



Dear OWN Members

Big changes and enticing opportunities are in the air at OWN!

The question on everyone's lips is "What do we want Sydney OWN to be"?

Some of us are interested in exploring the idea of Sydney OWN becoming an Older Women's Network Wellness Centre, while some of us think we could expand our physical and social activities (and have more fun!) and also become involved in local issues affecting older women. And there are probably lots of other ideas out there!

We really believe that separating OWN Inc. into two separate bodies ('Sydney' and 'NSW') can provide more, rather than less, opportunities for us to be involved - at different levels. Come to a meeting where we can talk about our ideas in an atmosphere of adventure and creativity - 10 am, Wednesday 18 April at 87 Lower Fort Street. Please stay on for a delicious sandwich lunch from *Splendid*.

Some of the practical issues needing discussion are the formation of an Interim Working Committee for Sydney OWN, the division of areas of activity between the two associations, plus issues such as funding, staff, premises and a logo.

Your opinions and energy are vital to the successful outcome of this reorganisation!

If you cannot attend the discussion on April 18, but would like to have your say, please contact us on 9247 7046.

If you can attend, please RSVP on the same number before Wednesday 11 April.

Hedi Roggeveen, Anne Warren and Joy Ross

Coordinators'



Report

It's been a very busy month. So busy, in fact, that we have had to add another four pages to the Newsletter to accommodate reports generated by the extra activities!

One of the highlights of the month (in fact it may be a highlight of the year!) was the Open Day at Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre's (BOWWC). Over 230 women watched and participated in a smorgasbord of activities offered by the women from BOWWC. The Theatre Group aired their 2001 show, *Doing Our OWN Thing*, in public for the first time and once again they have come up with some great numbers, cheeky sentiments and good fun – the well of creativity continues to bubble and splash! Everything about the Open Day was impressive: the number of women present, the number of women from different ethnic communities, the smooth organisation of the day, the rapport between the group leaders and participants, and above all the energy of all those present. A terrific day!

Another highlight this month has been the successful development and funding of our 'newest' Wellness Centre at Sutherland (SOWWC). Congratulations to Noreen Hewett and Barbara Burnham for their tenacity and creativity in getting this project off the ground. Their hard work has resulted in a seeding grant from Sutherland Shire Council of \$17,000 – they are negotiating (hopefully!) for a further \$10,000 from the Eastern Sydney Area Health Service for enhancement of the Wellness Project.

Our Review and Planning Session (RAPS) in February was, as usual, a fairly high-pressure day. Judy Laws from BOWWC was the facilitator for the day and she devised a very focused way of looking at planning, implementation and evaluation for the coming months. One section, 'coordination' was not covered so we plan to meet again in April to cover it. If you would like a copy of the RAPS Report, please contact the office and we will send it out.

The NSW Groups' Quarterly meeting discussed and ratified the OWN NSW Constitution and passed the baton on to the Interim Management Team which had its first meeting on 13 March with representatives from Illawarra, Newcastle, Penrith, and Sydney present. (See report p11.)

International Women's Day at OWN was a small but dynamic event held at Windmill Street where Christine Regan from New South Wales Council of Social Services came to speak. (See report in 'International Women's Week' p12.)

As a continuation on our involvement in the "Now we the people" project we had another discussion on globalisation, this time with the excellent input of Dr Pat Ranald who spoke informatively and passionately about the subject. (See report on p13.)

A disappointment this month was the cancellation of our Seniors' Week event on 17th March – the Volunteering Forum. Unfortunately, not enough members were sufficiently interested to make the day viable. It would have been a great opportunity to discuss with two very well informed women the future of volunteering. An alternative forum was held on Wednesday 28 March for volunteers who contribute on a regular basis and without whom OWN could not function.

Another big disappointment was the resignation of Judy Laws from BOWWC. Judy's energy and creative involvement for the past sixteen months have broadened and consolidated BOWWC as a forceful and joyful presence in Bankstown. Her skills and experience are going to be badly missed but, reluctant as we are to lose her, we wish her well in her new position with the South Western Sydney Area Health Service.

Pam Ledden, Joy Ross, Renate Watkinson and Louise Anike

Pension 'clawback'

The Government is determined to cut \$4 per week from the March indexation increases for unemployed people and pensioners, which is half of last year's 4% compensation payment for the GST.

Normally the government increases pensions in line with the inflation rate which was 2% last July. Inflation is currently running at 4% but only 2% of this has been passed on to pensioners because the Government argues that the money paid last July was an 'advance' to compensate for the GST. Few pensioners understood at the time that half the increase would be clawed back in March 2001. Apparently many experts also had difficulty understanding the compensation scheme.

In contrast to the totally inadequate compensation payment given to pensioners in July 2000, taxpayers on \$60,000 were overcompensated with a tax cut worth \$63 per week, or more than 5% of their income.

Now, with its current drop in popularity, the federal government is talking about offering more tax cuts to high-income people! And they are also backtracking on a promise made two years ago to tax trusts as companies, currently a major tax loophole for high income-earners. How can they justify clawing back \$4 per week from unemployed people and pensioners?

Organisations such as OWN and the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (CPSA) are very concerned about the financial difficulties arising

for many pensioners since the introduction of the GST. We hope that the enquiry into the effects of the GST on pensioners and the unemployed, proposed by the Democrats, goes ahead and that the government is forced to pay the full 4%.

If you have a story to tell about the effect of the GST on your income and lifestyle, please write to us.

Editors



BANK FEES

Are pensioners aware of fees being charged by the Commonwealth Bank on Passbook Savings Accounts? An account fee of \$3 per month applies on two (previously it was three) withdrawals per month. The special rebate of \$6 per month applies to my account (Pensioner Security Account) but when there are three pension payments in the month an extra \$3 is charged!

Why don't we mount a campaign to get everyone to withdraw from the Commonwealth Bank and put our money in a community bank like the Bendigo Bank? Or am I over-reacting, as my daughter implies? What do members think?

Nancy Brown

Editor's note: Did you know that the Bendigo Bank has developed an alliance with Community Aid Abroad to offer an Ethical Investment Fund that supports projects which are socially and environmentally beneficial to people?

Corporate citizenship is not (always) a myth!

OWN recently decided to have roller blinds installed in the main meeting room at 87 to reduce the glare during meetings.

We asked Ladybird Blinds (a company run by women) for a quote and were so impressed at the price that we put in an order immediately. Imagine our surprise when their letter of confirmation arrived a few days later with the following:

"A percentage of every order placed with Ladybird Blinds is donated to charity. Our current project is to assist the Make-a-Wish Foundation, which brings some magic and happiness into the lives of very sick children and their families."

Worth remembering if you're in the market for blinds some time in the future

Dorothy Cora

Commonwealth Seniors' Health Card

The Commonwealth Seniors' Health Card entitles Australian residents of pension age, who do *not* receive an age pension, to cheaper prescription medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The card entitles them to prescriptions for \$3.30 and free emergency ambulance. The income limits for the qualification of this card are: single \$41,000, couple \$68,676 and a couple, separated by illness, each \$37,615.

The current pension age is 65 for men and 62 for women. To apply for a Health Card, please phone Centrelink on 13 10 21.

International Women's Week!

These days the focus on women goes on not for just one day but for a *whole week!*

The first event of 'International Women's Week' was the Premier's very stylish late-afternoon gathering at Government House on Monday 6 March. We were delighted to meet Professor Marie Bashir, our first woman governor in NSW. She strolled among us chatting about current issues for women and happily receiving congratulations on her recent appointment. Disappointingly, Professor Bashir was not one of the guest speakers.

On International Women's Day, Wednesday 8th March, a number of us enjoyed a champagne lunch at Windmill Street following a stimulating talk from Christine Regan from the NSW Council of Social Services – see a report of Christine's talk on p.12.)

The following Saturday morning, about twenty OWN members joined seven hundred or so regulars at the International Women's Development Agency breakfast. The funds raised at the breakfast support a third-world women's project. This year, *Hseng Nuong Lintner* from the Shan Womens' Action Network, told us about their work to end the trafficking of Burmese women and children who are living in camps in mountain areas on the Thai-Burmese border. Because they are not recognised as refugees, but as illegal immigrants, they are exploited in low paid jobs and are often sold to brothels. Our funds will go to skills training and other programs.

After the breakfast, some of us joined the throng at Town Hall for the IWD rally and march to Hyde Park. Last year we were told we were not permitted to march (something about getting ready for the Olympics!), but we marched all the same – in the rain! This year had its grumbles too... although rain wasn't one of them! On a brighter note, many of us behind OWN's banner remarked on how wonderful it was to see so many young women in the march.

Finally, on Sunday afternoon, I attended a stimulating forum called 'Mothers of Federation' at the Jessie Street National Women's Library. Six well-known women shared their thoughts and ideas on "our mothers, grandmothers and friends who didn't make it into the history books, but are part of the country's history".

Elizabeth Evatt, who opened the forum, talked about women's role in the bloke-dominated 1901 Federation and Constitution discussions; how marginalised women have been in Australian politics and how issues for women are much the same today – jobs, family responsibilities, violence, fertility control. She also spoke about the exclusion of Aborigines and how Jessie Street and Faith Bandler waged a ten-year campaign to repeal their exclusion, eventually passed in 1967.

Other speakers were Betty Searle, Bronwyn Bancroft, Susan Ryan, Shirley Fitzgerald and Lenore Coltheart.

Joy Ross

The Greek Community Celebrates IWD

An International Women's Day Celebration attended by more than 450 women and men from the Greek Orthodox Community was held in Lakemba on Sunday evening, 4th March. The function was expertly organised by Sophie Psarris, member of OWN, the Union of Australian Women and the Greek Community.

Guests included Sicilia Fernandez Dominguez, the new Consul General for Cuba, and Lee Rhiannan, MLC for the Greens, who spoke about the history of IWD and introduced a petition concerning Government funding for education.*

Leila Mohamet, spoke movingly of the suffering and torturing of women in Kurdistan Iraq and Anna Kontouris described the trauma, isolation and the upheaval in families who immigrate to Australia, for many different reasons. Despite being cut off from families and culture, Anna described how they overcome difficulties and are able to practice their language, culture and religion in a multicultural Australia.

Congratulations Sophie on a most successful celebration.

*The Green's petition is available for signing at 87 Lower Fort Street.

Merle Hightet

Advocacy Advocacy Advocacy

Housing Group

You've noticed by now that there are very many reports in this issue. And even if you are bored you have to remember that some members actually like to read the reports and complain when there aren't enough. I'll try to keep this one short!

After a bit of investigation over the last month we have found, we think, that nobody knows very much about homeless older women: how many there are, where they spend their time (especially at night) and what they would like to have by way of shelter and support.

We have therefore decided to make a submission for funds to set up a research project to find the answers to these and other questions. Eventually, we hope to take the next step towards a service that will meet their needs. When the submission is drafted we'll meet again to consider, amend and approve it before sending it off.

No bad for brevity?

Pam Ledden

A good remedy

Did you know that St John's wort (a herbal remedy) has been shown to be at least as effective for treating moderate depression as drugs commonly prescribed for mild to moderate depression? It doesn't work for everyone but it's worth a try!

Transports of Interest!

The OWN transport group enjoyed the opportunity to hear about the work of Action for Public Transport (APT) at its March meeting. Member Alan Miles gave us some inspiring insights into the campaign successes and the modus operandi of this effective independent consumer group, whose objectives are:

To foster and promote the expansion and improvement of public transport services for the overall benefit of the community

To promote a rational transport system having regard to environmental and social consequences and to efficient use of resources

To promote public discussion and participation in the provision of transport services

To support research furthering the above aims.

Most of us have heard APT's spokespeople quoted in the press, on radio and on television about public transport issues. It was interesting to learn one secret of their media effectiveness is members' daily monitoring of issues, combined with a telephone tree and weekly informal meetings. Modest membership fees and donations fund the group.

Also at our meeting we considered the response from OWN's Working Group - together with the views of a number of individual members - to our recommendation to change OWN's position on the Pensioner Excursion Ticket. No clear consensus has yet emerged. As the Working Group has requested further member discussion, we resolved to prepare additional information for members through the newsletter.

We discussed the need for a more effective public transport consumer communication forum with government, since by all accounts the statutory body set up to provide this is currently less than dynamic. We are encouraged that the new Director of the Department of Transport appears keen to change this.

This month's contributions to our growing clippings file include several items on the need for seniors' concession fare eligibility to be reciprocal between Australian States - an obvious area for Federal cooperation.

The next meeting of the OWN transport group will be held on Wednesday 11 April at 10.30 am., at 87 Lower Fort Street, Millers Point. All interested members are welcome.

Ros Gordon

LETTERS

Dear OWN,

Thank you so much for the birthday card from OWN for my 90th! The card is quite profound, I think, the nicest I've ever had.

I happen to be given, all my life, to things of the mind... Never typically an Australian, though I was born in Waverley (not attracted to sport and regard football as being closer to foobrawl or thugby! Don't follow racing or the pokies – mindless monsters – and not over-keen on meat pies or tomato sauce!) Therefore, thought and interests of the mind register more with me...

These are the best years of my life, and funnily enough, I feel younger at 90 than I did at 20! And joining OWN has been a fitting interest for closing years. Your groups rounded out many views and fostered a lot of companionship.

Eilie Dimsie

Dear OWN,

I'm still alive and busy teaching, but am beginning to look forward to being back in Sydney. Still nearly four months to go, however.

Many thanks for sending the Newsletter. It's so full of news of what's going on, and always comes up with great tidbits in the way of articles, letters, reports, or even the occasional Haiku - great reading for us exiles, anyway.

As it has been arriving regularly, I take it that you have received my subscription. I ask, because I had to send it via ordinary mail and am none too sure how reliable that is from here.

Is there any info. on China that you would like to have, either for reference, or for the Newsletter? Women's Issues, perhaps?

Special greetings to the Theatre Group and good wishes to all,

Brigid Sen.

Remembering the peacekeepers

We are nearing 25th April, celebrated as Anzac Day. To most of us it is a well-known day of marches and a day of mourning for soldiers and others who died in battle.

Surely it is time to make Anzac Day a day in which we strive to prevent more deaths and honour those who have died since those long-ago wars – many as peacekeepers, supporting the UN. Do we know how many? Do we know their names? Are there any memorials or special days set aside to remember them by? They have died in Kossovar, Rwanda, East Timor and, as far as I know, there's been no public recognition.

We are in the middle of vast changes. The British Empire is, of course, a memory. Our population is now a multicultural one and Australia's ties to the British Crown can hardly make much sense. Isn't it time to cease looking backwards and recognise change?

I suggest that Anzac Day should become a Day of Remembrance of peacekeepers, and that our children be taught this when schools turn out for Anzac Day. I would be very interested to get feedback from other OWN members.

Cecily McIlroy

Room for improvement?

The following services in NSW have been identified by the NSW Council on Social Services (NCOSS) as being below average or poor performers.

Community Care (Aged) – NSW

Lowest level of HACC services per month received by people aged over 70;

2nd lowest level of meals per month received by people over 70;

Lowest HACC expenditure per person.

Health - NSW

2nd highest rate of hospital acquired bacteria;

2nd lowest separation rate in public acute hospitals;

Lowest rate of same day separations from public acute hospitals;

2nd lowest proportion of patients seen within recognised time for triage category 2 (emergency);

Lowest proportion of patients seen within recognised time for triage category 3 (urgent);

Highest GP consultations per 1000 persons;

Lowest participation rates for women (20-69 years) in screening for cervical cancer;

2nd highest GP referral rates for pathology tests and highest rate for diagnostic imaging;

Below national average recurrent expenditure on mental health;

Below national average availability of mental health beds;

Below national average full time equivalent staff in specialist mental health services.

IF ONLY...

Wouldn't it have been a splendid thing to have had Professor Marie Bashir as President of Australia? That is, *if we had had a Republic and if we, the people had been able to elect our own president!*

However, as Governor of NSW, she is an inspired choice. We have never had a better qualified governor. But more than that and better still, Professor Bashir is a healing professional, an older woman and an obviously adored grandmother.

The idea of an Australian Republic with a head appointed by the people, is dear to my heart, so I was delighted to be able to attend a meeting of like-minded people recently at the State Library. Calling themselves "A Just Republic" this group is committed to renewing the push for a Republic and replacing the Monarchy with an Australian Head of State.

To the chagrin of many, the Referendum in 1998 was defeated, thanks to the manipulation of John Howard, who allowed us only two options, to retain the Monarchy or to have a Republic with Head of State elected by Parliament. This unacceptable model gave us no choice of a true people's representative. Many Republicans then voted to retain the devil they knew rather than be stuck with the wrong Republican model which would have been there for all time.

The Federal Opposition, if they gain office this year, has promised to hold an early plebiscite on the whole issue. It is an issue we can all be thinking about and I suggest to OWN groups that this is a subject well worth discussing

Muriel Hortin

Onya Barry!

The keynote speaker at the NSW Premier's Forum on Ageing was Australia's 'National Treasure', The Hon Barry Jones, AO. Outspoken and provocative as usual, Barry blasted state and federal governments for their ageist and demeaning attitudes towards older people. Always the zealous advocate for positive change, he carried a rapt audience along with him as he identified the attitudes and mindsets that see politicians ignoring the wealth of talent and experience that older people could contribute to this country.

Barry asserted that people live through not three but four ages: the first age of immaturity, the second of work and family responsibilities, the third of personal fulfillment and the fourth of decrepitude and death.

"The Third Age", Barry explained, "can be characterised as 'the age of greatest freedom' when the pressures imposed by work and family responsibilities have been lifted, but physical and mental health remain good. With a rethinking of the way society operates, the Third Age could become the age of personal achievement and the crowning glory of an individual's life. There are two main obstacles to this aim: the poor economic position of many older people and the often demeaning way in which society (especially those in the Second Age) views and treats the aged."

In public discourses, he argued, the third and fourth ages are conflated so that it appears that the issues affecting people who have just retired are the same as those affecting older people who are close to death. How ridiculous!

The applause was deafening!

Dorothy Cora

Aboriginal Support Circle

After several training sessions, the Aboriginal Support Circle has embarked on its first oral history interviews for its forthcoming publication "In My Own Voice". The real hard work starts after the interviews, which have to be copied, transcribed, and then edited.

We are fortunate that Yvonne Jackson, who is the program director at Tranby College, has given us much encouragement and has graciously agreed to be interviewed. She has also offered to assist us in our endeavours.

We look forward to reporting on further progress over the next few months and once again thank our generous donors for helping to make this project possible.

Pat Zinn.

P.S. Heartiest congratulations to Betty Little for successfully completing a five-week Post Office training course at Bankstown TAFE!

The Personal is Political at Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre

Celebrating diversity

Bankstown Wellness Centre women have the opportunity to build community harmony and to challenge stereotypes and prejudice about difference on a daily basis. Over 35% of Wellness Centre women are representative of the diverse cultural groups living in Bankstown including German, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese.

Reclaim the Night and IWD

Drumming was introduced to the Wellness Centre in 1999 by Julie Earngy and has proved to be an enjoyable and therapeutic activity as well as a springboard for political expression for the Wellness Centre. Several Bankstown Wellness Centre drummers marched in the rain last October in the city to Reclaim the Night with Liz their wonderful drumming teacher and again at International Women's Day (IWD) in 2001.

A huge 'Stop Domestic Violence and Bankstown Women's Issues Network' banner formed the backdrop for Wellness Centre women dancing and drumming at the Bass Hill Plaza on Tuesday 6 March. They were joined by young Phillipino and Vietnamese dancers from Bankstown Girls High School, increasing the visibility of Bankstown women publicly celebrating IWD and having fun. Helen Westwood, who chaired this event, highlighting safety issues for women along with the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer from Bankstown Police, and other health and community workers.

Several Wellness Centre women attended the first wonderful multicultural IWD concert at the Bankstown Town Hall on a Friday night – celebrating women's lives.

Increasing the visibility of Bankstown women and interrupting stereotypes

Ten Wellness Centre women were invited to the launch of the first Bankstown Women's Art Exhibition celebrating IWD at Bankstown Hospital along with about fifty other women. Hundreds of wonderful pieces of Bankstown women's art are hanging in the ground floor of the hospital for six weeks, increasing the visibility of Bankstown

women. The Wellness Centre photographs are being exhibited in the Aged Care Ward to interrupt the stereotype of older women as well as to promote the Wellness Centre.

Older Women Speak Out Against Violence

Wellness Centre women participated in a consultation about violence in older women's lives. The Project Management Team worked all day to package and post out books on *Older Women Speak Out About Violence* to libraries throughout NSW, helping to make this free publication accessible to older women everywhere.

Bankstown Wellness Centre Photographic Project

Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre and Greek OWN women generously made themselves available to be included in twelve beautiful black and white photographs aimed at interrupting the stereotype of older women.

These wonderful photographs depicting older women participating in community life and having fun have been displayed by Kiama Community Health, SE Sydney Area Health Women's Seminar, Blue Mountains Council IWD lunch and Seniors week events, Lane Cove Library, UWS Bankstown campus Welcome Week Women's Collective display, the National Women's Health conference in Adelaide and in the Bankstown hospital.

Bankstown Wellness Centre women are managing their own Wellness Centre on a daily basis and in doing so are:

- promoting the rights, dignity and well-being of older women
- promoting enrichment mutual support and companionship/friendship among older women
- presenting a positive image of older women
- providing resources and programs to assist and empower older women
- celebrating age and ageing and
- opposing ageism, sexism and racism
- disseminating information for and about older women

Not a bad effort for an Older Women's Wellness Centre!

Judy Laws

***THEATRE
GROUP
REPORT***

The older women from the Bankstown Wellness Centre invited us to share and participate in their open day on February 26. Oh, what a morning! Our Bankstown sisters showed us how they enjoy themselves, have fun and keep fit. We were treated to a splendid array of artistic talent, including dancing, tai chi and the wonderful Jam Tarts on drums. Our performance was the very first show of the year and it was a mixture of old and new material. The ever-popular redundant and out-of-work fairies were a huge success as usual. Our new Slovak song looks like it might become a favourite judging by the audience's reception. Some of us took the opportunity to mingle with women from far and wide during morning tea.

March 6 saw us cruising down the river on board the Rivercat to the Parramatta Riverside Theatre. The passengers must have wondered what on earth eleven raucous women in purple and white were up to! We lugged the keyboard and lagerphone on a huge trolley plus two bags of props alongside the river, up a steep flight of steps, dashed across a busy main road (no pedestrian crossing) and arrived at the Theatre a bit dishevelled but in high spirits.

The Theatre was hosting a conference to examine issues relating to public spaces and who uses them, with a special emphasis on Western Sydney. Our performance space was the courtyard. Open-air performances are not to our liking, mainly because of difficulties with sound gear, and being at the mercy of the elements can sometimes be unpleasant. The show was well received by the audience – a good mix of ages and sexes – with plenty of smiles, applause and cheering throughout. The line “Don't let them ruin our ABC” was a real hit. Our new reconciliation song “White Hands and Black Hands” seemed appropriate because of the historical significance of the site to our indigenous people.

One of our members, Marie Williams, had a birthday – a biggie – on the day, so we celebrated in great style with cakes and coffee on the wharf while waiting for the ferry home.

Traditionally March is the busiest month for the Group and that tradition is alive and well. By the end of the month we will have performed the grand total of fifteen shows. Is that busy?

Jean Jacobs

Over the Back Fence

Domestic Violence Prevention Tour

On the morning of 12 March, seven members of the Theatre Group: Jo Allon, Peg Hewett, Josie Jackson, Judith Mustard, Lucy Porter, Janet Waters and pianist, Ann Cunynghame, left Sydney at 7.50 am. on Hazelton Airlines bound for Tamworth. Five days and 900 kms later, we returned to Sydney bright eyed and bushy tailed after a most successful tour.

The tour was a group effort organized by Domestic Violence Prevention, Northern Tablelands Area Health Department, Home and Community Care Services (HACC) and the Country Women's Association.

Arriving in Tamworth we were met by three lovely women, Deb, Gill and Maggie, who transported us to the venue. Dorothy McRae-McMahon officially opened the first day of the weeks events and after morning tea, we performed our “domestic violence section”. Lunch followed. The next section was a local doctor's address and then we were off again “doing our own thing”. This was the procedure at each venue. The aim was to provide older women with a day of fun, a serious message on health, new information, and an opportunity to ask questions and to laugh – and they did!

From Tamworth to Armidale via Narrabri, Warialda and Glen Innes, audiences numbered between 50 and 150. They laughed and cried in all the right places! Many responding with tears and shock as we spoke out about our personal experiences of domestic violence, and then laughed as we sang and performed skits about issues relating to older women.

Our hosts and ‘minders’ were Deb Pugh and Gill Crump from HACC Development Services in Armidale; Kath Hastings, the Regional Violence Prevention Specialist in Tamworth; Maggie Dalcy, Clinical Nurse Specialist, New England Health Service, Tamworth and Lorraine Sewell from the Armidale Country Women's Association (providers of wonderful lunches and morning teas).

I believe this was a very successful tour; not only did we have wonderful audiences, the members of the Theatre Group had a wonderful time too and greatly appreciated the attention, the accommodation, the hard work and commitment and getting to know Kath, Deb, Gill, Lorraine and Maggie.

The Older Women's Network Theatre Group would also like to acknowledge the generosity of Hazelton Airlines.

Jo Allon

Politics, Action & Renewal

The 4th Australian Women's Health Conference recently took place in Adelaide, and OWN was there. The Conference was designed along three streams: Politics, Action and Renewal, with a concurrent Arts Program which brought great interest and wonderful entertainment interspersed with the business sessions. The program was huge. More than 500 delegates had to choose between a large array of concurrent sessions, including depression, cancer, violence, health issues specific to indigenous women, NESB women, lesbians and women with a disability, women in prisons, feminist research, gender equity – you name it!

Coffee breaks and lunches were held in a large hall filled with excellent poster displays and information tables, colourful banners and a variety of women's artwork that told many stories related to the health and wellbeing of women of all ages. And as always, more of the stories were of the struggle, rather than the success. The delegates seemed to be mostly people who work in providing women's health services, many from rural communities, and a number of government workers interested in developing more policies that support women's health.

We heard several outstanding keynote speakers. Dorothy Broom from ANU described the Federal Government's systematic dismantling of national women's health programs. Mary Kalantzis from RMIT in Victoria spoke passionately about a broader and more compassionate view of citizenship, and criticised the glossing over of Australia's darker early days of Federation. And Beatrix Campbell, British journalist, feminist and social commentator was a great draw card for a public forum one evening. Her commentary on the Blair government's 'new way' is insightful.

Health issues for indigenous Australian women were discussed by several excellent speakers including Pat Anderson, from Danilda Dilba Health Aboriginal Health Services in the NT, Kerry Arabena, from the Torres Straits, a vibrant speaker on public health, planning and training, and Jackie Huggins, from the University of Queensland. We were moved and impressed by the knowledge and understanding of these women, and by their frustration at the bureaucratic bungling and waste

of resources. Nomfundo Walaza, a clinical psychologist who works with women who are survivors of trauma and violence in Capetown, South Africa, told of the systemic abuse of women in that country. Jocelyne Scutt, Anti-Discrimination Commission, Tasmania titled her presentation: *Bullying women, battering women's health culture, pattern, practice and what to do about them.* She's a dynamic speaker!

Renate Watkinson and Sam Smart represented OWN, with an information table promoting OWN, our Wellness Guide, and health-related projects OWN has done recently in partnership with Government and community agencies, including the Rural Women's Network. Sam's presentation, in the 'Action' category, talked about 'Partnerships that Promote Older Women's Health and Wellbeing', and it was well received. We used slides made from the excellent Bankstown photographic display, and the audience loved them! Older women's concerns, and voluntary organisations like OWN were quite under-represented, not surprising when these conferences are so expensive, however we felt that OWN gained a lot of attention as both older and younger women showed their interest in our work.

Renate brought back tapes of some of the keynote presentations, and these are available for borrowing from OWN.

Sam Smart & Renate Watkinson

More women wanted!

The NSW Government wants to increase the percentage of women in decision-making on more than 1500 Government councils, boards and committees. Although women now represent 35% of new appointments, up from 19% in 1995, they are still under-represented.

The government has a register of women interested in being appointed to boards and committees. For further information on how to put your name on the register, contact Premier's Department Telephone: (02) 9228 5292 or (02)92284199 or email: boards@premiers.nsw.gov.au.

Remarkable Australian Women

At our March discussion Group we agreed that until we researched the subject we didn't realise just how many remarkable Australian women there have been. Fortunately, there are records of women's achievements in many fields of endeavour to be found in libraries and on the Internet.

Our dilemma was who to discuss out of the hundreds of names we had. One book, *A Sense of Purpose*, names 545 great Australian women of the twentieth century. One of our members had researched the life of Catherine Spence, the face on the new \$5 note. She was born in Scotland and arrived in Adelaide with her family in the 1800s. In 1879 she established a school for girls; was the first woman novelist to write about Australia; the first Australian feminist and social activist (she helped women get the vote in Adelaide in 1884) and was the first female to be appointed to the Board of Education. She died in 1910.

Another remarkable Australian woman was Dame Mary Gilmore, 1865-1962, who was a teacher, a poet and journalist. A very progressive thinker, she moved to Paraguay in 1895 to join William Lane's ill-fated Utopia settlement. On her return to Australia in 1902 she continued working as a journalist and a poet. In 1954, at the age of 89, she published her last collection of poems, *Fourteen Men*. William Dobell, the artist, painted her portrait when she was 92.

Women living to-day are also remarkable. For example, Miriam Hyde has a long history of composing music; Mary Gaudron, was the first female justice of the High Court and Simone Young has conducted at most of the world's major opera houses and in 2001 will become musical director of Opera Australia.

We felt the above-named, plus hundreds of other distinguished Australian women, made us very proud.

The next Discussion Group will be held on Monday, 9th April, at 10.30am at Windmill Street. The subject is: What did Dame Mary Gilmore mean by "Learn to live outside yourself?"

All welcome to join in!

Joan Hook.

OWN NSW

Interim Management Team Report

The IMT met with representatives of four OWN groups. This was a very business-like meeting mostly to do with the process we are now engaged in with the Department of Fair Trading to register the new association. The meeting appointed Hedi Rogeveen and Pam Ledden as the foundation members and Gwenda Fulford as the Public Officer.

I have been asked to begin the approach to the Ageing and Disability Department to consult/negotiate with them about recognising the new association and redirecting funding to it.

We did spend a fair amount of time discussing publicity for OWN in general: a new leaflet for OWN NSW is already in the pipeline. We also discussed the possibility of getting free advertisements and articles about OWN in local papers and information to local councils. It was decided to ask OWN member, Nancy Currie, to offer some of her knowledge and experience on these issues and devise a strategy for how we might proceed.

We also discussed a new logo. One has been designed by a designer nominated by Sydney City Council in lieu of direct funding submission but the design as it stands is regarded by all as unsuitable and I have been asked to see if the designer is willing to have another go at it.

All members are invited to submit designs for a logo, remembering that it will be used on a letterhead as well. All designs are to be submitted anonymously and will be published for comment. Choosing the most suitable design will be the task of the IMT or the new Management Team depending on the progress of the two parallel processes.

We also discussed the possibility of holding a conference at the same time as the first AGM of the new association. All agreed it would be fun to do but that money will have to be got for it!

We meet again Thursday April 12 at Lower Fort Street, at 10.30am.

Pam Ledden

Community Organisations in a Changing Political Climate

On International Women's Day, Christine Regan from the New South Wales Council of Social Services (NCOSS), spoke to us about the future of community organisations in a changing political climate.

Christine began by talking about the word "citizenship", pointing out that both sides of government are using it, but that its meaning tends to be slippery. On one hand citizenship can mean "individualism": people look after themselves and their families, then their communities and then, through their taxes and votes, they support the government. This meaning of citizen derives from prioritising personal responsibility.

On the other hand, "citizenship" can describe the notion of contributing to the community and accepting responsibility to work towards an equitable society – without prioritising.

Does the first position allow governments to abrogate its responsibility for the provision of community welfare services? Perhaps the application of economic rationalism does mean that the government has little or no role in community service provision. If so, then it is up to market forces and citizens to initiate the services they need. Market forces will only initiate services where there is a profit incentive whereas citizens will initiate where the needs are known or experienced.

But what of disadvantaged people; people who are socially, culturally, geographically or economically isolated?

In a period of reducing the size and activities of the public service the government has contracted out many of its services and used competitive tendering as the process for doing this. The government decides what it needs and then advertises for tenders to offer competitive prices to fulfill its requirements.

Community organisations have usually obtained services for special interest groups by writing funding submissions to the government. Now, *despite promises to the contrary*, the government has begun to apply competitive tendering processes to human services. Imbedded in the process, no doubt will be a requirement that there will be a charge for the services to be offered – user pays.

Christine also talked briefly about the closure of rural banks – not because they were unprofitable but because they were not profitable enough; early discharge – which in itself is not a bad thing given the ambience, food and infection rates in the average hospital – but there is no further funding to ensure adequate care for those convalescing at home. She also spoke about the system of health checks being initiated for people over seventy and how investigation and planning for those with health problems in this age bracket will inevitably apply more stress to already-stretched services.

Other issues implicated in the contraction of human services include access to information technology, public housing, welfare reform, inequity of superannuation provision, and the growing duplication of services provided by federal and state bodies PLUS a recession!

The question is, where does all this leave groups like OWN, who have been vocal but responsible critics of government, when it comes to continued funding?

Following Christine's talk there was very lively discussion, none of it terribly optimistic. We all felt the seriousness of the current situation and could see no likelihood of early or significant improvement.

However, it was International Women's Day and we do have many achievements to celebrate at OWN, so we opened the champagne and adjourned to the courtyard for a delicious lunch!

Pam Ledden

Good News for Coffee Lovers

Coffee lovers concerned that they are doing their heart damage by quaffing those daily cappuccinos can take comfort from a new study that shows a couple of cups of coffee a day does no harm. The UK study contradicts previous research that has suggested coffee may raise cholesterol levels or levels of the amino acid homocystine, which is thought to be a risk factor for coronary heart disease.

Check out the details on www.surgerydoor.co.uk/news/detail.asp?id=498

AUSTRALIA WAKES IN FRIGHT

Globalisation and the World Trade Organisation are familiar words these days. Our government tells us the former is unstoppable and the latter has our interests at heart. Neither is true. What may have been a good idea in the beginning is developing into a nightmarish scenario where the skills and crafts of poor countries are being abused and manipulated by American and European multinationals all in the name of free trade, aided and abetted by the WTO.

Take for instance out-sourcing. This means that a brand name, like Nike, can be produced in a poor country where the worker is paid peanuts to produce an item that will be sold for 500 times its value elsewhere. The excess profit goes into the pocket of a multinational and the poor go on being poor. Or thousands of people are suddenly out of work because a factory has gone 'off shore' (it happened here with Speedo swim suits just recently). This is the shady side of 'free' trade. In short, economic rationalism means if you can get a product made cheaper elsewhere, do so. The poor should be thankful to be provided with employment; keeps them slim and off the streets.

Dr Patricia Ranald, Principal Policy officer for the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, recently spoke to a large group of interested members of OWN. Patricia drew a verbal picture of the development and escalating effects of globalisation with WTO in the driver's seat. The rich countries, the USA and Europe principally, are the conductors of this economic orchestra and the principal winners.

Until the 90s each country's government had a say in tariff levels and costs. But America persistently sought to reduce GATT's (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) protective powers because it frequently didn't serve their concerns.

Over the decades, as oil prices, inflation and government budget deficits increased the quality of life and social issues (old age, childcare, education and health) have decreased in importance. What rules now is maximising profits for shareholders and stockholders. Takeovers, investments, money making money and unpayable

loans are the language of the day. The more humane GATT turned into WTO in 1995; economic rationalism being its true name and human rights its anathema.

Corporate lust for power is endangering Australian livelihood, environment, health and social values. Medical centres, run by corporations, are there to make money, not to promote health or well-being. Deregulation means that power and wealth is controlled by the few. Corporations love privatisation; that's how they gain power over countries. Imagine our essential services being owned by a foreign corporation! It serves us well to remember that when the home is sold, we no longer have any say in its well-being or future.

This is what privatisation means.

Our next discussion, as part of the *NOW, We the People* project, will be on 'Jobs – casualisation, wages, conditions, equitable distribution of work and the role of trade unions'.

Samantha Mckay

BOOK REVIEWS

NINE PARTS OF DESIRE

by Geraldine Brooks

Geraldine Brooks was born and educated in Australia. She then spent six years covering the Middle East through wars, insurrection and the violent upheaval of resurgent fundamentalism as an American foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. She studied the lives and history of Islamic women, interviewing and observing, in an endeavour to understand the religious, political and cultural forces that shape their lives. It is in paperback, informative, fascinating, but difficult to read at times. *Anchor Books*.

WHEN BROKEN GLASS FLOATS

by Chantrithy Him

A gut-wrenching memoir of a young Cambodian girl's horrifying experience during the Khmer Rouge reign. She now lives in Oregon, and tells with a poet's touch about the brutal experiences of her people on the killing field. Inspiring. I could only purchase it in hardback. *Norton Press*

Joan Johns

THE GOOD WIFE GUIDE*

Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready on time for his return from work. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favourite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.

Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you will be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh looking. He has just been with a lot of work weary people. Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.

Clear away the clutter. Gather up school books, toys, papers etc. and then run a dust cloth over the tables. During the colder months of the year you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order and it will give you a lift too. After all, catering for his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction. Try to encourage the children to be quiet.

Be happy to see him. Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him. Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Make the evening his. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner or other places of entertainment without you. Don't complain if he's late home for dinner, or even stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.

Have a cool or warm drink ready for him. Arrange the pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice. Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness.

Once he has had a chance to have his evening meal clear the dishes and wash up promptly. If your husband offers to help, decline his offer. Encourage your husband to pursue his hobbies and interests and be supportive without seeming to encroach. If you have any little hobbies yourself try not to bore him speaking of these, as women's interests are often rather trivial compared to men's.

At the end of the evening tidy the home ready for the morning. Once you have both retired to the bedroom prepare yourself for bed as promptly as possible. Whilst feminine hygiene is of the utmost importance

your tired husband does not want to queue for the bathroom as he would have to do for his train. But remember to look your best when going to bed. If you need to apply face-cream or hair-rollers wait until he is asleep as this can be shocking to a man last thing at night.

When it comes to the possibility of intimate relations with your husband it is important to remember your marriage vows and in particular your commitment to obey him. If he feels that he needs to sleep immediately then so be it. In all things be led by your husband's wishes; do not pressure him in any way to stimulate intimacy. Should your husband suggest congress then accede humbly all the while being mindful that a man's satisfaction is more important than a woman's. When he reaches his moment of fulfilment a small moan from yourself is encouraging to him and quite sufficient to indicate any enjoyment that you may have had. Should your husband suggest any of the more unusual practices be obedient and uncomplaining but register any reluctance by remaining silent. It is likely that your husband will then fall promptly asleep so adjust your clothing, freshen up and apply your night-time face and hair-care products. You may then set the alarm so that you can arise shortly before him in the morning. This will enable you to have his morning cup of tea ready when he awakes.

* This is an extract from a 1950s Home Economics textbook

From the Internet

BOOK REVIEW

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Another book about Cambodia by Geraldine Cox, one of the few foreigners ever to be granted Cambodian citizenship. She worked in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, stirring the pot with her brave and sometimes outrageous behaviour, and her impatience with rules and regulations. Pol Pot killed all the poets, novelists and other literary people in Cambodia, and America threw more bombs on that poor country than is conceivable. A stupid war, a holocaust for its people. Geraldine established an orphanage, adopted two Cambodian children, and worked her guts out under mind-boggling difficulties. Large in body and spirit, she is a brave and wonderful woman. It is as exciting as a James Bond thriller. *Pan MacMillan, Australia – Paperback.*

Joan Johns

Stop the Women's Gaol

A group called 'Stop the Women's Gaol' is seeking support to ensure that the proposed new women's gaol at Windsor is not constructed. They argue that \$42 million of taxpayer's money should not be spent locking up more of our sisters, daughters and mothers. Rather, it should be spent looking after victims and providing education, housing and quality rehabilitation services for women who are currently being locked in cells.

The following statistics speak for themselves:

- * Women make up 6% of the total prison population but are a very clearly defined high-needs group.
- * 85% of the women in prison in NSW are survivors of incest/sexual abuse.
- * 70-90% of women in prison have a drug addiction and need support to deal with the issues that resulted in these addictions.
- * 73% have been admitted to psychiatric or mental health units.
- * 70% experienced physical violence as an adult.
- * Half the women in prison are also the mothers of young children and most are the sole carers for their children.
- * 39% have attempted suicide.
- * 30% of women prisoners come from Sydney's three most disadvantaged suburbs.
- * At any one time at least 30% of the women in prison are indigenous women.

Most women in gaol are there for non-violent offences. The incarceration of women for minor non-violent offences serves only to damage the lives of the women and potentially the communities into which they return following incarceration.

A NSW Upper House Select Committee (a multi-party committee) looking into 'Increased Prison Population' released a report in July 2000, which recommended that the gaol not be built and that the government considers alternatives such as wider bail and probation hostels and rehabilitation facilities. It appears that the government is ignoring these recommendations and is going ahead with building the gaol.

Stop the Women's Gaol encourages community involvement in this campaign. If you would like to be involved or want more information please contact Kerry Nettle, *Stop the Women's Gaol* Coordinator on 02 9281 5100 or email stop_the_womens_gaol@hotmail.com. The website is www.justiceaction.org.au

June West

Who's place?

I recently attended a conference in Parramatta, which focussed on how public spaces, such as CBD areas, shopping centres, parks and reserves, urban streets, are used in western Sydney.

After the welcome to land by Colin Gale of the Darug people, and greetings by Mark Greenhill of Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils and Lorraine Wearne, Mayoress of Parramatta, and addresses from various other people, we began to look at access, usage, management, development and design of public spaces.

In workshops we looked at the needs of older people, e.g. seating, open space, their feelings of safety and the number and accessibility of public toilets. Cars were identified as the main culprits taking up public space since they require space not only for driving but for parking. Planning and design are important and so is consultation with the community whose social needs should not be overridden to satisfy commercial interest.

During the lunch hour, our OWN Theater Group entertained us with a number of sketches from their new show – much enjoyed by the audience!

We achieved some excellent links between people on the day, and if these can continue at all levels of government and non-government planning and a positive approach is taken to planning public space, rather than treating it as a problem, the conference was worthwhile.

If you would like a copy of the recommendations from the conference, please phone the OWN office for a copy.

Hedi Roggeveen

BOOK REVIEWS

PRODIGAL SUMMER.

Another absorbing book by Barbara Kingsolver, set in the backwoods country in America, where Deanna lives in isolation protecting the wild creatures of the bush, falling in love with the coyotes and... But read about this love affair yourself, and laugh and cry with the characters in this excellent novel. *Paperback.*

THE IDEA OF PERFECTION, by Kate Grenville.

A dying country town and its inhabitants is the setting of this easy-to-read novel. Anyone familiar with small Australian country towns that have had their day will identify with this story and its characters. *Published by Picador, Paperback.*

Joan Johns

notice

The Women's Library

The Women's Library in Newtown is a unique resource specialising in books by, for and about women. It provides a peaceful space for reading and thinking. The Library, which is unfunded and managed and run by volunteers, is always happy to welcome new members, volunteers and financial sponsors.

For more information, including hours of opening, please phone 9557 7060.

The Women's Library Inc. 8-10 Brown Street, Newtown

Groups at Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre

Self Esteem - Mondays

Meditation Group - Thursdays

Very Gentle Yoga - Thursdays

Drug and Alcohol - Tuesdays

Gentle Yoga - Thursday

Phone 9560 3011 for more info.

WEL celebrates the life of Edna Ryan

When she died in 1997 at the age of 92, Edna Ryan left a rich legacy. She balanced her advocacy with friendship (mothering more than her own three children), a sense of fun (creating potholders with political slogans) and a love of theatre. She passionately wanted to make the world better for all, and especially for working women.

The Edna Awards (inaugurated in 1998) are an opportunity to celebrate what we do. This year OWN has nominated Merle Hightet for her feminist activity in the community.

When: Friday 11 May 2001 6.00 pm drinks 6.30 pm presentation of the Ednas 7.30 pm snacks will be served

Where: The Cafeteria, Design and Architecture Building, University of Technology, Harris Street, Broadway (next to the ABC)

Cost? \$35 waged or \$25 concession, includes snacks and soft drinks. There will be a cash bar for alcohol.

Mental Health Access Line

1800 636 825

24 hours a day

7 days a week

For people with a mental health problem

For concerned relatives and friends

For GPs and other agencies

Shelter NSW

is holding meetings across NSW for tenants and community organisations to help develop a better public housing system. For information about meetings in your area, please phone 9267 5733

Keeping In Touch

The February 2001 edition of the OWN Australia newsletter is now available.

Please phone the Sydney office 9247 7046 for a copy.

"Our ABC"

shareholders (that's us!!)

Rally

11 am to 1 pm

Sunday, 29 April 2001

On the steps of the Opera House

What do women want?

A forum on health and health services will be held in the Centenary Lecture Theatre at Royal North Shore Hospital on Saturday, 7 April from 9.30 to 2.30. Light lunch provided.

Keynote speaker

Julie McCrossin

RSVP 9926 6752

board

Jessie Street National Women's Library

Lunch-hour Talk 19 April 12-1.30 pm

Guest speaker: Anne Deveson - 'Walking Through Minefields'. Anne discusses the hazards and rewards in writing a political novel. She will be signing copies of her book 'Lines in the Sand'.

Venue: Southern Function Room, Level 4, Town Hall House, 456 Kent Street, Sydney.

Entry \$10, sandwich lunch included.

Bookings: Shirley 9876 3927, or 9265 9486 or email: shirleyjones@ozemail.com.au.

U3A Online courses for 2001

Courses are usually eight week long and include such subjects as

Ageing and Retirement, Astronomy, Design Your Life, Genealogy, Writing Family History and many more ...

Fees: \$16 per course plus annual subscription fee of \$12.

For more information email info@u3aonline.org.au or visit their website at <http://u3aonline.edna.edu.au>

Bequests to the Older Women's Network

If you would like to include a bequest to OWN in your will, the following options will guide you in its wording. Please specify which Older Women's Network you wish to be the recipient of your gift: the Older Women's Network NSW or the Older Women's Network Sydney

Option No. 1

I devise the sum of \$to the Older Women Network for the general purpose of the Older Women's Network OR for the specific purpose of

such purpose being consistent with the aims and objectives of the Older Women's Network, to be administered by the Older Women's Network.

Option No 2 (for a proportional bequest)

I give to the Older Women's Network for its general purposes or the specific purpose of % of my estate (or% of the rest of my estate).

The gift you make to the Older Women's Network will be an enduring record of your generosity.

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

ANNUAL FEES

Membership, including Newsletter..... \$20.00

Newsletter only (for Gov't Depts. institutions and organisations)... \$25.00

Please send your cheque, name, address and phone number to:

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