VICTORIAN WOMEN'S TRUST

Trust News

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Above: photograph by Georgia Ginnivan for Rural Women Online. Below: a happy snap by Breeana Dunbar from our unofficial office warming (left to right) longstanding supporter Hilary Irwin; Leah McPherson (VWT, Major Projects & Initiatives); Mary Crooks AO (VWT Executive Director); Emily Rolls (Siren); Cassandra Lloyd (SHAPE); and Esther Hoang-Le (SHAPE).

Spring greetings

We've got a different perspective on spring this year, as we settle into our new neighbourhood of Clifton Hill. Read more about the Victorian Women's Trust (VWT) new digs on the right.

In other news, we've been on tour of Victoria with our major initiative Rural Women Online, learning more about the digital divide and providing learning opportunities for women in the regions (read more on page 4). Speaking of digital, our flagship harm prevention project, Club Respect has launched a new original podcast, Smart Plays! Read more on page 2.

We're hosting a free online event on 31 October on the incredible impact women have had our political culture. Panelists include Fiona Patten, leader of the Reason Party; author Ramona Vijeyarasa; The Hon Judith Troeth AM, former Liberal MP; The Hon Jenny Macklin, former deputy Labor leader; and Samantha Ratnam, leader of the Victorian Greens.

See back page for more info.

We've moved! And we're so grateful.

Yes, the rumours are true! For the first time in the history of the Victorian Women's Trust, we have a permanent home. Made possible thanks to Hilary Irwin, we are now located at 137a Queens Parade, Clifton Hill. This move has been a long time in the making and we are very excited about what this new phase means for VWT.

Like many other charitable organisations, the last few years have been difficult and required our team to respond quickly to new ways of working. This experience steeled our resolve in searching for a space that would be able to accomodate a dynamic, hybrid team, that specialised in digital advocacy.

We have many people to thank in making this transition as seamless as possible. In terms of creating a space that fits the ethos and character of VWT, we are extremely grateful to Nicole Pollak and Emily Rolls from Siren Design, and Cassandra Lloyd, Esther Hoang-Le, Rob Lineker and the rest of the SHAPE team. We would also like to thank Gino Thomas and Connie Stivala from Thomas Consulting for their engineering support and excellence. Thank you all for your support in making this transition as seamless as possible.

→ We're now located at 137a Queens Parade, Clifton Hill

→ Want to visit? Call us on (03) 9642 0422, we'd love to hear from you

Listen and subscribe to Smart Plays, our latest harm prevention podcast

Presented by Club Respect, Smart Plays is a new podcast that uncovers the biggest problems facing Australian sport, and what it will take to bring sport into the modern world of respect. Hosted by Tarik Bayrakli (Manager, Club Respect) Smart Plays is a fortnightly podcast featuring special guests from all over the sporting world.

At its best, community sport is a social glue, teaching values of fair play, inclusion and respect from the ground up. But community sport at its worst becomes a battleground in which a win-at-all-costs mentality can lead to verbal and physical abuse of players, coaches and match officials. Every week our media highlights unsavoury sporting incidents that triggers the question – is this who we really are and is this the example we want to set for our kids?

In each fortnightly episode of Smart Plays, Tarik and special guests will be tackling difficult social issues in sport and exploring our capacity for positive social change.

→ Smart Plays podcast available now wherever you get your podcasts

Tarik Bayrakli on gender equality and parenthood

What do you love about working at VWT?
Tarik: "I love that we can tackle big issues in a respectful and constructive way. I've got great colleagues, learn heaps from the boss Mary Crooks and our brand new office is fantastic."

As a Dad, how do you bring gender equality into the home with your kids?
"It's an ongoing process of role modelling curiosity, safety and respect while challenging gender roles. Importantly, it's about being kind and constructive as my boys learn their way around this crazy world!"

It's no secret that you are very into sports. What is it about sport that you love?
"There's so much to it. I love community sport more than the elite stuff on TV because of the way it brings people together, teaches kids resilience and keeps everyone moving. Also, Go Blues!"

Smart Plays is a Club Respect production, one of our flagship harm prevention initiatives created by the Dugdale Trust for Women & Girls. Smart Plays has been made possible thanks to the support of donors. Special thanks to the Wood Foundation and Spicers Australia.

Ep. #1. Female footy umpiring crisis
We chat with Victoria Rawlings and Damian Anderson about their breakthrough report on the female footy umpire crisis, including necessary changes to improve conditions and respect for female umpires in Aussie rules football.

Ep. #2. Sideline abuse and the parent-coach connection
We speak to Julia Walsh about the challenges for parents and coaches that often leads to sideline abuse and how clubs can invest in the coach-and-parent experience.

Rosie 2.0 will be live in 2023

Thanks to a generous grant from the Wood Foundation, Rosie—our harm-prevention initiative from the Dugdale Trust for Women and Girls—is being revamped to support the evolving needs of young women and non-binary people in a post-COVID world.

Last month our Rosie editor, Maki and Major Projects Officer, Leah, drew together first-hand accounts from 40 young people, Rosie contributors, parents, teachers and youth workers both locally and from around the country, to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges young people are now facing.

Maki and our Communications Manager, Ally, are now working closely with an all-female design team at Your Creative to revise Rosie's branding, website and content structure. Earlier this month, we met with young feminists aged 14-15 from Princes Hill, Castlemaine Secondary and Fitzroy High School, at UX workshop on what changes they wanted to see in the new Rosie website.

Now that we've gathered the feedback, we're putting our heads down to make the sparkly, new-look Rosie to best support young people as we move forward. Keep your eyes peeled for updates as we work towards launching Rosie 2.0 in early 2023.

→ Learn more: www.rosie.org.au

Sub-Fund grants to be announced

We were blown away by the number of applications to the Sub-Fund grants program this year — over 100 applications across a diverse range of areas of community need. A process is underway to assess each application on their merits, and we hope to be announcing the successful applicants in the coming weeks. Stay tuned!

Communications team update

Over the winter months, we made a few changes to our comms team. Ally Oliver-Perham, returned from maternity leave, which meant that we had to say good bye to Lucy Ballantyne. As the strategic communications manager in Ally's absence, Lucy made a lasting impression, bringing The Trap, our harm prevention podcast to fruition, and steering the communications Matters that Count, our public campaign for better parliamentary representation on key issues in the lead up to the last federal election. Rachel Imam, our hardworking communications officer, also stepped into a new role as a parent, which allowed VWT to bring Sala Goma into the fold as her maternity leave replacement. Sala has been a very welcome addition to the VWT team.

Top: former grants manager Maria Chetcuti and Supriya Sing, photographed by Breeana Dunbar. Left: photograph taken at the recent Rosie UX workshop with Your Creative.

Unbelievable: dismantling the narrative of the 'perfect victim' within the criminal justice system

By Hannah Ferguson

The 'perfect victim' in the criminal justice system is a virgin.

She's never had a drink. She doesn't post on social media. She's never sent an intimate message and she's unmarked in the eyes of the law. She comes forward at the perfect time. There are always witnesses to corroborate her story. She shares just enough with the public to be empathised with, but not too much, or she's hysterical. Most importantly, she doesn't exist. She's an ideal that sets every survivor up for failure, for judgement and to bear the burden of their own victimhood.

At the crux of the perfect victim is unconscious bias, a dangerous and sustained belief of what a victim must look like in order for society to deem them worthy of credibility and subsequently, believability. Our cultural ability to perceive a victim as being authentic in their claim, particularly of sexual violence, is incredibly narrow.

Five years after the #MeToo movement broke open these conversations, are we any closer to dismantling the need for a checklist of believability? #MeToo created a tidal wave of reckoning, resulting in a sweeping movement to legislate affirmative consent in multiple jurisdictions, to introduce harsher penalties for image-based abuse and see an uptake in conversation around healthy relationships, sexual health, wellbeing and safety. The rise of powerful voices like Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins and Chanel Contos highlights a societal willingness to engage in conversation, and to make change proactively. When we see proactive change everywhere from the national curriculum to a federal election, we are prioritising not just reactive measures, but demonstrating a commitment to stopping an assault before it's even occurred.

While societal values are shifting, the narrative of the 'perfect victim' is still perpetuated to a dangerous extent, extending to our ability to identify who the victim really is. [In July 2022] the Commission of Inquiry into the Queensland police response to Domestic Violence heard evidence from Thelma Schwartz, Principal Legal Officer with the Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service.

Schwartz succinctly describes a relatively typical domestic abuse scenario: "There will be a woman there, she will otherwise be covered in blood, she might be holding an instrument...they will see a man sitting there very quiet and calm, they will go to him and speak with him. She will become probably irate. They will then treat her as the aggressor."

In many circumstances where police attend to a domestic violence callout, women acting in self-defence will often be listed as a respondent on police protection notices, because when authorities arrived, the perpetrator often presents as the 'ideal victim'.The commission of inquiry also heard evidence last month of a senior Queensland Police officer who informed their colleague that they had not investigated the suspicious death of a domestic violence victim as she and her partner were a "pair of scumbags who live in a shit area in a shit house." These are the attitudes we are up against, and they are coming from powerful positions of law enforcement.

The idea of the perfect victim isn't limited to credibility or believability, who you are in the eyes of the criminal justice system and by extension, society, can determine whether you will access justice in any capacity. While victimhood is judged on your socioeconomic status and privilege – justice is not blind, it actually does not exist at all.

Five years after the #MeToo movement broke open these conversations, are we any closer to dismantling the need for a checklist of believability?

While the police have the capacity to tangibly enforce narratives just like these, the media are the key drivers of the story in the public sphere. The content we consume across social platforms and media publications lacks nuance, and the takeaway message is often solely dependent on who is delivering the message.

Each time you read a tweet undermining Brittany Higgins. Whenever a family member undercuts the credibility of a survivor. With every remark about what someone had been drinking or what they're wearing flows a tidal wave of bias that prevents others from speaking up. The desperation to meet this impossible benchmark re-affirms the power of a criminal justice system which is largely stacked against us.

While the burden of change should not be placed on women and minority groups, who are significantly more likely to be victims of a sexual or violent crime, we can choose to take on some responsibility in order to shift the conversation. The changes we are currently seeing are the result of millions of individual actions and conversations that are painful, but can empower the voices of others.

Our vulnerability can be transformative. Each time we have a conversation, each time we challenge the narrative and speak out is incredibly taxing, but communicates a vital message – that 'the perfect victim' ideal only serves to feed the perpetrator, to protect them.

We have a long way to go, but don't forget to look at how far we've come. Every time we speak, every time we tell our story, the 'perfect victim' starts to look a little more like every one of us, in every circumstance.

Hannah Ferguson (she/her) is the Co-Founder and Chief Content Officer of Cheek Media Co.

Cheek Media Co. is an Australian digital media platform founded and run by three 20-something women who found a gap in the market for accessible, interesting, and entertaining journalism for young people. Cheek provides progressive news commentary and challenging opinions to people who want to make change in their communities and start hard, but necessary conversations.

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→ For more news and analysis from feminist writers, head to www.vwt.org.au/blog

→ To find out more about Cheek Media Co. visit www.cheekmedia.com.au

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Sends every Friday.

Subscribe: bit.ly/trustVWT

Rural Women Online's tour of regional Victoria

Rural Women Online (RWO) have presented 12 Open Days throughout regional Victoria, including Mallacoota, Tallangatta-Corryong, Buchan-Bairnsdale, Hamilton, Wonthaggi, Myrtleford, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Horsham, Ballarat, Swan Hill, and Mildura.

There was an incredible buzz at each of the RWO Open Days held at regional libraries across the state. Library staff, alongside RWO Open Day producers Tammy and Sue, created a welcoming and inclusive IT learning environment.

In Hamilton we had a chat to a mentor, who had an excellent story to tell. Her mentee wished to know how to build a simple website for her business, however, the mentor did not know how either – so she simply jumped on to the Rural Women Online website, found the relevant section on how to build a website, and then, taught herself and her mentee! What a brilliant outcome.

Rural Women Online I.T. Mentoring Program

At the Wonthaggi Open Day, we met Marg (pictured right with VWT's Executive Director Mary Crooks). Marg, a lifelong community activist was keen to learn more about WhatsApp and social media in general. After the RWO Open Day in Wonthaggi, Marg signed up to Rural Women's Online IT mentoring program and is now receiving up to 30 hours of one-to-one mentoring, thanks to her brilliant mentor, Fionnuala.

→ Our I.T mentoring program is available to anyone in need of tech assistance
→ Sign up for free one on one mentoring: www.ruralwomenonline.org.au/find-a-mentor

Great news! Helpdesk Wednesdays extended until the end of October

Thank you to everyone who has have called the RWO Helpdesk with their digital queries. We've received calls about navigating email use, avoiding viruses on mobile phones to adding credit/debit cards to your digital wallet. Many of the women we spoke to were eager for assistance and simply appreciated the chance to voice and deal with their IT concerns. One woman voiced her appreciation for the accessibility of the Rural Women Online program, mentioning the security she felt through having regular access to tech assistance and being able to speak to an actual person.

→ Rural Women Online Helpdesk hotline operates 10am-4pm Wednesdays until the end of October
→ Free call: 1800 921 383

Top: photograph by Georgia Ginnivan for Rural Women Online. Bottom left: Mary Crooks AO speaking with a Rural Women Online Open Day participant at Wonthaggi Library. Bottom right: Helpdesk Hotline volunteers assisting women with tech queries.

RURAL WOMEN ONLINE

Mentor Application

Would you like to volunteer your skills as an I.T mentor?
We're always looking for tech savvy women to join the team. Learn more: women@vwt.org.au

June 2022
Victorian Women's Trust
Rural Women Online program team
women@vwt.org.au

Hi everyone,

Rural Women Online was just shared on my company's intranet. I am a woman from a regional area who's worked in IT for more years than I can count. I have also been the only women in various teams for well over a decade, and I continually get confused as to why IT is seen primarily as 'men's work'. No-one is denying that IT is a male dominated industry, but my question is why? If women realised what IT workers get paid compared to the difficulty of the work, and compared to the undervalued, and extremely hard work of 'women centric' industries, like child-care or aged care there would be a revolution. While the tiresome, and amazing fight of women everywhere to ensure those industries get paid their due is a good one, it is a long one.

Meanwhile, right here, right now, women who choose a career in IT get a good wage, good maternity and leave benefits, and flexible working arrangements. I don't know about you, but I can't think of another industry that currently does that for women. It is a flexible career path, there is an abundance of opportunities for growth and learning, and in my personal experience a career in IT can be whatever you want it to be.

I really believe in what you're doing, IT is such a big part of everyday life now, it is needed to pay bills, speak to a doctor, go to a restaurant and shop while you are sick. And to me Rural Women Online is about empowering women to be proactive to learn essential skills. I have had 20+ years in IT, and I'm looking forward to becoming a mentor. Rural Women Online mentoring opportunity enables you to access an IT savvy women (like me) for up to 30 hours one-on-one.

Although I have a lack of management experience, I think it is important that the message gets out that IT doesn't have to be about 'management' and there is always scope for sideways or diagonal movement. I really believe that there could be more women in IT, and programs like Rural Women Online can enable women to increase their IT literacy and ensure that we are all a part of, and help create, the digital future together.

From a regional women hoping to change things.

Regards,

Julie

From an email received June 2022. Edited by Bronwyn Johnson and Jess Dugdale-Walker, republished with permission.

VICTORIAN WOMEN'S TRUST PRESENTS

WOMEN REPRESENT:

POWER, POLITICS & MAKING A DIFFERENCE

RAMONA VIJEYARASA
Author,
The Woman President

FIONA PATTEN MP
Leader
The Reason Party

SAMANTHA RATNAM MP
Leader
Victorian Greens

THE HON.
JENNY MACKLIN
Former Labor MP

THE HON.
JUDITH TROETH
Former Liberal MP

MODERATED BY
MARY CROOKS AO
Executive Director, VWT

1PM Monday 31 October 2022 Free online event

Register: bit.ly/WomenRepresent