

## Grandmother Wins Award

Julia Hanssen received the 2005 Rural Women's Health Award at the Women's Health Goulburn North East Annual General Meeting for her unique initiative in offering support to grandparents caring for their grandchildren.

Julia was chosen for the regional honour for her work in establishing the Guardian Angel Support Group.

This has been a successful initiative which today supports 48 members from across the district.

Julia has worked for three years to get this support group up and running, and she's done it all on her own.

Before the Guardian Angel Support Group there was no other service offering support to grandparents, who had become the primary carers for their grandchildren.

Julia said this is largely because it was a misunderstood role. It is assumed that you've been a mother before, you should be there to do it anyway and you don't need support. But carers have to have someone to care for them too.

In coordinating the support group, Julia offers links to essential services and information, such as the financial support provided by the government for those who become legal guardians.

Despite all the good work, the award came as a shock for Julia, "At last someone thinks that we are worth listening to and worthy."

Congratulations Julia. A worthy recipient.



Guest speaker, Beth Wilson, Award winner Julia Hanssen and manager Susie Reid at the 2005 AGM

## Membership

Memberships with Women's Health Goulburn North East is renewable after the AGM every year. We appreciate your support and would encourage you to read the application renewal and if you would like to support us, sign the form and return it to continue your membership.

Enclosed is the annual report for 04-05 year.

## AGM a resounding success

For the 2005 AGM we combined resources with Cooroonya Domestic Violence Services and Upper Murray Centre Against Sexual Assault (UMCASA).

The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive.

"a brilliant idea"

"a great time to connect and share"

"wonderful, great opportunity to network and relax"

"good use of resources and time"

"I liked the atmosphere"

"[I like] the speed with which the AGMs were conducted and the truly gifted and entertaining guest speaker. I also enjoyed the singing very much and appreciated the thoughtful planning behind the mix of activity"

Beth Wilson the Victorian Health Commissioner was the guest speaker. Ms Wilson receives and resolves complaints about health service providers with a view to improving the quality of health services.

Ms Wilson said it was a tendency for country people, however, not to bring their issues to light.

"They don't even know they can complain." She said.

She went on to say "Also for the health services, I want them to know that a complaint isn't something that's unpleasant or unconstructive. I want to invite people to think about a complaint as an invitation for quality improvement because nearly everyone that comes to my office wants to know what went wrong, and why and want to make sure it doesn't happen to someone else."

Susie Reid said "Ms Wilson's talk was both informative and entertaining."

The take home message for us was about privacy and to make privacy to work for you.

Ms Wilson raised the point that people want to see systems changed. They don't go to an organisation like mine to be punitive, they go to get things changed so other people don't have to suffer.

A presentation was made of the combined research UMCASA and WHGNE are currently planning Intimate Partner Rape research, described on the last page.

## Teenage pregnancy and parenthood

WHGNE has formed a partnership with Benalla Rural City, Mitchell Community Health Service and Seymour Renewal project to research teenage pregnancy and parenthood within our region. Two locations have been chosen – Benalla and Seymour and we are hoping to have ten young women from each town participate in this research.

The project is currently seeking Ethical Approval.

An innovative research methodology has been planned, where the women will be asked to form pairs and interview each other as part of a fun day at Parish Perfumery in Violet Town on December 8, 2005.

A narrative approach will be taken, where "the interplay between the interview partnership of interviewee and interviewer is at the core of this approach ... the personal characteristics of the interviewer can constitute one of the main stimuli to the interviewee and there is not a blanket prohibition against the interviewer either reacting openly to the statements of the interviewee and/or revealing personal details of their own." (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 208)

If you know of young women under 23 who were or are pregnant or parenting as teenagers, please let them know about this research. Lunch, transport and childcare are provided free of charge.

For more information call Julie at Women's Health Goulburn North East on 03 5722 3009 or Jane in Benalla on 0429 621902 or Margie at Mitchell Community Health Service on 57845530. A CD voucher will be given to each woman as a token of appreciation. Call before November 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## Pru Goward Commends WHGNE

Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward spoke to a group of community representatives at Women's Health Goulburn North East in Wangaratta

on Friday 14th October on 'Striking the Balance: Women, men, work and family'

Ms Goward was invited as part of an information sharing forum. Other speakers included Susie Reid, Manager of Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE), who presented evidence relating to the current health status of women in the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria. Adele Davies from The Centre spoke about The Centre's important work of preparing people to be healthy in their older years.

Ms Goward was impressed with the local research made available by WHGNE, particularly the Women's Health Handbook 2005.

'Striking the Balance: Women, men, work and family' explored men's and women's choices for balancing their competing work and family responsibilities.

Many of the difficulties Australians experience in trying to balance their paid work and family responsibilities are magnified in rural areas.

Rural Australia cannot ignore the need to balance work and family for the same reason urban Australia cannot.



The middle years for women bring demands from children and ageing parents, just as the need for stable adequate income is most pressing.

It is these multiple pressures on women to be earning an income, caring for children, the family home, caring for parents, keeping an eye on the neighbours and contributing to community life that affect quality of life for women.

Ms Goward presented some dismal facts. Women do more unpaid work than men and less paid work. Women in full time work without overtime earn, on average, 85 cents in the male dollar. Once all workers, including casuals and part timers, are included, that earnings gap for women grows to 66 cents in the male dollar.

The end result of this earnings gap is poverty - women are two and a half times more likely than men to live in poverty during retirement.

Despite women's increasing participation in the paid workforce, the Association of Super Funds predicts that by the year 2019, women will have half the retirement savings of men.

Interestingly the gap in economic outcomes for men and women only really begins at age thirty, the time when women are now having children. Indeed there is an enormous amount of evidence to suggest that the primary source of female economic disadvantage is child rearing. The role men play in rearing children does not involve this financial ill effect.

Child rearing in Australia means women either drop out of work altogether, or for a number of years, and when they return, return as part timers or casuals.

A third of women who work in this country have no paid entitlements and even more have no significant superannuation.

Part of Ms Goward's role as the Sex Discrimination Commissioner is to promote the principle of equality between men and women.

"Work has always been the best insurance policy against poverty; today, that definition of poverty extends to old age."

Only 40% of Australian women over the age of fifty five are in paid work, much less than women in our peer group countries.

Local statistics confirming the financial difficulty faced by women, twice as many women than men have negative or nil income especially in the ages between 25 and 64.

The idea that your husband looks after you in old age, doesn't stand anymore. Around one in two marriages end in divorce.

Ms Goward stated that the lower workforce participation of older women is undoubtedly related to their share of unpaid work.

Extraordinarily 91% of elderly parents receiving informal care receive it from their daughters, not their sons.

Some of these daughters will work, but many will be in part time work (where frequently there is no superannuation) and others will have stopped work to look after mum or dad.

Around 30% of the Hume region population is under 20. When combined with 16% aged over 65, there are a lot of people who potentially need care.

Ms Goward concluded "My view, and increasingly I suspect this is the Australian majority view, is that it doesn't matter who does what, so long as both men and women have the same options to choose from and the outcomes are fair."

The view of WHGNE is that government leadership in maternity leave provisions, child care accessibility and protection for casual workers would enhance women's participation in the paid workforce.

Gay and lesbian Health Victoria has two poster for reception areas.  
*'You don't have to tell us if you're gay or lesbian. But you can.'*  
And  
*'You don't have to be straight to use this service.'*  
Your statement of support can make a difference. Displaying the posters is one way to have a positive effect on a person's comfort and use of a service, even though the person's sexuality may not be directly relevant to their immediate health issue.  
Available from [www.glhv.org.au](http://www.glhv.org.au)

## WOMEN LEADING CHANGE – A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

For Women Police Employees and Women in the Victorian Community



Staff member Emma Fahey participated in the Australasian Council of Women and Policing - 'Women Leading Change' program over a ten week period. The Project was specifically designed to engage women in policing

with women in the community through their joint participation in a leadership education module. The overall aim of this project was to:

- Equip women in policing and women in the community with the skills to be successful leaders
- Create and build on the capacity for women in the community and in policing to work together collaboratively on improving community partnerships

Emma and the other participants formed Peer Learning Groups during the training course, and identified and worked on mutually beneficial projects that add value to our community and to our community/policing relationships.

The topics for selection by the Peer Learning Groups for their research assignment included any one of a range

of issues of interest to our community, such as domestic violence, mental health, truancy, local gangs, graffiti, and communication barriers etc. Emma and her group presented their research assignment "Domestic Violence, Mental Health, the gap in the system" to key local identities and Christine Nixon, Chief Police Commissioner.

## **Intimate Partner Rape Research**

This major research project will be undertaken in 2006 and is a collaboration between Upper Murray CASA and WHGNE. Kerry Burns, Manager of UMCASA, introduced this planned research at the 2005 AGM:

"We, at UMCASA envisage a day when the criminal act of sexual violence perpetrated against women and children and men has stopped. As advocates for survivors of sexual assault we call on our colleagues in the, legal system and the human services sector to join us as we name this action a crime and as we call for justice.

We offer those using services at UMCASA the space and the time to learn about how the crime they've been subject to is one that is an abuse of power and control. We locate responsibility for the crime with the offender.

Too often criminal action that takes place within a domestic setting and a familial relationship is related to as a private problem. It is not a private problem. It is our problem. It is a problem created within and reproduced by the way we arrange relationships in our society. We can change that.

One of the ways we can go about organising change is by becoming better informed. We believe it is critical that change is informed by the people who know most about this crime and, that is, those who are affected by it.

At UMCASA counsellor advocates, bear witness as women inform us of sexual assault that occurs within an intimate relationship.

For all survivors of sexual assault being heard and being believed is an important part of recovery and also a risky business. Frequently family, friends and workers will question the survivors' account of her experience or express doubts about whether the crime has happened.

When rape happens within an intimate relationship it seems that others find it more difficult to believe than ever. This makes our work at UMCASA critically important to the well being of survivors. It also means that we have

a clear responsibility to become better informed about the nature of this particular crime and to learn from what we find out.

Several years ago, at Women's Health Goulburn North East, we conducted the Powerful Journey research into women leaving violent relationships, and through this project, we heard from women who had experienced rape within their marriage.

In 2006, Upper Murray CASA and Women's Health Goulburn North East will collaborate to research marital rape and its effect on women in our rural communities.

Across sectors and in the community generally, marital rape has not been recognized as a serious social problem.

There is little research that specifically identifies and explores rape by intimate partners, rather than sexual abuse generally, or domestic violence. Existing research has excluded women living in rural and remote communities, and excluded Indigenous women.

Yet, the scarce evidence that does exist suggests that marital rape affects a significant number of women.

Women cannot find a language to describe rape by their partner. They try to normalize it; they minimise it. As a result, they are unlikely to seek help for physical or emotional injury and they are reluctant to seek protection from the law. Rape in marriage is a criminal act, but it is rarely prosecuted.

These research findings may help shift the concept of rape in marriage as a criminal act from mere theory and rhetoric to a concept that is understood in our community.

In this way, this research has the potential to reduce the prevalence of intimate partner rape.

## **Professional Training - Hume region**

### **Cultural Awareness Training Day**

Facilitated by Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation as part of WHGNE Equity:Project For Upper Hume PCP member agencies and workers.

9<sup>th</sup> Nov, 9.30-4, \$20, Karen 02 6024 7599