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Freya Higgins-Desbiolles & Manjit Monga

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# Transformative change through events business: a feminist ethic of care analysis of building the purpose economy

Freya Higgins-Desbiolles<sup>a</sup> and Manjit Monga<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Management, University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia; <sup>b</sup>School of Management, University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia

## ABSTRACT

As we confront social, ecological and economic challenges, some look to a new model described as the purpose economy as a pathway to more sustainable and just futures. Responsible and sustainable events are increasingly of interest to both academics and practitioners. However, little work has explored the capacities for social entrepreneurship in events management and ways that events can build socio-cultural well-being. This article presents a case study of an unusual events business known as GOGO Events located in Adelaide, South Australia. For some eight years, GOGO has offered a social enterprise initiative training and supporting teams of marginalised people to create and install event installations. To accomplish this, GOGO's founder has built a web of stakeholders, including: corporate clients; not for profit organisations supporting homeless and vulnerable people; and these vulnerable people themselves. Together they build networks of care and social change. Using the lens of feminist care ethics, we analyse how such work contributes to building the purpose economy. These efforts move beyond corporate social responsibility and suggest events businesses can help build community, create relationships of care and contribute to more sustainable and fair futures. After COVID-19, such socially committed work has become even more imperative.

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## Introduction

We create truly unique events and event experiences, but our events are different. We go beyond creating the WOW factor - we change peoples' lives. We educate and train homeless and disadvantaged people to produce our decor items and event materials, and then we employ these trainees to install our events. (GOGO Events, n.d.)

Despite this era of humanity seeing great improvement in the standards of living for much of the globe's population, poverty, inequality and marginalisation still haunt too many people today. Development models focused on growth are increasingly challenged and responses have included a re-centring on human well-being and more holistic agendas such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Boluk et al., 2019). As a result, the mission of business is also challenged and some sort of social returns are demanded of them, ranging along a continuum from minimising social harms to dedicated programmes of corporate social responsibility. Recent analysis even suggests we are entering a new era of re-envisioning economics and

economies, moving beyond the information economy to the purpose economy (Hurst, 2016). Hurst's survey of entrepreneurs identifies emerging values including a desire for impact, a concern to build community and to fulfil personal growth (2016). Those dedicated to using their business capabilities to contribute to building this purpose economy are transforming thinking on the pathways to sustainable futures. This article presents a case study of one events business founded by a leader exploring the cutting edge of this transformative project. Considering the momentous ecological challenges we face and the growing impacts of social inequality, the building of the purpose economy offers a promising pathway to holistic sustainable development.

As researchers, we were surprised that the corporate events sector, known for its commercialism and industry interface, would offer up a novel model pushing the boundaries of social enterprise and supporting the purpose economy. But having discovered the example of Sarah Gun and her business GOGO Events (GOGO) based in South Australia, we discovered a successful events planner willing to transform her business into a tool to provide disadvantaged and homeless<sup>1</sup> people a chance to engage with the events industry and thereby change their circumstances. GOGO is an Adelaide based premium, event stylist and management company that specialises in organising events for corporate, government and non-profit sector clients. It was founded as conventional events management business, but the founder Sarah Gun, made a decision to shift it to a model of social enterprise with a motivation to use her business as a tool for social transformation. She brought major corporate partners such as Toyota Australia and hospitality leaders such as Food SA into her vision to empower marginalised and homeless people by offering training and experience in events styling and operations. This article will explore the case of GOGO to gather some insights into how this unique approach was inspired and assess its operations, impacts and model in its efforts to address social disadvantage. As a social entrepreneur, Gun bridges a network of organisations and individuals to co-create a social mission in the unusual space of the events sector.

This case study evidences a growing values-led transformation that surpasses the dynamics previously identified in the literature of responsible events management and sustainability in events (e.g. Getz, 2007; Musgrave, 2011). The questions raised in this work are not the typical ones of "why should events transition to sustainability" but rather "what values could underpin events management to create lasting legacies and support positive social change". Gun was ahead of the curve in 2012, when she embarked on reformulating her business approach to deliver on a commitment to achieving a social purpose. She intentionally chose to use her business as a tool to implement her vision of positive social change rather than pursuing the more usual philanthropic approach. In this analysis we use the explanatory power of the feminist ethic of care to understand this work.

The British Academy's project "the Future of the Corporation" argued that the social contract between business and society needed to be revisited; "A return to corporate purpose is central to a renewal and revival of business as an institution that plays a positive role in society. And over the course of 2019, there has been growing recognition of this" (The British Academy, 2019, p. 14). In 2020, in the context of the World Economic Forum, the role of business in building the "for purpose economy" was the hot topic. Mayer articulated a vision for such an approach: "to produce profitable solutions to the problems of people and planet, and not to profit from producing problems for people or planet. It is about producing solutions, doing so profitably not just philanthropically ... " (Mayer, 2020).

The aim of this work is to investigate the case of GOGO Events as a social enterprise in order to demonstrate that the events sector has valuable capacities to contribute to the development of purpose-driven approaches to building both society and economy. Such work is especially valuable in an era with growing inequality which analysts have shown to undermine efforts at sustainability. It also demonstrates the value of the feminist ethic of care to explain the development of the purpose economy agenda.

## Literature review

### *Events management and sustainability*

This case study of an events business could be situated within the literature of many fields of study, ranging from business ethics, to social entrepreneurship, to hospitality, tourism and events. As an innovative model, it sits at the juncture of these many fields. We prioritise the events literature initially as this emerging field of study has only recently developed concerns with understanding the imperatives of responsibility and sustainability and GOGO is clearly an unusual example in the events industry. As Raj and Musgrave (2009, p. 11) argued, the values of events industry leaders must change and take into account community and moral concerns.

Donald Getz in 2009 offered a “new paradigm” for responsible and sustainable events following on from thinking advanced in the effort to attain sustainable development. Highlighting the public good roles of events and the social equity events may promote, Getz argued:

Sustainable events are not just those that can endure indefinitely, they are also events that fulfil important social, cultural, economic and environmental roles that people value. In this way, they can become institutions that are permanently supported in a community or nation. (2009, p. 70)

Getz (2009) suggested that responsible tourism principles, the triple bottom line approach to sustainability and following the path to institutionalisation that sustainable development has taken, are the keys to implementing this new paradigm. He claimed governments should assume a key role in developing “agencies for the advancement of sustainable and responsible events” to achieve this and “... the effect would be to ensure that the usual claims of economic benefits are not accepted at face value, and that social, cultural and environmental measures of value would be equal to the economic” (2009, p. 79).

This underscores the need to strive for holistic sustainability and to institutionalise this in events governance. Since Getz’s original foray, the sustainability imperative has only strengthened in the events sector. Musgrave (2011) argued that contexts such as environmental awareness, the threats of global climate change and social tensions exacerbated by events have pressed the events industry to better engage with sustainability.

Pernecky and Luck (2013) edited volume argued that events, society and sustainability are inextricably linked: “sustainability needs to be tackled not mainly through the prisms of event management but understood in a wider context of society” (p. 26). They asserted the proposition that: “Events are an important means of socio-cultural sustainability and have the potential to promote equality, cultural diversity, inclusion, good community relations, and human rights” (2013, p. 26). Events and their management also have specific attributes which make them valuable conduits to social action and transformation. As Musgrave observed: “Getz (2007) argued what is fundamental to the context of sustainable event management (SEM) is that events are intermediaries and have many partners” (2011, p. 265).

Works like these just mentioned, discuss events as tools to build social capital, events offering legacies to hosting communities and the social impacts of events. Despite these few works on the social impacts of events, Mair and Whitford (2013) survey of events academic experts revealed there remained too few studies addressing the socio-cultural impacts of events. This article contributes to a growing body of work building greater understanding of the social value of events and events leadership.

### *Social enterprises and social entrepreneurship*

In an era when neoliberalism has seen both greater marketisation and reduced public support for social welfare, the development of social enterprise models have emerged as a way to address these changed circumstances. According to Social Traders:

Social enterprises are businesses that trade to intentionally tackle social problems, improve communities, provide people access to employment and training, or help the environment.

Using the power of the marketplace to solve the most pressing societal problems, social enterprises are commercially viable businesses existing to benefit the public and the community, rather than shareholders and owners (Social Traders, n.d.).

The creative blending of business practices with social agendas has led to a burgeoning field of social entrepreneurship. Mair and Noboa (2006, p. 122) define social entrepreneurship as:

... as the innovative use of resource combinations to pursue opportunities aiming at the creation of organizations and/or practices that yield and sustain social benefits. We deliberately do not delimit the definition to initiatives in the nonprofit sector and imply a notion of helping behaviour.

Key to the development of social enterprises is the leadership and vision of the social entrepreneur. Social entrepreneurs have a unique quality: “the relentless motivation to change a whole society, shared by only a very small percentage of the population” (Mair & Noboa, 2006, p. 123). Von der Weppen and Cochrane (2012, p. 498) argue the social entrepreneurial movement “[...] can be seen as a marriage between altruism and capitalism in moving social interventions away from dependency by endeavouring to harness market forces for social aims”. Alter (2006) described operational models of social enterprise, including: entrepreneur support, market intermediary, employment, fee-for-service, market linkage, service subsidisation and organisational support models. Through these various models, social entrepreneurship has advanced in recent years to address social problems and build society. However, it must be noted that social enterprises may experience challenges due to the mixing of business and social goals; this includes the potential for incoherence, goal-ambiguity, conflict and instability (Stryker, 2000).

There is a growing analysis of social entrepreneurship in tourism (e.g. Mottiar, 2016; Mottiar et al., 2018; Sheldon & Daniele, 2017; von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). Mottiar (2016) found that: “social entrepreneurs can play a fundamental role in the development of tourism destinations, and this is an important topic for researchers in tourism to be concerned about” (p. 1137). However, recent work found there is a lack of research studies focused on women social entrepreneurs in tourism (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). These works are important as they indicate the strong potential for tourism to be harnessed for local community flourishing when social enterprises are developed and thrive.

von der Weppen and Cochrane (2012, p. 499) offered insights into the diverse models of social entrepreneurship in tourism and how these secure value creation. Olberding (2016) edited a volume focused on special events that feature a social mission using the conceptual framework of social enterprise. Sheldon and Daniele (2017) edited volume offers the most comprehensive analysis of the interstices between tourism and social enterprise to date and explains how it connects to efforts to create wider social transformations. These works evidence a growing interest in the tourism and events sectors to harness emerging practices of social entrepreneurship to support social missions and social benefit. However, Sheldon and Daniele (2017) work points to the way the myopic focus on the market economy is giving way to broader visions of the purpose economy.

However, from our extensive reading of the event literature, we found few analyses that addressed social entrepreneurship in the events sector. One exception is the work of Eversole et al. (2014) who presented three case studies of social entrepreneurship in Tasmania, with one being the Bloomin’ Tulips Festival. They described this as: “a medium-sized social enterprise developed around an annual community festival and partially resourced by a fortnightly community market” (2013, p. 251). We have found no instance of an event leader using an events business as an opportunity for social entrepreneurialism in the way as the case we report on in this article. It would thus seem that there is a promising research gap to pursue on social enterprises operating in the events sector and their contributions to fulfilling the full social and economic capacities of events.

### ***Conceptualisations of the purpose economy***

One of the newest trends evident in business studies and business practices is the embracing of humanistic values and tying these to business success. In the aftermath of numerous business scandals, there has been concerted calls to rethink the roles and purposes of businesses in society (Karns, 2011). The book *Firms of Endearment* (Sisodia et al., 2014) is one notable example that refers to Fortune 500 companies that are examples of purpose-driven business and an operating model built on stakeholder relationships. Some analysts have called this an evolution to “conscious capitalism”, described as:

Conscious businesses are galvanized by higher purposes that serve, align and integrate the interests of all their major stakeholders. Their higher state of consciousness makes visible to them the interdependencies that exist across all stakeholders, allowing them to discover and harvest synergies from situations that otherwise seem replete with trade-offs. They have conscious leaders who are driven by service to the company’s purpose, to all the people the business touches and to the planet we all share. (Mackey & Sisodia, 2013)

Karns proposed stewardship (STW) models as an approach to align business purpose with wider human flourishing, through:

[...] providing the goods and services that enable people as consumers to flourish; opportunities for meaningful and creative work that enable people as workers along the value-chain to flourish; and, support that enables communities to flourish. STW aligns with the sustainability movement’s emphasis on people and planet issues. (2011, p. 341)

One important development in this mix is the creation and growth of the B Corp community.

Certified B Corporations are a new kind of business that balances purpose and profit. They are legally required to consider the impact of their decisions on their workers, customers, suppliers, community, and the environment. This is a community of leaders, driving a global movement of people using business as a force for good. (B Corporation, n.d.)

The study of B Corps in tourism and events management is also in its infancy, with Zebryte and Jorquera (2017) offering some insights from Chilean case studies.

These developments are part of the movement to transition to a purpose economy, as described in the introduction. In this new context, caring, passion and connection are encouraged in these new business forms rather than a focused pursuit of profits and self-interest.

### ***Feminist ethic of care***

In explaining the unusual case study presented here, we turn to care ethics, the feminist ethic of care in particular, as well as feminist hospitality. Hamington (2013) noted that “care ethics” was first identified in the early 1980s by Carol Gilligan in her response to work on moral development thinking which she noted undervalued relational, imaginative, creative, and contextual thinking. Gilligan argued a feminist ethic: “begins with connection, theorised as primary and seen as fundamental in human life” (Gilligan, 1995, p. 122). “The ethic of care guides us in acting carefully in the human world and highlights the costs of carelessness” (Gilligan, 2014, p. 103). Hamington argued “caring entails a disposition toward others but action on behalf of others as well” (2013, p. 1131). Engster (2005, pp. 53 and 54) defined care as “everything we do to help individuals to meet their basic needs, develop or maintain their basic capabilities, and live as much as possible free from suffering, so that they can survive and function at least at a minimally decent level”. In understanding the value of feminist care ethics, it is important to not mistake it for a feminine ethics which would possibly commit a mistake of essentialising the nature of women as carers (see Borgerson, 2007).

The feminist ethic of care presents a challenge to Hobbesian views that humans are selfish by nature and instead posits that caring relationships are what allow us to survive and thrive. As Held (2014, p. 109) noted, feminist care ethics also challenges “[...] the portrayal of economic

man [sic], with its assumptions dominating our market-driven society, that we always and everywhere pursue our own interests...". Hamington (2013) argued that care in corporations is not a utopian ideal; it is in evidence today. A feminist ethical analysis helps understand why and how some business leaders exhibit an ethical sensitivity and how such dynamics may help reshape society (Borgerson, 2007).

The feminist ethic of care offers explanatory value for understanding how certain business leaders are contributing to the development of the purpose economy. Models of conscious capitalism and stewardship show a realisation that businesses are part of society and are connected through relationships to it. Social enterprises, with their innovative mixing of business and social goals, are important leaders in these developments. Building relationships of care and interdependence, they serve as essential catalysts to building a more sustainable and fair future.

This literature provides a framework to understand the case of GOGO Events. Using the socio-cultural capacities and networks of events management, Sarah Gun has established a vision and evolving set of practices to build social benefits through social entrepreneurship. We found the explanatory power of the ethics of care model and relationality it implies a way to understand the partnership approach Gun created with her GOGO Events stakeholders. Through the years of the development of the social enterprise model, Gun's effort also worked to promote the advance of the purpose economy in South Australia.

## Methodology

This work is based on a critical research methodology for tourism governance for sustainability as articulated by Bramwell and Lane (2011). Critical approaches "... challenge and re-conceptualise established ideas in the field, and thus they seek to advance conceptual thinking" (Bramwell & Lane, 2011, p. 414). Critical methodologies in tourism and events studies are known for their disruptive ideas as well as employing diverse and inclusive approaches. One aspect of this for this project is the ongoing, longitudinal commitment of this research relationship with Gun which began in 2015 and continues today.

This research project was initiated after the researchers learned about the unique model of Sarah Gun's GOGO Events through the popular media. Because this research focused on exploratory research of the unique case of GOGO, a case study design comprising a series of interviews with the GOGO Founder and GOGO stakeholders was selected as the best research method and methodology. As Yin (2014, p. 4) has noted, case study approaches work well when research seeks to answer the "how" and "why" questions and when the research questions "... require an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon". Although this design may have many of the limitations of case study approaches including non-generalisability, its strengths lie in the rich, thick, context-specific descriptive insights and understanding that can be used to build tentative hypotheses to help inform future research (Flyvberg, 2006).

The researchers introduced themselves to Gun in 2015 and explained their intentions in the research. The work started with three semi-structured interviews with Gun each of some three hours duration. Questions explored included:

1. What are the motivations for someone in the events sector to transform their business and shape it to deliver social outcomes to disadvantaged communities?
2. How is the events business able to deliver social outcomes through a social enterprise model?
3. How is this model sustainable and replicable?

This was followed by a set of interviews with three of the corporate or not for profit organisational clients that have supported Gun's social entrepreneurship transition and booked GOGO



work teams. Additionally, we interviewed one of the not for profit agencies supporting Adelaide's homeless which worked with GOGO by recommending their clients that were ready for GOGO event work opportunities. Finally, we interviewed three women who gained work training and opportunities through GOGO. All interviewees were selected based on the recommendation of Sarah Gun and were approached after her introduction. Each interviewee had had a long-term relationship with GOGO Events and thus could offer us needed insights. This selection of interviewees ensured we gained a fully rounded understanding into the GOGO approach and could understand the efficacy of this model. Each of these interviews was conducted at a place of the interviewee's choosing in order to ensure ease and comfort. Interviews lasted approximately one hour in duration.

We audio-recorded these interviews and had them professionally transcribed. The transcripts were then analysed separately by the two academic researchers for emerging themes, enabling analyst triangulation in the process of developing the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interpretation of the data was also shared with Gun to ensure participant triangulation and to avoid misinterpretation. All interviewees were offered an opportunity to review the transcription of their interviews and correct any mistakes or clarify their meaning if needed. University ethics protocols were followed and all interviewees were afforded the opportunity for anonymity in their contributions.

The interview data has been reinforced through analysis of primary and secondary information from media, testimonials and evaluations that GOGO has collected and event documents from GOGO event clients. These documents were used to gain greater insights into how GOGO works and was perceived. The researchers also employed participant observation by participating in one GOGO Events team workshops, four GOGO Events run events and two GOGO Events team training sessions. Collectively, these methods helped to gain depth and confidence in the insights into GOGO Events and Gun's work. These interactions also embedded the researchers in relationships with the GOGO network. The researchers have been careful to employ critical reflexivity in the conduct and analysis of the research but do transparently declare this as a collaborative research work that is embodied and complicit. We use the term "complicit" here in the sense of Wilson and Hollinshead's discussion of soft science research: "In place of the conventional top-down lead of expert knowledge, there increasingly appears a call for complicity in research, where 'local', 'communal', 'situational', and 'non-scientific'/'non-academic', 'collaborative' and 'community-auspiced' forms of knowing are explored" (2005, pp. 32-3).

In such a research practice, the researchers bring themselves into the research to build authentic research relationships built on collaborative principles and shared values. Both researchers are women, and this was essential in building trust and shared experiences with some of the research informants, particularly the women from GOGO work teams. The first author has built a research portfolio based on critical, feminist, Indigenist and collaborative principles and this brought experience and values that underpinned the research approach. The second author is a migrant to Australia coming from South Asia and has conducted research on diversity in organisations and management integrity. Together they brought professional talents and personal experiences that allowed for points of connection and understanding with all informants. It was also important that all contributors to this research project shared mutual values on inclusivity and equity that are the foundations for the complicity achieved in this research work together.

It is intended that this research relationship will be extended beyond this exploratory study and that the researchers have a long-term commitment to working collaboratively with Sarah Gun as a co-researcher and as collaborators for ongoing social change. This commitment to longitudinal research and action is not something that many tourism and events scholars are able to do because of the pressures to meet the demands and metrics of the corporate university. It is this ongoing relationship with Gun that is premised on a shared commitment to positive social transformations that has underpinned our commitment to the feminist ethic of care. Our critical, feminist approach guiding us to this long-term commitment has allowed us to gain the deep



insights and understanding of the GOGO model and its impacts that would have otherwise been impossible.

## The gogo story

GOGO Events started in 2000. It is a premium, events-styling company winning contracts from top corporate businesses and organisations, such as Toyota Australia, the Australian Hotels Association of South Australia and Food South Australia (Food SA). After some twelve years of successful business operations, GOGO founder Sarah Gun, began to search for a way to do more. As she described the catalyst in a media interview:

"I found the commercial side of business and the whole industry vacuous," Gun says. "I felt empty, like I wasn't contributing, so I thought: I have to either find a new career, or a way to make this work. I realised the most powerful tool I had was actually my business". (Sarah Gun interviewed in Wells, 2016)

In the interview for this research project, she explained:

I [came] to a point in Christmas 2012 where I thought I'd lost my passion for the business and also I was having increasing awareness that I was operating in a highly consumer-driven environment. And that was very dissatisfying or had become very dissatisfying and I also became aware that I'd got to a point in my life where I felt the need to do what I could to have a positive impact in the world and I recognised that the best tool I had available to me was my business. (Gun, pers. comm. 23 December 2015)

According to Gun, a key catalyst to her actions was the experience of having her brother struggle with mental health issues which led to his sporadic homelessness. This made her aware of the disadvantage that some people confronted, and it motivated her to try to do something in her capacity to contribute to positive change. As she searched for a pathway for this, her events company had existed for more than a decade and was probably in need of a new direction. These two realisations sparked the shift as Gun recognised that her best vehicle to contribute to positive social change was through her events company. She recognised that she could train disadvantaged people, women particularly, to make events decorations and displays and then to install them for the major corporate clients that GOGO had on its client books. A key aspect to this awakening of consciousness and creation of the idea was an appreciation of the capacities of the disadvantaged and homeless arising from her intimate insights into her brother's own experiences:

I've always been aware that there are very few people that are homeless that lack the skills or the drive or the passion to make their lives better. Given an opportunity and someone, or a group of people, that just provide that opportunity can mean a world of difference. (Gun pers. comm. 23 December 2015)

This experience gave her trust in the efficacy of her members of GOGO work teams to seize the opportunity and make a success of it when others might have doubted that an elite events business was an appropriate vehicle for this work. This confirms what Mair and Noboa suggested (2006, p. 124) that the background and context of social entrepreneurs shapes their ability to recognise social opportunities and also to focus on altruistic goals; this is one of the marks of distinction between social and conventional entrepreneurship. Such a decision to evolve from a commercial enterprise to a social enterprise to deliver social outcomes is not unprecedented and has been described in the tourism literature (see von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012, p. 507).

Simultaneously, Gun had networks with significant others that could help make this a realisable goal. One pivotal foundation was her relationship with the Big Issue (TBI) that runs as a social enterprise to create employment opportunities for the homeless, marginalised and disadvantaged people. Gun joined the organising committee for TBI's "The Big Lunch" event and this provided her with models and ideas:

From a business management perspective where I'd been on the committee for The Big Issue lunch in their fundraising and I had the opportunity to experience and gain some insight into how that social enterprise

operated. Also over the period of those years we had often thought about how we could involve their clients in a fundraising event... (Gun, pers. comm. 23 December 2015)

While this particular pathway did not come to fruition, it planted the seed for Gun to eventually approach her events clients with a proposal to employ homeless and disadvantaged people, women in particular, to make and install elite events. The specific operational model of social enterprise Gun envisioned for GOGO was an Employment model (see Alter, 2006). She pitched this idea to Food SA first, soon followed by Toyota Australia.

At this point, Gun developed a consciousness for becoming an agent of change, envisioned that a commercial events company could take on social enterprise characteristics and through a strong network of companies, organisations and individuals could work collaboratively to enact the vision together. Gun asked herself: "how to connect those that would give us money with those that are needy and is there a way to build a relationship between these two groups of people?" (Gun, pers. comm., 23 December, 2015). She described her approach:

It's been completely a commercially run business where my business clients pay for the employment of my teams [of homeless/disadvantaged workers] and they pay for my fee for service. They pay for me to design and run the event, manage it and for me to engage the team of women then they pay for whatever it is that we're producing... And we haven't applied for any funding; we haven't received any philanthropy money. (Gun pers. comm. 23 December 2015)

Gun through GOGO had worked with Toyota Australia for some ten years when Gun sought their support for the transformation. Gun presented a business plan to support this revised approach which put an additional costing of just a modest ten percent for such clients to pay for the employment of disadvantaged work teams to create and install their events. According to Gun, "in 2012 Toyota embraced the social change at GOGO events; they engaged their corporate social responsibility policies and commenced an enduring relationship with our disadvantaged women's work team". A representative of Toyota Australia explained:

I think it was only about four years ago she came to us and said that she had this new business model that she wanted to propose... It was kind of a no brainer... when she explained her business model and how we're going to help those disadvantaged people and they can have training... We just went, absolutely. She said, you've got to trust us because we do have that level of expectation that it does have to look like a glamorous event... We've just been really happy with her work and the direction she's taken her company and we just think she's doing amazing things. We were happy to support her vision to do that. (representative of Toyota Australia, pers. comm. 8 November 2016)

A Marketing Manager for Toyota Australia, Felicity Henshaw has attested:

In recent years we have been privileged to partner with Sarah and GOGO events to help make a difference to some special people in our society. Everyone involved in our events have been overwhelmed by the work Sarah and her team do to provide meaningful training and work experience for these women, whilst at the same time delivering an unforgettable experience for our guests. (GOGO "working with Toyota Australia)

The corporate clients that book with GOGO take the opportunity to gain credit for their support of GOGO's social enterprise in terms of their CSR strategies. For instance, Food SA booked GOGO to style its 2016 Food Industry Awards Gala Dinner and noted in its event brochure that it was "giving back to the community" by having GOGO style this event using work teams sourced from the Hutt Street Centre's homeless and marginalised clientele (Food, 2016, p. 8).

GOGO events crews are sourced through service providers for the marginalised in Adelaide. For instance, GOGO Events has a long-standing relationship with the Not for Profit (NFP) Hutt Street Centre, an organisation that supports homeless and vulnerable people. This started when Gun reached out to such NFPs at the beginning of her path to social entrepreneurship through GOGO from 2012. As a representative of the Hutt Street Centre (HSC) explained: "At first it was like she put her trust in us and said this is the job I've got, you guys give me the staff. We're lucky... we've had great results" (pers. comm. 15 August 2016).

The process involves organisations such as HSC recommending and connecting suitable women to Gun so that she can train them and provide them with employment experiences in some of the many corporate events that GOGO creates. The HSC's Pathways to Employment Program Manager explained:

I think if anything we've proven that stereotype is wrong, I think we've proven that give someone a chance they can actually work better and harder than anyone else that you might employ. So if anything, it's helping break the stereotype rather than reinforcing the stereotype. (pers. comm. 15 August 2016)

GOGO and the HSC have developed a mutual relationship built on trust and shared approaches. Gun explained:

An assumption I make is that the service providers would only send in people they feel could cope with a day's work or two days' work, whatever it is. So I rely on them to send me people that are stable; you know they're often anxious, they're often nervous or dealing with something [new]; they're certainly often lacking confidence. But they come mostly equipped with enough, with just a capacity to get through five or six hours of work (pers. comm. 11 April 2016).

A key aspect of the GOGO ecosystem is the members of the event work teams who come from disadvantaged backgrounds with many experiencing homelessness. They are recruited through NFPs such as the HSC. While Adelaide is a city known for its good living and has a plan called the Adelaide Zero Project dedicated to achieving "functional zero homelessness" in Adelaide's central business district by 2020 (City of Adelaide, 2020), the problem of people experiencing homelessness remains persistent due to such things as poor services to support mental health, housing unaffordability and the inadequacy of social welfare supports (see Novak, 2019).

Once an organisation such as the HSC has prepared suitable individuals through such things as the Pathways to Employment Programme, they are recommended to Gun for GOGO training and work opportunities. Gun acculturises them through a code of conduct and mentors them back into the workplace situation with all of its demands for performance, quality and outcomes. Women have received training in creative arts such as screen printing and floral design in order to be able to make the event decorations and installations. Gun requires best practice outcomes and does not deviate from her high standards, but she plans activities very thoroughly to support success. From the interviews it is clear that this is highly dependent on her supportive energy to give the women the confidence that they can rise to the situation and a good deal of emotional intelligence, emotional labour and loving kindness go into this. The women that form the work teams for GOGO Events are paid for their time in training and work at Australian award rates. They have earned qualifications such as certificates for the Responsible Service of Alcohol, Responsible Food Handling and First Aid. Through such efforts they are thereby encouraged back into the workspace and supported away from vulnerable dependency on social services and charity. These women transition from very difficult circumstances to capable and effective work teams. Their comments illustrate this.

I think that there's been a lot of positives for me in terms of reengaging with the paid workforce. Particularly back then when I wasn't leaving the house a lot and I was very depressed and I was hospitalized for depression and other mental health issues. I just didn't feel a part of something or part of the bigger world... So it was a hugely positive and to be paid for that, having lived in poverty for years and lost my housing, it's like wow I've got this \$350 coming for this. It's just that sense of pride that I've worked for this money and also all the other people that you meet, that you're part of something. ... So GOGO has been ... integral to just having that sense of place and belonging and bringing myself back into the bigger community again. (pers. comm. 1 December 2016)

The impacts of GOGO's work creates both tangible and intangible benefits for GOGO work team members. One woman who received GOGO training and experience stated:

Coming from not working for 15 years until last week, the experience gave a new sense of self-worth, hands on experience and something to put on my resume. I hadn't worked for 15 years due to having children (one with a disability which had made life harder) and this current work will look so much better to prospective employers than my resume did before. I loved the experience and even just being out and with the other women was valuable. It was very enjoyable. (Client testimonial)

And another:

I am still in recovery from mental illness and from being homeless and do not think it is possible for me to work in mainstream employment at this time. Working for GOGO Events though is achievable and feels meaningful and very positive. I have worked for GOGO Events in the past and no longer feel outside of my comfort zone. I'm also encouraged that a large organisation like Toyota supports us through contracting GOGO Events. (Client testimonial)

This highly demanding and creative energy that this elite events space requires is part of the element of lifting the self-esteem and hopes of the client participants; Gun noted "they have to go away thinking I was a part of a team that did something really extraordinary and the creativity in that is also a part of their personal exploration too" (pers. comm. 23 December 2015).

There has also been external recognition of Gun's role and status as a social entrepreneur. She has won a Flinders University scholarship from its New Venture Institute, a Gold ENVIe Award and an award for "most innovative social enterprise" from the South by South West Interactive Festival in Austin, Texas in 2016. Gun also won a Social Change Fellowship in 2017 from the Westpac Scholars programme which expanded her networks, advice and mentorship. In 2019, Gun was selected as a SheEO Australia venture; SheEO "[...] is a radically redesigned ecosystem that supports, finances, and celebrates female innovators" (SheEO, n.d.). While these many accolades attest to the quality of Gun as a female social entrepreneur, they more importantly have been utilised to their fullest capacity to build her network, gain mentorship, evolve her vision for GOGO and work more broadly towards building the purpose economy.

This narrative has tried to uncover the facets of the GOGO ecosystem which has been the foundations of the work GOGO has been able to undertake and achievements made so far. [Figure 1](#) shows what we call the feminist ethic of care model of GOGO. It illustrates the building of layers of care and relationships that supports a shared vision of inclusion through events work. One client, Brett Manuel of the Department of Child Protection explained this well: "They are the masters of 'bringing people on the journey', creating enthusiasm and casting an exciting vision that motivates people to be involved and get the best out of them" (GOGO website, statement from 2019). Gun acts as the broker between corporate clients who value corporate social responsibility, the agencies supporting disadvantaged people and the disadvantaged people themselves who form GOGO work teams. These networks create a web of relations for fostering communication, engagement and support that otherwise might not be undertaken in such a direct manner without GOGO Events as a facilitator. [Figure 2](#) indicates the networks of relationships that GOGO harnesses in collaboratively building the purpose economy.

However, the interviews did reveal two inter-related weaknesses in the GOGO model that is not surprising when a business with a social mission is so dependent on one very creative person. Like other entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs are often driven individuals with strong personalities which is what sustains their passion and energy. This can be a weakness if it carries over into egoism and may need to be checked (see Zahra et al., 2009, pp. 527-8).

Additionally, the dependence on the leadership of the social entrepreneur can cause uneven attention between the business and social imperatives. In the interviews, Gun noted that she was concerned with the economic sustainability of her work:

Whether there's enough profitability in that I don't actually know. I think because I haven't been driven by income or profit that it is now important in order for it be sustainable. I have to be much more mature and progressive about that. (Gun pers. comm. 11 April 2016)

She has been willing to operate without emphasising profits with her commitment to achieving her web of networks supporting the GOGO social vision. She is now working on putting in place the processes and mechanisms that will underpin long-term sustainability, realising her ability to employ teams of disadvantaged people is dependent on her ability to secure financial sustainability. She recognises that the social enterprise aspects of her business make it a stand-out among corporate clients who realise what such a social mission can deliver for their CSR

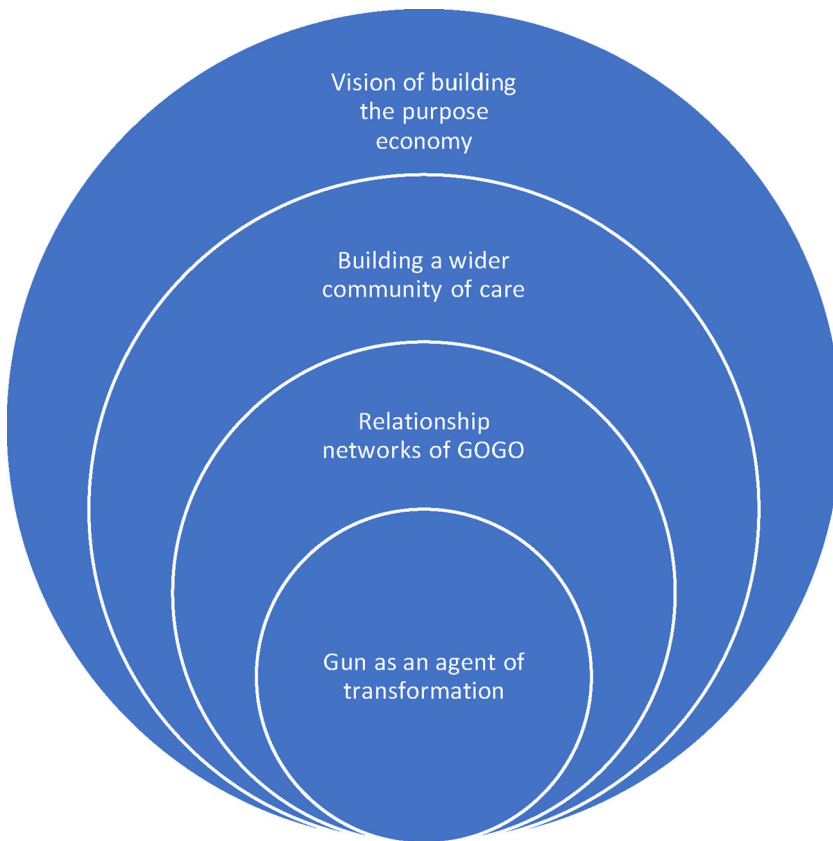


Figure 1. A feminist ethic of care model of the GOGO case showing the interconnectedness of the elements.

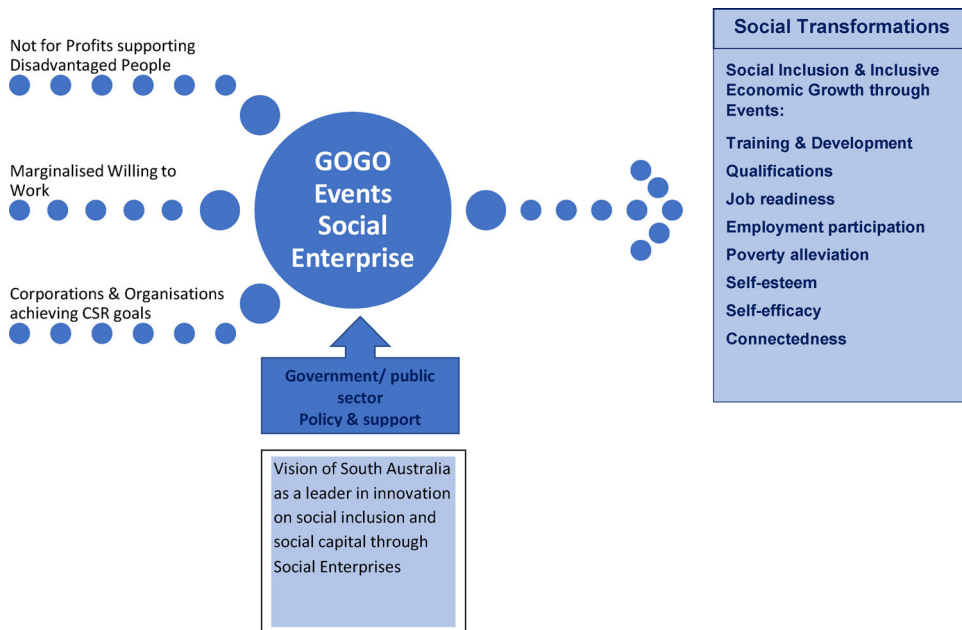


Figure 2. The networks of relationships that GOGO harnesses in building the purpose economy collaboratively.

strategies. But she also noted that the events industry is challenging to her practice because it is always in flux. She noted that she needed to be:

[...] realistic and upfront about how much of our business is the social enterprise and how much actually requires event professionals... the business is constantly evolving. One year ago it was probably mostly social enterprise, with people saying we want you to event manage this... So right as of today with the events I'm currently working on, it's probably 40% skilled employees and 60% social enterprise... you know it's a split between keeping money coming through the business and picking up the events and then turning these opportunities into social enterprise opportunities. (Sarah Gun pers. comm. 11 April 2016)

In response to the advice and learning that she achieved in this growth phase of GOGO as a social enterprise, she made the decision in 2016 to develop the GOGO Foundation. As a result of this, she has separated the for profit activities of GOGO Events from the not for profit work to be done through the GOGO Foundation. The vision of the Foundation is to use work opportunities for the marginalised as a pathway to an equitable and inclusive society. This charity status allows GOGO to apply for government and other grants and to receive donations to support the social mission. The Foundation has since raised funds to initiate development of the Inclusive Work Program which will launch in 2020 (The GOGO Foundation, n.d.). This program plans two months of learning and development, paid on-the-job work experience and a pathway into suitable, meaningful employment with GOGO'S South Australian business collaborators; this is done in coordination with the community service provider/s supporting enrolled participants. This new development expands the social impact of GOGO and harnesses the growing network of partners Gun has cultivated. Also by having a board to direct the Foundation, this mitigates the potential weakness of Gun's dominance of the social mission as identified above.

Additionally, in 2017 GOGO Events was successful in achieving certification as a registered B Corporation. This reinforces Gun's commitment to combining her business capacities with her social mission and consolidates her role in the growing purpose economy being developed and promoted in South Australia and beyond.

A final question the research posed was on the replicability of the GOGO model in using events for social purposes. In the second interview, Gun confirmed she was in discussions with colleagues in Tasmania and had some hopes that others might build similar collaborations to that of GOGO. She was exploring models that would expand the GOGO impact, including "franchising" and co-operatives. In 2016, Gun was participating in the numerous dialogues occurring in South Australia on the sharing economy, social incubators and the work of change-makers, involving local and state governments and leading social entrepreneurs (pers. comm. 11 April 2016). However, the most important step to date has been the collaboration Gun established with a group of three other women who work in and promote the social enterprise sector in the state, called Collab4Good. Gun stated part of her vision in joining this alliance:

... acceleration, because that to me is the essence of collaboration in the purpose economy... how do we change the world for the better and faster, because the frustration is that – that there is a lack of opportunity for social enterprise... And that we see women-founded businesses as the opportunity to amplify that... Because it's not about acceleration for money, it's about acceleration to create jobs, jobs for the disadvantaged, bringing them into the economy, creating an equal opportunity and reducing global poverty. (pers. comm., 4 June 2018)

At the conclusion of this case study, a key question occurs on how much one events styling company can matter to building the purpose economy. GOGO Events' webpage documents its measured impacts between 2012 and 2017 as: employing more than 85 at risk staff, running 331 events, creating 1700 days of work and facilitating 70 extra labour hire jobs (GOGO Events, 2017). But these metrics do not measure the value of the relationships built, the improvement in each impacted individual's life and the inspiration that has transpired as a result of this evolving model. More importantly, by fostering a network of collaboration involving events leaders, businesses and corporations, NFPs, thought leaders for social change and groups of marginalised or



homeless people, Gun has contributed substantially to building the purpose economy in South Australia and beyond.

## Analysis

The preceding case study has been quite detailed in order to expose the origins, practices, evolution and connections of GOGO Events through Gun's practices. This provides a basis for understanding not only the specifics of this social enterprise but also to understand its wider significance in building networks of care that contribute to the building of the purpose economy. As Social Traders stated, social enterprises are businesses that are focused on addressing social problems and improving communities (Social Traders, n.d.). GOGO Events has transitioned into a social enterprise under a philosophy that an events business can provide training and employment opportunities to people who have been marginalised from work and community.

Social entrepreneurs use their entrepreneurial skills and assets to achieve a social mission for significant social change (Osberg, 2015). From the GOGO story provided earlier, it is clear that GOGO blends a creative mix of successful event business acumen together with a social mission to draw partners together to collaboratively build positive social change. Social entrepreneurs such as Sarah Gun have an other-oriented mindset and are dedicated to some form of "helping behaviour" through their social enterprise (Mair & Noboa, 2006, p. 122).

The case of GOGO Events also exemplifies Getz's (2009) responsible and sustainable events paradigm. This example of an events company leader building a social enterprise that supports inclusion of people vulnerable to homelessness as events employees is significant. This initiative goes much further than a one-off event with a social mission. GOGO fulfils most if not all of the quite demanding social criteria listed for events by Pernecky and Luck including promoting "equality, cultural diversity, inclusion, good community relations, and human rights" (2013, p. 26). GOGO's years of operation has seen the building of a network of care and social action which has steadily worked on fostering social entrepreneurship, social collaborations and social policies that are intended to foster a purpose economy in South Australia.

The feminist ethic of care can help explain the import and impact of the case of GOGO Events and the practices of Gun. "Care can be characterized as a relational approach to ethics that values emotion, context, and connection in a manner that integrates epistemological and metaphysical considerations with ethics" (Hamington, 2013, p. 1131). Key to this practice is knowledge which is required for effective care and is derived from significant attention to the experiences of others. GOGO's social enterprise had its origins in Gun's knowledge of homelessness and people experiencing homelessness learned from supporting her brother. It was this knowledge and experience that led her to see the opportunity to support people vulnerable to homelessness and also to have confidence in their abilities to take up the opportunity that GOGO Events could offer them. Borgerson (2007, p. 501) explained how feminist ethics of care draws attention to ethical sensitivities arising from the entrepreneur's lived experience and how this informs their practices.

Gun's role as an events leader and a change-maker has placed her in a position to build networks and relationships built on care, trust and fostering mutuality. Her work allows the building of community networks between people and organisations that otherwise might not relate or relate only indirectly. Her commitment to recognising the capabilities of the disadvantaged and inviting them to contribute to an events installation allows them to begin to engage with the workplace again and build their skills for greater social inclusion. But significant to Gun's practice has been a larger vision to activate these networks to build wider social change within the society; what she has characterised as a commitment to building the purpose economy.

Another analytical lens is offered by Hamington (2010) who offered a feminist theory of hospitality derived from the feminist ethic of care. Hamington noted: "at a minimum, feminist



hospitality drives at a non-hierarchical understanding of hospitality that mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest” (2010, p. 23). According to Hamington, feminism is a social-justice movement concerned with intersections of oppression; attaching the qualifier “feminist” to hospitality is intended to bring a mature body of justice analysis and sensibilities to the notion of hospitality. Following on from Derrida’s (2005, p. 16) idea that hospitality is culture itself, or how we treat people, Hamington’s work suggests a framework for a feminist theory of hospitality involving these concepts: identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness, and embodiment.

1. Identity- hospitality is a performative act of identity. Being hospitable is an action of an individual who knows themselves through their acts of sharing and generosity.
2. Inclusion- a feminist hospitality is expansive in its inclusion of others.
3. Reciprocity- hospitality is shared in a two-way giving and is not one-directional or hierarchical. A feminist approach emphasises each is both a giver and a receiver in feminist hospitality.
4. Forgiveness – host and guest are likely to commit offense – and so a feminist approach has forgiveness built in. Hospitality always has hostility potentially within its orbit. An acceptance for the difference of the Other who is encountered as a guest.
5. Embodiment – feminists understand experience is a body experience. Bodies are cared for through physical care of the guest (food, drink, safety), this way of viewing makes the hospitality of the “Other” more concrete and real rather than abstract. (Hamington, 2010)

Applying this to Gun’s work through GOGO, we see her assert an identity of hospitable agent who recognises the authenticity and efficacy of others. Her work is expansive in its inclusion of all kinds of others to build networks of support for co-created change. Her praxis is built on mutuality, reciprocity and co-creation together. Her trust in the efficacy of the events creative space to engage different others and to allow for uncertain interactions is built on understanding and the possibilities for forgiveness as diverse people are brought into engagement with each other. Her work features respect for embodiment as she continually harnesses her energy to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all who are in the GOGO embrace. This concept of feminist hospitality helps us understand Gun’s practice through social entrepreneurship particularly located in the events sector.

With this feminist theory of hospitality, we expose the importance a feminist ethic of care. Hamington noted, “One of the trends in feminist care ethics has been to explore the social policies and practices that can sustain and promote care in an effort to bridge the personal and political” (2010, pg. 33). It was not obvious to us that an events business could be used so effectively to build a web of care when we first started our research journey with Gun and that it could so powerfully contribute to building a different form of economy and society. After our years of working together, it became clear that GOGO Events was modelling a new kind of business leadership in the events industry, built on the creativity, boldness, connectedness and caring of a leader with unusual vision and spirit. Rather than limiting herself to the work of her social enterprise, she has committed to using the web of relationships she has nurtured to foster wider transformation. Her personal experience has shown her that we are all vulnerable beings and that is through building our webs of relatedness that we may overcome these vulnerabilities. Thus, helping individuals out of homelessness is not sufficient to address her concerns; building the connections of a purpose economy is essential.

Robinson (2018, p. 3) explained that feminist ethics are practical ethics:

Because the voice of care is not searching for objective principles of right or the good, but seeks to navigate moral dilemmas in context by attending to relations of care—by making sure no one is left alone or hurt—it challenges the divide between “theory” and “practice.” It [...] starts with a view of moral agents as inherently vulnerable and interdependent.

Events and event management are an ideal realm for this care to be enacted. As Getz (2007) stated, events are intermediaries and have many partners. The relationships, sociality, community and positivity that generally pervade events creation and the networks of partnerships that sustain them are ideal for supporting the building of the purpose economy.

This case study of GOGO Events showcases an example of one visionary social entrepreneur utilising her business to build a network of partnerships to achieve a social mission through a shared vision of improving the lives of marginalised people by using their events purposively. Gun has also worked collaboratively to build the purpose economy in South Australia and demonstrate how business can deliver on social missions while still seeking profitability. An important point in the feminist ethic of care is this vision to change the world for the better. As Gilligan noted: "The ethic of care guides us in acting carefully in the human world and highlights the costs of carelessness" (2014, p. 103). GOGO Events is a social enterprise with a mission to address homelessness, however Gun's actions through GOGO builds additional layers of care which work to transform the larger society (see [Figure 1](#)).

As this article was being prepared for publication, the global community experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we are still in the midst of the crisis, it is nonetheless apparent that tourism, hospitality and events have been devastated by these closure of borders, the lockdown of communities and measures to arrest the spread of the virus (see Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). GOGO Events has temporarily ceased its activities, but Gun has not been idle. During this time, she has worked to strengthen the GOGO Foundation and prepare her Inclusive Work Program for activation when circumstances allow. The dynamics of the crisis also pushed her to initiate a new campaign addressing period poverty, a term describing lack of access to period products. In addition to lobbying for government funding to make period products freely available for school students, there is a wider goal to address menstrual taboos in society (The GOGO Foundation, 2020). As Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) has argued, the COVID-19 crisis has underscored the value of community and social ties and inspired visions of transforming tourism and affiliated sectors such as events. Social enterprises such as GOGO Events are well positioned to be responsive to emerging opportunities to transform society after COVID-19.

In closing, it is important to heed the cautionary words of Sheldon, Pollock and Daniele (2017, p. 6): "Since the potential for social entrepreneurship to transform society is strong, much literature may have donned rose-tinted glasses". In this case, it is important to be critically aware of privilege and evaluate the wish to "do good" to ensure avoidance of injustice and harm. Critical analyses in tourism and events offer tools with which we can question the power and limits of responsible discourses (see Mahrouse, 2010). In this case study of Gun's efforts through GOGO, we have witnessed efforts undertaken from the micro, interpersonal level to the macro, policy and governmental level to support change that supports greater inclusion and equity for all South Australians. We have also documented in this study Gun's reflexive, critical and responsive practices throughout her work. She has undertaken her own organisational research to receive feedback from her work team members to ensure at a minimum no harm occurs and also maximum benefit results from engagement with GOGO. While she occupies a position of privilege as an astute and connected businesswoman, she has actively chosen to use that privilege for collaborative partnerships to bring social transformation and build the purpose economy. This suggests that Gun's attitude is not that of a do-gooder but rather a collaborative partner for co-created social change.

## Conclusion

The widespread development of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises suggests that the nature of business is changing to be more responsive to delivering greater value to society. The fact that 2020 witnessed the discussion of visions of the purpose economy at the annual World

Economic Forum (Mayer, 2020) indicates a desire to move beyond the market values of myopic market economies. Additionally, the growing development of social enterprises in the tourism and events space suggests that these sectors based on human interactions and connections are especially ripe for development. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, such efforts of building community and social welfare are even more important and the transformational capacities of social enterprises will be needed.

This article has offered an in-depth case study analysis of the case of GOGO Events and the work of its founder, social entrepreneur Sarah Gun. This case study recounted the evolution of GOGO from a for profit business to a social enterprise which then added the GOGO Foundation as a pathway to use an events business to support people out of homelessness and into work and community. In this process, Gun built layers of relationships between her corporate clients, the not for profit agencies supporting the homeless and the individuals at threat of homelessness who embraced the work and training opportunities offered through GOGO Events. Using the concept of the feminist ethic of care we explained how these processes evolving over a number of years have worked to build support for the purpose economy in South Australia.

GOGO Events demonstrates one model of using an events enterprise to support vulnerable people out of homelessness. Events are conducive to such social enterprise work because they are accessible in terms of skills, offering training and qualifications that are transferable and also offering social connection that helps the vulnerable to avoid worsening social isolation. Others could learn from the GOGO example and adapt it to their particular contexts and needs. Such efforts would add to the positive social outcomes that could be attained from the events sector. This research collaboration has also served as an example of “complicity in research” and added to the growing body of feminist analysis in tourism studies (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015).

This case study also indicates that the requirements of sustainability are moving on from limited understandings of corporate social responsibility to more maximal goals of businesses serving higher purposes. We have outlined here the dynamics underway in moving past the limits and damages of market economies and asking how can business support a transition to the purpose economy. Values, relationships and connectedness drive these changes and this case study underscores how a feminist ethic of care holds important explanatory value. This research also demonstrates the importance of critical, feminist methods which have supported this engaged and long-term research relationship. It has enabled such depth of understanding as reported here and also drawn the researchers into the web of care and relatedness that supports the vision for social change.

Events are an essential part of human society and they give invaluable opportunities for us to come together. The example of GOGO Events invites us to think of new and meaningful ways we can harness them for greater inclusivity through social enterprise and social missions. Moreover, with an added ethics of care we may introduce values that empower us to aim higher, using events to build a purpose economy that better supports human flourishing, well-being and holistic sustainability.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Freya Higgins-Desbiolles* is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism Management, Business Unit, University of South Australia. Her work focuses on social justice, human rights and sustainability issues in tourism, hospitality and events. She has worked with communities, non-governmental organisations and businesses that seek to harness tourism for sustainable and equitable futures.

**Dr Manjit Monga** is a lecturer in the School of Management in UniSA Business School. She teaches and researches in business ethics and human resource management areas. Prior to joining UniSA, Manjit had a successful career in private sector business overseas and in Australia. She brought the practical experience and knowledge of business to academia and to her research program. Manjit has a Master's degree and a PhD in Social Anthropology from Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.

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