

VWT e-Bulletin

Volume 12 – July 2006

At the Trust!

Essie Burbridge Award Launch

Speeches by

Trust Director
Marilyn Lake

and

The Honourable
Mary Delahunty

are now on the VWT
website.

**Please visit the
Trust website at**

www.vwt.org.au/ebca

**and follow the link
to The Launch in the
right hand column.**

**A latest new initiative of the Trust,
the Essie Burbridge Award**

**was launched on Tuesday 11th July 2006 at the
Immigration Museum in Melbourne.**

The key note addresses were given by **the Hon. Mary Delahunty** Minister for Arts and Women's Affairs and **Professor Marilyn Lake** from the School of European and Historical studies at La Trobe University. Both speakers addressed the importance of multiculturalism to our state and our society and how one person, Essie Burbridge, was able to make a difference.

The Hon Justice Frank Vincent graciously spoke and launched the Award on the night. **Nurichan Ozturk**, Executive Officer Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, offered an insight into her experience as a young migrant to Australia.

Essie Burbridge Award-Launch Speech by

Professor Marilyn Lake
History program, Latrobe University

In commending to you the Essie Burbridge Award, I speak as a Director of the Victorian Women's Trust, which has such a long record of philanthropic practical achievement – of putting feminism into practice by providing assistance to such a great diversity of women – and I speak also as an Australian historian, mindful of the decades of activity and effort required to end the race-based White Australia Policy and associated racial discrimination, which were only gradually, very gradually, dismantled in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and superseded by the more generous and less fearful attitude to difference we now call multiculturalism.

By supporting the Essie Burbridge Award we can all join this proud Australian tradition of commitment to the ending of racial discrimination, an ideal always in danger, still contested, as we saw with the Cronulla Beach riots, and therefore always in need of active defense and support.

The Australian dictation test was abolished in Australia by the Menzies government in 1958, which had also, eight years earlier, introduced the Colombo Plan, enabling students from a range of Asian countries to study in Australia and thus also enabled a significant number of resident Australians, as neighbours, fellow students and teachers, for example, to meet and get to know individuals from Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India for the first time in their lives.

Essie Burbridge, living in Footscray, had a gift for forging personal relationships with newcomers and much later, in 1992, was honoured by the Melbourne Council for Overseas Students for her sustained work over the decades in making students from other countries feel welcome: - she was often referred to as 'a Mum away from Mum'. 'Ma Burbridge had the warmest smile, love and tireless care for overseas students in Victoria', recalled Raj Kannan, a student at Victoria University, 'the best Ambassador Australia has ever had'. Highlights of Essie's overseas trip in 1990 – undertaken at the grand age of 90 – included reunions with many of her erstwhile protégés, who had since returned to apply their professional skills in their own countries.

It has been said that Essie opened her door to strangers when others, more fearful, erected barricades and bolstered prejudice. The impulse to 'open doors' has a long history in Australia and not least among women. In 1919, in Melbourne, the first public meeting organised in support of an 'open door' policy with regard to immigration – as opposed to a policy based on racial discrimination – was organised by the post-suffrage Women's Political Association, whose president was Vida Goldstein. I like to think that the Victorian Women's Trust is following in this honoured women's tradition.

Multiculturalism was coined as a term to signal that it was OK for immigrants to dress, worship, eat, live, speak differently, to know different histories and sing different songs, to honour a multiplicity of traditions, to express their identities and sense of self, within the framework of a liberal, democratic, multicultural, civil society. Multiculturalism was invoked as an ideal to oppose racism and it was supported by the Whitlam government's Racial Discrimination Act of 1975. Whitlam also abolished the last vestiges of the White Australia policy in migration and citizenship law, but it was the subsequent Fraser government that adopted multiculturalism as official policy, and it has been said that it was his government's proudest legacy.

Multiculturalism, however, was not simply an ideal or a policy: it was also an expression of changing realities. Australia needed migrants, it advertised for migrants after World War 2 and it invited diverse peoples to make their home here and millions did so. Melbourne and its suburbs are now home to more than 240 nationalities, 180 languages and 80 faiths. What a tremendous resource for building bridges, enhancing our knowledge and making connections with the wider world in our globalized age.

The Victorian Women's Trust has instituted the Essie Burbridge Award to promote mutual respect between our diverse communities, indeed, like their foremothers in 1919, to promote a spirit of cosmopolitanism to combat the fear and prejudice that all too often damage and diminish people's lives. So I urge you to support the Award, to publicize its launch among your colleagues and friends, who might not have been able to attend tonight and to join that well established Australian tradition of combating discrimination and injustice. Let us join Miss Fullerton and Miss Weekes and Ms Essie Burbridge in saying that cosmopolitanism is good for the state and good for the nation.

National Ovarian Cancer Network

presents

The Lynda Gibson Memorial Comedy Event

a major fundraiser on

Sunday 30th July 2006

at the HiFi Bar, City

Tickets are available via
tix@ovca.org or 1300 660 334

Absolutely Women's Health

at the

Royal Women's Hospital

presents

The Big Day Off 2 Menopause and Beyond

Saturday 9th September 2006

Women's Planning Network

invite you to an informal 'slide show' and drinks evening .

The evening will focus on WPN's participation in the London Women and Planning Forum's conference

'International Perspectives on Women and Planning'

Wed 16th August 2006

High Court Decision

The Victorian Women's Trust welcomes the High Court decision to award Carol Stingel the right to launch civil action against former ATSIC chair Geoff Clark for psychiatric problems she says result from an alleged rape in 1971.

The Women's Trust provided support to Stingel's lawyers Maurice Blackburn Cashman in taking on the case through the Moira Rayner Fund for Equal Opportunity.

As MBC lawyer Viv Waller told the ABC's PM program, the ruling has far reaching implications.

"The result enables those people with delayed onset psychiatric injuries to be able to bring their matters before the court. It's the very nature of psychiatric injury arising from childhood sexual assault that renders someone incapable of seeking medical and/or legal advice often until much later in life, and I think it's a terrific result for justice."

The Moira Rayner Fund for Equal Opportunity is administered by the Victorian Women's Trust.

For more information contact Sarah or Mary at the Trust on (03) 9642 0422.