



VICTORIAN  
WOMEN'S TRUST

NEWSLETTER |  
WINTER 2017





# WELCOME



What a great first half of 2017!

It has been an exciting 6 months for Trust staff, volunteers and the Board. From the Eve Mahlab event to the VWT's menstrual leave policy, it really has been all hands on deck.

In early June we celebrated Eve Mahlab's AO 80th birthday party and fundraiser Let's Dance! The night was a coming together of 380 women and men alike to celebrate Eve and the past and future of feminism. We have known Eve for many years. She is such an inspiring woman and a feminist luminary in the Victorian community. For years, we have all here at the Trust admired her intellect, passion and generosity. A big thank you also goes to everyone who donated to the event in Eve's honour.

Reflecting on the night, it became clear how important events like these are to help build solidarity and to nourish values and spirit around gender equality. It was also clear how much interest and energy there is around the need to push on with gender equality. As we see it, we are at a special moment in time, a moment to be seized and to forward some imaginative, well-conceived policy actions which concertina change for women and girls – policy actions that don't tinker at the edges but help us as a nation to breakthrough in achieving full gender equality.

Short films can make the case so well when it comes to recording the struggle and making the case for further reform. I urge you to take the time to check out the short documentary film produced for the Eve event by volunteers Karen, Lauren and Christine, filmmaker Stu Mannion and Trust staff. In the time since, we have revised it to have a wider national focus and I am sure you will find it an uplifting three or so minutes in which we are reminded of the blood, sweat and tears – and bravery – of those who come before us to achieve change and reform for women and girls.

While talking short films, you will also find on the Trust website and in this newsletter, the details of another impressive effort, a documentary called The Invisible Farmer, which forms a part of the The Invisible Farmer Project being run by Museums Victoria. We were delighted to be able to fund this film.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. Thank you for your ongoing support of everything we achieve at the Trust.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Mary Crooks'.

Mary Crooks AO  
Executive Director

**Watch the #LetsBreakthrough short documentary here and then send it far and about:** [vimeo.com/225932476](https://vimeo.com/225932476)

**You can see The Invisible Farmer film here:**  
[youtube.com/watch?v=Xj3GYT-6Nq0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Xj3GYT-6Nq0)









# CELEBRATING EVE MAHLAB AO: FEMINIST. PHILANTHROPIST. TRAILBLAZER.

*On June 3 2017, VWT hosted a birthday party and fundraiser Let's Dance! in honour of feminist luminary, Eve Mahlab AO. The tagline for this sold-out event was 'celebrating the past and future of feminism' and celebrate we did. Held at Leonda on the Yarra with ABC's Virginia Trioli as MC, the room was lively and warm, filled with family, friends, and feminists from across the political spectrum.*

Virginia Trioli gave a rousing speech on the importance of Eve's work over the decades and her thirst for fun, made clear in the event theme. "As Emma Goldman said, 'If there won't be dancing at the revolution, I'm not coming,'" declared Virginia.

Before too long, we were up and dancing at the behest of Anna Go-Go, our dance instructor extraordinaire. With minimal encouragement, Anna had the 380 strong crowd dancing in sync to beloved disco track from BeeGees 'You Should Be Dancing'. So much action before entrees had even reached the tables.

Once we had resumed our seats, Eve rose to speak and was met with an immediate standing ovation. Eve urged attendees to give where it will have the most impact — such as to the Victorian Women's Trust. "It's always struck me why money for building bridges is considered investment but money for childcare is a cost," said Eve to firm applause. "The VWT is simply the most effective organisation for advancing women and girls in Australia. VWT works at the top to influence public policy and it works at the bottom, to give grants to those who need it."

VWT Executive Director Mary Crooks AO asked in her speech, "What are we waiting for? We are a big enough country with enough resources to fit our gender equality ambitions within it..we are at a very real moment in time in our country. One to be seized. We need policy and action that doesn't tinker at the edges." Hear, hear.

Nu-soul singer Hailey Cramer closed the night with a stirring rendition of 'I am Woman' with the crowd joining in with gusto. Heartfelt thanks for all who came, dance and raised funds for gender equality. And thanks most of all to Eve, for paving the way and inspiring the next wave.

**Event photographs now available. For more information, please visit:** [vwt.org.au/celebrate-eve-mahlabs-birthday](http://vwt.org.au/celebrate-eve-mahlabs-birthday)

**Top left:** Jacky Magid, Sasha Mahlab, Eve Mahlab AO and Jesse Mahlab.

**Middle (left to right):** (top row) Janya Clemens, Monique Pankhurst, Wilfredo Zelada, Ally Oliver-Perham, Eve Mahlab AO, Carolyn Munckton, Jan Browning, Christine Cummings, Maria Chetcuti (middle row) Casimira Melican, Lieu Le, Duré Dara OAM, (front row) Maddy Crehan, Lauren Meath, Mary Crooks AO, Janice Powell, Grace Mountford.

**Bottom (left to right):** Hailey Cramer, Julie Reilly, Anna Go-Go

**Top right:** Eve Mahlab AO and René Nathan.

All images by Breeana Dunbar.

# LET'S BREAKTHROUGH!

By Mary Crooks AO  
Executive Director, Victorian Women's Trust



It is hard to believe that we are now eight months on from our fabulous Breakthrough event late November 2016.

We made a pledge back then that we would commit to a program of sustained Breakthrough follow-up – and this is exactly what we have been doing, in and amongst everything else!

We have formed three areas of main focus:

- women's safety;
- equal representation; and
- economic security.

In terms of women's economic security, we are looking closely at the pay gap, childcare, women's retirement income and women's unpaid work.

Within each of these, we are concentrating on making sure we have the best possible research and information base, building on all previous efforts in the office as well as extending this program. To do this, we have not only allocated parts of existing staff time, but are also blessed by having an expanded raft of wonderful volunteers, some of whom are profiled in this newsletter. It is amazing how much concentrated research can be done in small teams of dedicated and skilled volunteers and staff.

All the time, we are mulling over the scope for bold and big Breakthrough actions – actions which would make a major difference to the timing and progress towards full gender equality. No point dying wondering! We want to see how far we can go over the next eighteen months in identifying a small but significant set of policy actions which are both ambitious and realistic. For some of these, we will need to take a lot more time and different strategies to determine feasibility, including economic modelling.

As we move from the research phase to thinking in more detail about policy actions, we intend to organise a series of Roundtables where we enter into constructive dialogue with a host of experts external to the Trust, making sure we are on track and able to sharpen our analysis and actions accordingly. We also want to go directly back to all of our Breakthrough attendees and bring their experience, expertise and wisdom to the process as well.

It is an unusual situation for us to maintain this program across several fronts at once. But the energy and capacity of the office is fantastic and we are quietly excited by what we might be able to pull off over the months ahead!

By the time you read this newsletter, we will have launched our fundraising campaign #LetsBreakthrough, with an aim to raise \$50,000 into our national harm prevention body, the Dugdale Trust for Women & Girls. The funds raised will enable the Trust to break through stage two of critical development for women's economic security and safety. We'd love you to join us and help resource this work.

**You can donate directly and find out more information about the #LetsBreakthrough campaign at:**  
[breakthrough.raisely.com/](http://breakthrough.raisely.com/)

Next Page top right: Jax Jacki Brown

All images by Breeana Dunbar.

# REAL TALK: WE NEED TO GET BETTER AT INTERSECTIONALITY

By Jax Jackie Brown

As a disability feminist who is queer, I live intersectionality, it shapes my life and my politics. However, the communities I belong to are often not intersectional or inclusive. The disability community can be very homophobic, biphobic and transphobic. I was reminded of this last week when I posted in a disability forum about a staff member for the National Disability Insurance Scheme who assumed the gender of my partner to be male, and my post was met with homophobic responses from other people with disabilities.

In the LGBTIQ community there is often a lack of awareness of people with disabilities, events are routinely held in inaccessible spaces, and when I and others with disabilities have raised access issues with queer event organisers they have often been met with inaction. These access issues mean that many of us can't get into queer spaces and so are not seen as part of the queer community.

We need to get better at intersectionality. We need to be able to talk about behaviour that is problematic, exclusionary or reinforces privilege. Disability does not negate gendered privilege, but often people outside the disability community (as well as those within it) presume that it does, which both saddens and frustrates me.

When people see me, the first thing they notice is that I use a wheelchair, then perhaps that I have bright red hair, maybe that I am white, and then maybe my gender. My wheelchair is always one of my key defining features, it takes centre stage in the minds of others and it obscures other aspects of my identity. It is often *the* thing strangers want to ask me about: "What happened?" "Were you born like that?" "Was it an accident?" to which I have a variety of witty answers which sometimes amuses, sometimes surprises or shocks them, as I consciously resist giving the medical diagnosis of my body to strangers.

My disability identity is important to me. I am proud of my body, of how I move through the world and of my social model of disability politics. I don't want my wheelchair not to be noticed by people, but when people say things like "I don't see your disability" or "I don't notice your wheelchair", while they often intend this as a compliment, it also tells me that they assume disability to be a bad thing which they feel uncomfortable with.

Whilst non-disabled people often fail to notice other aspects of my identity other than my wheelchair, within the disability community gendered privilege often has a big influence on our interactions.

A recent example of this was when I was on a train in one of two wheelchair spaces in the first carriage (the only carriage wheelchair users can get on) when a man in a power-chair got on and proceeded to swear at me because I was in the space he wanted. He then manoeuvred over into the spot opposite me and continued to swear under his breath. He then did the disability equivalent of man-spreading and reclined his



chair back taking up most of both the wheelchair spaces, so that when I came to my stop and needed to wheel past him I couldn't because he had blocked me in. He had to un-spread to let me past, which he did reluctantly whilst mumbling the F-word again. To be clear, there was a large space between the carriage doors which he could have reclined in without intruding into my space.

I posted about this incident on social media saying that his behaviour was aggressive and an example of how gender intersects with disability to increase entitlement to space, and my post was met with people saying "but you don't know why he behaved the way he did, stop judging him".

I'm not advocating here that people with disabilities need to be apologetic for the space our wheelchairs or other mobility aids occupy, not at all. However, we can think critically about how we use our bodies and wheelchairs in public space and how this can be a reflection of gender, power, and at times a form of lateral violence towards each other.

Disability feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson proclaims: "A feminist theory of disability asks us to investigate how culture saturates particular bodies with meanings and probes the consequences of those meanings. A feminist disability approach fosters complex understandings of the cultural history of the body and addresses such broad feminist concerns as the unity of the category *woman*, the status of the lived body, the politics of appearance, the medicalisation of the body, the privilege of normalcy, multiculturalism, sexuality and the social construction of identity."

We need to stop assuming that the actions or behaviours of people with disabilities are just a consequence of their impairments. We need to recognise that there are multiple layers of identity at play which effect the ways in which people with disabilities interact with and are interacted with in the world.

We must have empathy for others of course, but we should also adopt a critical, engaged and intersectional approach to our identities and experiences.

**Jax Jacki Brown is a disability and LGBTIQ rights activist, writer, public speaker and disability sexuality educator. You can follow her on Facebook [www.facebook.com/jaxfukability](https://www.facebook.com/jaxfukability) or Twitter [@jaxjackibrown](https://twitter.com/jaxjackibrown)**

# AROUND THE TRUST

## CLUB RESPECT



*Club Respect*, an initiative of the Dugdale Trust for Women & Girls, is one of our violence prevention projects, making violence unacceptable in community sporting clubs by embedding a culture of respect that is deeply entrenched in attitudes and behaviours both on and off the field.

We have been working closely on this project with a leading digital design agency Squareweave. Earlier this year, we undertook a deep process of intense strategy mapping, consumer profiling, lean canvassing, agile scoping and articulation of our research into workable targets.

On the back of this deep contextual work, we have now commissioned Squareweave to produce our leading edge digital platform. Over the coming months, as the *Club Respect* teams maps our content and user journeys through the site, Squareweave will be producing code and testing prototypes on members of our audience.

We also continue to engage with stakeholders in community sport, such as local councils and community clubs and other bodies. Our esteemed Critical Friends Group met again in June to provide direction on the project. The excitement for the launch of *Club Respect* continues to build!

## WARATAH

At *The Waratah Project* much is happening beneath the surface, like the proverbial iceberg, as we work toward completion. In the Project survey we asked women and girls about their experiences of menstruation and menopause, and what would make these better. Close to 3,400 women and girls shared their views and experiences, both online and in person, between 2014 and 2016. Their responses were intriguing, highly diverse and profoundly instructive, even for those of us with long experience in the field of menstrual education.

### What we've been up to

While Karen Pickering is applying her feminist acuity to writing the body of the manuscript, Jane Bennett

has been shaping the qualitative data for accurate representation, impact and ease, as well as exploring the wealth of research in all things menstrual: health, politics, activism, products, economics, education and so on. Jane is most ably assisted by volunteers Pam Carty-Salmon and Denise Keighery. Nicole Isles (currently studying a Masters of Public Health, Melbourne University) has successfully wrangled the quantitative data for us, and student intern Bronwyn Dwyer has kept us up-to-date with relevant research and articles. All this is overseen by chief vision-holder and flow-chart guru Mary Crooks.

We are *all* excited to be at the completion stage of this groundbreaking project and are happily anticipating the calving of this berg, and look forward to watching its unfolding impact.

## ROSIE: WRITE LIKE A GIRL

The *Rosie Respect* website aims to connect with teenage girls across Australia and help them build confidence, resilience and self-respect. Since the site's inception in 2013 we've had a regular 'Rosie Blog' that engages girls with current political, cultural and social issues. And who better to discuss these topics with than other teenage girls just like them? Introducing: *Write Like a Girl*.

Last year we decided to launch a teenage writing program, so that girls could have their opinions not only heard, but published. We put a call out for teenage writers on our blog in February 2016, and we were overwhelmed with the response. We had an incredible 123 applicants expressing interest in writing for *Rosie*.

Last year we published twelve wonderful blogs on topics ranging from sustainability to feminism to people seeking asylum. The content provided by our very own audience was truly inspiring and allowed us to really understand what teens are thinking about and engaging with. Each published piece was edited by the Rosie team. Authors received payment for their valuable contribution.

It's safe to say that the *Rosie* teen writing program 2016 was a huge success! So that's exactly why we decided to re-launch in 2017. Except this time under the much more eloquent title of *Write Like a Girl*; a reference to brilliant feminist book *Fight Like a Girl* by Clementine Ford. Again, we put the call out to teenage writers and again we received a great response. So far this year we have published three wonderful blogs by girls aged fourteen to sixteen.

We know teenage voices matter. So we want to give them a chance to use it.

**If you or someone you know are interested in writing for Rosie email [maddy@vwt.org.au](mailto:maddy@vwt.org.au).**



## POLICY SUBMISSIONS

**June 2017 Department of Communications and the Arts public consultation into a civil penalties regime for non-consensual sharing of intimate images**

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images has become easier with the advent of new technologies. This development represents a serious issue concerning the safety and wellbeing of women and girls as they increasingly navigate and live their lives through online spaces.

The VWT's *Rosie Project* Officer Maddy Crehan, *Club Respect* Project Officer Grace Mountford and Research & Advocacy Officer Casimira Melican collaborated to answer the thirty-eight consultation-paper questions using their expertise and knowledge to inform the responses. The Trust's submission highlighted:

- the importance of recognising that the harms caused in virtual spaces can be of equal, if not exponentially greater than, in physical spaces due to the anonymity and plasticity of online identities, the global reach of the internet, and the ease of access for individuals;
- that education around consent is vital for children, teenagers and adults who need support to make choices about their sexuality that is based on equality, dignity, and respect; and
- the importance of a victim-led process when considering this issue so that their wishes are respected at every stage of the identification, reporting and processes regarding sexual harassment and abuse online.

The consultation was to assist in providing advice to the Government on establishing a new prohibition at the Commonwealth level on the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and to implement a civil regime designed to deter and penalise persons and content hosts who share intimate images or videos of a person without their consent.

### Our Advocacy section is live on the VWT website

Go to [vwt.org.au/policy-advocacy](http://vwt.org.au/policy-advocacy) to find our policy submissions made since 2015. If you would like to know more about older submissions email our Research & Advocacy Officer, Casimira at [casimira@vwt.org.au](mailto:casimira@vwt.org.au) or call the Trust on (03) 9642 0422 to request a copy of any submission.

## MENSTRUAL LEAVE POLICY



In case you missed it, for the past year we have been trialing a Menstrual Policy at VWT. This workplace policy, co-written by Casimira Melican and Grace Mountford, allows staff members who are experiencing symptoms of menstruation or menopause the option to work flexibly.

The result? Exactly what you'd expect; greater productivity and a happier work environment.

**Read more about why we introduced this policy on our blog:** [vwt.org.au/blog-menstrual-policy/](http://vwt.org.au/blog-menstrual-policy/)

*Herald Sun* opinion writer Wendy Tuohy said, "the Victorian Women's Trust's call for women to be paid period leave is a bombshell. It is unapologetic and brazen and has the potential to be a big catalyst for debate around women's status at work."

In early June, VWT Research & Advocacy Officer Casimira Melican (pictured) spoke about our new policy with Waleed Aly, Carrie Bickmore and others on Channel Ten's *The Project*. **Watch and cheer Cas on at:** [facebook.com/TheProjectTV/videos/10154636102693441/](https://facebook.com/TheProjectTV/videos/10154636102693441/) (do yourself a favour though and don't read the comments!)

Angela Priestley, founding Editor of *Women's Agenda* said, "As far as we know this is the first organisation in Australia to offer such a policy, but it won't be the last." Prove Angela right — download our template (which you can find on the blog) and adopt this sensible policy in your workplace today.

## HERE SHE IS!

Exciting news for the *Here She Is!* initiative. Since launching on 8 March 2013, *Here She Is!* has become a valuable public resource to help people and organizations connect with capable and successful women. To build on this success, we are relaunching *Here She Is!* on the VWT website in mid-August. If you would like to join our great equal representation directory please contact our Project Officer, Esther at [esther@vwt.org.au](mailto:esther@vwt.org.au)

# VOLUNTEER SNAPSHOT

The VWT continues to be blessed with great volunteers. In this new section of the newsletter, we will feature five volunteers and their fantastic work...stay tuned for spring! If you are interested in volunteering with the Trust please visit: [vwt.org.au/volunteer/](http://vwt.org.au/volunteer/)



## SOPHIE BLISS

Sophie is a student at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, majoring in International Relations. Originally hailing from sunny Queensland, Sophie now resides in Melbourne and is fast learning the art of rugging up.



## PAM CARTY-SALMON

Pam has been volunteering on *The Waratah Project*, helping to process the large amounts of qualitative data received. Pam has a background in social work, with three decades of practice, policy and management positions in Child protection, Corrections and disability service provision.



## EMILY HOLDING

Emily is a student at Monash University studying a Bachelor of Music/Arts with a major in Gender Studies. She first became involved with VWT when she volunteered at *Breakthrough 2016*. She has been volunteering on the relaunch of the *Here She Is!* directory on the VWT website. In the future Emily will continue to work on the *Here She Is!* project as well as a project promoting a new documentary about Australian Women's Football.



## EMMANUELA NOI

Emmanuela first volunteered with the VWT at *Breakthrough 2016*, which encouraged her to learn more about women's rights, particularly the right to safety affecting women's lives. Emmanuela is volunteering on an advocacy strategy that promotes the safety of women and girls in processing centres as an equal priority to the protection of women in Australia. By promoting the dual responsibility to ensure the security of women regionally and in offshore processing centres, Emmanuela hopes to emphasise that the right to safety is non-exclusionary, nor discriminatory in its application.



## HILARY IRWIN

Hilary's active involvement with the VWT began in 2005 when she undertook research for *Our Watermark*. For the last seven years Hilary, along with colleague Susan Powell, has coordinated the *Paradox of Service Independent Advocacy Project*. This project advocates for a number of former religious women who were treated badly by their Orders upon leaving and who now find themselves in difficult financial circumstances, and often traumatised by the treatment. This Project is managed by the Executive Director Mary Crooks AO. Hilary has also become a donor to the Trust.





# 10 TIMES GILLIAN TRIGGS MADE US PROUD

By Casimira Melican

With her 5-year term as President of the Australian Human Rights Commission coming to a close we wanted to celebrate Professor Gillian Triggs, a woman who has undertaken her role with grace and leadership in promoting the human rights of all Australians. Although I'm sure we could find 100, here are 10 times Gillian made us proud.

1. That time she launched a *National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention* in 2014 to "investigate the ways in which life in immigration detention affects the health, well-being and development of children."

2. When she defended the Inquiry's report *The Forgotten Children* against political attacks, which found that the practice of holding children in detention was not only in breach of international human rights law but also detrimental to children's health and wellbeing.

3. Remember when the Abbott Government were calling for Gillian Trigg's resignation after she released *The Forgotten Children*? In January 2015, the Government said that they had lost all confidence in her as Commission President. This is what she had to say in response to these attacks, 'Were I to receive... warm and congratulatory words from the Government on a consistent basis, I think the taxpayer would be justified in my resignation, because I wouldn't be doing my job.' Way to stand strong.

4. When she was nominated by thousands of people and won "2015 Woman of the Year" by *Daily Life*. When describing why they were nominating her, readers pointed out her "integrity", "guts", "grace" and "dignity" in the face of what many described as "bullying" by the Abbott Government (see number 3).

5. That time she called for marriage equality, 'It is time for us to move to genuine equality in marriage for all Australians.'

6. When she told us that sexual harassment, especially

in workplaces, needs to stop, 'After all, being free from sexual harassment is a basic human right.'

7. When she called out the sexism she faced during her tenure with political attacks from the Coalition Government continuously criticising her for defending the human rights of children, asylum seekers, and more recently, Yassmin Abdel-Magied, 'I am coming to the view that they have been able to say things about me, and attack me, in a way that never would have happened to a man. And I am sorry to that, but it's true.'

8. When she defended the attack on Yassmin Abdel-Magied after her ANZAC Day post and called out the racist undertones to the attack, 'The headscarf has become a lightning rod for attacking Muslim women.'

9. When she reminded us that we can never stop fighting for an equal and inclusive society, 'there has never been a more important time to stand up for laws which prohibit racial abuse in the public arena.'

10. When she was named the 2017 recipient of the Voltaire award by Liberty Victoria early in May for her "courageous stand on people's rights".

Thank you for everything that you have done for human rights, especially women's human rights Gillian. You have shown us that we can stand up for what we believe is right, no matter how much criticism we face, and do it with a huge amount of grace. You get the Victorian Women's Trust Badge of Courage Award!

We can't wait to see what you do next and here's to many more female leaders who are unafraid to speak the truth!

We also welcome the Commission's next President, Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM

**Above (left to right):** Eve Mahlab AO, Mary Crooks AO and Gillian Triggs. Image by Breena Dunbar.

# AUSTRALIA'S FARMING WOMEN HAVE NOT BEEN ABSENT, BUT UNRECOGNISED

By Sophie Bliss  
VWT Volunteer

An old riddle goes: a father and son are in an accident, killing the father and sending the son to intensive care. When the doctor comes to see the boy, the doctor says, "oh my god, that's my son!".

Who is the doctor?

Some are quick to suggest that the doctor is the boy's other father, adoptive father or biological father, before it dawns that the doctor could be the boy's mother.

It is in the same vein that when you ask people what mental picture they conjure when they imagine a farmer, you are most likely to spend the following moments listening to varied descriptions of the Marlboro Man. Rugged, dirtied, Akubra mad, and, unfailingly a 'he'.

The farm is one of many domains typically conflated with maleness. A hierarchical and gendered division of labour means that men and women are thought to perform different tasks in divergent realms, and work undertaken by men is afforded a higher status. Women are thought to care for the home, keep the books, and run the errands. However, it is the physical on-farm labour, typically thought of as men's work, that is associated with the identity of a farmer, and legitimises the idea that farmers are men.

This notion is pervasive, and difficult to dislodge. It is problematic, given that Australian farming women have been on the land as long as farming men, and their work no less intrinsic. Women farmers have, and continue to play critical and innovative roles within and across our agricultural enterprises, producing at least 49% of real farm income. There lies a rich history and wealth of knowledge, largely untapped.

Until 1994, farming women were legally defined as 'silent partners', uninsurable on the land. Historically, they have been excluded from the national census, from agricultural courses until the 1970's, from voting in farming organisations until the 1990's, even from succession planning of their family farms.

In 1996, the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust (VWBT) funded the Rural Women's Legal Outreach Program *Who Gets the Farm*, which raised awareness of the inequities that discriminate against rural women in land ownership and succession. It impressed the importance of succession planning upon rural women. Through focus groups and education workshops, these women could come together to discuss their experiences and inform themselves on their local services, legal rights and entitlements. VWBT funded the project again in 1997, for further research into the link between domestic violence and poor succession outcomes for women, and how women's treatment by legal and financial professionals impacted decision making.



**Top image:** Sallie Jones and cows, Jindivick, Victoria, 23 Nov 2016 **Photographer:** Catherine Forge **Source:** Museums Victoria

This year, VWT has had the privilege of funding a video about *The Invisible Farmer*, a new rural initiative for women.

*The Invisible Farmer* launches an offensive against the historical and contemporary invisibility of our farming women. The largest ever study of Australian women on the land, it is supported by nation-wide partnerships between rural women and cultural organisations, academics, governmental and non-governmental bodies. At the risk of losing history undocumented, there is a pressing need to research and document their stories. We need to collect and preserve these women's personal narratives in the national historical narrative, and map an agricultural landscape that is far less exclusively male.

The project centres on woman's entitlement to recognition, and self-recognition; not as a farmer's wife but as farmers in their own right. It demands fair and equal representation in agricultural bodies, boards and councils, in bodies of works in libraries and museums and history books, and on the consciousness of bodies in the street.

Australia's farming women have not been absent, but unrecognised. It's high time this changed.

**You can watch *The Invisible Farmer* video here:**  
[youtube.com/watch?v=Xj3GYT-6Nq0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Xj3GYT-6Nq0)

**And learn more about the project here:** [invisiblefarmer.net.au/particularly](http://invisiblefarmer.net.au/particularly)



# OUT AND ABOUT

## PROGRESS 2017

Maria Checuti, Ally Oliver-Perham and Casimira Melican joined 150+ speakers and more than a 1000 participants at *Progress 2017* on June 6 & 7; a conference which aimed to gather, energise and propel forward Australia's leading campaigners, advocates and change-makers from every sector. Session topics ranged for Indigenous rights, social change documentary making, messaging for advocacy, environmental activism, how to talk about the economy and more.

## UNITED VOICE RESPECT IS THE RULE CAMPAIGN

One of our fantastic volunteers Jess Browning is campaigning alongside the hospitality union United Voice on a new campaign working to stamp out sexual harassment in hospitality. *Respect is the Rule* is the new pledge, that asks for venues to remove individuals that sexually harass patrons or staff members. The pledge also involves venues and workplaces promoting the campaign with printed materials as well as training materials for staff.

**You can find out more information about the campaign and sign the petition here:** [megaphone.org.au/petitions/respect-is-the-rule-stop-rampant-sexual-harassment-in-hospitality-1](http://megaphone.org.au/petitions/respect-is-the-rule-stop-rampant-sexual-harassment-in-hospitality-1)

## LAUNCH OF THE RED DUST HEELERS

The *Club Respect* team attended the launch of the Red Dust Heelers Women's Team in the Women's National Wheelchair Basketball League (WNWBL). The launch was held at Ikon Park on the 15th June and presented by Koorie Women Mean Business and Outback Academy Australia. The Red Dust Heeler members are Aboriginal and other Australian athletes with disability. They work closely with the Australian Paralympic Committee to open pathways for Aboriginal and other youth with disability into elite sports, alongside community based activities that encourage healthy lifestyles, improved social inclusion and wellbeing.

## INDIGENOUS NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY & TELECOM NETWORK (INTTN) LAUNCH

Finance and IT manager Wilfredo, Project Officer Grace and Work Experience Student Amelia attended the launch of the iNTTN on the 29th June in Shepparton. iNTTN is Australia's first telecommunications service provider owned and operated by Indigenous people for Indigenous people.

## VWT HOSTS THE LODDON MURRAY AND THE NORTHERN MALLEE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

The VWT offices were visited by a large group (54 people to be exact!) from the Loddon Murray and the Northern Mallee Community Leadership Programs on the 19th June. Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program Manager Lucy Mayes said this of the visit, "our sincere thanks to you and your staff for welcoming our very large group to your inspiring office space and for taking the time to share with us your inspiring and practical, impactful work and insights. I personally found each of the stories shared to be hugely inspiring, as well as the story of the organisation more generally, and your lovely humble yet powerful style of leadership. I also really appreciated you taking us through some very practical and useful tips around change processes."

## MARY JOINS GOOD SHEPHERD'S GOOD CONVERSATIONS

On June 28th, Mary Crooks AO was a guest speaker at a Good Shepherd panel discussion with Dr Elise Klein (University of Melbourne), Tanya Corrie (Good Shepherd) and Alison McClelland (Good Shepherd) on *Economic frameworks and women's human rights*, the second in Good Shepherd's *Good Conversations* policy series.

## KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS AT GOOD SHEPHERD

On 29th June 24 Good Shepherd staff were involved in a training session with VWT staff and Mary Crooks AO on the Victorian Women's Trust's kitchen table conversations framework.

## YARRA VALLEY WATER

Mary Crooks AO has been working as a consultant for Yarra Valley Water on public engagement strategies over the past few months, drawing funds into the Victorian Women's Trust Ltd.

## DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL CEO EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

In April this year Mary Crooks AO was appointed as the Independent Chair of the City of Darebin CEO Employment Matters Committee. This is a two year appointment. The first major task is the securing of a new CEO for the city. The committee then conducts the CEO annual performance review.

# THE VICTORIAN WOMEN'S BENEVOLENT TRUST

By Carolyn Munckton  
General Manager, Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust

## GRANTS

Winter is a busy period for the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust (VWBT). Applications to the General Grants closed at the end of March so we've spent time reviewing, assessing and identifying donors and co-funders for the 2017 grants.

The trustees approved fourteen grants and ten of these projects will specifically benefit women and girls in regional Victoria. This is a terrific outcome because the focus this year was primarily to promote social inclusion and community cohesion in regional Victoria. We wanted to address the needs of refugee and migrant families or women or girls who were experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, lack of educational or training opportunities, or who live with a disability or illness.

Stay tuned for full details about all the General Grants and the Sub-Funds Grants in the spring newsletter.

## SUB-FUNDS

This year, all nine of our Sub-Funds were open for application during June and July. In 2016, we launched three new Sub-Funds, so it will be exciting to provide grants from all funds this year. It is such a pleasure to work with donors and families to bring to life the legacies of the women who have been honoured through these small but vital funds.

Women contribute to our world in so many wonderful and significant ways but often their role and work is forgotten. We rarely walk past buildings bearing their name, apply for scholarships established in their honour, read their biographies or attend lectures upholding their legacies because very often they do not exist.

The VWBT is committed to ensuring women are on the public record and to remembering and highlighting their important place in our communities. Our Sub-Funds are one way we can honour women who have made a valuable contribution to the lives of women and girls in our state or in memory of women who are special in the hearts of their families.



## PRESENTATION TO SWINBURNE STUDENTS

It was a pleasure recently to present to students in the Master of Social Investment and Philanthropy program at Swinburne University on 'Women and Giving'. Students were interested to hear about women's giving circles, VWBT and the Trust in general.

## PRESENTATION TO WOOR-DUNGIN

Together with representatives from the RACV Foundation, Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, and CAGES Foundation, VWBT was invited to present to a meeting of Woor-Dungin, which is a not-for-profit coalition of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, philanthropic foundations, donors, and pro bono service providers working in partnership to enable Aboriginal organisations to access the resources and support they require, and to achieve self-determination.

This was a great opportunity to meet and engage with representatives from Aboriginal community organisations from across Victoria who were particularly interested to hear about the Chris Friday Sub-Fund, which seeks applications only from Aboriginal-led organisations – a great fit for Woor-Dungin members. We also discussed last year's General Grant to Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation and the brokerage role VWBT played in leveraging additional funds from RE Ross Trust for an Aboriginal Family Therapy training program.



# PROMOTING THE LOULA RODOPOULOS SUB-FUND



To build the profile of the Loula Rodopoulos Sub-Fund, we placed advertisements in both the English and Greek editions of *Neos Kosmos*, Australia's largest circulation Greek community newspaper and website. We provided content for an inspiring story about Loula and the Sub-Fund, which ran as a half-page article in both the Greek broadsheet edition and the English Saturday paper.

As the 'go to' place for news with the Greek diaspora, *Neos Kosmos* is arguably the most effective way to leverage Loula's significant achievements and community impact and gain interest in and support for the Sub-Fund established in her honour.

**If you'd like to know more about the individual purposes of our Sub-Funds, visit our website page:**  
[vwt.org.au/grants/sub-funds](http://vwt.org.au/grants/sub-funds)

Top left: Loula Rodopoulos  
Middle right: Jean McCaughey  
Bottom right: Fay Marles

# FUNDRAISING

To build the capacity and giving of our Sub-Funds we ran a targeted end-of-financial-year fundraising campaign specifically for two Sub-Funds:

- Jean McCaughey Social Justice Sub-Fund.
- Fay Marles Equal Opportunity Sub-Fund.

Many people knew Jean or Fay well or admired their work and achievements, so we expect further donations will roll in because the grants from these Sub-Funds have the potential for big impact and we aim to give more and larger grants in the future.

This year we anticipate that projects for women and girls will benefit from at least \$60,000 from our Sub-Funds, making these Sub-Funds an integral and valued part of the Benevolent Trust's grant-making work



*“..a woman who dedicated her life to helping other women..”*



## THE WONDERFUL MARY OWEN OAM

By Alice Pung

Mary and I met at twelve years ago at a Footscray writing workshop organised by her daughter Wendy. Mary was the oldest person in our group, but had the uninhibited enthusiasm of a school child – the sort that was bursting to share their work, but instead of raising their hand, couldn't help but blurt out what they needed to say. When Arnold Zable asked us to write about an object of special significance to us, Mary wrote about a hand-cranked sewing machine she called 'The wonderful Withers Werthiem.'

Mary explained that her mother had died following the birth of her twin sisters when Mary was just sixteen months old. Her mother's sister, Margery Withers, took her godmother responsibilities over Mary very seriously: "She probably meant more to me than anyone else." Margery had inherited the German sewing machine, and wanted to ensure that her goddaughter had something new to wear to her first job after leaving school.

Margery had an old woollen overcoat – "good quality but a dreary fawn colour and somewhat faded," Mary wrote. "Together we unpicked all the seams and resewed the coat inside out on that old hand sewing machine. I remember the terrible job of managing the bound buttonholes. When it was done, Marge boiled it up in her gas copper with a packet of navy blue dye and – hey presto – I had an (almost) new overcoat! – the first I ever remember having except for a school raincoat."

*I imagined the two women – one older, one young – spending winter evenings unpicking every single stitch of that coat, turning it inside out and re-sewing it. Dipping it in a vat of boiling dye, wringing it by hand, drying it out.*

The delight with which Mary told us about her aunt's ingenuity was disarming to the younger members of the class. There we all were, a group of anxious writers concerned about reading our thoughts in public, crafting our prose so that it could sound deep or confessional, floored by a simple tale about an act of great love. Here was a natural storyteller – honest and un-egotistical. "I wish I knew what happened to that old Wertheim," Mary chuckled, "Probably still going – totally un-reliant on carbon-producing electricity."

After class, I told Mary how moved I was by her story, and she offered to type it up and send it to me. A few weeks' later, true to her word, I received it in the post. This is how our friendship began – first through letters, then emails, then through lunches at the university where I worked, and later we even went to other writing events together. Once, well into her eighties, Mary drove me to Victoria University to hear a talk by Hannie Rayson and Cate Kennedy, and told me that after the war, the poorest, displaced people lived inside tents

pitched along Footscray Road. Where I saw factories and cranes, Mary saw families eking out a subsistence.

Mary attended my thirtieth birthday, and after I met Nick, our wedding. We would visit her in her house in Sandringham with its light-filled kitchen and floor piled up with the *Mary Owen papers* she was compiling. Mary showed us all the paintings by her famous grandfather Walter Withers and his daughter, her beloved aunt. Most of them were landscapes but there was one particular painting of a beautiful fair-haired child against a dark background. "That's me," said Mary, "Margery painted me."

The last time we saw Mary was at her ninety-fifth birthday at her niece Belinda's house. The house was filled with friends and family – Mary was very loved. Instead of holding court like the grand dame she deserved to be, she was holding our baby son Leo in her lap, making sure everyone was looked after, and introducing her friends to family.

Mary's ability to engage with another person – regardless of whether they were talking with her in an intimate living room or in front of an audience of 400, whether they were those in the upper houses of Parliament or the lower basements of sewing factories, was what made her exceptional, what commanded such devotion from her friends.

Mary had once confessed to me once during a lunch that she had wanted to write when she was younger, and thought she might be good at it, but knew she didn't have the time because there were other things she had to do with her life, things of greater priority, like campaigning for the workplace rights of women. But Mary was a fine writer. She had the very quality Ernest Hemingway said was essential – a built-in bullshit detector.

*Eleven years' ago at the launch of my very first book, when Helen Garner was speaking a voice piped up 'Hear! Hear!' I knew exactly who it was. At that stage we had only written to each other twice – when Mary had sent me her story about the Wertheim sewing machine and I had written back to thank her. It was before we'd even met up.*

At the signing table, Mary presented me with a copy of my book that she had bought for signing.

"Mary! It's so great to see you!" I said.

"How did you remember my name?" she asked in genuine surprise.

Here was a woman who dedicated her life to helping other women, who had a two-decade long leadership dinner named in her honour, who had inspired the Melbourne Press Club to pass a special law in her honour (which they later repealed), a lady who would think nothing of driving into the city to attend the book launch of an unknown 25 year-old Chinese Cambodian writer – and yet did not even expect to be remembered in return.

But who could ever forget Mary?

She was my friend and inspiration. She was never self-important or grandiose. She taught me how to imbue a story with love.



Alice Pung is an award-winning writer whose books include *Unpolished Gem*, *Her Father's Daughter* and *Laurinda*. She is also the editor of *Growing up Asian in Australia* and *My First Lesson*. She has also written for the *Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Monthly*, *the Age* and *Good Weekend*.

**Bottom right:** Alice Pung  
**Photographer:** Federica Roselli



# REMEMBERING JEAN TOM AO FOUNDING VWT TRUSTEE

By Mary Crooks AO

*“Jean [exemplified] the ideal of voluntary service and fellowship. Jean had an enormous personal impact over the past six decades in an extraordinary number of local, regional, state, national and international organisations – the sheer number of which is too long to list here.”*

- excerpt from Jean Tom's profile as part of VWT exhibition *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* (April 2001)

Committed to increasing opportunities for women, particularly for rural women, Jean played a key role in the final deliberations in the formation of the Victorian Women's Trust. Part of the formal minutes of a meeting in January 1985 records that Jean had to hurriedly leave the meeting after a telephone call to inform her that her Kyneton farm was ablaze in a shocking bushfire season. Jean became a founding Director of the Victorian Women's Trust, serving our organisation with distinction from 1985-1993. She remained a steadfast supporter ever since. Among her many leadership roles, she was also National President of the Country Women's Association Australia (CWA). Jean was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia for service to the welfare of women in rural and remote Australia.

Throughout her life, Jean was a dedicated social justice advocate for women and girls. After graduating from Melbourne University in 1946 with a Masters of Science, Jean married and settled into a busy routine of farming, family life and community activism. After serving on committees and boards in Victoria and many years' membership in the CWA she led and participated in delegations to World Conferences in Nairobi, Germany, Fiji and Ireland. She claimed that quiet listening and constructive suggestions were a direct influence on decision makers. She was nominated for inclusion in our acclaimed 2001 exhibition, *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*. Not surprisingly, she was profiled in the category 'Meetings Always Meetings'. The theme reflects the role these women filled as 'playing huge roles in organisations. They take on key positions, requiring enormous time and effort. They juggle family, school, the farm, the store.'

Jean's personal, professional and social impact on the lives of many thousands of people is immeasurable. She was kind and generous, always courteous and diplomatic. She was a powerful advocate for farm safety and rural health and spoke out against violence in the home. She will be greatly missed.



## VWT BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1992

(left to right): Dure Dara OAM, Jenni Mitchell, Judy Whiteman, Marieke Brugman, Jean Tom, Jan Dillow, Victoria Marles. Absent: Patricia Caswell, Judy Taylor (Image by Ponch Hawks)



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