt not to return to the workforce at all.



of primary carer's leave is taken up by women.



of employers offer paid primary carer's leave

This discrimination is far-reaching and highly damaging. In 2018, the Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) found that there was an increase in the number of women who believed they missed out on a promotion due to being pregnant (from 4.5% in 2011 to 7% in 2017 - that's 23,100 women), as well as an increase in mothers who missed out on training and development due to this perceived bias (from 3.7% in 2011 to 6.4% in 2017 - coming in at 21,120 women). There was also a rise in the number of women who perceived they had received negative comments from managers or supervisors (from 3.3% in 2011 to 5% or 16,500 women in 2017) and an increase in the number of women who reported that their job tasks and roles and responsibilities changed without consultation while pregnant (from 2.2% in 2011 to 3.5% or 11,550 women in 2017).

Of course, this is much more than a 12-month parental leave problem. When women return to work after parental leave, their experience has a significant impact on their career success and ability to retire comfortably. According to the ABS (2017), a sizable portion (26% in 2017) of mothers in the public sector experienced some form of change in their responsibilities, roles and tasks upon return to work, while 6% decided to change employers upon returning to work. **Some - up to 30% according to the ABS - also opt not to return to the workforce at all.** Needless to say,

parental leave and the return to work is a fraught and challenging time for many mothers.

And while this research speaks to the experience of mothers, this is not a women's issue. **Women take up over 93.5% of primary carer's leave, while men's share of this leave currently sits at 6.5% (WGEA, 2019).** Despite the disproportionate access of primary carer's leave, figures are moving slowly as more organisations choose not to distinguish between primary and secondary carers leave and elect to give equal paid parental leave to both men and women. **However, only 50% of employers offer paid primary carer's leave and 44% of employers (WGEA, 2019) offer paid secondary carer's leave.** What this shows us is that Australian fathers either have little access to, or are reluctant to take up, primary care parental leave.

This evidence clearly showcases that all parents, regardless of gender, need support from their employer to have a fulfilling work-life balance and parental journey. Not only is this critical in managing their family and work lives, but positive outcomes also help businesses to retain talented staff, creating benefits for their bottom line.

Most importantly, however, is that these outcomes are direct drivers of gender equality. As such, the Victorian Public Service determined that it was time for action.

With their Gender Equality Strategy - Safe and Strong - in place, the Victorian Government already had a framework for enduring and sustained gender equality action over time. Combined with the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic), which requires the Victorian public sector, Councils and universities to take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality and promoting gender equality in the wider community through their policies, programs and services, there was a powerful framework at play. But research on effective interventions when it comes to improving women's workforce participation, career advancement and economic security, together with evidence for supporting men to access workplace flexibility and parental leave, were limited. Therefore, it was critical to build research evidence around the underlying causes and effects, as well as the most successful interventions, to help develop policies and practices aimed at preventing turnover and talent loss, as well as achieving gender equality in the workplace.

Enter Grace Papers.

Prior to undertaking the Grace Papers Program, pre-participation research showed that working parents at the VPS, particularly women, found it a huge challenge to build the confidence to approach managers and supervisors about career related issues including parental leave and flexible work

# Engagement

## Creating Interventions That Work

In 2017/18, to support VPS employees through their parental leave and career transition journeys, funds were allocated within the Victorian State Budget to develop an evidence-based approach that would inform the development of future programs.

Having developed a gender equality system and program where careers, parenting and flexibility can thrive, Grace Papers were selected as the provider of this expanded pilot program through a competitive tender process. Specifically, the Grace Papers Gender Equality System and Program (GPP) would be used to support parental leave and workplace flexibility throughout the VPS.

As a tried and tested approach, the GPP integrates real time, on-demand support for participants and their managers; providing agency and empowerment. In addition to online elements, participants are supported with digital phone coaching, attendance at Keeping In Touch (KIT) events, custom content including access to workplace policies and procedures, a concierge service for on demand support, frequent communications, story-telling and executive coaching for talent.

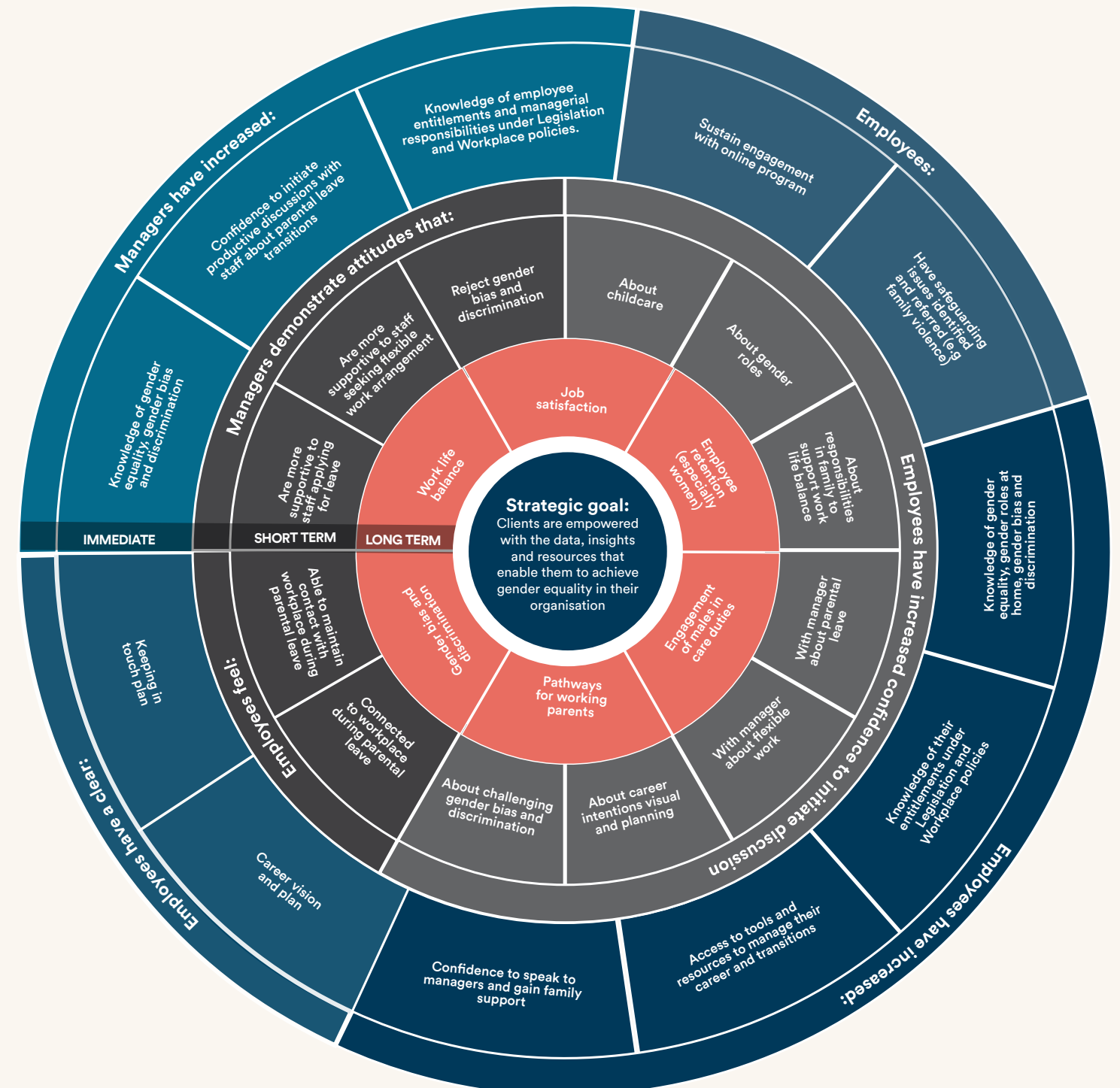
Specifically for the pilot, the GPP was further built to incorporate a "Theory of Change" model, with the broad strategic goal of improving gender equality outcomes across the Victorian Public Service. The goal of the program itself was to ensure VPS employees were empowered and supported (at work and at home) to manage their careers alongside their transitions to parenthood, utilising parental leave entitlements, KIT days and flexible working arrangements. With a series of immediate, short-term and

longer-term outcomes identified and associated activities to support the goals, the Theory of Change model was rich and deeply embedded with the VPS's organisational priorities.

To assess the effectiveness of the GPP initiative, Macquarie University was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation. Ranked among the top two percent of universities in the world, we welcomed the opportunity for Macquarie University to conduct this research evaluation, in breaking new ground with their research that is ranked in the top one percent in the world.

Developing a strong evidence-based Evaluation Matrix that was aligned to Safe and Strong, Macquarie University sought to evaluate whether the GPP, as a gender equality intervention, positively influenced the job and career attitudes of program participants. The GPP Theory of Change model was used to enable the research team to evaluate the plausible cause and effect relationships likely to exist between GPP interventions on individuals and groups, as well as organisations and systems. Providing an understanding of the early and intermediate changes in an organisation that are required for effective long-term outcomes and strategic changes to occur, the Theory of Change formed the basis of this research.

Following the study, researchers were asked to provide the Office for Women, participating agencies and Grace Papers with recommendations for improvements to the existing interventions.





**EMMA BARTEL** \_

TRAINING OFFICER FOR GEELONG, SURF COAST AND COLAC  
OTWAY POLICE SERVICE AREAS, VICTORIA POLICE

## Confident Parenthood \_ No Cop Out

The force is with police officer Emma Bartel as she parents three young boys.

Whether it's at home or at work, Emma Bartel is accustomed to spending her days --and nights -- surrounded by boys in blue.

Already a mum to identical three-year-old twins, Eli and Chester, the Geelong senior sergeant welcomed a third son, Jude, last September.

You could be forgiven for thinking that, night shifts and dealing with the unpredictability of police work, Emma would be better prepared than most for early motherhood.

"Not at all," she laughs.

"I have always said that it's easier dealing with full cells [at the police station] than it is with twins."

Making her parenting juggle even more remarkable is the fact Emma initially did it solo via IVF, giving birth to identical twins Chester and Eli.

After the birth of her twins, Emma applied for a job closer to home with more family-friendly hours. Although

her bosses were accommodating of her unique situation, some peers were less supportive.

"A few people felt I was being given preferential treatment because I was



a woman with kids and not working 24/7," she says.

Fast forward three years and there's been major cultural changes from the 2015 independent review of sex

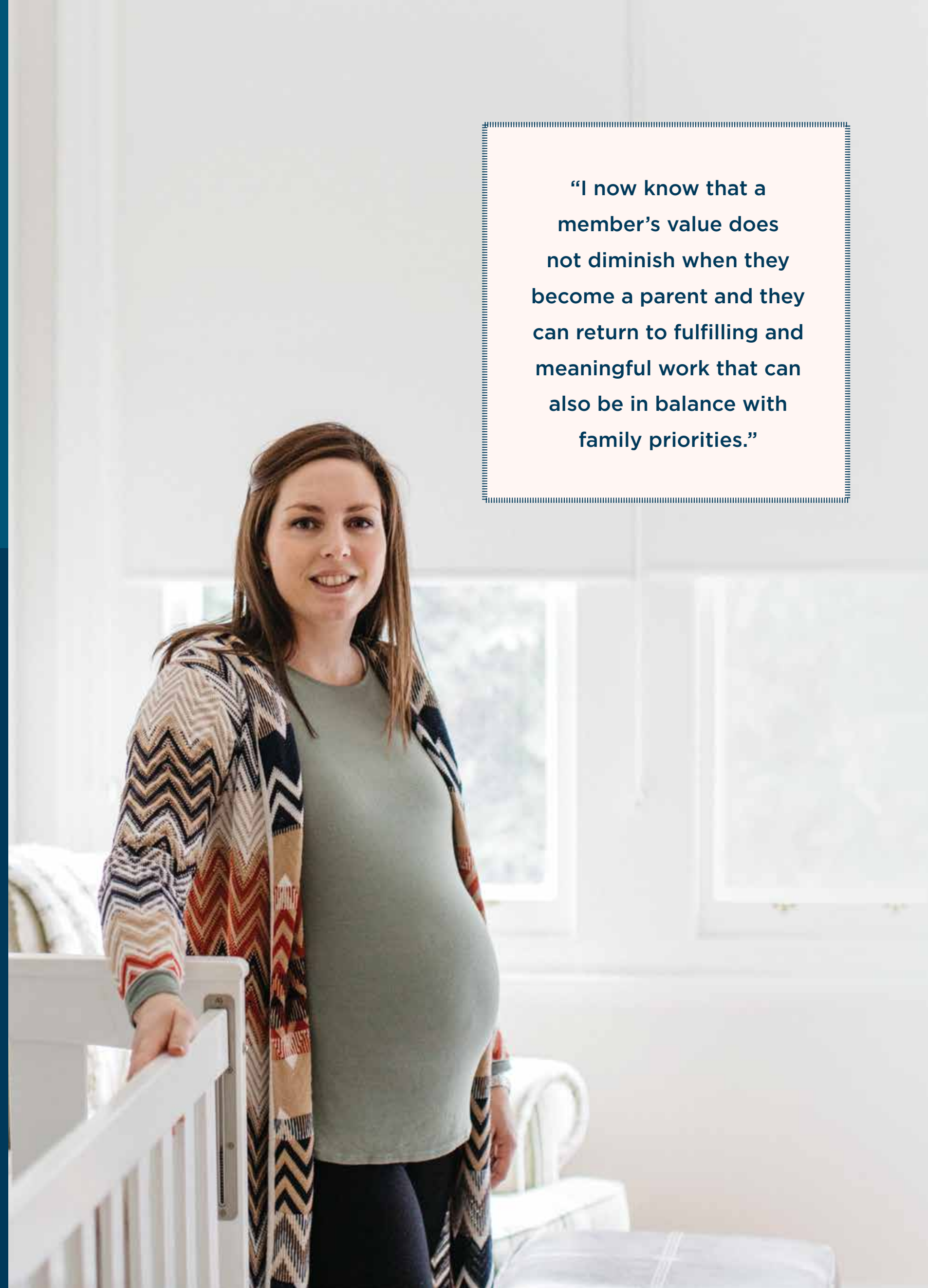
discrimination and harassment in Victoria Police.

It led to significant organisational changes to create a more gender-inclusive workplace, including the introduction of the Grace Papers digital support. Funded by the Victorian Government's Office for Women, Grace Papers has so far helped many working parents in the police force, including Emma, who is expecting her third child later this year.

At Prue's urging, Emma has already had conversations with her superiors about her career trajectory within the force upon her return. Through Grace Papers, Emma feels more confident about her future as a working mother-of-three.

"I now know that a member's value does not diminish when they become a parent and they can return to fulfilling and meaningful work that can also be in balance with family priorities," she says.

**"I now know that a member's value does not diminish when they become a parent and they can return to fulfilling and meaningful work that can also be in balance with family priorities."**





# Evaluation Methodology

## Assessing the Program

The GPP was made available to a limited number of participants (350) across the VPS: the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); Victoria Police (Vic Pol); the Department of Education and Training (DET); and the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC).



The GPP was assessed against multi-item measures that indicated deeper attitudinal changes within participants that were beneficial from the perspective of knowledge, career agency, confidence and career engagement as they related to the individual, the employer and the culture. The measures were designed to assess short, medium and long-term impact of these changes.

Over 140 participants, primarily identifying as women, completed the pre-participation indicators, and the results revealed that government agencies still had a lot of work to do to foster an inclusive culture where gender equality flourishes. Unsurprisingly, it was found that there was an urgent need for intervention that progresses gender equality – along with a need to build evidence on what’s working, and what’s not.

The research team used multiple sources to address the objectives of the evaluation. These included pre-program and post-program surveys and focus

groups. The research included individual meetings with relevant stakeholders (across the four participating agencies) and extraction of data from the ABS and reports from the Victorian Public Sector Commission, Federal Government, and the Commonwealth Workplace Gender Equality Agency for the purpose of capturing relevant and supporting statistics for the evaluation. Finally, the research team designed and conducted eight semi-structured focus groups with questions designed to gain an understanding of how participants responded to the GPP and their feedback on its effectiveness in achieving its stated objectives.

This evaluation provided an in-depth analysis on whether or not the GPP positively influenced the job and career attitudes of 31 participants who completed both the pre and post participation assessments. The evaluation insights we are pleased to share focus on the immediate and short-term impact of the GPP on those participants.

## Dismantling the parental wall

### Nine points of engagement to empower flex and inclusion for working parents.

When it comes to women in the workplace, we hear a lot about barriers to leadership - the glass ceiling, for example. But for many women and men, there’s another barrier they come across much sooner in their careers: the parental wall.

The maternal wall is a term coined to describe the drop in career success that female employees often experience either when they become pregnant, while on parental leave, or upon return to work after parental leave.

Grace Papers gender equality interventions, as validated in these research findings, addresses the parental wall, working with clients to create systematic and cultural strategies to authorise and execute a culture of flexibility and inclusion for working parents and carers.

- 1 Set targets that overcome biases.
- 2 Have leaders who have clearly articulated the business case for gender equality, and hold their people leaders accountable.
- 3 Empower those who have most to gain through coaching and education - and leave no woman behind.
- 4 Sponsor the success and promotion of their talent.
- 5 Engage millennial dads to disrupt the traditional stereotypes.
- 6 Believe that keeping in touch is a shared accountability between the parental leaver and their people leader.
- 7 Introduce policies to close the gap in retirement savings.
- 8 Interrogate their systems for gender bias.
- 9 Normalise workplace flexibility to remove stigma

## The Findings —

The Grace Papers Program is empowering employees to thrive at work and home, with confidence.

The measuring of attitudes of participants towards gender equality revealed an urgent need for line manager literacy to address the impact ambition bias has on the careers of those who take parental leave and flexibility.

**78%** of participants felt more confident to approach their manager about career related issues including parental leave and flexible work arrangements

**70%** of participants gained a better understanding of how to initiate, control and manage their career transitions.

“The encouragement and motivation I got from Grace Papers gave me the boost I needed to sort out my return to work with confidence rather than feeling like I needed to start the conversation with my boss.”

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT



Early results indicated that Grace Papers delivered both immediate and short-term outcomes that improve parental leave conditions.

Through a clear increase in thirteen out of sixteen evaluation measures, the GPP was shown to empower employees and their managers, to both increase an individual's agency to manage their career, and improve the perception of their organisation's culture.

**While the research findings and recommendations are broad-ranging, highlights include:**

1. Participants demonstrated significantly increased confidence to approach their managers for support relating to flexibility, parental leave or career issues.
2. Participants demonstrated a high increase in gaining knowledge for career vision and planning. They were overwhelmingly positive about the impact GPP had on their ability to develop career vision and plan for their parental leave journey.
3. Managers and supervisors play a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness of parental leave policies, work-life policies and practices, including family-supportive policies and practices.
4. The GPP supported an increasingly positive perception of gender equality policies and workplace culture in the Victorian Public Sector – both for women and men.
5. The GPP increases knowledge of, and access to, diversity and inclusion tools, resources and entitlements.

6. Participants identifying as LGBTIQ or culturally diverse experienced higher gains from the GPP across several feedback measures such as the overall effectiveness of the GPP.
7. Further promotion and encouragement of the interventions are required in order to increase the take-up of parental leave, entitlements and flexible work arrangements by fathers, including in some cases, improved and/or equal access to parental policy entitlements.



Speaking to the success of the program, Victorian Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams said, **“Our Government is working to build a fairer Victoria that values the paid and unpaid contributions of working parents by supporting gender equality interventions to affect real change. The Grace Papers’ program proves that when we support employers to value care and entrench flexibility, we can create a culture where careers and families thrive.”**



**JOEL BACKWELL** \_  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION DIVISION,  
VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## Challenges Make Joel a Champion of Change

Every new parent knows the meaning of sleep deprivation. But for Joel Backwell, it is usually guilt rather than his baby son keeping him up at night.

Joel is passionate about his job as head of the International Education Division in the Victorian education department. But he's also a doting father to two young boys. And most of the time, he feels he's falling short.

With the ever-increasing demands of his career and his home life, now exacerbated by COVID-19, Joel finds himself wondering about the long-term sustainability of this juggling act. And many of his colleagues -- also young parents -- who work in his Department also ask themselves, "We spend so much time thinking of how to care for children and families across our education system, but are we making enough time to care for our own?"

Joel believes his own challenges as a working parent hint at a far bigger societal problem.

"I am a young, white male in a dual income household with two sets of very engaged grandparents -- living in inner Melbourne on two good incomes and still I have really struggled," he says.

"The nature of my role means I work with a lot of people from migrant backgrounds who don't have any extended family living in this country. I see single parents who are working two jobs or have a kid who has a

major illness. If you add up all those categories I just described, that's a significant percentage of the population.

"We could not possibly be in a better position to be able to manage having two kids in three years. Objectively we are both mentally and physically healthy. We tick every box of privilege, yet this last 12 months has been incredibly difficult. Just imagine what it is like for the rest of the population?"



Joel believes it is time for Australia to follow the lead of Scandinavian countries and improve its parental leave schemes to allow both parents to play equal roles in their children's lives while enjoying a career.

"As a leader I can't just complain about it; I feel I have the responsibility to do something. And as a father I know

it's doubly important. As Annabelle Crabb put it so well in her Quarterly Essay, "Men at Work", when we have a culture that encourages men to stay at work then we are effectively encouraging women to stay at home," he says.

"Until we fix these kinds of systemic issues we are just tinkering around the edges and not modelling equality or making it easy."

"Being an executive in the public service I do believe we have a moral responsibility to take a lead on this, both in terms of our approach to parental leave and flexible work practices. Ultimately our job in the education department is to help ensure that this next generation is coming out of their youth as happy, active, well-rounded individuals. Is this possible if we are perpetuating inequality through our own practices?"

To that end, Joel was encouraged to see the proposed new public sector enterprise agreement includes 12 weeks of paid leave for secondary carers, which can be taken within the first 18 months of a child's birth.

"The challenge now will be cultural - supporting more dads to actually take up that opportunity to spend quality time with their children during that most precious period of their young lives. But this is a good step in the right direction".

Another important part of the solution is doing more to promote and facilitate flexible work arrangements. Investment in technology and innovative ways of working, allowing people to log-in or dial in as required, would make juggling family commitments far easier. COVID-19 has further emphasised a lot of the structural disadvantage in our community, particularly its disproportionate impacts on women. But if there is one silver lining, it has been the normalisation of working from home.

The key, once we're out of the current crisis, will be to capture the best practices from this experience and embed them permanently. Crises always provide an opportunity to reimagine the kind of society we want to live in. Gender equality is critical to the future I want for my children. Amidst the doom and gloom of 2020, there's a lot to be excited about in this space, and I'm grateful to be in a position where I can champion positive change, both at home and in the workplace."

"As a leader I can't just complain about it; I feel I have the responsibility to do something. And as a father I know it's doubly important.

As Annabelle Crabb put it so well in her Quarterly Essay, "Men at Work", when we have a culture that encourages men to stay at work then we are effectively encouraging women to stay at home."





# Recommendations — Taking Greater Action

The Macquarie University research team, led by Raymond Trau, stated, "Our research to date has found that the GPP is building crucial and critical evidence around gender equality intervention.

This type of evidence is critical to the dismantling of the parental wall and we believe that these positive insights could potentially contribute to other positive long-term job-related attitudes and behaviours of VPS employees, as well as promoting overall gender equality, both within the VPS and workplaces more broadly."

Raymond continued, "Confidence is by far the biggest and most positive increase among any of the measures tracked – what we're seeing is that pre-program, employees were only moderately confident in areas such

as approaching their manager for support and planning their parental leave journey whereas post-program, there's a substantial increase in confidence."

In evaluating the GPP, the research team identified four key themes, with specific recommendations for the Office for Women (OfW), participating agencies and Grace Papers, which is equally valuable for organisations across industries looking to make measurable positive impact in gender equality.

Highlights of these recommendations include:

# 1

## Enterprise-wide adoption:

- Implementing GPP across VPS as an enterprise-wide intervention for all staff regardless of gender, including managers.
- Additional engagement of Grace Papers to support the implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) across the VPS, including making recommendations as to audit/survey measures with respect to (i) the availability and uptake of flexible working arrangements, and (ii) working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities.
- An expanded time frame of the evaluation; with Grace Papers working with the department to agree a shared funding approach, to further include evaluations at the 14-month mark and the 20-month mark post program launch.

## Line manager literacy is critical:

# 2

- Line manager literacy and engagement in the GPP has shown to be essential to its success as a gender equality intervention. In addition to mandated basic training, it was recommended that Grace Papers works with the department on an appropriate model of delivery for support for managers/supervisors that is on-demand, scalable, accessible and affordable.
- Research suggests that the authorisation of the culture by a department's leader improves the workplace gender equality climate. This was evidenced within the study and it was recommended that this hypothesis be further validated by Grace Papers.

# 3

## Digital Coaching for participants

- Given the overwhelmingly positive experience of participants who combined the online GPP with digital phone coaching, it is recommended that this offering be the essential offering provided across the VPS.

## Ongoing evidence-based approach and impact

# 4

- Pre-participation surveys were found to provide invaluable data and insights to assist the improvement of gender equality in the VPS. It is recommended that this data capture is normalised and built into the platform.
- The GPP impact could be further increased with more a strategically targeted, individual user experience by Grace Papers, with more targeted communications based on a user's personal attributes and online behavioural interactions with the GPP, to potentially drive a larger collective impact.



**KRISTYN HANNA** \_

MANAGER OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND SUPPORT, VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**CLAIRE SHERWILL** \_

MANAGER OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND SUPPORT, VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

## Two Heads Can Be Better Than One \_\_

Kristyn Hanna and Claire Sherwill share everything at work from their strong work ethic to their salary negotiations.

Just like the Friends' cast, who famously lobbied for pay parity in the 1990s, Kristyn and Claire wanted an equal fiscal playing field when they began job-sharing at the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.

"It was really important for us to be on a completely equal foundation when we started," Claire says.

"We wanted to make sure we were on the same salary because we would be doing the same role.

"Talking about your salary can be an awkward conversation but it was something that was important to us." Both mothers with young children, they were working part time when they saw an opportunity to progress their careers by applying to share the role of manager of employee wellbeing and support.

Their manager Nicole had never seen a joint application for a management

position but was immediately supportive of the proposal.

"I was really excited about the idea and the opportunity this presented, not just for Claire and Kristyn to continue their professional journey but for the whole team," Nicole says.

Nicole worked closely with Claire and Kristyn to help them find their groove in the new arrangement. All three are optimistic and determined to make the job-sharing work not just for themselves but to pave the way for others.

"People need to stop apologising for working part time," Nicole says.

"I hear it all the time, people saying: 'I ONLY work two days' or, 'I ONLY work three days.' Stop saying 'only'! You work part-time. That doesn't mean you are any less capable."

Throughout the application process and beyond, Claire says Grace Papers was invaluable.

"Grace Papers were talking a language that was appealing to us," Claire explains.

"All their material, their approach and their guidance resinated with the journey we were on. They were able to provide coaching and support both in preparing us for interview (including an impromptu coaching session on Collins St when I randomly ran into [Grace Papers' chief] Prue!) and helping us transition into the role as a job-share team.

"Their support has been relatable, easy to navigate while also being thought provoking. Once engaged with Grace Papers we felt we are part of a family.

"They have helped us to own our professional vision and not let flexibility get in the way of progressing our careers."

Kristyn says of their flourishing partnership: "I don't think it would be possible to do a job like this with someone who you didn't have complete trust in."

And Claire, of course, agrees!

"I now know that a member's value does not diminish when they become a parent and they can return to fulfilling and meaningful work that can also be in balance with family priorities."

CLAIRE SHERWILL





“Our Government is working to build a fairer Victoria that values the paid and unpaid contributions of working parents by supporting gender equality interventions to affect real change. The Grace Papers’ program proves that when we support employers to value care and entrench flexibility, we can create a culture where careers and families thrive.”

GABRIELLE WILLIAMS  
VICTORIAN MINISTER FOR WOMEN

