



WOMEN'S HEALTH
GOULBURN NORTH EAST

Women's Health Goulburn North East Member's Newsletter April 2008



International Women's Day 2008

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) hosted a gathering of almost 100 women to celebrate International Women's Day for 2008 on Friday the 14th March. The event was held at TREAD in Wangaratta. "Welcome to Country" was delivered by local Aboriginal woman, Chris Bonacci and Leonie Brien sang and led the women in a group harmony.

An important challenge for everyone is ensuring MPs are urged to support the upcoming removal of abortion from the Crimes Act. Susie Reid, Executive Officer of WHGNE, spoke passionately about the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Review of Termination of Pregnancy* and asked that all women present contact their local MP and urge him or her to take abortion out of the Crimes Act.



Maz McGann, Chair of the WHGNE Board, spoke to the gathering about this year's celebration of 100 years of women's suffrage in Victoria. WHGNE will participate in this year long event by collaborating with members of the Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the North-East Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in a project to bring young Aboriginal women together with older Aboriginal women to hear how they felt about voting for the first time in the 1960s. The project, 'Our Vote Counts' will result in a book and DVD to be distributed in Aboriginal and non Aboriginal communities. There is more information about this project later in this newsletter. International Women's Day, as celebrated by WHGNE, brings together local women from all parts of our community, to reconnect, celebrate women's achievements and to discuss ongoing issues for women at the local and global levels.

WELCOME TO NEW WHGNE STAFF MEMBER



KERRY MOYLAN

Hello, having joined the team at WHGNE just two weeks ago, I am beginning to settle in to my role as Co-ordinator of the Hume Region Integrated Family Violence Service System (HRIFVSS). My role at WHGNE is to continue to facilitate the implementation of the HRIFVSS strategic plan.

A priority for me in the weeks ahead will be meeting with and maintaining established partnerships and ensuring effective communication between all stakeholders. This is an exciting time and I look forward to contributing to the regional team, working towards a cohesive and consistent approach to service delivery.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission's Review of Termination of Pregnancy

On the 20th of August 2007, the Victorian Premier, Mr John Brumby announced that the Government would ask the Victorian Law Reform Commission for advice on drafting laws that reflect existing Victorian abortion practices. This came in response to a Private Members Bill to decriminalise abortion brought before the Parliament by Upper House MP Candy Broad in July 2007.

The Commission will report to the Government no later than the 28th of March 2008.

The aim is to remove abortion from the Crimes Act in Victoria. This is needed because:

- Abortion is the only widely practiced medical procedure in Australia that is criminalised.
- We are currently experiencing a crisis in service provision. Although it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers, the region of Greater Melbourne is serviced by only a handful of private clinics and public hospitals. In rural and regional areas of Victoria, the situation is critical with few private clinics and access to terminations in public hospitals limited or unavailable.
- Women are having difficulty in accessing services due to restrictive practices in some areas, particularly regional and rural parts of the state. In at least one regional hospital, training doctors were told that the hospital should turn women away as the hospital doesn't perform abortions.
- Restrictions in access to abortion make it unsafe- the threat to privacy, the increase costs, increase distress and delay in finding services puts women's health at risk.
- The legal situation allows hospitals and doctors to avoid their responsibility to provide a full range of medical services to their communities, including reproductive health services, and including abortion.
- The current legal situation places doctors and their staff in an invidious position. It deters young doctors from training to provide abortions, it provides ammunition for those in society who harass and abuse doctors involved with abortion. This further exacerbates the crisis in service provision as older doctors retire and younger doctors do not replace them.
- The uncertain legal status contributes to an atmosphere that allows groups of people to attack abortion clinics, harass and intimidate women and their partners attempting to access abortion services
- MPs may ask how we know all this- we are informed of these situations by service users, health professionals working in field, General Practitioners, and Obstetrician/ Gynaecologists

Eight Victorian Women's Health Services have joined in calling on MPs across political parties to listen and understand what support for decriminalisation of abortion means. It is vital that any abortion law reform results in the removal of all possibility of criminal prosecution within the bounds of good medical practice.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission reported to the Victorian Government on March 28th. Commission Chairperson Professor Neil Rees has said that the commission will "provide the government with possible legislative options for decriminalisation of abortion law". It is clear in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference that the Commission should have regard to the "Government's commitment to modernise and clarify the law, and reflect current community standards, without altering current clinical practice".

It is unmistakable. The Victorian Government wishes to decriminalise abortion and reflect community standards. We applaud this conviction and look forward to a Bill put before the Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity that reflects this conviction. When that time comes, we call on all MPs to vote to remove the legal ambiguity for women, their partners and doctors and the stigma they experience.

(Abridged from Women's Health Services Statement March 2008)

What action can we take?

Contact your State MP and urge him or her to vote to take abortion out of the Crimes Act. See website for Upper House members and tips on lobbying: www.whealth.com.au/ourwork/abortion_law_reform.html

Namely: Be informed; Be honest; Don't waste time; Be sure to know what you want; Say thanks!

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Towns

Shepparton District

Shepparton

Tatura

Murray Valley District

Cobram, Yarrawonga

Numurkah, Rutherglen, Wangaratta

Benambra District

Wodonga, Yackandandah

Corryong, Mitta Mitta

Benalla District

Benalla Bright

Mansfield Eildon

Seymour District

Seymour Yea Alexandra

Marysville Healesville Kilmore

WHGNE STUDENT PLACEMENT

Elly Taylor, a student from The University of Melbourne, recently spent a week volunteering at Women's Health Goulburn North East. Elly has completed a thesis investigating the difficulties young women experience in trying to terminate unwanted pregnancies in rural Victoria. The research revealed that the young women's experience of abortion were embedded in structures of inequality relating to poverty, rural disadvantage and dominant views of women's sexuality.



"I think mum had to borrow money...It can be really difficult to come up with the money just to be able to cover it [the abortion procedure], let alone try to get there [Melbourne] and stay there".

Elly found that it was the combined effects of structural inequality and the judgements of others (such as GPs, anti-abortion protestors, etc) which combined to produce traumatic experiences and feelings of shame for the young rural women of her research.

"Basically my GP told me I was a slut. But I mean the thing was that I was taking the pill and using condoms... I told him what had happened (contraception failure). And he was, like, I don't believe you".

"We actually had to be escorted around to the back door because they couldn't actually open the front door because I think there was about fifteen or twenty of them (anti-abortion protestors) all waving signs in my face...It was awful"

Indeed, participants revealed that stress and trauma was caused rather by the disapproval and condemnation of others rather than the abortion itself.

"It wasn't traumatic...I went in and had a chat with the doctor who was actually doing it [the abortion procedure]...She went through everything and made sure I definitely wanted to do it".

"I was already a single mum of a three year old...I wouldn't have been able to cope with another one, it was just too hard at the time...I don't regret having it [an abortion] done".

If you or someone you know has decided to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, terminations are available at the *Albury Fertility Control Clinic* every Thursday (02) 6021 0077 or 1800 809 013 or from a variety of clinics in Melbourne such as *Fertility Control Clinic* (03) 9419 2922, *Women's Clinic on Richmond Hill* (03) 9427 0399, *Hampton Park Women's Health Care Centre* (03) 9799 2817 (No referrals from GPs required at any of the above clinics).

WHGNE has developed a brochure called **Women's Health Clinics- Goulburn Valley & North East Vic**, which details where to access information on Contraception, Well Women's Clinics, Ante-natal/Pre-natal classes, Termination Options, Reproductive Choices, Health Screens, Pap Clinics and other Health Issues. A copy is available on line at www.whealth.com.au or if you would like a copy sent to you please contact Karen by phone on 0357223009 or by email on whealth@whealth.com.au.



Knowing our Past, Transforming our Future

This year, Victoria will celebrate the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote. This hard earned victory did not include all women, as most Indigenous women did not fully participate until the 1960s.

WHGNE collaborated with members from Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation; and the North-East Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to write one of the 50 successful submissions:

"Our Vote Counts: Stories of Aboriginal Women's Voting Experience"

It will bring young Aboriginal women together with older Aboriginal women to hear how they felt about voting for the first time in the 1960s. This important history will be captured on DVD in 2008 - the Century of Women's Suffrage year.

This project will highlight an aspect of women's suffrage not generally considered in our celebrations. It will explicitly include the perspective of Aboriginal women in the celebration of Women's suffrage and most importantly, will capture an oral history that soon will be lost to us.

We believe it will contribute to positive mental health as older Aboriginal people may experience some emotional healing through sharing their history. And, it will strengthen family bonds by sharing history and knowledge, and making a new connection as older Aboriginal women remember voting for the first time and share this with their younger relatives.

NO INTEREST LOAN SCHEME (NILS)

WHGNE NILS has now been operating successfully for five months. We have been able to assist women, on low incomes, to access loans of up to \$2000 to purchase white goods, computers, and other household furniture or to finance car repairs. WHGNE has two NILS Schemes.

Scheme 1 is for women having exited a domestic violence situation who reside in the Hume region. This scheme has a limit of \$2000 and may be used to purchase household goods, medical procedures, vehicle repairs and educational one off costs.

Scheme 2 is for women on low incomes who live in the Wangaratta and Benalla Shire areas and has a limit of \$800. Both loans are not for emergency relief, bond or rent, living expenses or debt repayment. For more information on both schemes please contact Karen on 0357223009.

LAUGH AND LEARN

WHGNE in partnership with The Centre is now offering a 10 week course focusing on **Stress Reduction and Money Management**. Offering women a chance to meet with other women for the purpose of fun, food, laughter and learning, the topics covered will be chosen by the participants at the first session. Some suggestions include-relaxation, saving for the future, credit card traps, assertiveness, relationships. **Start Date is Wednesday 16th April. Please contact Rachael Mackay asap for further details on 0357223009.**

Women's Celebration Event

We are women and we are celebrating! **May 16th** from 7:00pm until midnight at Wangaratta Football and Netball club room in Wangaratta. Continuing the celebrating of 100 years of Women's Suffrage WHGNE is hosting a **Women's Celebration Event** which will be a fun night for women to get together and have a great time with music, food and dancing.

Dallas Frasca and Jungal, are feature bands and for fun we have Koorie-oki and Bollywood Dancers.

This event aims to bring women together, we encourage you to bring some other women, your mother, daughters, sisters, neighbours, clients, someone who doesn't normally go out!! We encourage women from diverse backgrounds and cultures to attend and you may come in your traditional costume. We will assist with transport and childcare (contact us). Optional gold coin donation.

RSVP is helpful for catering 5722 3009 whealth@whealth.com.au



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Challenging inequity, embracing diversity.



PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING