RARE BIRDS

#YES SHE CAN

ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY

IMPACT REPORT 2025



A message from Rare Birds Founder and CEO Jo Burston

There's no denying the current influence and prevalence of AI in business and everyday life. It's been a hot topic in lounge rooms, boardrooms, chatrooms and classrooms across the world.

One thing that I've always known, and has been reinforced through our impact at Rare Birds this year, is this: the transfer of knowledge and lived experience – human to human – will always trump AI.

One of this year's Mentees said it beautifully: "In a world where you've got tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm, I wondered what mentoring would offer.

"It does something different," he reflected. "You can ask a tool how to solve a problem. But mentoring gives you perspective. It pushes your thinking."

Mentoring remains our greatest tool of impact precisely because of this idea. Assumptions are challenged, perspectives shift, introductions are made and confidence grows. Add to that the accountability of regular meetings to report on the actions you've taken and it's no wonder that our programs have the power to grow businesses, connect people and contribute to a diverse, innovative and thriving economy in a meaningful and measurable way.

That case study – part of our AmEx Business Class Program report – is on page 23. There's a lot to read in this year's Impact Report, but I encourage you to take the time to read the entire story of how this business owner who was sliding towards an unknown future used his mentoring program to chart a new and profitable way forward. It's so uplifting and inspiring.

Our education highlight this year was building and delivering an 'always on' Incubator Program for Uber. Our previous programs had proven to be so popular, with around 4,500+ drivers and delivery partners competing for just 100 spots each year, that Rare Birds was tasked with providing the program to all 150,000 people earning on their apps throughout Australia and New Zealand.

You can read the full story on how we pulled it off, and the impact that program produced, on page 29. It's something the team and I are very proud of and our *willingness to say yes and deliver the how* remains one of our strongest Rare Birds values.

Those are just a couple of highlights from a great year of impact – steadfastly human to human.

I hope you enjoy this full report of all Rare Birds activities during the 2025/26 financial year.

Jo Burston



CONTENTS

Rare Birds

Our Team 4
Our Values 5
Social + Economic Impact 6
Our Programs 8
2025 Impact Snapshot 9

Mentoring

Mentoring Snapshot 11
Rare Birds Mentors 12
Mentoring Programs Value Proposition 13
AmEx Business Class Program 17
AmEx Business Class Case Study 23

Education

Education Snapshot 27
Uber Business Booster Program 29
Mentor Labs 32

Community

Community Snapshot 34
Powered by Volunteers 35
International Women's Day Fundraiser 36
Community Meet-ups 37

Advocacy

Advocacy Snapshot 39
Ambassador + Activators 40
Key Opportunities 41
Social Media Mentions 43

OUR TEAM

JO BURSTON
Founder and CEO





SIMONE HENDERSON-SMART
Head of Marketing and Communications



TEEGAN DIAMOND
Mentoring Partnership and Community Manager



HELEEN TOL
Executive Assistant and Office Manager

OUR VALUES

ENTREPRENEURIAL: We don't fear failure, we dare to be uncomfortable and are always improving processes and programs with out-of-the-box thinking. We are curious and agile. We say yes and deliver the how. We stay informed and are lifelong learners and lovers of innovation.

COMMUNITY: Our products and services are designed and delivered by real people, for real people. We understand the value of support and connection and are building a strong and empowered community of practice. We have each other's backs and we set everyone up for success. We are enablers of self-agency.

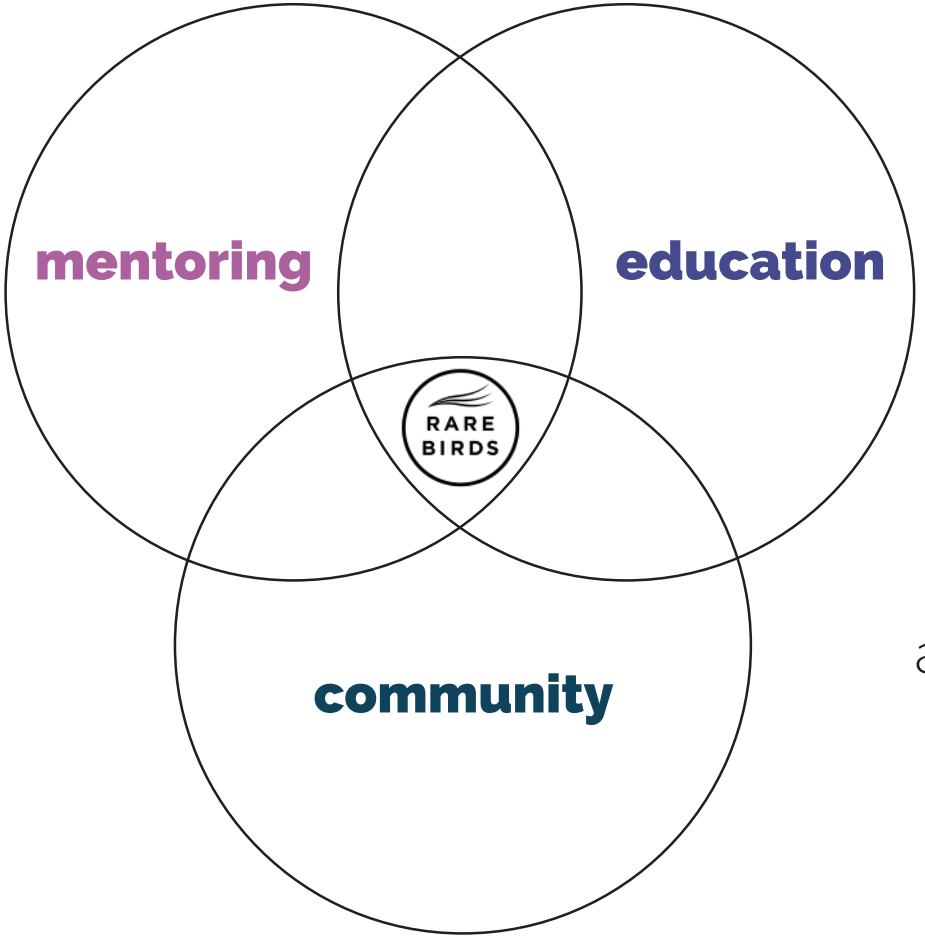
INTEGRITY: We are reliable, trustworthy and diligent. We do what we say and act with integrity to deliver great outcomes. We strive to remain the best at what we do and learn from our past actions and interactions to be our best in the present moment and in the future.

PURPOSE: We care about impact and improving lives. We are champions of change for the benefit of all and celebrate every win. We bring commitment, intention and passion to our work and the social impact that we deliver.



SOCIAL + ECONOMIC IMPACT

RARE BIRDS IS **ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY** THROUGH MENTORING, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY



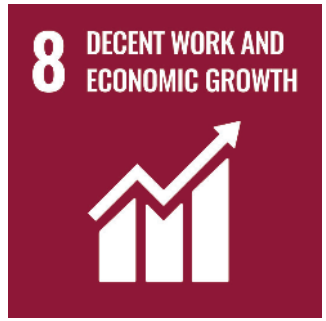
OUR VISION:
A strong and resilient human and financial economy through equal opportunities in entrepreneurship and leadership for everyone

U.N. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:









SOCIAL + ECONOMIC IMPACT

Founded in 2015, Rare Birds runs **high-impact mentoring and education programs** to boost diversity and innovation across Australian businesses and increase economic equality.

Today, Rare Birds is an **active business community** that reaches more than 70,000 women entrepreneurs and their supporters. It is one of Australia's leading communities for women to grow themselves and their businesses, with tools and resources from within a community of practice that reaches every state and territory, particularly rural and regional areas where business education and support can often be in short supply.

Importantly, it is not a women's organisation: roughly 40% of mentors are men. It is our mentors who underpin our success, donating thousands of hours every year in support of our mission. **Together, we**:



Provide women with a program to build their confidence in business in seeking opportunities for **growth and investment**



Teach women **new skills** in business such as digital marketing, AI, productivity, team management, and procurement



Provide women with a trusted and highly experienced business confidante who provides **one-on-one support**



Continue to create impact beyond the program through a new **community of practice** and connected business networks

OUR PROGRAMS

WHAT WE DO

BESPOKE MENTORING PROGRAMS

Since 2015, through partnerships with government, industry, corporations, and sponsors, we have been providing entrepreneurs and emerging leaders across Australia with fully managed mentoring programs to improve diversity in business.

- **Corporate programs** provide an important reward and retention tool for high-performing female talent inside companies, providing pathways to senior leadership roles;
- **Government-sponsored programs** provide pathways to financial independence through entrepreneurship for women from marginal and under-represented demographics;
- **Industry-sponsored programs** provide support to women in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as agriculture and wine making, to enable members to grow their business and networks;
- Programs are also available to individuals looking for **personal and professional development**.

OUR PARTNERS

Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

CITY OF SYDNEY

AgriFutures Australia

WesTrac CAT

BlueRock

pwc

AMERICAN EXPRESS

Monadelphous

Uber

2025 IMPACT SNAPSHOT

What do we do?			Why?	What for?
Strategies	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Impact**
MENTORING	One-on-one mentoring program for entrepreneurs	**32 x mentees engaged in a mentoring partnership for entrepreneurs**	Improved competence in business with a focus on aligning vision and purpose; introductions to new networks of support; greater business and financial success and economic security	**Economic security for women and people from diverse backgrounds**
	One-on-one mentoring program for emerging leaders	**1 x mentee engaged in a mentoring partnership for emerging leaders**	Higher rates of women seeking promotions and moving into leadership positions	
EDUCATION	Workshops on topics relevant to business and professional development	**13 x community workshops** **8 x cohort education modules**	Increased knowledge, networks and confidence of business owners and emerging leaders; better financial literacy	**Enabling environment for diversity in entrepreneurship and leadership**
COMMUNITY	Events to promote networks and connection	**10 x community events**	Sharing and connection between a community of business owners and leaders and their supporters; opportunities for learning in a peer-to-peer environment; growing the pool of mentors who want to give back and facilitating connections	
	Peer support through social channels and facilitated networking sessions	**8 x facilitated peer sessions** **4,339: following on Instagram** **19,936: following on Facebook** **6,135: following on Linkedin**		
	Community content	**Newsletters and LinkedIn articles, website posts, mentoring case studies**		
	Mentor recruitment and engagement	**22 new mentors onboarded into the program**		
ADVOCACY	Research and reporting on issues relevant to diversity in business	**CEO JO BURSTON:** **2 x key engagement opportunities** **4,277: following on Instagram** **4,700: following on Facebook** **23,673: following on Linkedin** **6 active Ambassadors**	Amplified voice and thought leadership on gender equality and diversity in business	**Sector support for diversity and inclusion initiatives**

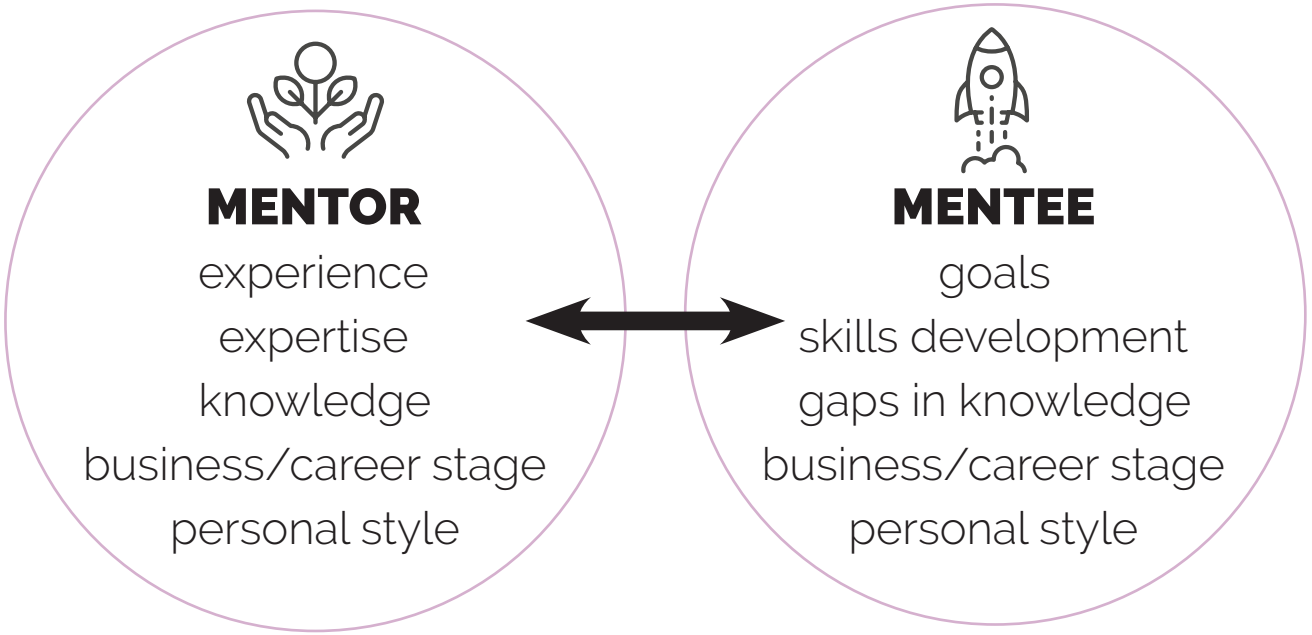
MENTORING

2025

ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY
MENTORING SNAPSHOT

2 HOURS PER MONTH FOR 12 MONTHS OF ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

The Rare Birds mentoring program has facilitated thousands of mentoring partnerships since it launched in 2015, for both entrepreneurs and innovative leaders. Our matching system and ongoing partnership support are key to the success of our programs.



TOP FOCUS AREAS

GOALS: Scaling, Branding, Growing network, Building confidence, Leadership
SKILLS: Marketing strategy, Business strategy, Digital marketing, Branding, Positioning

4
PROGRAMS

33
MENTEES

32 ENTREPRENEURS
1 EMERGING LEADER

792
VOLUNTEER HOURS

$118,800 value

INSPIRING RARE BIRDS MENTORS

The Rare Birds Mentor pool is always changing and growing. We currently have more than 1200 men and women across a broad range of industries.

Inspiring Rare Birds has been fortunate to give hundreds of executives and entrepreneurs the ability to give back by doing something they love – nurturing entrepreneurs and emerging leaders on their journeys. They share their hard-won wisdom and experience in business to help those who are still finding their way.



Shalini Nanden Singh
Lawyer, Legal Coach, Owner at Love Your Legals



Cherry Ward
Founder and MD, Bluebird Leadership



Dave Clare
CEO and Founder, Circle Leadership Global



Brian Pereira
Director and Founder, Digital Reign



Paul Cohen
Founder, Paul Cohen Consulting



Mark Baartse
Digital Marketing Strategy Advisor



Richard Nedov
Managing Director and CEO, Active Group



Phil Talbot
Founder and CEO, Authentium



Sally-Anne Blanshard
Coaching Specialist



Alyse Sue
Co-Founder, Transhumanism Australia



Anna Osherov
Co-Founder and CEO, Flintt



Xander Hendricks
Firmware consultant specialising in startups



Dianna Schinella
Founder, Head Business Consultant and Mentor



Cissy Ma
Founder, Grow and Sell Your Biz



Phil Ore
Co-CEO and Chief Mentor, 25eight



Phil Hayes-St Clair
Co-Founder, Drop Bio Health



Roshan Sidhu
Senior Associate, PwC Legal



Ekaterina Myshinskaya
Head of Transformation, Real Pet Food Company



Belinda Paul
Founder, RCYCL



Greg Rudakov
Senior Product Manager - AI and Innovation, 6clicks



Simon Belousoff
Senior Manager - Data Discovery, Transport for NSW



Katie Heathcote
Associate Director Technology, NSW Govt



Gabrielle Browne
Founder, Dynamic Unicorns



Doug Garske
Producer, Event Manager

MENTORING PROGRAMS VALUE PROPOSITION

Our Programs Empower Women at Every Stage of Their Career

Our Mentoring and Leadership Development Programs are expertly designed to support women whether they're just beginning, growing within an organisation, leading teams, building a business, or preparing to exit. From onboarding junior hires to shaping executive leadership, we equip women with the tools and confidence to thrive.

The programs create maximum impact with our **unique value proposition:**



Drive Organisational Growth Through Structured Leadership Development:

We prepare future leaders with people and management skills, and empower existing leaders to build, motivate, and retain high-performing teams. By embedding leadership capabilities across all levels, our programs help foster a resilient, collaborative, and learning-driven culture.



Showcase Impact with Real-Time Data & Reporting:

Our programs include comprehensive data collection and storytelling mechanisms—ranging from quantitative metrics to testimonials and case studies. These insights allow organisations to clearly demonstrate ROI, celebrate success, and promote internal advocacy.



Seamless Program Delivery with Our Mentoring Platform:

The Rare Birds Mentoring Platform ensures structured progress with integrated calendars, agendas, meeting reminders, and toolkits—removing admin burden while keeping every mentoring relationship on track.

MENTORING PROGRAMS VALUE PROPOSITION



Dedicated Partnership Manager for Turnkey Support:

Every program is supported by a dedicated Rare Birds Partnership Manager who ensures successful onboarding, effective group matching, program monitoring, and community building across every cohort.



Built-In Accountability for Measurable Outcomes:

From onboarding to feedback surveys, our team provides one-on-one support to ensure participants stay engaged, complete program milestones, and have a positive, productive mentoring experience. Clients receive regular updates and outcomes reporting tailored to their success metrics.



Smart Automation for Scale and Reliability:

Our fully integrated CRM and mentoring platform automates matching, communications, tracking, and reporting—ensuring consistency, scalability, and reliability across programs of any size.

OUR SUPER POWER

Precision Matching with Bias Mitigation:

Our unique algorithm assesses goals, skill gaps, and learning styles to deliver high-quality matches from our deep mentor pool. We then combine personal goal mapping, skill gap analysis, and communication style preferences to ensure every Mentee is matched with the most suitable Mentor – boosting engagement, alignment, and long-term impact.

Innovative Programs Led by Proven Experts:

Backed by a diverse network of high-calibre mentors—executives, entrepreneurs, and leaders—our programs offer world-class knowledge-sharing, insights, and strategic thinking to accelerate mentee development.

Continuous Feedback Loops for Agile Improvement:

With post-session evaluations and mid/end-point surveys, we provide real-time insights and tailored refinements to improve outcomes and ensure that program objectives are being met.

A Thriving, Lifelong Network:

Participants gain access to our extended Rare Birds community, with ongoing opportunities to connect, collaborate, and grow through monthly events, masterclasses, and alumni support.

SUCCESS METRICS

Celebrate Success with Tangible Impact:

At the program's conclusion, we provide a comprehensive impact report—complete with data, stories, and case studies—to help our clients champion gender equality and leadership advancement within their organisation and beyond.

OUR PROGRAMS

2025

VISION + EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's competitive landscape, nurturing and retaining Small Business Service (SBS) and Small Merchant Customers is crucial for sustained growth. Our bespoke Business Development Mentoring and Education program offers American Express **a tailored solution designed to empower and elevate these vital segments**. By integrating personalised mentorship with business and professional development workshops, we provide AmEx's customers with the tools and strategies necessary for scaling their operations and enhancing customer satisfaction.

This turnkey program not only fosters a deeper connection between American Express and its clients but also **positions AmEx as a pivotal partner in their clients' success journey**. Through a comprehensive curriculum and ongoing business support, we aim to help Small Business customers navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and cultivate loyalty. By investing in these relationships, American Express will **strengthen its brand reputation and drive customer retention**, ultimately leading to increased market share and profitability. Together, we can craft a brighter future for the Small Business community, ensuring they thrive in an ever-evolving marketplace.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our annual bespoke professional development and business support program is designed to empower a select cohort of 30 of American Express's Small Business Services (SBS) and Small Merchant Customers. This comprehensive initiative offers **tailored mentoring, educational resources, and strategic business insights**, ensuring participants not only enhance their operational efficiency but also foster long-term customer loyalty and growth. With a commitment to delivering exceptional value, our program enables small business owners to thrive in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

TAILORED MENTORSHIP

Participants receive personalised mentorship from industry experts, tailored to their specific business needs, allowing them to overcome challenges and seize opportunities effectively. Mentors provide a minimum of **2-hours each month** via video call, phone, email or in-person. Our structure is flexible allowing the partnership to progress in a format that will encourage the best engagement and outcome.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Our program offers **complimentary access** to materials designed to enhance key business skills, empowering customers with **knowledge and tools** for sustainable growth via online Mentor Lab masterclasses and community events.



PROGRAM IMPACT SNAPSHOT

KEY OUTCOMES

84% of participants report they are significantly or considerably enjoying their mentoring partnership.

100% report an increase in business confidence since joining the program.

100% report both progress toward their business goals and an improvement in their target skills.

62% achieved an increase in revenue of 20%-60%. Half the cohort also employed more people during the program.

100% said their Mentor had helped them to overcome a roadblock in their business.

2025 PROGRAM SURVEY RESULTS

At the conclusion of the program, participant feedback highlights strong engagement, meaningful Mentor relationships and clear signs of measurable business progress.

The mentoring partnerships are supporting founders to strengthen leadership capability, improve decision-making and navigate key business challenges with greater confidence.

BUSINESS IMPACT

Participants reported **tangible outcomes:**

- **Gaining clarity on financial performance and profit drivers;**
- **Strengthening leadership and team management skills;**
- **Improving hiring and onboarding processes;**
- **Exploring new marketing strategies;**
- **Expanding networks and professional connections**

WHAT PARTICIPANTS VALUED MOST

Participant feedback consistently highlights the unique value of the mentoring relationship.

Key themes emerging from responses include:

Strategic perspective – Mentors help founders step back from day-to-day operations and focus on long-term direction.

Accountability and progress – Regular sessions create momentum and structured follow-through.

Confidence in decision-making – Participants report increased confidence when navigating complex business challenges.

Access to experience – Mentors provide real-world insights drawn from their own leadership journeys.

These outcomes reflect the program's role in helping founders move from uncertainty to clarity, and from ideas to action.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

COMMON AREAS OF GROWTH INCLUDE:

- Leadership and team management
- Financial understanding
- Marketing and communications
- Hiring and onboarding processes
- Strategic planning

The program delivered measurable impact across several areas of business development.

INCREASED BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

100% of participants reported an increase in business confidence as a result of the mentoring partnership, with ***62% experiencing a significant or considerable improvement.***

This increase reflects the value of having a trusted advisor to help navigate business decisions and explore opportunities with greater clarity.

PROGRESS TOWARDS BUSINESS GOALS

Participants are making steady progress toward the goals they identified at the start of the program.

69% report significant or considerable progress, while the remaining 31% report meaningful progress as they begin implementing strategies developed with their mentor. Mentoring sessions have helped participants focus their priorities, identify next steps and maintain accountability in working toward their business objectives.

OVERCOMING BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Mentors are also helping participants address key roadblocks in their businesses. ***100% of participants report their mentor is helping them overcome major challenges***, with many highlighting the benefit of working through complex decisions with an experienced advisor.

Participants report that mentoring provides a valuable space to step back from daily operational demands and focus on strategic problem solving.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Participants are also strengthening the skills they identified as development priorities at the beginning of the program. ***More than half report considerable or significant improvement*** in these capabilities, while others are also applying new approaches learned through mentoring conversations.

PROGRAM FEEDBACK



KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK INCLUDE:

- **Strategic reflection and clarity**
- **Leadership development**
- **Confidence in decision-making**
- **Accountability and structured progress**
- **Access to experience and external perspectives**

Overall, at the conclusion of the 2025 program, participant feedback reflects a highly positive mentoring experience.

84% of participants report they are significantly or considerably enjoying their mentoring partnership, highlighting the strength of the mentor matching process and the value of structured conversations with experienced business leaders.

Participants frequently describe their Mentors as trusted advisors who provide both practical insight and strategic perspective.

Many Mentees highlight the benefit of having an experienced professional outside their business who can challenge thinking, provide honest feedback and offer guidance based on real-world experience.

One participant shared:

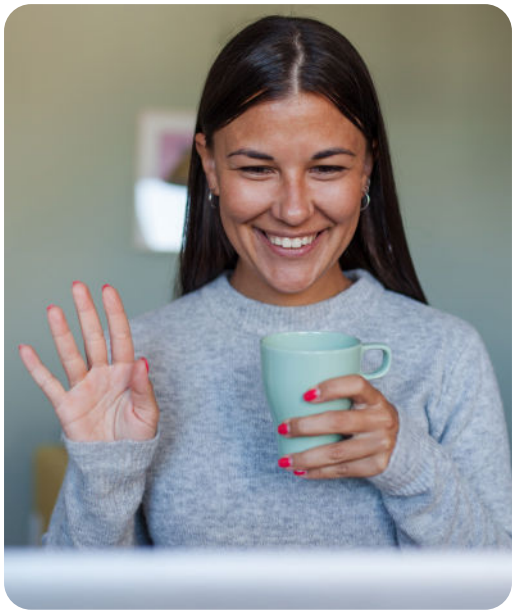
"The sessions have been insightful and have helped me reflect more clearly on both my personal capacity and the direction of the business. The conversations have been practical, supportive and have already made a positive impact."

Another noted:

"It's great to have someone outside of the business with a wealth of experience to talk with. My Mentor listens, challenges my thinking and provides clear perspectives on how to address business issues."

These insights reinforce the importance of mentorship in providing both practical guidance and emotional support for business leaders.

PROGRAM TESTIMONIALS



"The program felt really well set up from the start. The structure, communication, and expectations were clear, which made it easy to stay on track. The regular check-ins were valuable in keeping momentum and making sure things didn't drift, and communication throughout was consistent and easy."

"I can now see that significant progress is on the way having put in place necessary planning and actions. Thank you very much. I've had a complete change of attitude about finances. This has been the information I needed but didn't know how to get and was not previously exposed to."

"Kelley was a pleasure to work with – she provided just the right tension of guidance and information vs encouragement to complete the tasks independently but with a sound knowledge base."

"The program assisted in helping me realise that I was on the right path but need some guidance, consistency and accountability to keep on track."

"Tiana has been brilliant, very helpful and I loved what she had to offer. Thanks for the opportunity to join the program, I got a lot from it."

"It has been an extremely in-depth experience that brought a lot of awareness and is changing the way I view things in my life and business. Just brilliant."

"I've really enjoyed the mentoring partnership. The guidance and perspective I received were practical and relevant, and I appreciated how open and supportive the conversations were. It felt like a safe space to explore ideas, challenges, and opportunities, which made the experience genuinely valuable."

"The program helped me take a step back from the day-to-day and think a bit more strategically, while still giving me things I could apply straight away. I've come away with more clarity on where I'm heading, more confidence in my decisions, and a better understanding of how important perspective and accountability are."

"My Mentor was a steady lighthouse. Someone that kept me focused on the big issues of the business rather than getting lost in the day to day."

PROGRAM CASE STUDY



NAME: Aidan Mackinnon, Founder at Cut Throat Knives
MENTOR: Caroline Raper, Director of Events and Marketing at This Space

KEY IMPACTS:
• Strategic clarity during a pivot in response to declining sales
• Greater confidence in decision-making and willingness to seek specialist expertise
• Structured accountability through regular sessions
• Emotional support and perspective during a challenging economic period
• Expanded network and ongoing connection beyond the formal program

When you've spent a decade building something by hand, it can be hard to step back and see it clearly. For Aidan Mackinnon, a full-time knife maker and founder of a handcrafted kitchenware brand, the past few years had tested not just his business model, but his mindset. Emerging from COVID into a consumer spending recession, sales had dropped and the path forward felt uncertain.

Through a 12-month Rare Birds mentoring partnership with Caroline, Aidan didn't just find answers – he found clarity, confidence and renewed direction. What began as a structured mentoring relationship evolved into a trusted partnership and genuine friendship. Together, they reshaped his thinking, strengthened his strategy, and positioned his business for its next chapter of growth.

This is the story of how mentoring helped Aidan steady the ship and rediscover his edge.

Aidan launched his knife-making business in 2015 with a powerful vision: to transform the way people engage with cooking through beautifully handcrafted tools. Each knife is made entirely by him, from start to finish. It is slow, intentional craftsmanship in a world of mass production.

For years, the business grew steadily. But like many small businesses, it was hit hard by COVID. Classes and experiences – an important revenue stream – had to pause. Then came a consumer recession. As an "everyday luxury" product, his high-end knives were often the kind of self-gift people delayed during uncertain times.

Twelve months ago, Aidan found himself at a crossroads. Sales were down. The market had shifted. And he was entering a necessary pivot.

PROGRAM CASE STUDY

"I was definitely going into this open-minded," Aidan shared. "I wasn't sure what the benefits would be. In a world where you've got tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm, I wondered what mentoring would offer."

What he discovered was something profoundly human.

From the outset, Aidan and Caroline committed to meeting monthly. Rare Birds' structured approach created consistency and accountability, but the real impact came from the quality of conversation.

Caroline brought deep business experience and, importantly, objectivity. As someone outside the business, she was able to ask different questions – and challenge assumptions Aidan hadn't even realised he was making.

"It does something different," Aidan reflected. "You can ask a tool how to solve a problem. But mentoring gives you perspective. It pushes your thinking."

At a time when Aidan was navigating uncertainty, Caroline became a sounding board. They unpacked the pivot he was undertaking and explored how to "re-right the ship" in a changed economic climate. Instead of reacting to falling sales with fear, they worked through strategy with calm focus.

That shift – from overwhelm to clarity – was pivotal.

Aiden says that more than an accountability buddy, Caroline provided a reality check. "You can easily get lost in both the day-to-day of running a small business, but also you can totally get lost in the dreams and aspirations of the business," he says. "And sometimes what you actually need is somebody to tell you, 'Okay, cool. That's great. I know where you want to be, but what are you doing now to make it happen?'"

Rather than focusing solely on a B2C business model, selling one knife at a time, Aidan explored B2B possibilities, successfully building strategic partnerships with restaurants.

"We happened to have a restaurant come in and ask us about ordering knives and I was able to upsell that from a $10,000 order into a $50,000 order. So that's become the golden goose for us. I'm going over there to pick up some samples that they're have approved for another 60 knives and I'm dropping off another sample that will become another 40 knife order. So we were able to solve the problem that if consumers don't have the spending power, who still does have the spending power and how are we going after those people?"

Like many founders, Aidan carries the full weight of his business on his shoulders. When revenue drops, it can feel personal. Mentoring created space to step back.

Through their sessions, Aidan gained greater clarity around what was working, what needed to evolve, and where his

PROGRAM CASE STUDY

energy was best spent. Rather than trying to do everything alone, he began to see where specialist support was needed.

In fact, one of the outcomes of the mentoring relationship was Aidan's decision to engage an additional Mentor with specific manufacturing expertise to support the next stage of growth. That choice reflected a more strategic, confident leader – someone who understood that building a resilient business requires both humility and collaboration.

Caroline celebrated that decision. The goal was never dependency; it was empowerment.

As the formal 12-month program nears its end, Aidan and Caroline have already agreed to stay in touch. They have shared dinners, stories and milestones. What began as a professional match has become a lasting relationship built on mutual respect. This aspect of the partnership was a surprise for Aidan.

"We've become friends through this," Aidan said. "I'll definitely stay in contact. It won't be as structured as once a month, but I'll keep sharing updates as things go on."

This is the ripple effect of mentoring. It extends beyond scheduled meetings into a broader support ecosystem.

At Rare Birds, we believe mentoring is not just about tactical advice. It is about building community, allyship and connection. Aidan's experience reflects this beautifully.

While mentoring cannot control external market conditions, it can transform how a founder navigates them.
Aidan's knives are forged slowly, with intention and precision. Over the past year, so too has his leadership.

Mentoring did not change who he is as a craftsman. It strengthened who he is as a founder. It gave him space to think differently, the courage to pivot, and the confidence to chart a new course.

In uncertain times, having someone in your corner makes all the difference.

His next big move? He has partnered with a production company to create a 10-part web series called *Forging Friendships* that's on YouTube. The show sees celebrities make a knife with Aidan that is then auctioned off for charity. They are currently seeking funding for a second season.

At Rare Birds, we know that mentorship changes lives and livelihoods. It builds confidence, opens doors, and helps founders like Aidan not only survive challenging seasons – but grow through them. Because financial independence and sustainable success are rarely achieved alone. **They are built in community.**

EDUCATION

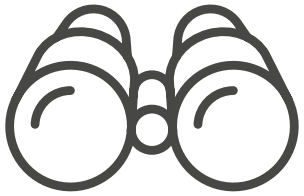
2025

ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY

EDUCATION SNAPSHOT

60 MINUTE FREE business, personal and professional development masterclasses for the Rare Birds community and program cohorts

The Rare Birds mentoring programs' impact is augmented by continued and lifelong education masterclasses. We design custom education programs for our corporate and government clients and also facilitate monthly workshops and mentor deep-dive sessions for our community. We engage business leaders and experts from the Rare Birds Mentor community to deliver quality, actionable content.



FOCUS AREAS 2025

AI CAPABILITIES, SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING, FINANCIAL LITERACY, PERSONAL BRAND STRATEGIES

8-MODULE INCUBATOR PROGRAM TO DEVELOP FOUNDER SKILLS FOR 9,695 PARTICIPANTS

37
SESSIONS
8 FOUNDER INCUBATOR MODULES
13 MENTOR LAB MASTERCLASSES

10,612
PARTICIPANTS

118
VOLUNTEER HOURS
$23,600 value

OUR PROGRAMS

2025

VISION + EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supporting entrepreneurship and small business development provides Uber with a **meaningful opportunity to strengthen engagement** with its community while reinforcing its position as a brand that enables flexibility, innovation and economic opportunity.

The Business Booster Program **offers Uber a tailored solution** designed to equip aspiring and emerging business owners with the practical knowledge, confidence and tools needed to launch, develop and grow their businesses.

Originally developed for cohorts of 100 Uber drivers and delivery partners, **the success of Business Booster led to its evolution** into an always-on digital program, extending access to high-quality business education to a broader community. This scalable model enables Uber to provide meaningful business support while maintaining an ongoing connection with people at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey.

The program not only builds business capability but **positions Uber as a genuine partner** in participants' success. By investing in accessible business education and practical pathways to growth, Uber can deepen engagement, strengthen brand affinity and demonstrate a credible commitment to entrepreneurship and small business. Together, Uber and Inspiring Rare Birds can continue to **create opportunities that help aspiring business owners** turn ideas into action and build stronger, more sustainable businesses.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

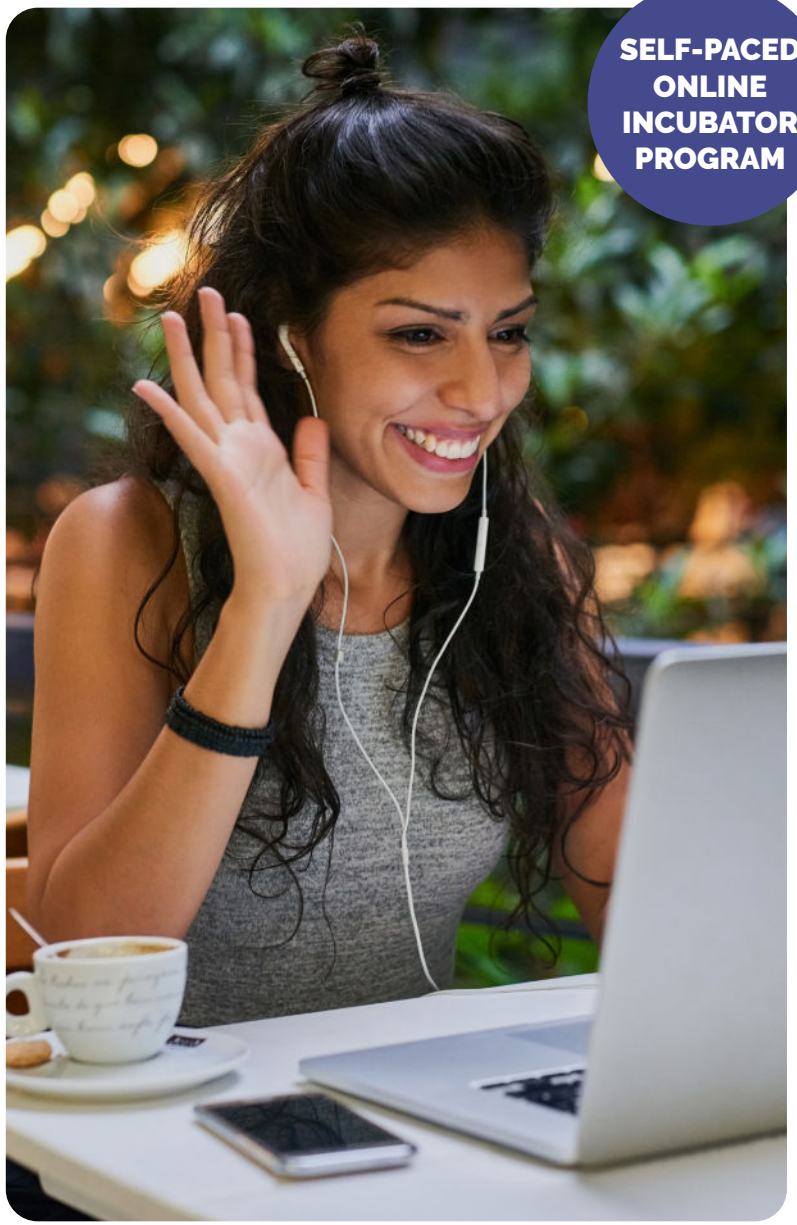
Rare Birds designed and delivered a bespoke Incubator Program in partnership with Uber that comprised 8 masterclasses, live Ask the Expert sessions, workbook activities and evaluations, plus the opportunity to pitch for business grants worth a combined $50,000.

In previous years, this program was offered to a select group of 100 people driving or delivering on the Uber platforms. The program proved so popular and successful that Uber requested to open it up to anyone who wished to participate.

The result? In 2025, Rare Birds delivered an always-on program, professionally filmed, built on an LMS platform, with quizzes, extra resources, case studies, community noticeboard and live sessions for a Q&A with the masterclass presenters.

- **9,695** enrolled participants across ANZ.
- **Over 73%** of respondents were pre-launch or idea-stage, confirming the program primarily attracts aspiring founders rather than mature businesses.
- **Top 5 focus areas** for students ahead of commencing were:

Business Strategy
Vision and Purpose
Digital Marketing
Product Development and Pricing
Pitching Your Business



PROGRAM OUTCOMES

91%
WOULD RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM TO OTHERS



63%
MADE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO BUSINESS PLANS

94%
SAID THE COURSE PROVIDED TANGIBLE OUTCOMES

"The main takeaway is learning how to keep growing and building loyal customers even after the program ends. The program helped me shift from 'just selling products' to building a brand with a strategy."

"The program gave me real clarity on how to turn an idea into something practical. The biggest takeaway was learning how to break things down into simple steps I can actually apply right away. It helped me understand my customers better, tighten my pitch, and feel more confident about building something that serves the community."

83%
RATED THE CLASSES 5/5
14% RATED THEM 4/5

99%
IMPROVED THEIR KNOWLEDGE
73% IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY

96%
WOULD DEFINITELY APPLY LEARNINGS

Pitch Competition: $50k in business grants

A total of 109 3-minute videos were submitted for judging to our panel of experts who selected the three winners. The judging criteria looked for capability, knowledge and viability.



1st prize: $25,000
Naomi Clements, Flora

"I'm incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to develop Flora, from the ground up, through such a transformative and timely programme, and to know others believe in this idea too is just so exciting and humbling. I am confident this is just the beginning of Flora's journey and I can't wait to get to work and see what the future holds!"



2nd prize: $15,000
Eduardo Frez, Smart Cover

"Winning the Uber Business Booster is the green light we've been waiting for. For us, this capital is strictly fuel for R&D. It allows Smart Cover to bridge the gap between a digital concept and a physical industrial prototype.

I am incredibly proud and grateful that a tech giant like Uber recognises the urgency of this issue."



3rd prize: $10,000
Lisa Jolly, I am Hot Honey

"As a woman entrepreneur over 50 who lost everything during Covid, this win means more than I can properly put into words. Uber quite literally gave me the space and time to rebuild on my own terms.

I feel like it's just the beginning as we go to raise our first round… so Uber is officially our first investor in the best way ever!"

Mentor LABS

FREE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MENTOR LABS
Rare Birds leverages the knowledge, generosity, and real-world experience of its national Mentor network to deliver impactful online workshops and Mentor Labs. These sessions support both **business growth and personal leadership development**, with a focus on practical skills, mindset, and peer connection.
Offered at **no cost** to our broader community and their networks, all workshops are recorded and added to our growing library of **on-demand learning content**, ensuring continuous access to high-quality education.
In 2025, a total of **917 participants** registered to attend these sessions — a testament to the growing demand for inclusive, expert-led, and accessible professional development.



Growing Your AI Capability: A Practical Guide to ChatGPT and Generative AI Tools
Simon Belousoff
206 registered guests



Connecting and Thriving in Flexible Work
Belinda Morgan
47 registered guests



Thriving in 2025: Building a career with purpose and progress
Caitlin Guilfoyle
91 registered guests



Joining a Board: What you need to know
Heather Disher
128 registered guests



Brand Building Series – Finding Your Brand 'True North' (3-part series)
Lauren Clemett
132 registered guests



Money Meets Mindset: Why Getting Personal with Your Finances Is Your Superpower
Fran Hughes
38 registered guests



How to run your business finances like a boss!
Michelle Kvello
60 registered guests



From Identity to Influence: Building Inclusive Innovation Across Cultures
Deepa Mani
24 guests



When Confidence Plays Hide and Seek
Howard Cleveland
43 registered guests



The Impact of Menopause on Health, Career and Relationships: panel discussion
Amy Lombard (left) Phil Hayes-St Clair
Andie Tickner
46 registered guests



Social Media Strategy: the new proven techniques that boost results
Melanie Coint-Bavarot
102 registered guests

COMMUNITY

2025

ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY
COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

ALWAYS FREE

Free membership to a community of Entrepreneurs, business leaders, C-suite executives, Founders and Investors

The Rare Birds community exists to create high impact and meaningful connections that enable members to increase their capabilities and expand their networks. As a social impact organisation, we are driven by a desire to build innovative businesses and support the people who run them.



SOCIAL MEDIA 2025

FACEBOOK
19,936

LINKEDIN
6,135

INSTAGRAM
4,339

HOURS OF GOOD WILL

IN 2025 OUR COMMUNITY GAVE A TOTAL OF

1,119 HOURS =

$223,800

70k
MEMBERS

1,252
MENTORS

8
PEER-TO-PEER SESSIONS FOR MENTORS

10
IN-PERSON EVENTS

POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS

The high-impact work done at Inspiring Rare Birds is delivered alongside our incredible community of 1200+ volunteer Mentors. Some of them have been with us since we launched in 2015.

Their considerable contribution enables us to invest our profits back into running programs and events across Australia.

During the 2024/25 financial year, they contributed an **approximate total of 1,119 hours** of their time, energy, experience and expertise in the service of others and our mission to advance economic equality.

Their goodwill was dedicated to:

- **Mentoring** – **792 hours** of one-on-one support to entrepreneurs and emerging leaders.
- **Education** – **39 hours** preparing and delivering Mentor Lab online masterclasses; **64 hours** preparing, filming and running Ask the Expert sessions for our Business Booster program; 25 judges spent **15 hours** evaluating and scoring pitch videos.
- **Community** – **55 hours** delivering Activator in-person events around Australia; **64 hours** sharing ideas and expertise at Lunch Club meet-ups; **64 hours** connecting online at Mentor Meetups.
- **Advocacy** – **26 hours** contributing to case studies, blog posts and video testimonials.

A huge thank you goes to these Mentors who have been with us for

10 YEARS

Dave Clare
Phil Hayes-St Clair
Melanie Power
Mark Phillips
Phil Randall
Sally Mlikota
Catherine Pazvakavambwa
Emma Fraser
Kristal Kinsela
Sarita Johan
Jason Malouin
Jasmine Batra
Dannielle Michaels
Sean Heylen
Jackie Gordon



"As a Mentor, you continue to expand your knowledge, refine your skills, and connect with new people – sometimes with people who may become your next business partner, collaborator, trusted ally or even friends! Mentoring is a two-way street – it sparks new ideas, creativity, motivation, and action in your own life and business. Both Mentor and Mentee evolve together. While it may sound clichéd, my Mentees' wins are also my own. I genuinely want to see them achieve their goals and thrive, which spurs me on. I'm really proud of my Mentee and the progress we've made together."

– Dianna Schinella

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

CHARITY DRIVE: International Women's Day Fundraiser
In 2025, Rare Birds made the pivot to use International Women's Day as a fundraising platform, rather than just a one-off event.
We selected Dress For Success NSW/ACT as our charity of choice and set about raising funds in support of their high-impact and meaningful programs via a GoFundMe page and a ticketed lunch event.

THE WHY:
The mission of Dress for Success NSW/ACT mirrors our own in so many ways. Both of our organisations are committed to economic empowerment for women. At Rare Birds, we focus on leadership, entrepreneurship, and scale. Dress for Success, through their work in career readiness, attire, mentoring and wraparound support, creates the essential foundation for that journey.
Together, we're creating a pipeline – from job readiness to boardroom leadership – and hoping that no woman is left behind at any stage of her professional path.

CHARITY LUNCH:
Sponsored by Deloitte and held in their Sydney HQ at Quay Quarter Tower. Speakers were:

- **Robyn de Szoeke OAM** - Head of Property at Deloitte and past Chair of Dress for Success NSW/ACT
- **Jo Burston** - Founder and CEO at Rare Birds
- **Andrea Culligan** - Office Managing Partner at Deloitte Sydney, Chair of Dress for Success NSW/ACT and Rare Birds alumni
- **Phil Hayes-St Clair** - Rare Birds Ambassador 2025
- **Sonia Casanova** - CEO at Dress for Success NSW/ACT
- **Ellen** - DFS client story showcasing real-life transformation

TOTAL FUNDS RAISED: $3662.80



COMMUNITY MEET-UPS

ACTIVATOR EVENTS

Rare Birds Activators are Ambassador Mentors who run events to connect with local Mentors, engage their networks and local communities, and grow our reach.

In 2025/26, they held meetups in Sydney, Perth and Brisbane.

LUNCH CLUB

Monthly meet-ups for Mentors and their networks held at a venue close to Rare Birds HQ in Sydney CBD. Designed as a casual lunch to connect with fellow Rare Birds, exchange insights, and deepen relationships within our community. We sparked many new ideas and connections!

Mentors are invited to bring along friends and colleagues who are curious about being part of the Rare Birds Community. It also offers Mentors the chance to catch up with the Rare Birds Team, share their input, and hear more about what's coming up in the near future.

Lunch Club is limited to 10 attendees to foster deeper connections and conversation around the table. It has been so successful, we will look to expand to other cities in 2026.









ADVOCACY
2025

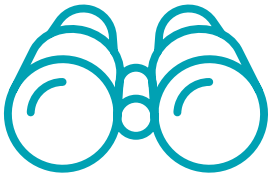
ADVANCING ECONOMIC EQUALITY

ADVOCACY SNAPSHOT

ALWAYS ACTIVE

Rare Birds and its high profile Ambassadors publically advocate for Diversity and Inclusion in business.

Rare Birds Founder and CEO Jo Burston is an active and vocal advocate for Diversity and Inclusion and improving entrepreneurship and leadership opportunities for women as well as other under-represented demographics. She is a recognised thought leader and sought after speaker in the gender equality space.



JO BURSTON SOCIAL MEDIA 2025

FACEBOOK
4,700

LINKEDIN
23,673

INSTAGRAM
4,277

JO BURSTON EVENTS

PEARCEY AWARDS

YPO REGIONAL ATHENA CHAMPION

6
AMBASSADORS
+ ACTIVATORS

248
MENTIONS
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

2
KEY OPPORTUNITIES
EVENT MC AND YPO ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN BY CEO JO BURSTON

AMBASSADOR + ACTIVATORS



RARE BIRDS AMBASSADOR

Phil Hayes-St Clair – Executive Coach, Entrepreneur and Award Winning Speaker – was our Rare Birds Ambassador for 2025/26.

Phil has been a Mentor with Rare Birds since 2016 and has provided his knowledge, passion and expertise to a raft of our Mentoring and Business Development programs over the years.

Advocacy for equal opportunities in all aspects of life for women and girls – particularly entrepreneurship and health – lies at the forefront of Phil's work.

We are truly grateful for how this partnership sparked new growth and connections, leading to greater social impact in our work to advance economic equality. Phil addressed our IWD Lunch event, Lunch Club, and played a huge role in delivering our Business Booster Program.

ACTIVATOR PROGRAM

The Rare Birds Activator Program is designed to grow our community, foster meaningful connections, and support women entrepreneurs and leaders across Australia.

Activators play a vital role in amplifying the Rare Birds mission by representing our values, sharing our news and programs with their network, and running events in their local and business communities. All with the support of Rare Birds.

In 2025, our Activators were:

- Cherry Ward: Brisbane
- Bronwen Sciortino: Perth
- Cate Kemp: Sydney
- Khyati Bhatia: Sydney
- Kay Godfrey: Sydney



"I hosted a Brisbane Mentors Coffee & Connect for Inspiring Rare Birds, an organisation I've been mentoring with for over five years now.
I'm still connected to the women I first mentored and have ongoing mentoring partnerships outside of the formal program.
That's what I love about this work – it's not transactional and you don't 'finish' and move on. You watch someone step into a bigger role, land the promotion, start the business, find their voice. In the process, you realise you've gained as much as you've given."

– Cherry Ward

KEY OPPPORTUNITES

Pearcey FOUNDATION



Jo Burston, awarded the **Pearcey Foundation NSW Entrepreneur of the Year** in 2012, has remained a prominent figure in the ICT sector. In 2025, she returned as MC for the NSW Awards, a role she has filled since 2015.
Jo's presentation was met with strong acknowledgement from many ICT industry leaders, who praised Rare Birds' role in fostering entrepreneurship and driving meaningful change.

AUDIENCE: 200

YPO



Jo Burston has been the **YPO Athena Regional Chair** since 2021.

The YPO Athena program is an initiative designed to accelerate gender diversity, increase the number of female chief executives, and foster an inclusive environment within the global leadership community.

During Jo's tenure, our region has seen an incredible 65.98% growth in female membership, with 116 women recruited across ANZ. That is no small feat, and Australia and New Zealand continues to be recognised globally as a leading region for the program's success. This achievement is a direct reflection of her leadership, advocacy, and the time and energy she has invested within her YPO chapter.

SOCIAL MEDIA MENTIONS

Cherry Ward · 1st
I help leaders find their compass when the map no longer works...
10mo · Edited ·

The best career advice I've ever received came from someone who'd already lived my dreams.

That's the power of strategic mentorship and why I've been an Inspiring Rare Birds mentor for 5 years.

This week I am in Perth and in between workshops, I met up with my fellow Inspiring Rare Birds Activator, Bronwen Sciortino for a planning session. We have recently become Activators, running events and spreading the word about the work that Rare Birds does.

Here's what makes Inspiring Rare Birds extraordinary:

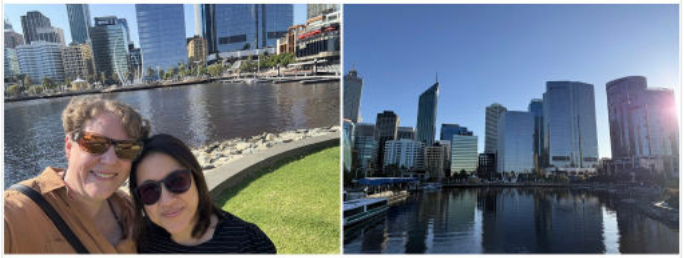
🎯 They don't just pair mentors and mentees randomly. You're connected with someone who's walked your exact path and shares your personality style.

💡 This isn't casual advice over coffee. It's structured support with dedicated team backing and proven materials.

📈 Since 2015, they've been helping women (and men) achieve financial independence through mentorship that actually moves the needle.

If you're ready to shift gears and grow but need external insights to get there, Inspiring Rare Birds might be exactly what you're looking for.

#mentoring #inspiringrarebirds #womeninbusiness #leadership #community



40 7 comments · 1 repost

Uber
3,572,353 followers
1yr · + Follow

Took a drive with Mark Bouris AM and Emma Foley 🚘 to chat about Uber x Inspiring Rare Birds #BusinessBooster program in Australia and New Zealand 🇦🇺🇳🇿 ...more



Kay Godfrey -Up Up and Away, Book... · 2nd Connect
Implementation and Training on Xero and Quickbooks as...
3d ·

💥 I'm proud to share that I've joined the Rare Birds Activator Program for 2025/26! 💥
Inspiring Rare Birds is a national initiative dedicated to mentoring, education, and purpose-led action — and I'm thrilled to be part of it.
As a Rare Birds Activator, I'll be involved in hosting events that inspire new ideas, share practical insights, and encourage others to take bold steps in their personal and professional journeys.
This opportunity allows me to contribute to something bigger — championing values I care deeply about: integrity, learning, innovation, and impact.
A heartfelt thank you to the Rare Birds team for welcoming me onboard. I look forward to what the next 12 months will bring!
If you'd like to find out more or get involved, feel free to reach out.
#RareBirds #MentoringMatters #Leadership #PersonalGrowth #YesSheCan #LifelongLearning #UpUpAndAway



SOCIAL MEDIA MENTIONS

The Growth Manager
2w • Edited •

A few months ago, I had the privilege of leading a Inspiring Rare Birds Mentor Roundtable on networking, community and strategic partnerships.

We brought together experienced business mentors to discuss a topic that almost every business owner faces.

How do you consistently grow your business through relationships?

The biggest takeaway surprised many of us.
Most business owners are approaching it backwards.

They're spending time networking, attending events and collecting contacts, but they haven't built a system that turns relationships into long term business growth.



Cherry Ward • 1st
I help leaders find their compass when the map no longer works...
7mo • Edited •

Coffee, conversation, and mentors who are committed to lifting others up.

This morning I hosted a Brisbane Mentors Coffee & Connect for Inspiring Rare Birds an organisation I've been mentoring with for over five years now.

I'm still connected to the women I first mentored and have ongoing mentoring partnerships outside of the formal program.

That's what I love about this work - it's not transactional and you don't "finish" and move on. You watch someone step into a bigger role, land the promotion, start the business, find their voice. In the process, you realise you've gained as much as you've given.

Rare Birds exists to advance economic equality by connecting women in business with mentors who've walked the path.

If you're in Brisbane (or anywhere in Australia) and have expertise to share, we need more mentors. You don't need to have it all figured out. You just need to be willing to show up.

DM me if you're curious, or contact Inspiring Rare Birds to learn more.

Teegan Diamond Simone Henderson-Smart Annie Allan
Jason Malouin - Superpower Portraits



Bronwen Sciortino • 1st
International Author & Speaker - The Simplicity Expert
9mo •

Big news — I've just stepped into a new role as an Activator for Inspiring Rare Birds here in Perth. 💫

I've been part of this incredible community as a Mentor for a while now, and I'm now helping expand the movement — creating spaces for connection, collaboration, and growth for women in business and leadership.

Because when we come together, share experience, and lift one another up, we rise faster — and higher — together. 🌱

For those who don't know, Inspiring Rare Birds is a purpose-driven organisation helping women achieve financial independence through mentorship, education, and a powerful community of practice.

Their mentoring program is a total game-changer — pairing you with someone who's been where you are, understands the journey, and can guide you through it. It's all about support, accountability, and meaningful connection.

If you're looking for that next step — the kind that helps you grow your business, elevate your career, or simply gain clarity — Rare Birds is worth checking out.
👉 https://lnkd.in/gQcW-qEy

Here's to women rising together — through collaboration, courage, and community. 🌸

Inspiring Rare Birds Teegan Diamond Simone Henderson-Smart Jo Burston



Taylor Brbot • 2nd
Manager, Business Projects | Top 50 People in E-commerce ...
1w •

+ Follow

Two years ago, my husband and business partner, Nicholas Brbot , stood on stage pitching an idea for a product we knew our customers desperately needed.

That pitch earned us second place in the Uber Business Booster program and a $30,000 grant to help bring that vision to life.

Fast forward to today, that product which launched in February has become one of the biggest growth drivers in our business Cat Harness Australia.

Since launching our Premium Cat Backpack, it has:
• Increased our business revenue by 52%
• Improved our net margin by 86%
• Acquired new customers who weren't using our hero product (Cat Harness)

At a time when so many businesses are finding retail challenging, we're incredibly proud of these results. But the numbers aren't what I'm most proud of.

The biggest lesson for us was about listening to our customers.

Before we designed a single feature, we spent countless hours surveying our community, reading every email, replying to social media comments, and speaking directly with customers at expos. We weren't trying to create another pet product nobody asked for, we wanted to solve the problems cat owners were actually facing.

Our customers told us they didn't want another generic product they'd replace in 12 months. They wanted something thoughtfully designed, premium, and built to last. They wanted products they could invest in with confidence, knowing they were buying quality.

In a niche market, that customer obsession has become our biggest competitive advantage against "the big guys".

A huge thank you to Uber for believing in our vision and helping us turn an idea into a product that is now making a meaningful impact on both our business and thousands of cat owners (one has even travelled to Andorra).

A special thank you to Inspiring Rare Birds , and the incredible judges Sarah McLachlan , Will Davies , Bree Kirkham , Phil Ore for your encouragement, feedback and belief in small business.

RARE BIRDS

#YES SHE CAN

To discuss this report, please contact **Founder and CEO Jo Burston:**
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