

COORDINATION GROUP REPORT

Here we are already a month into the last year of the 20th century and it looks like being a corker! OWN's calendar is filling up very rapidly and you can be sure that the Year of Older Persons will be providing us with many stages upon which we can be seen and heard. Peg and Joy in their reports over the next months will be keeping us informed about the performances and activities being undertaken by OWN's Theatre Group and IYOP Committee.

We closed last year on a high with a wonderful end of year party with lots of great chatter, good grub, wonderful dancing (thanks International Folk Dancing Group), great songs (thanks Theatre Group - who will forget the pair of high steppers in their tights, the sari winding so expertly demonstrated and the risqué solo performance of our guitarist?) and a warm, fuzzy feeling of belonging to a network of good women.

And we needed that high since only a week before the office had been robbed yet again! Yes, our brand new computer, printer, answering machine, modem, zip drive, our not so new floor fan (!) and our petty cash (not much) were all taken on a night of dramatic storms. We lost a branch from our lovely Robina tree to the storm and the rest almost certainly to the same lowlife who took our stuff only 8 weeks before. When next you come to OWN you will find new bars on the windows and front door and an electronic alarm system installed.

Now for some good news. Just before we broke up we received news that Gwen George had been awarded a certificate in recognition of her service on the Home Care Service Advisory Committee during 1997/98. Her Certificate is displayed on the notice board at 87 Lower Fort St and I feel sure that you will all want to join us in saying congratulations and thanks to Gwen who continues to be a great warrior.

Whilst giving out accolades - we have just received news that Peg Hewett's story has been accepted for inclusion in the United Kingdom OWN's publication *Life After Work: Stories of Freedom, Opportunity and Change*. Good on you Peg!

Early in December we had a visit from Anne Ruddy of New Zealand OWN. We had a greatly stimulating chat and were reminded yet again of the remarkable determination and resilience of women and the rewards available for those who network for mutual advantage. They, as with many of our groups, have no office and have only just gained access to a computer. This last is good news since it means that we will be able to communicate more regularly through e-mail and the internet with our sisters across the Tasman. Whilst here Anne gave us a copy of *Older and Bolder*, an anthology of reminiscences, stories and poems which share some of the life experiences of 42 members of OWN NZ. It is in

great demand at the moment and will find its way to the bookshelves at 75 Windmill St in due course so keep an eye out for it so that you, too, can enjoy a good read.

Back here in OZ we are already receiving stories for our new publication *Tell Me More: Untold Stories of Older Women* and so far, like the stories in last year's book, they make great reading. We are eagerly looking forward to the rest of the wonderful stories out there just waiting to be written and read.

Also received early in December from the Department for Women: *You Can Make a Difference - A Decision Making Resource*. This is a folder of sheets offering strategies for approaching many situations faced by women in their lives. It complements our own publication *You Can Make a Difference* very well and is available for copying. If you would like to browse through the kit please see one of us or Dorothy or Kris when next you are in.

Last issue we outlined the work of the Coordination Group and the areas of responsibility for each of the coordinators. As a postscript we need to say again that we three are coordinators and we want more than anything to have a team to coordinate. If you are interested in being on one of the teams - advocacy (Renate), membership (Sam), administration (Margaret) - and in undertaking some responsibility in your chosen area please contact us.

This issue we thought an outline of the Working Committee might be useful.

This Committee is the major decision making body of Sydney OWN. The members of the Working Committee are: Renate Watkinson (Chair), Margaret Bridger (Secretary), Jean Skuse (Treasurer), Louise Anike, Caroline Eggington, Gwen George, Peg Hewett, Betty Johnson, Pam Ledden, Judith Mustard, Hedi Roggeveen, Joy Ross, Sam Smart.

The Working Committee, on a monthly basis, receives reports from each of the Coordinators and the Treasurer and from the Convenors of the IYOP Committee (Joy Ross), Newsletter (Judith Mustard), NSW OWN Groups (Margaret Bridger), OWN Australia (Betty Johnson), Telecommunications and Home Care Committees (Gwen George), Theatre Group (Peg Hewett), Violence in the Home (Louise Anike), Wellness Coordinating Committee (Sam Smart), from Renate Watkinson representing the Health Group and from convenors of current projects eg Peer Support Advocacy Network (Margaret Bridger). Dorothy Cora, OWN's Community Worker, takes the minutes and prepares them for distribution to members of the Committee.

The Working Committee responds to social issues and to emerging problems within the Network as they occur.

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1999: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS

On January 1, the Governor General, Sir William Deane, welcomed in the International Year of Older Persons, urging Australians of all ages to celebrate, value and encourage the achievements of older people in our society.

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in launching the Year, said that, "A society for all ages is one that does not caricature older persons as patients or pensioners but sees them as agents and beneficiaries of development... It honours traditional elders in their leadership and consultative roles in communities around the world."

And further, the Federal Minister for Aged Care, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, as Minister responsible for Australia's participation in IYOP, said that she believes that Australia will see cultural change begin in 1999, "so that we value older Australians for their continuing contribution to our community, not just what they have done in the past."

Community organisations across NSW have already begun to hold events to mark the year. The NSW Ageing and Disability Department will provide a quarterly calendar of all IYOP events, and 'The Australian Senior' will provide coverage of Seniors Week.

In Sydney, OWN is about to start on its busy round of IYOP events and we invite our members to help in the planning and to join in.

The 'Peer Support Advocacy Network Project' funded by the Department for Women, will begin in late January, and in February, Louise Anike will provide a report of the responses to the questionnaire Domestic Violence and Abuse Against Older Women that she circulated last year.

March will be an active month with 'A Week for Women' from March 6 to 12. The International Women's Day (IWD) March is on Saturday, March 6.

Assemble at Town Hall Square at 10.15am for an 11am march to Hyde Park for the Rally. This year, older women will lead the IWD March (there will also be low-step buses) so let's make a splash with a large contingent, and our beautiful new banner! OWN members will be handing out a statement along the route, and some of us will be carrying placards identifying major issues for older women.

The IWD march will be preceded by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) annual breakfast celebration on March 6 at 8am for 8.30am. Breakfast finishes in time to join the IWD march. It is a continental breakfast with speakers and entertainment. Proceeds will go to the Burmese Migrant Women's Project and the Women's Action for Change Theatre Unlimited, Fiji, to raise awareness of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

We hope to have two tables of ten at the Breakfast. Cost is \$35/\$25 and the venue is the Sydney Hilton, 9th Fl, 259 Pitt St Sydney. As no tickets will be sold at the door, please pay beforehand to Joy Ross, 87 Lower Fort St., Millers Point, by Feb 26 and Joy will make table bookings.

On March 13, OWN's Senior's Week function will be held at the Mott Hall from 2 to 5pm. Called '**Gains and Pains : A Women and Retirement Forum**', this function will be open to members and non-members of OWN who are anticipating retirement or who have retired and would like to share their stories. More details in the March newsletter.

Seniors' Week this year goes from March 17 to 30, and once again OWN will have a stall at the 3-day Seniors Week Expo in the upper and lower Sydney Town Halls from March 23 to 25. Volunteers are needed to 'woman' the OWN stall on Tuesday 23, Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25. Please ring Joy on 9252 2040 or 9247 7046 if you can be there for a day, a half day or a couple of hours.

A volunteer is also needed to be on the OWN Seniors' Week 99 stall in the Sutherland Shire Council area on March 25. We also need stall volunteers for the Campsie area and the Glebe area during that week. Please ring Joy for details on 9252 2040 or 9247 7046.

On Thursday February 11, the OWN IYOP Planning Committee will meet at 10am at 75 Windmill Street, Millers Point, followed by a working bee at 1pm to prepare for the IWD march. Everyone is welcome!

Joy Ross

Coordination Group Report (Continued from Page 1)

Twice a year it undertakes review and planning sessions (RAPS) so that it can determine action priorities and develop strategies for future directions. Feedback and ideas from members are always welcome. Our first RAPS for '99 will be held in mid February so there is time for you to get your ideas in to any of the people mentioned above who will then take your contribution to the RAPS session.

As pointed out in the last Newsletter, members are welcome to attend, as observers, monthly meetings held on the second Monday of the month commencing 10.00am.

That's it for this month. We hope that '99 will be a satisfying last year of the century for you - and us - and that we can find ways to anticipate the new century with optimism, excitement and inspiration.

Renate Watkinson, Margaret Bridger, Sam Smart.

HANDS ACROSS THE TASMAN

In Auckland, on a visit to my favourite niece, I decided to ring Barbara Stanley, the Convenor of the New Zealand Older Women's Network on the off chance that she was home – I had last met her when she called into Sydney OWN in 1995.

Not only was she home, but she straight away invited me to lunch the next day. An hour's bus ride took me to Torbay on the North Coast, a most beautiful stretch of coastline north of Auckland, alas now under threat from developers.

Barbara and Bernard, her husband, had invited some friends to meet me, and we all lunched in the beautiful garden under a wide umbrella. Lots of good talk went on, of course. I discovered that New Zealand OWN became an incorporated body in 1995 and now has two groups, both in Auckland. They receive no government funding, have no paid workers, and do not even have an office.

In spite of all this, they publish a monthly newsletter and have produced a most professional anthology of older women's stories called "Older and Bolder". They beat us to the post on this one. They manage to hold regular meetings and have a lively theatre group, a very productive creative writers' group and other special interest groups.

I could not have come at a better time, because their end-of-year party was due to take place in two days' time, and of course I was invited. Even better, Barbara and Bernard brought me tea and toast in bed next morning, and when was the last time I had that!

About eighty members had come to the party, which was held in a very large and beautiful room, with windows all around overlooking the ocean.

The interesting programme included stories read by the writers' group, a funny and telling sketch by the theatre group about the increasing cost of living, as well as music and songs, before much socialising over wondrous food and drink.

I very much enjoyed my time with Barbara and Bernard, who are fantastic people. Both dedicated environmentalists, they are trying to protect their precious coast and create a 1000 acre regional park. Their committee has international support, including David Bellamy and now Australia OWN as well, because I left a subscription on our behalf.

I returned to Sydney in time for our own break-up party, and was delighted to see New Zealand OWNER, Anne Ruddy, who had come over here to have Christmas with her daughter.

We loaded her up with our recent publications to take back with her. She told us they have just acquired a computer and all that goes with it, so now communication between our two countries should be much improved through e-mail.

Let's hope this will forge another link in the chain that can lead to a world-wide network of older women.

What a dream for the I.Y.O.P.

Muriel Hortin

Letter to the Editor

I am prompted by Enid Maher's article entitled "Scared Stiff" (November issue) to write a response. I was a patient, on and off, for several years in the late 1960s and early 70s, in both Parramatta and Rydalmere psychiatric hospitals. There are echoes for me in Enid's experience, and a sense of shock too. I had foolishly thought that things had improved over the years, but Enid's account makes it clear that the bad old days are not way behind us, but still breathing down our necks. My own experience has taught me how easily a conveyor belt mentality can take hold in a doctor's mind and how difficult it can be to intervene in such a process once the wheels start turning. Add this to our anxieties and doubts when we are troubled by disturbing symptoms and wondering what's happening to us, and it's easy to see how any of us could lose our freedom and ability to think and act for ourselves.

Elaine Showalter, in her book "The Female Malady", tells the story of Edith Lanchester, the daughter of a prosperous London architect, who worked as secretary to Eleanor Marx. Through her many political activities, Edith met an Irish railway clerk, James Sullivan. They decided to live together and found a flat in Battersea. The year was 1895. Edith's father and three brothers were outraged and kidnapped Edith early one morning on her way to work. They had her committed to The Priory, a private asylum, on an 'urgency order' signed by Dr. G. Fielding Blandford.

This man gave the supposed cause of her insanity as 'over-education'. (Edith Lancaster was a university graduate.) Blandford later explained that he believed this patient was insane because 'her opposition to conventional matrimony made her unfit to care for herself.' Edith was lucky. She had these lefty friends. They held a vigil outside the asylum and invited the media along. Edith was released five days later. These same friends tried to have Blandford censured, but both The Lancet and The British Medical Journal supported him, though even they questioned his involvement in the kidnapping.

Edith and James Sullivan went on living together and had several children, and Edith maintained her commitment to radical politics and the women's suffrage movement for the rest of her life. Fielding Blandford continued on as before, and he, and men like him, have intimidated many, many women, throughout history.

Perhaps the lesson we can learn from Edith's experience is the value of networks; not just family networks (many of us don't have those anyhow) but also friends and feminist activists who we can rely on to be straight with us and for us, to find out information on our behalf, to run campaign or a vigil, whatever it takes. I used to belong to a self-help group, and we had this saying, "The professional's on tap but definitely not on top." It's a good saying, don't you think?

Pearlie McNeill

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR OLDER WOMEN?

Remember those cool, wet November days? On November 18th, the drizzle did not deter a group of more than 20 OWN members who gathered at 87 for a dynamic discussion of the NSW Government's long awaited Healthy Ageing Framework, 1998-2003. The goal of the framework is "A society in which all older people lead satisfying and productive lives with maximum independence and well-being".

The Framework is organised in six sections, each addressing a major objective. At the workshop we discussed each section in turn, asking ourselves: What does it mean for older women? What are OWN's priorities (in relation to each area of the Framework)? and How can we ensure that the promises are kept?

ATTITUDES TO AGEING AND OLDER PEOPLE

OWN can help older women to know, exercise and extend their rights. Our project for an advocacy database will strengthen our ability to be a clear and informed voice of issues which affect older women. OWN will promote the Senior's Information Service through the Newsletter, and will continue to have input into government policy and decision making.

PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY LIFE

We have identified transport and communication as key areas of concern for the coming year, with visible and invisible minority groups facing the greatest barriers to participation. Transport concerns are being taken up locally by several OWN groups.

MAKING YOUR OWN DECISIONS

The Government talks here about training staff and putting out more information about rights and services. We believe that we need more consultation in the development and delivery of services, and support for older women to exercise greater choice in housing, health care and support for independent living.

SUPPORTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES

Housing options, help with home maintenance, accessible local public transport and issues of personal and public safety are all key issues here. We want to see greater consultation with consumers at all levels of Government rather than the top-down "Here's what we'll do for you" approach. This section has a longer list of what the Government will do, but it's mainly described as provision of services and programs, rather than working together with community groups for the best outcome all round.

HEALTH, ACCOMMODATION, CARE AND SUPPORT

OWN's Wellness project is singled out for funding from the Health Department during 1999 to progress our

'wellness model'. They will also fund the Statewide Forum in July. Everyone at the OWN discussion agreed that most of the section on health is, as usual, medically oriented and concentrates on the provision of mainstream health services, particularly for frail, needy people with disabling illnesses. We would like to see greater emphasis placed on prevention programs and health promotion to enable older people to stay "wella longer" (to quote Noreen). OWN should be involved in the Ageing and Disability Department's plans for identification and prevention of situations of abuse in the home.

MAKING THE BEST USE OF RESOURCES

The Framework speaks of improved data collection and serviced based on evidence of need. We want to see greater consultation with consumers and we want to be directly involved in research, not just as objects and statistics.

The Ageing Issues Directorate within the Ageing and Disability Department is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the Healthy Ageing Policy. OWN will be providing comments to the Directorate on behalf of older women both initially and as implementation proceeds. See elsewhere in this Newsletter for other comments on the Healthy Ageing Framework.

Sam Smart

COMPUTER BODY GUARDS

Following our first robbery in October (we had a second one just before Christmas!), the son-in-law of one of our members, Gwen Boon, offered to instal a security system onto our computer at Windmill Street - for free!!

We jumped at the chance of course and we now have a steel unit enclosing the hard drive and the whole thing is bolted to the computer desk. Thank you, Andrew, we couldn't cope with losing our Windmill Street computer, too.

These 'body guard' units aren't that expensive (well, ours was actually free) but they are absolutely essential for those of us with expensive computers and inadequate home security.

Andrew Pusey is the generous man involved and his company is called Pro-Techt. Andrew can be contacted at PO Box Hurstville 2221, or by telephone on 1800 35 35 15.

On Organising Funded Workshops

Last year Woy Woy OWN applied for a grant from Gosford Council 'To Promote the Position of Women in Society' under their Community Development Grants Program. We received \$1,400 to run a series of lectures/workshops on 'Social Justice for Older Women' to be facilitated by people with expertise in the following broad fields: social isolation, basic human rights, safety, aged care, elder abuse, neglect, respect and support, discrimination and wellbeing. The lectures/workshops were to be completed by 30 June, 1999.

Once we knew our application was successful, we wrote to community organisations on the Central Coast (including Gosford and Wyong OWNs) and Sydney OWN, inviting them to send two representatives to our first planning meeting. At the planning meeting, it became evident that not all of us were of the same mind about how the Project should proceed.

When undertaking a project like this, it is important that OWN groups adhere to the topics outlined in their application and to the philosophy and principles that are basic to the Older Women's Network, and which will have already been expressed in the funding application.

In our case, there was intense disagreement within our group about a number of issues. Some members argued for their particular interests to have priority, others believed that all four topics should be covered on the same day, while one or two wanted to focus on narrow aspects of a particular topic rather than exploring it in full. The pressure to resolve these issues was intense and unfortunately some members resigned from the group.

After a great deal of turmoil and debate, plus consultations with Dorothy Cora (the community worker at Sydney OWN) and, later, Sam Smart (the Membership Coordinator from Sydney OWN), we decided that the series should consist of four workshops: Violence Against Older Women and Social Justice; Aged Care; Basic Human Rights and Discrimination; and Social Isolation and Wellbeing.

Our group is now reflecting on the success of the first two workshops. The value of not limiting or restricting discussion was evident in the first workshop on 'Violence Against Women and Social Justice'. This was a huge topic and we needed time so that participants could share ideas and discuss issues in small groups as well as listen to the keynote speakers. OWN's approach to workshops is based on the belief that most women are more likely to speak in an informal setting and that small group discussions provide the opportunity for women to get to know each other and to make personal contact which can lead to a better understanding of each others

point of view.. We had great feedback about this workshop, particularly from members of Newcastle OWN who thought it was exceedingly worthwhile. While the second workshop, 'Aged Care' was different in that local professionals provided factual information in a lecture-style format followed by questions. We also made use of poetry and quotes which added an emotional depth to the workshop.

In all, the series so far has been hard work but a really satisfying experience for those involved. Participants have thought so too as the word most circled in their evaluation forms were 'stimulating' and 'informative'. The third workshop, on Friday 12 February, will focus on Basic Human Rights and Discrimination and the final workshop on Social Isolation and Wellbeing is planned for Friday 12 March. At the final workshop, we will consider 'where to from here'.

In summary, I think that groups applying for funding need to take into consideration what people and other resources they have available, ensure that everyone agrees to abide by the content of the application, and apply OWN's aim which is to promote the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women in everything we do.

Enid Harrison

MAGIC MOMENTS

Clothes all neatly stowed

Freshly dried in breeze

Meals served, kitchen tidy,

Unit completely vacuumed.

Free time, time to read

Time to write or take a hike.

Bills paid, letters written,

Tax return posted,

Grass cut, garden weeded,

No commitments diaried.

Magically free,

Moments for me;

FREE, FREE, FREE

To run or just be.

Frayda Cooper

NEW SOUTH WALES HEALTHY AGEING FRAMEWORK

Elsewhere in the Newsletter, Sam has described what OWN is doing in relation to the NSW Healthy Ageing Framework. What follows here is a summary of a response to this document by Lewis Kaplan, president of the Council for the Aged (COTA)/ This was published in NCOSS News in November 1998.

Lewis begins by saying that he hopes that the government "can proceed with more active implementation of healthy ageing objectives rather than continually re-writing policies."

On the plus side, he believes that Cabinet endorsement is important. He is pleased that the Ageing Issues Directorate (AID) intends to strengthen partnerships with the non-government sector. He is somewhat sceptical, however, that the AID will have the resources to effectively monitor the commitments the government claims to be making in this document.

His main criticisms are:

- 1) The document fails to made adequate connection between State, Federal or Local governments or with the community sector and non-government sector.
- 2) A "key challenge...will be to devise ways" of evaluating the proposed actions contained within the six sections, especially given that these do not sit well within the two government portfolios, i.e., Health, and Ageing and Development and Disability (ADD).
- 3) "There is no new money being announced." Rather, the document states the intention of re-focusing existing policies and programs to better take "account of the needs of older people."
- 4) "...there is inadequate emphasis on consultation with older people."
- 5) There are vague references to developments and improvements without mention of "the extent of commitments or any measurable outcomes."
- 6) There is "no new motivation to respond in a meaningful way to issues facing older people into the next century."

Overall, Lewis sees that is important that organisations like COTA "participate in a process of public reporting against the Framework." As you can see from Sam's report, like COTA, OWN will be keeping an eye on how the commitments of the Healthy Ageing Framework are met.

Pauline Reynolds

GAINS AND PAINS

On Saturday, 13 March from 2pm to 5pm we will be holding a Forum to explore the 'gains and pains' of retirement, especially as they relate to women. Because most information about retirement is written with men in mind and focuses almost solely on retirement income, we want to take a different approach.

At this stage we are planning to begin the forum with a panel of guest speakers who can provide different perspectives on, for instance, how retirement can affect one's identity, or sense of self, how techniques can be developed to avoid 'the void', how forced and voluntary retirement can have different effects and, importantly, how to 'cope' with all that freedom!

A large part of the Forum will consist of small group discussions where participants will have the opportunity to discuss in an informal setting whatever issues are important to them.

We hope that women who are anticipating retirement will come along and share their thoughts and ideas, as well as older women who have already retired and who are willing to share the gains and pains they have personally experienced. 'Gains and Pains' is open to anyone who is interested in the topic so do tell friends who are not OWN members about it.

The Forum will be held at the Mott Hall, right next to the 433, 431 and 339 bus terminus at Millers Point. For more information, please phone Dorothy Cora on 9247 7046.

'Ode' to Nanna

Notices mistakes

Attends to tiny christmas trees

Naturally naughty person

Never too busy

Art (very good)

John Howard on the tele (Nanna swearing)

Jokes old fashioned

Unostacko (shaky)

Deliting in grand children

Intelegant in everything

Telephone ringing (cannot catch it)

Hoping they'll ring back.

Milan, aged 8

WHO CARES?

In the last number of "Making Known", July 1997, Ruth Errey of South Australia questioned the notion that the de-institutionalisation of the care of frail aged and disabled people leads to a situation of "least harm." Least harm to whom? The patients (now clients) and their families, the wider community or the budgets of those authorities responsible for their care?

In 1997, after the outcry at the imposition of entry fees to nursing homes, our caring and concerned Prime Minister modified the entry fee and later allocated a further \$280 million for payments to carers and for respite care, thus making it more practicable for people to be cared for in their own homes. It also makes it much cheaper. A full-time carer receives the equivalent of the single pension. If the carer is already a pensioner, she or he receives a token amount, about \$30 weekly. Ancillary services such as Meals on Wheels and Home and Community Care may be had if deemed necessary by a Care Assessment Team.

On the face of it, this seems highly desirable, people being cared for by their loved ones in their own homes, so much so that it seems no longer socially acceptable for a family to consider institutional care for a parent or relative

While it is unrealistic to ask for a return to the past, it might be as well to remember that twenty years ago in the now despised 70s, aged infirm people would readily consent to enter a hostel or nursing home secure in the knowledge that they were not causing anyone's life to be put on hold for an indefinite period.

It must be recognised too that families do not always enjoy benevolence towards one another. If it means that a family member has to leave paid employment, it will usually fall to the lot of a wife, daughter, sister or niece. The duty undertaken in a spirit of generosity can become an intolerable burden, and a loving relationship deteriorate to a state of mutual hostility. Carers may themselves have health problems, or in cases of those leaving paid employment, seeing their chances of re-employment steadily receding.

As far as making use of respite care is concerned, that depends on the patient's acceptance. They may protest bitterly at being "sent away among strangers", or "you are not going to leave me with a stranger", quite legitimate anxieties, but extra pressure on the carers.

Therefore, as Ruth pointed out in her article, there is more than one person at risk. Could it not be possible for families to have the option of institutional or domiciliary care without undue guilt?

As for people not needing continuous care electing to stay alone at home, deliverers of Meal on Wheels in less affluent areas often find these people living in miserable conditions, in spite of house cleaning and maintenance provided by community organisation. There will be an

air of neglect, imperfectly cleaned carpets and curtains; dimly lit stuffy rooms, tightly closed up because of fear of illegal entry. Furthermore, many people are alone at night, or accompanied only by Vitalcall if they feel they can afford it. Sadly, for most of these people, the term "nursing home" spells as much terror as did the words "work house" in the nineteenth century.

Surely today the gulf between rich and poor should not be so evident as it is in the current approach to aged and disability care.

Helen Monaghan

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BEND

Loyal readers of our Newsletter often send us interesting bits and pieces culled from various sources. Being usually short of space, we have to reject these offerings – but this one we have to pass on to our gardening sorority. It comes from the Easy Access Gardening Services in Victoria and explains how you can garden successfully if you (a) find it difficult to bend and (b) find it difficult to dig.

Here is the recipe:

First make sure the area chosen is in full sun with good drainage. Cover an area of ground about 1 x 2 metres with overlapping sheets of newspaper, 1cm thick. Buy two bales of lucerne or peastraw. Leave the cord around the bales and place them top of one another in the centre of the paper. This raises them to waist high. On top of the bale, sprinkle dried animal manure (cow is best.) then a layer of compost or good mix about 15cms thick (a 10 litre bag is enough.) Water with a fine spray and plant - anything you like, vegies, herbs, flowers.

All the nutrients the plants need are there at their roots, so they grow faster and fruit earlier.

As the bale composts down, the plants grow, so harvesting is achieved without bending, and with two stakes in the ground beside the non-dig bed and some plastic wire, you can grow tomatoes, or peas, too.

Just thought you'd like to know.

Muriel Hortin

A LONG DISTANCE LOCAL CALL?

I was delighted to hear recently that the limit for people entitled to the Commonwealth Senior's Health Card had been raised to \$40,000 p.a. – I had always been slightly above the previous permitted level. So I went to the nearest Centre Link Office to get the claim form, and duly filled it in. I read through the instructions, and towards the end it said that if you proposed to return the completed form by hand, you should make an appointment.

I rang the prescribed number, only to be greeted by the usual, "If you want this, press 1, if you want that, press 2" and so on. I pressed what I thought was the appropriate number. It rang, and a voice said "We apologise, all our operators are busy, you have been placed in a queue and will be attended to as soon as possible, probably in about six minutes." I waited stolidly, hearing some very faint music in the background. After about thirty seconds, to my amazement, it rang through again. Another voice said, "Please be sure to have your ID ready." More distant music. Half a minute later - "You have progressed in the queue, you will be attended to as soon as possible." Yet more distant music. Then a real person! "Can I have your ID, please?" I said I didn't have one, that I wanted to make an appointment. "Oh," she said, "I'll put you through."

Another extended wait. No voices, just an occasional ringing tone, with the occasional comforting message that I had moved up in the queue. I was about to hang up in exasperation when a pleasant male voice said, "And how can I help you?" Relieved, I explained that I just wanted to make an appointment for an interview for the claim. He asked for my name, address, telephone number, as one would expect. "Thanks, Rebecca," he said. (Rebecca is my formal name, the one I only use for things like this.) I was affronted by him calling me Rebecca, but I kept myself in check, realising that I would probably never have any further contact with him. "Now where would you like to have the interview, Rebecca?" "Bondi Junction," I said. "Well, Rebecca, let me have a look at their appointments sheet. Hmm, Rebecca, I'm afraid there is nothing till mid-February." I must have gasped or something, though I don't remember it. "Rebecca, why don't I ring Bondi Junction and see if they can make an early appointment?" A short break. Then, "Well, Rebecca, good news, they said you can go there in your own time, whenever you wish." I thanked him. Then - "What's the weather like there, Rebecca," he asked. "Hot and sunny," I replied, somewhat puzzled. "Why, where are you?" Came his reply - "Cairns, up in Northern Queensland....."

Renee Simons

PEER SUPPORT ADVOCACY NETWORK (PSAN)

As many of you know we were successful in our bid for a grant from the Department for Women to develop a peer support advocacy database. An extremely knowledgeable and friendly consultant, Justine Humphrey, has been appointed to work with OWN members to develop the database.

There will be four groups of members working with Justine: a Steering Committee to oversee the project and ensure that it comes in on time and within budget, a database development group who will be involved in some of the technical development, a group who will assist Justine to organise focus groups and analyse the results, and an acceptancy testing group who will ensure that the database is consistent with OWN's philosophy, is user friendly, easy to update and that the information it contains is easy to access.

We are all very excited that this very necessary follow up to our 1997 Decision Making Skills project has at last commenced and we will keep you informed of its progress.

FILM REVIEW

Three films with no sex or violence. What a pleasure! And you will have a laugh.

WAKING NED DEVINE. Ian Bannen and David Kelly are two delightful older men who conspire with a whole village to cheat the lottery company. This is a fun film by first time writer/director Kirk Jones, so hope we can see more of his work in the future.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Once again, Meg Ryan Tom Hanks team up in a charming film about misunderstandings between two people who meet but do not realise they know each other thanks to E-mail. Nora Ephron's writing is wonderful, as always, for a mix of character actors with impressive performances. Upper West Side New York never looked better either.

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

Roberto Benigni is Italy's favourite actor.. He wrote, directed and starred in this funny but at times poignant story of a man who stayed optimistic through all that life could throw at him. There is some very low-key violence due to the setting in WWII, but Roberto will keep you laughing in this heart-warming film.

Jean Smallwood

Discussion Group

Our first monthly discussion group for the year began on Monday, 18th January, in the friendly atmosphere to which we have become accustomed. The topic for discussion was 'positive childhood experiences and their influence on our lives today'.

We settled into groups of four and in no time at all the room was abuzz with the sound of animated participants sharing their stories. The high energy level was obviously a sign of their interest in the subject. Although a small number of women could only think of negative childhood experiences, some had succeeded in turning these into positive benefits later in life.

After coffee (a longer time was allowed as it was the first meeting for the New Year), we moved into one group where, in general discussion, several topics of community interest were raised. From this discussion, some topics for future meetings emerged. We called an end to a really thought-provoking discussion at midday.

At our next meeting on Monday, 15 February, we will be exploring the pros and cons of 'Facing up to the crime: juvenile offenders face their victims'.

Joan Hook



Support Group

OWN's Support Group has been meeting for about four years. We have decided to 'shut up shop' because there is not enough interest. It seems that the majority of OWN members manage their own lives satisfactorily without the need of a support group.

Quite a few women, however, have, over the years, expressed the benefits they have gained from these open and friendly 'unburdening' sessions.

Jan and I believe that coming together to verbalise and monitor changing events and feelings in our lives is a good idea. We personally regret that the group has been discontinued.

A happy I.Y.O.P. to us all!

Nina Walton

THEATRE GROUP UPDATE

The Theatre Group is back, rearing to go, but homeless. At the moment the floors are being renewed at the Abraham Mott Hall so passers-by may see us rehearsing on the village green since we have seven definite bookings until the end of March. Well, we're seasoned troopers and the show must go on, so, by hook or by crook, we'll get on. International Year of Older Persons will certainly know who we are!

Lucy will be going overseas for three months - February 28th to June 1st. Bon Voyage! If anyone would care to join us to fill in for her, or to become a permanent part of our troupe, welcome! welcome!

Peggy Hewett

Have you started writing yet?

Just a reminder to those of you who had good intentions about writing a story for **Tell Me More... Voices of Older Women** over the summer break but have lost the initial impulse because you've been too relaxed, can't think what to write about, life's been too busy, you've forgotten about it, or the weather's been too hot and humid.

The deadline for stories is the end of March, so get those fingers moving!

As it will be impossible for the Editorial Group to handle individual enquiries from potential contributors, we have decided to keep everyone informed about the process of publication through the Sydney Newsletter.

All contributors will have an opportunity to re-check their story before publication.

If you have any doubts about a story being suitable, please ring Dorothy on 9247 7046 or Judith on 9560 2668 and we can talk it through.

The Editorial Group has had its first meeting and is eagerly awaiting more manuscripts.

MOVING MEMORIES

We are moving house! After thirty years of climbing 47 stairs we have decided that a ground floor unit is the only way to go for 70 and 80 year old legs. Its a hellish business. I'm tired and cranky. If I have to make one more decision I'll scream! I hold up a picture of my great greatgrandfather in Birmingham in his three piece suit and elegant hat, his famous whiskers sweeping down his chest. He was proud of that beard. It was carefully groomed each day, and when washed, given a final rinse in Reckitt's blue.

"Look at this!" I cry.

"Chuck it", says Doug.

"But it's my great great grandfather", I protest.

"Chuck it".

I put it in the too hard basket.

Here he is again in the family album on a pennyfathing bicycle, and yet another studio portrait with simulated snow falling on his fur coat and hat. What a vain old man!

I am told that in the early days of photography the studio provided props for their clients so maybe that could account for the bicycle and furs.

I sort through a pile of papers and come across my great uncle Sydney's obituary notice in the Manchester Guardian, dated 1962. He was a manufacturer of quality jewelry at Soho Hill and gained a reputation for "mainly being responsible for persuading the working man to wear a collar, stud and tie pin".

Poor working man, strangled in a collar, stud and tie pin, thus making my great uncle Syd rich, I thought cynically. On the other hand he could have generously provided the working man "with embellishments that had previously only been available to his betters!"

Our mother told us with us with awe that his chauffeur also dusted the furniture. I don't think he and I would have got on. Me chained beside Mrs. Pankhurst to the gates of Parliament House crying "Votes for women" and my uncle driving past in his Rolls. Two of his fine quality pieces have been handed down to me, so I must be grateful, but I would have loved a collar, stud and tie pin!

Ah! here are letters from England dated 1909, one from great grandfather Henry to his granddaughter, my mother, and to her great uncle Sydney on the occasion of her 21st birthday. He encloses a little gift. I look down at the ring on my finger - his little gift to my mother.. Gosh! It is 90 years old. "One of his fine quality pieces" - a beautiful thing.

Back to sorting. My father's "dead meat tag" as he called it, a simple disc with A.I.F., and his name and number etched into the thin metal, brings tears to my eyes. Stroking it gently I think of that dreadful war to end all wars - Siegfried Sassoons's war, Wilfred Owen's war, both pacifists - Owen killed two days before war ended in a no win slaughter as stupid and cruel as Gallipoli.

A letter from my brother during the Second World War written from Egypt after he was wounded at El Alamein - a practice run for his stint in New Guinea - increases the flow of tears.,

Another loving letter from my elder brother in Darwin - fighting the Japanese this time, is the last straw. He has since written me off as a sister over some petty incident after our mother's death.

I ring my 83 year old sister and cry a little. She has me laughing in no time, "that brother was a bully," she says. "Pulled wings off flies, chased us with a goanna (remember the glass door he broke when the goanna hit it instead of us"?), and put frogs in our short sheeted beds. Get on with your sorting or you will still be at it when the removalist comes".

I put everything into the too hard basket. It overflows. I pick up a photo of myself as a toddler sitting on a fat pony - the proverbial pimple on a pumpkin!

"Look, Doug, at this!"

'Chuck it", says Doug. "Chuck it all".

I look firmly at him.

"If you are not careful, you hard hearted old man, I'll chuck you!"

Shirley Murphy
1998

notice

Dementia

All you ever wanted to know and didn't know who to ask.

The Aged-Care Rights Service (TARS) has recently published a revised second edition of their book Dementia and Community Support which provides information for people trying to cope with dementia. It is available from TARS, Room 505, 64 Kippax Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. Telephone number for Sydney callers is (02) 9281 3600 and for callers outside Sydney 1800 424 079.

Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Saturday, February 27th

For those wanting to join the march

watch out for the UN IYOP Banner.
Assembling 6:00 p.m. onwards, or ring Joy for details, 9252-2040 or 9247-7046.

DYMPNA HOUSE GROUPS

Dympna House is a community based agency providing a range of services for women, children and families affected by child sexual assault. Current services include a nine week group for women beginning in March, a three week Saturday group for women beginning in April, a four week group for mothers of sexually abused children beginning in May and a group for lesbians beginning in July. For more information, please phone 02 9797 6733.

Tai Chi for Arthritis

Judy Laws is a member of OWN, and a qualified gentle exercise instructor. She will be conducting 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' on Fridays from 12 February to 26 March at the Presbyterian Church Hall, Campbell Street, Balmain. The cost is \$35 or \$30 concession for the course. For more information, please contact Judy on 9564 1528.

WOMEN'S MUSIC AND ARTS

THE 1999 SOUTH COAST WOMEN'S MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL BEGINS ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5 AT 5PM AND CLOSED ON SUNDAY 7 FEBRUARY AT 4.30 PM.
FOR A FULL PROGRAMME AND INFO ABOUT WHAT TO BRING,
PLEASE CONTACT THE OWN OFFICE.

board

READERS AND WRITERS!

On Friday the 5th of February at 1:30 p.m. our Reading Group will have its first meeting to discuss "Wuthering Heights," the last (we hope) of the Gothic Novel. The core of the Creating Writing Group, which will meet as such on Friday 19th of February at 1:30 p.m. will also attend our Reading Group. All interested R's and W's are welcome at either or both Group meetings. Please phone the OWN office on 9247-7046 if you wish further information.

*Congratulations to
Young Australian of
the Year, Bryan
Gaensler, grandson of
our OWN
Renee Simons.
It must be catching!!*

IYOP 1999 EVENT

Tuesday 16th of February
10 for 10:30 a.m. departure
Cruising With Seniors Card
Sydney Harbour Cruise with
Morning Tea. Sydney
Showboat, \$11.
(02) 9552-2772

IYOP 1999 EVENT

February 20th, 7 pm
Schools Aged Care Debate
Anglican Retirement
Villages, Castle Hill. For
information phone Julie
Carter, (02) 9634-5500

MEMBERSHIP OF THE OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK INC. IS OPEN TO ALL OLDER WOMEN.

Annual fees:

Membership (\$4) and Newsletter (\$11)....\$15.00

Newsletter only (for Gov't Depts.
institutions and organisations\$20.00

Send your cheque, name, address and phone number to:

Older Women's Network
87 Lower Fort Street
Millers Point NSW 2000

Tel: (02) 9247 7046
Fax: (02) 9247 4202
email: ownnsw@zip.com.au
Web site: <http://www.zip.au/~ownnsw>