

**Women and Royal Commission Branch**  
**Department of Premier and Cabinet**  
**1 Treasury Place**  
**Melbourne**  
**3002**

Gender inequity, created and maintained across centuries of systemic disadvantage and discrimination against women and girls, is at the heart of women's lack of access to life's resources and opportunities.

To take just one example, Oliver Cann, from the World Economic Forum has predicted that it will be 117 years until women have the same career prospects as men globally.<sup>i</sup> Victorian women must be empowered to ensure that we don't have to wait that long for gender equity.

Since its inception in 1985, the Victorian Women's Trust has explored, and continues to explore a myriad of ways to assist the status of women and the quest for gender equity across many issues such as the superannuation and gender pay gaps; childcare; women's leadership; women's political representation; and many facets of women's health and wellbeing.

Currently, for example, we are focused on the question of women's economic security and the national superannuation debate as well as the issue of equal representation and what it will take to achieve gender parity. However, these advocacies of ours are a few more months away from final drafts and civic mobilisation strategies.

In the meantime, to enable us to contribute to this valuable state consultation, we have sought to identify and distil some of our learning and models that we believe would be useful in advancing the gender strategy, focused on women's leadership; acknowledging women's public achievements and contribution; and the question of work-life balance.

In this submission we present Trust initiatives which fulfil the goals of each question; have a low cost with positive outcomes; have the potential to be scaled up; and enable practical implementation by the Victorian Government state-wide.

Should the working group require any additional information, the Trust is more than happy to assist in any way we can.

We look forward to the final Gender Strategy.

Regards,

Mary Crooks AO  
Executive Director of the Victorian Women's Trust

Casimira Melican  
Policy and Project Officer

## **1. How do we encourage women and girls to take up leadership roles?**

### **A. Girls-Vida's Voices**

The Victorian Women's Trust knows the powerful impact women make when they have a chance to raise their voice. *Vida's Voices* is named after Vida Goldstein (1869 – 1949), a tireless campaigner on behalf of women and children, believing firmly in the power of an educated and articulate woman.

In 2010, the Trust initiated *Vida's Voice: Giving Young Women Voice*, the first Year Ten girls' public speaking competition and leadership program in Victoria. That year, nineteen Year 10 girls from Preston Girls Secondary College were trained to be leaders by the *Vida's Voices* Project Officer Vicki Fitzgerald. Student leaders then led peer training sessions and judging for all participants in central Melbourne and in four regional Victorian areas: Seymour, Morwell, Ballarat and Colac. Over 100 students were involved in training and judging in 2010 and twenty leaders took part in intensive leadership training.

**Cost:** \$26,500 including one staff trainer, marketing and venue costs

#### **Outstanding features of the program:**

- The leadership skills development of the Preston Girls Secondary College Leaders team members.
- These students were from culturally diverse backgrounds at a disadvantaged school.
- Dramatically improved level of public speaking skills and confidence building amongst the 100 plus students who participated.
- Mentoring and role-modelling by prominent local women in all the regional locations.
- A high level of practical community involvement and networking – councils, businesses and community organisations.
- Bringing together country and city students to work together and to learn from each other.

The Grand Final finished with a flourish, at the Edge Auditorium Federation Square on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2010. The winner of the competition was Iryna Byelyayeva from Elwood Secondary College. The keynote speaker was Susie Brennan, the World President of the YWCA. The Student Leaders ran the competition as MC's, receptionists and ushers, timers and judges. The event was a very powerful demonstration of their development as confident young leaders when given the opportunity.

#### **Feedback from *Vida's Voices***

Below is some of the feedback the Trust received from the project:

*"Any program centred around young women to promote their involvement in the world outside their home and school must be supported totally.*

*If women are to enter into all levels of Parliament/Community life/top professional and business positions they require training to gain confidence in their ability.*

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*Men will apply for a job if they have only 20% of the required skills, yet women will not apply until they have 80% of the skills!*

*I totally endorse the Vida's Voices Program and wish them all the best."*

-Jennie Rawther, National Council Women Victoria President 2010

*"As a parent I see this as a wonderful opportunity for young girls to learn and be comfortable with the art of public speaking.*

*If we want women to be leaders and inspirational role models then often the first step is giving them confidence to get up and speak to a group about what they feel strongly about.*

*Keep up the good work!"*

-Parent of Vida's Voice participant

*"Being able to speak in public with confidence is a skill so beneficial in all aspects of their future, be it career or personal parts of their lives."*

-Grandmother of Vida's Voice participant

*"I suggest you expand the amount of people involved and allow more girls from various schools to participate in this fantastic competition so that they can improve their public speaking skills and their knowledge on the sensitive topic of women's rights and feminism."*

-B.H., Parent of participant

*"I think it was a great program. I have learnt so much, especially on the training day. These are things that I will use for the rest of my life. I have also met so many people that I am now friends with because of it! Everyone was so nice, especially the judges. Everyone was so supportive of each other and I am so glad I did it. I hope to encourage everyone else to do things like this.*

*Thank you for this amazing opportunity."*

-Student participant, Metro area

### **Recommendation:**

**We recommend that a program similar to Vida's Voices be rolled out across Victoria to give young girls the opportunity to develop crucial leadership and public speaking skills.**

### **B. Girls-Rosie Creators Award**

In 2015, the Trust's harm prevention project for girls *Rosie Respect* launched the Rosie Creator Awards on International Women's Day. Girls aged 12-20 were invited to submit an entry in four creative areas: writing, photography, video or activism with a chance to win \$500 towards their creative or activist project and a feature in *Young Vagabond* magazine. We wanted entrants to explore the theme "respect-for yourself, others or planet earth". Nurturing talent in Victoria's young girls is crucial in helping their build confidence, follow their passions and become leaders in their fields.

**Cost:** \$3,000 donation, 2 full-time staff for 3 months

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### Outcomes:

- We received hundreds of entries from girls all over Australia. We heard from teenage artists, wordsmiths, explorers, activists and heroines, each of whom articulated a creative and thoughtful study of respect and what it means to them.
- The activist category winner whose entry focused on body love and eating disorders now has a project with Butterfly Foundation to teach others and share her experience as an eating disorder survivor.

### Recommendation:

**We recommend that the Victorian Government actively encourage young women to explore their creativity and passion for activism through an annual award program like the *Rosie Creators Award*.**

### C. Women-Here She Is!

Time and again we at the Trust observed an absence of female keynote speakers at major conferences, women presenters at events, women on panels and a media environment largely lacking women's voices.

We all know women with skills and enormous capacities who are achieving great things in our communities, workplaces, and in the public arena.

To address this gap the Trust launched the *Here She Is!* website ([heresheis.org.au](http://heresheis.org.au)) on International Women's Day 2013. We wanted these capacities to be better recognised and tapped.

We wanted to make it easy to find, for example:

- An inspirational female speaker
- An expert in her field
- Someone to conduct a workshop
- A board member

**Cost:** \$100,000 including website creation, staff time for set-up and ongoing maintenance over 3 years

### Outcomes:

- Here She Is! currently features over 350 women making it Australia's largest directory exclusively featuring professional women.
- Over three years since its launch, it has attracted over 100,000 website views.
- *Here She Is!* is an excellent resource that professional women can use to build their confidence in promoting themselves or finding a mentor, whether it be a business or board mentor.
- The directory has been used in a variety of useful ways as listed in the feedback below.

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### Feedback

Here are a few examples of the type of requests the women listed on the directory receive:

*“I am about to embark on a community engagement project.... I would love to have your input... Any direction and information you could provide would be greatly appreciated.”*

*“We are running a seminar... and we were hoping that you would be prepared to speak on the theme of contemporary justice challenges facing Australians. We would be very pleased if you would agree to join the list of engaging thinkers and speakers and look forward to hearing from you.”*

*“We are currently seeking board members for a NFP working with youth at risk and we would like to invite you to join our board”*

*“We would like to interview you in relation to our topic for an expert opinion on the matter”*

*“We are organising a young female empowerment event...(that) will bring together already established female and male leaders from across government, media and business spheres... We would be honoured and privileged to have you facilitate at our event, share your experience and help us celebrate the positive impact women can have in positions of leadership.”*

### Recommendation:

**We recommend that the Government promote a state-wide directory of women to support their visibility and the wide pool of talent available.** Government should encourage businesses to introduce their own mentorship programs so that men and women can find women to support, teach and encourage women to advance their skills, confidence and careers.

## 2. How should we celebrate and recognise women's achievements?

### A. *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*-Exhibition

*"One measure of human rights equality lies in the truthfulness of the public record. When women are accorded a proper part of this record, when the enormous contribution to families, communities and society are accurately represented, they will have achieved an inclusiveness that is a pre-condition for equality."*

-Mary Crooks AO, Victorian Women's Trust Executive Director, speech at the closing ceremony of the *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*.

Day after day, year after year, women make an immeasurable contribution to our economy and society - one that is still not adequately acknowledged by conventional history or the wider public record.

It was with a desire to share the courage, passion, endeavor and determination of Victorian women that we conceived *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*.

*Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* opened at the Melbourne Museum on the 2nd May 2001. It featured the lives of over 260 Victorian women across twelve fascinating themes, such as *With Passion, Dare to Begin, Always Work to be Done, Meetings Always Meetings, Who Cares?* and *Defying the Odds*.

The exhibition tour went to Melbourne, Brunswick, Ringwood, Traralgon, Lakes Entrance, Wangaratta, Bendigo, Mildura, Portland, Geelong and Ballarat with invaluable assistance from local shire councils.

**Cost:** \$300,000 including printing the exhibition catalogue, exhibition freight costs, venue costs

#### **Outcomes:**

- The exhibition attracted 21,703 visitors.
- Inspired a postal stamp set of seven local Bendigo women by Australia Post, a sponsor of the exhibitions regional tour
- Received wide media coverage including press coverage in 25 print news publications, 12 radio features and 5 television features based in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

#### **Feedback**

*"The remarkable evidence presented in this exhibition suggests the need to radically rethink our understandings of history, politics, citizenship and community. Could Victoria with its many communities have survived and prospered without the extraordinary work of women such as those whose lives are represented in *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*?"*

- Marilyn Lake, Professor of History at La Trobe University and member of the Steering Group for the exhibition

*"Congratulations to all involved in *Ordinary Women – Extraordinary Lives*, such a grand and detailed record of the strength and talent of so many dedicated, caring and loving women. And, the book is inspiring and uplifting."*

-Visitor to the exhibition

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*“The exhibition is inspiring and beautiful in every way. I could not help thinking that everyone of the women in the exhibit could have named 2 or 3 other women who they would count as more worthy of being in the exhibit than they and that in itself says something wonderful and great about women and their contribution down the years. Well done.”*

-Visitor to the exhibition

*“Truly a magnificent achievement by all involved. My own mother Agnes (Essie) Burbridge featured prominently and made me feel very proud and humble that Mum has been recognised in this very fitting manner”*

-Barry Burbridge

### **Recommendation:**

**We recommend that the Government support more exhibitions which specifically acknowledge Victorian women.**

### ***B. Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives-Book***

In conjunction with the exhibition the Victorian Women’s Trust published a book in 2001 featuring all of the women presented in the exhibition.

The book was available for sale across Victoria and represents an important resource capturing the many women who have made outstanding contributions to Victorian life. The book provides outstanding role models for young Victorians across the state.

One member of the Education Department commented in response to reading the *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* book,

*“you know, we have classrooms of boys in our system where we can’t attend to put a female teacher in front of them because their valuation of women is so poor.”*

Providing young Victorian boys with strong and inspiring female role models from history is a wonderful way to build respect for women.

**Cost:** \$60,000 to publish 5,000 copies of the book.

### **Outcomes:**

- 2000 copies of the book went into public, independent and catholic schools across Victoria.
- bulk purchase of 1500 copies by the Victorian Education Department and bulk purchase of 500 by the Catholic Education Office to place in Catholic schools.
- Key resource to inform Victorian individual’s public knowledge and knowledge sharing in their communities.

### **Recommendation:**

**We recommend that the Victorian Government include notable female contributions to Victorian/Australian public life in state-wide school curricula from primary school through to secondary school.** This includes funding projects like the *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* book as key resources in educating young Victorians about the invisibility of women in the public record.

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### **C. Women's HERitage Centre Victoria**

The Victorian Women's Trust was involved in the early conceptualisation of the Women's HERitage Centre Victoria with Mary Delahunty and Judy Madigan.

The Women's HERitage Centre aims to 'build, record, arrange, support and provide information and education resources to enhance access to the achievements and history of women in Victoria, and to provide an information base for records that are held in other locations. As well as being a thorough repository of historical information the centre will also encompass a space to celebrate women in contemporary Victorian culture.'<sup>ii</sup>

#### **Recommendation:**

**We recommend that the Victorian Government resource the Women's HERitage Centre Victoria to ensure that a permanent space to celebrate Victorian women exists.**



### 3. What strategies do we need to ease the strain of balancing work and caring responsibilities?

#### A. Stage 1: *Getting the Balance Right* Booklet

In 2005, the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust (VWBT), the Victorian Women's Trust's charitable entity, and Industrial Relations Victoria (IRV) co-funded a partnership between the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE), URCOT and the Queen Victoria Women's Centre (QVWC) came together to produce a document that helped employees, employers and management committees within not-for-profit workplaces to negotiate conditions to improve work-life balance.

The resulting booklet, *Getting the Balance Right*,<sup>iii</sup> was generated as part of a broader project to offer nine women's organisations support, training, information and mentoring to assist them implement family-friendly policies in their workplaces.

Launched in October 2006, the *Getting the Balance Right* booklet articulated barriers to family friendly policies and starting important workplace conversations for practical solutions to achieve work-life balance.

**Cost:** \$15,500 initial grant from The Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust.

#### Outcomes:

- The booklet was an outstanding success, with nearly 2000 copies issued in the first six weeks.
- A second-print run of 2000 booklets was printed.
- Became the model assisting a national policy and practical support program that would advance practical solutions for people, especially women, to balance work and family (see next section).

#### B. Stage 2: *Creating Family Friendly Workplaces*

Members of the original *Getting the Balance Right* group, Mary Crooks (VWT), Samiro Douglas and Carolyn Ingvarson (WIRE), Cheryl Teng and Kay Setches (QVWC), Leonie Morgan and Sharon Winocur (IRV) devised a framework proposal where a federal government agency coordinated and funded two-year small grants program would help employers and staff initiate workplace-based solutions for better work-life balance.

In August 2007 the group pitched their proposal in two separate meetings, to an advisor for then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon. Joe Hockey, and Shadow Minister Julia Gillard.

On the eve of the 2007 election campaign in late November, Deputy Labor Leader and Shadow Minister for Employment & Industrial Relations Gillard advised the working group that Labor's flagship policy, *Fresh Ideas for Work and Family*, would be announced, highlighting a targeted work and family initiative to help small businesses implement practices to help employees balance their work and family obligations, thus improving employee retention and productivity.

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Four months later, in March 2009, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon. Julia Gillard, launched the *Fresh Ideas for Work and Family program*.

Grants from \$5,000 to \$15,000 (GST inclusive) were offered to not-for-profit and non-government organisations, a consortium of small businesses, or sole traders or incorporated sole traders with less than 15 employees to develop innovative solutions to the work and caring challenge. Solutions to balancing work and caring responsibilities such as rosters based on school terms and alternative core hours, part-time or job-sharing opportunities, unpaid leave policies for employees who care for children with disabilities, elderly relatives or other people with special needs, providing facilities such as family rooms for employees for your children, or introducing workplace mentoring were explored through this grants program.

The program was administered in funding rounds by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), with supporting information on the DEEWR website and via the Workplace Infoline, which was staffed 8 am to 7 pm weekdays.

**Cost:** \$12 million

### **Outcomes:**

- The program developed and distributed business and industry specific information to help implement family friendly work arrangements, and experts were available within Fair Work Australia from January 2010 to further help set up family friendly work arrangements.
- Demonstrated the power of relatively small philanthropic grants (in this case \$15,500) to grow into a national multi-million government initiative; and trigger wide and far-reaching social and economic change.
- Assisted 258 businesses: 82 in New South Wales, 72 in Victoria, 49 in Queensland, 19 in South Australia, 16 in Western Australia, 11 in Tasmania, 7 in the Australian Capital Territory and 2 in Northern Territory, to develop family-friendly work practices. It is highly likely that the positive influence of these grants has spread considerably further than the businesses themselves – rippling out through business talk and discussion, networking and “following the leader”.
- Demonstrated the powerful outcomes that can be achieved when Government and philanthropy work together, especially on innovative and transformative initiatives.
- Demonstrated how the not-for-profit sector can inform Government policy in significant and constructive ways.
- Demonstrated how philanthropic grant-making that focuses on systemic change, can be instrumental in unlocking decades-old workplace practices that may not necessarily have come about without such a positive intervention.

### **Recommendation:**

**We recommend that the Government introduce workplace flexibility incentives and schemes to all Victorian workplaces with models, support and funding to enable parents and individuals to take**

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**up caring responsibilities for their families, children and others.** This may include a re-run of the state level of the Federal Grants program facilitated by the Trust. Please find the details of this work attached to the submission email.

### Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> Cann O 2015, 'It's Back to the Future as Women's Pay Finally Equals Men's...From 2006', World Economic Forum, viewed 15 March 2016, < <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/press-releases/>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Women's Register 2015, 'A new project to celebrate Victorian women's history and heritage!', weblog, viewed 16 March 2016, < <http://www.womenaustralia.info/blog/2015/04/23/a-new-project-to-celebrate-and-support-victorian-womens-history-and-heritage/>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Online version of *Getting the Balance Right* booklet available <<http://www.wire.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Getting-The-Balance-Right-Booklet-small-NGOs.pdf>>.