



OWN MATTERS

*The Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales Inc.
No. 3 December 2001*

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Editorial Proof

It's a truth that never flatters
When we state that our OWN matters!
To pride we must confess
As *OWN Matters* goes to press.
The Editorial Group,
A dedicated troop,
Pursues with some elation,
Typing errors, punctuation.
We feel our spirits quake
At overlooking some mistake,
These same spirits are upraised
When we read your notes of praise.
With work, our OWN newsletter
Will keep on getting better.
We hope that you, our peers,
Will swell the ranks of volunteers,
And come if you are able
To sit at our press table.
Let us tell you this December
That we work for each OWN member.
Your thoughts, suggestions, hopes, engage
Older women centre page.
Forgive the 'we', there is no choice,
It is the Editorial Voice.

Want to use your skills in interesting and productive ways?

Then join the vital and creative team that produces *OWN Matters* each month!
If you have some skills, want to develop new ones, or just want some info about what's
involved, please come to a planning meeting at 9.30 on Thursday, 6 December at 75
Windmill Street. Contact Dorothy Cora 9247 7046.

OWN Matters

is the Newsletter of the
Older Women's Network
New South Wales Inc.
It is published 11 times a year.
Subscriptions are \$20.

Who Are We?

OWN NSW is the peak body for
sixteen OWN groups in NSW.
OWN promotes the rights, dignity
and wellbeing of older women
through a range of activities and
resources, and advocates to
government and non-government
agencies on issues of concern
to older women.

Contributions

All members of OWN groups in
NSW are encouraged to
contribute to **OWN Matters** with
items of interest to older women
and letters to the Editor.

Contributions must be received by
the second Monday of each
month. They can be sent by mail
or email marked 'Attention –
Editorial Team'. Please include
your contact details.

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Point of View

There are many challenges for OWN as we look to the future. We must, more than ever before, continue to work for and promote the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women.

The election result has left me and many others depressed. We face an increase in racism, peace can no longer be assured and people are frightened.

We've been a relatively egalitarian society, but now I worry about the increasing gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It's likely that the GST will be increased and even be applied to food. I know that since its inception, the GST has made significant inroads into my standard of living, and many people I know have similar concerns. We need to develop an offensive action plan before changes are made to the GST, not wait until it's a reality.

The government's attitudes towards older women are captured very well by Amanda Vanstone's remark that "You only have one funeral". Since older women are more likely to be widows and paying for funerals, this is a sexist attitude and makes me more aware of the contempt and disregard shown to older women.

Gambling is becoming an increasing problem amongst pensioners – particularly women. If this trend continues, more older women will be further disadvantaged. We need to recognise gambling as a problem that can lead to homelessness, and develop some strategies to expose this as a critical social issue.

Dental services are strictly limited by government budgeting. Without decent teeth, our health is affected by an inability to eat properly. Access to low cost or free dental care should be considered a preventative strategy for all rather than a privilege for the well off.

High tech medical advances are not generally provided to older women on low incomes. If you are in a private health fund, no problem, if you aren't, you're a second-class citizen. We must put pressure on politicians to re-examine medicare so that older women, who live so much longer than men, are not deprived of the right to proper levels of health care.

OWN would be neglecting our stated aims and guiding principles if we narrow our focus in these economic rationalist times. Let's keep up our OWN courage in the face of diminishing rights and refuse to be relegated to the bottom of the pile.

Enid Harrison

Looking Ahead

Fourteen women attended the 'Looking Ahead' advocacy workshop on Monday 19 November. We spent some time exploring a definition, finally agreeing that "advocacy is a way to present and fight for issues which affect specific groups or an individual."

During our discussions, it became apparent that OWN needs to develop clear policies to guide those of us who represent OWN on committees and in the media, although OWN's Guiding Principles are an excellent basic guide.

We agreed that passion is an important energiser for women involved in advocacy. Pamela Sharpe, for instance, became a consumer representative in Coordinated Care Trials because of the lack of such care for her mother, while Joy Ross, who is herself a public tenant, supports older women who are in public housing in her area. Margaret Sargent told us about her recent action to assist visually impaired OWN members to receive audio tapes of *OWN Matters* and Sheila Mason works passionately in support of captions on television for hearing-impaired people. Barbara Burnham has fought hard and successfully for the rights of Retirement Village Residents, eventually managing to achieve changes in legislation to consolidate these rights. Since 1991, Mollie Smith has been a passionate member of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays NSW, an advocacy group which supports families of gays and lesbians and educates the community on gay and lesbian issues. Marie Williams is involved in the OWN Theatre Group, which has been a supreme advocate for older women's issues for more than thirteen years. These diverse stories illustrated the many forms that advocacy can take.

We decided that one of OWN's roles could be to support all these splendid women through regular Advocacy Support Meetings where we can explore issues and provide support to any OWN advocates who might need it at the time. Keep your eye on the Diary for details of our next meeting.

Renate Watkinson
(whose passion is wellness)

Older Women Working Out!

Imagine one hundred and sixty friendly, relaxed and energetic older women, participating in a range of wellness practices designed to fulfil the expressive needs of the individual in a social setting.

Peggy Hewett, compere extraordinaire, introduced Betty Murphy, a member of the OWN Wellness Coordination Committee, who spoke about OWN's unique model of wellness.

Noreen Hewett, with her matchless warmth and exuberance, told us about the history of OWN and our ongoing commitment to the wellbeing of older women. Noreen pictured for the audience the birth of Sutherland Older Women's Wellness Centre earlier this year. What a success story that is!

Our 'wellness menu' included gentle exercise (not all that gentle!), creative movement (so expressive of the whole person!), traditional Greek dancing (colourful and structured), drumming (for the extroverted amongst us!) and International Dancing (always a winner!)

After a lunch of 'splendid' sandwiches and sinfully delicious cakes, our talented Theatre Group treated us to another of their lively and witty performances – they definitely love a responsive audience!

Everyone was asked to place a tick on a list of possible wellness activities and guess what activity had the most ticks? Drumming! Gentle Exercise came a close second.

The day was a roaring success. Thank you to everyone involved for your hard work in planning and participating in OWN Sydney's first big event. Thanks also to the City of Sydney for their financial assistance.

There's a strong possibility that one or more of the wellness activities will be offered in the future, so keep watching...

Judith Mustard

Sydney OWN Highlights

The light at the end of the tunnel is in sight as we begin a new stage as an independent group with the closure of OWN Inc. and the inauguration of OWN Sydney. Not that the tunnel was ever dark. We have always had women lighting our way forward since we began. Our warmest thanks to all the women who kept OWN Inc. alive and vibrant over the years. Thank you, too, to the women who worked on the Interim Working Committee and to the Working Committee elected in August.

After the inaugural meeting, we will have a new Working Group who will have more time to focus on strengthening and building OWN Sydney, free from the former formalities and legalities we were obliged to observe. This is a good opportunity for all members to contribute their ideas and to become involved in making OWN Sydney bigger and better.

The end-of-the-year party on December 12 will be an excellent time to get together to celebrate our progress and toast our new future. Come and party with us before we close for the year on December 14, to re-open on January 14. There are, however, events planned during January (see diary page) that you will be able to enjoy.

Sorting out the complexities of the new membership fee system has meant some hard and meticulous work for Ermes Solari, but after July next year, it will be plain sailing for Ermes, with a yearly payment of \$5 for membership and \$20 for *OWN Matters* newsletter.

The new a capella group enjoy their sessions with Jackie Loeb and are looking for more women to come and have fun. Jackie says *everyone* can sing.

The Melbourne Cup day lunch followed the quarterly meeting of NSW groups, giving group representatives and OWN members a chance to share food and relax in the courtyard at Windmill Street while admiring the hats some women wore for the occasion. Three sweeps quickly sold out, competently handled by Mollie Smith. (Alas, neither Mollie nor I had a winner – LA)

Twenty two of us from various OWNs spent a wonderfully relaxing weekend at Broken Bay

recently, many thanks to Nancy Brown, of Gosford who organises this annually, at a very reasonable cost.

We wish all OWN members a happy, safe and rejuvenating holiday and look forward to seeing you in 2002.

Louise Anike and Joy Ross

Dear OWN

Thank you, all you senders of lovely cards and messages. I hereby assure you that I didn't die of pneumonia as expected, but live on...to partake of those treasures-of-pleasure that Sydney OWN has in store for us. Like that day at Watson's Bay. What a place to get together with friends, old and new, to hear all the news I've missed out on; the sea, the sand, and the green park nearby..the sun on our backs, and fish and chips inside us! Roll on, more such outings!

Dorothy Cox

Dear OWN,

I enjoy your Newsletter, so keep up the good work. As I grow older myself, I am becoming aware of my limitations. I have always had an interest in Women's Health, and am currently participating in the Vicfit Instructors' course, which includes Resistance training, Water and Land aerobics, to assist myself and other older women to remain strong and mobile as we grow older. At my age (51), it has certainly been challenging (physically, emotionally and mentally) for me, especially working alongside the young people and their "beautiful bodies and ideas". We have all learnt heaps, so that is very positive.

Encouraging women to build up their strength is now my next challenge. My own mother suffers balance problems with Meniere's disease, but at 76 her ideas and attitudes are difficult to break through, so she will be my biggest challenge – how to do it and still remain responsive and sensitive to her needs.

Kathy Woodward

A Bonding Time

The October annual weekend at Broken Bay Sport & Recreation Centre with full- on non-stop fun, singing and laughter, has left me, nearly two weeks on, feeling excited at being alive and energized to the point of exhaustion!

Thanks to all those wonderful women, especially sisters of our Lucy Porter, who I believe could sing for twenty-four hours nonstop without repeating one song. The Talent Contest on Saturday night produced some amazing performances, which gave the judges a very difficult task.

A big change in the weather to 'freezing' and 'windy' on Saturday did not deter this group of feisty women, who set about scouting the bush for a large supply of dry wood. Most of Saturday was spent before a roaring fire, with much yarning and bursts of singing and laughter.

Saturday dawned still and beautifully warm. We were off on a barge to Patonga for a pleasant morning at a fete in support of Downs Syndrome children. Back to the Centre for lunch and packing.

Despite the food not being up to last year's standard, and the staff ditto, (a letter has been sent to the Centre), the refurbishment of the dining room and the addition of two bedrooms with ensuites, and bathrooms at the end of each dormitory, were a big improvement.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the women who made this such a wonderful weekend, especially Lucy and June, who organised the teams for meals.

It would be wonderful if we could make this weekend an annual event. I've already heard some women expressing a willingness to be the organisers. Let's make it an even bigger group next year, with women from all over NSW. A wonderful, bonding time.

Nancy Brown

Breathlessness is *NEVER* Normal

(Unless you're climbing a mountain!)

More than 8% of older people have asthma – and a higher proportion of them are women. I recently attended a one and a half day Asthma Colloquium (discussion!) in Melbourne convened by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to explore a range of asthma issues from a consumer perspective. The aim of the colloquium was for older people with asthma to meet with health professionals to formulate more effective strategies around detection, diagnosis and management of asthma based on the experiences of older people.

Figures show that there has been a significant decrease in children dying from asthma in recent years, but an increase in older people dying from asthma. This is because many older people with chronic breathlessness put it down to 'getting older' or to other illnesses such as heart disease – which it might or might not be – and don't seek or get appropriate treatment.

A half-day was set aside for us (the consumers) to talk about our experiences of the health system. We developed 'a plan of attack' for the following day when we joined representatives from the medical and pharmaceutical industries and community educators for a full exploration of the issues.

This format, of consumers meeting by ourselves before joining 'the experts', proved very productive. During the course of the day, in workshops and plenary sessions with medical people, we kept coming back to the list of recommendations that we had worked on the previous day. We had a real sense of empowerment in an environment (medical people talking medical matters) where consumer voices are often not heard.

Our recommendations to the Colloquium were for increased community awareness programs, better GP education from a consumer perspective, longer GP consultations, support for an asthma education strategy and the development of hospital discharge plans. Nothing terribly radical, really.

Dorothy Cora

Reconciliation in Nowra

On a fine Sunday in October, members of our group were among many who walked over the Shoalhaven Bridge in Nowra in an act of reconciliation with local Aboriginal people. The bridge walk was the Shoalhaven Aboriginal Reconciliation Group's effort at encouraging reconciliation as well as providing an opportunity for a reunion of past residents of the local Aboriginal Mission.

Drawn together under the banner, "Moving Forward Together", we wended our way over the Shoalhaven Bridge and up the Princes Highway to the old Mission site, just off the Highway. Walkers covered the whole age spectrum; some people walked with banners and flags; some mums and dads pushed prams; and some four-legged supporters accompanying their owners also added their 'voices'!

The hill immediately over the bridge was a challenge – for this member anyway – but there were no casualties and we arrived to find that seating had been thoughtfully provided around the Memorial Garden and Plaque, which was later dedicated to all former residents of the Mission. The Memorial Garden itself has been constructed on the site of the last remaining original cottage in the Mission grounds.

We were welcomed by the Chairperson, Sonny Simms, who immediately broke the ice by getting us to shake hands with people around us. Following a didgeridoo performance, we were addressed by Pastor Ossie Cruse, former head of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, whose theme was "The Stolen Generation". Other speakers were the Federal MP, Mrs Joanna Gash, visiting Aboriginal Elders and former residents of the Mission. A former resident, Brian Marshall, summed up the Stolen Generation years when he said there were "good patches and bad". The occasion was very well organised, with free cold drinks, tea and coffee and sausage sandwiches. There was a very happy atmosphere throughout the day.

Our group had received a personal invitation to the Reconciliation Walk when we joined Aboriginal Elders at their local meeting house for lunch early in September. On this happy social occasion, we learnt about the origins of their meeting house, which is on the site of the Mission, the first to be established in New South Wales to care for Aboriginal children deemed to be in need of care. The group, mostly elderly women, included one or two who were taken there as children, and it was both interesting and disturbing to learn first hand of the indignities that some of them had suffered. We were given background information about the Mission by the Chairperson of the Nowra Local Aboriginal Land Council, the son of one of the women present – a 92 year-old Aboriginal Elder with many stories to tell of the past.

The Aboriginal theme was later continued at our regular meeting, when one of our members, Winifred Hilliard, talked about her thirty-two years working with the Pitjantjara people. Winifred was born eighty years ago and, after attending a craft college, went to the Presbyterian Mission at Ernabella in Central Australia as a Deaconess. There she encouraged local Aboriginal people to extend their skills in weaving and painting, and introduced them to batik work. Winifred was given the name of Awulari by the Aborigines. Today, many examples of their intricate and beautiful designs are held in art galleries all over the world. Not only has Winifred recorded the cultural blossoming of the Pitjantjara people in a published book, she is also responsible for a display in the National Museum in Canberra showing their art and creativity – all the artifacts being donated to the Museum from her own collection of memorabilia.

We are hopeful that our reconciliation efforts here in Nowra will have lasting effects and be a step in the right direction towards national reconciliation.

Ennyd Williams

Aboriginal Support Circle Goes Green

Our November 'meeting' took place in the Sydney Botanic gardens. Thirteen of us strolled through the Gardens, in balmy spring weather, accompanied by John Lennis, the Garden's Aboriginal education officer. John, who is a Dharawal man from Botany Bay, recently completed work on the special Cadi Jam Ora display, which is situated near the Palm House.

We started off looking at native trees such as a 250-year old forest red gum, the bunyah, one of the bush cherries, fig trees and she-oaks. John pointed out their uses in providing food, medicines and tools. We tasted sweet nectar from a grevillea flower and "sugarbag" honey produced by native bees.

Part of the gardens was originally under the sea. It is quite evident when one studies the rock outcroppings and sees the wave damage. The first settlers thought that the huge trees growing down to the shore indicated that the soil was fertile, but didn't realise that the "soil" is sandstone. Woccanmagully is the name given to the Farm Cove area by the Cadigal people, who were the original inhabitants of Sydney.

On our way to the Cadi Jam Ora display, we saw the magnificent webs of the Golden Orb spider. Spider webs were used as band-aid over dressings of the soft insides of paperbark, the Golden Orb web being the toughest. The area behind the Cadi Jam Ora has been laid out with the plants that the first settlers would have encountered. We were able to taste some of the ripe edible berries such as the native raspberry and riberry, and the purple berries of the blue flax lily. We sampled native spinach, which is a prolific ground cover. The tough leaves of the *Lomandra longifolia* grass were used as rope, generally by plaiting strands. However, this is women's business and John, being a bloke, couldn't show us how. A model gunyah (shelter) is on display as well as a hearth and a shell midden. The dead were cremated and their bones became part of the midden, so these sites were sacred.

Cadi Jam Ora depicts a continuous storyline from the Dreaming to the present day, illustrating key

points in Aboriginal history and colonial settlement, and is a "must see" for those who are interested.

Pat Zinn

Dear OWN Matterers

News from chilly Changsha. Teaching still goes well even though I was suddenly and unexpectedly saddled with teaching written as opposed to the oral English I had been doing, with some success, ever since I came here. It would have been helpful if I could have heard of this before I travelled to England and returned bearing a large parcel of books which are barely relevant!

I so much enjoy the day my OWN magazine arrives, and think *OWN MATTERS* a brilliant title (bet it was my mate Judith's suggestion). So that leaves us with *SOWN* for our newly formed Sydney branch – has a nice ring of "wild oats" about it, don't you think? "Been there, done that", you might say. I'm glad to read of the Theatre Group's continuing successes, though it makes me homesick and wish I could be with you all.

I shall only need one more issue of *OWN MATTERS* to be posted to me here in Changsha, as I finish teaching in mid-to-late January and we shall then be travelling in China for a bit, arriving back in Sydney in February some time.

My response to so many great articles in *OWN MATTERS*, will accompany my newsletter subscription in due course. Love to all, and especially The Mob,

Brigid Sen

Newsletter & Membership Renewal

Previously, the date of your newsletter and membership renewal was shown on your newsletter label.

Now, a month before your newsletter subscription and membership renewal falls due, you will receive a reminder letter showing what to pay to June 30, 2002. From 1 July 2002, all newsletter subscriptions (\$20) and OWN Sydney membership renewals (\$5) will fall due.

Ermes Solari

Shrieks, Stridency or Silence

A week after the bombing of Afghanistan began there was a peace demonstration in Sydney. I wanted to join it, but felt that a very elderly woman supporting herself on a stick would be regarded as a liability in a crowd. I need not have worried, the crowd, seen briefly on TV that night, was pitifully small.

However, my silence discomfited me, as silence may be taken as acquiescence. Last week a poster in our shopping center advertised a peace rally in a neighbouring suburb. The day was cool; the rally only two bus stops away. I went. The gathering proved to be a political one for a newly formed party. There were about twenty young people, four men of middle age, and me. Nowhere to sit and hours of speeches. The speeches were amplified and so were the shrieks of "traitors" coming from a loud hailer in a car circling the park where we stood. When we moved off for an unauthorised march through uncontrolled traffic, that car with its shrieking occupant followed. Banners and amplified loud hailer proclaimed the things we did not want. A near miss from a passing car sent me on to the footpath. There I could observe the reaction of the bystanders – scarcely a reaction, just incomprehension or sullen indifference. I dropped on to a nearby seat at a bus stop. My small badge, 'No racism, no war' identified me as one of the marchers.

"Ratbags!" said a middle-aged woman, whose crown of dark curls I was envying, "Drown the lot of them!" I ventured to say what I truly believe, that the stridency of the marchers was not serving them well, that protest is necessary, but silent, persistent protest would be more effective. "Drown you too!" said the woman, as she moved away.

Helen Monaghan

Locked in Logic!

John Howard has said he won't say sorry to first peoples in Oz because he personally didn't do anything to them. However, he did say sorry to the Americans after September 11. It follows then that a sorry from Johnny means he must feel personally responsible.

A Gentle Protest in Port Macquarie

A gentle protest against conflict was co-organised last month by Noreen McDonald, one of our members living in Port Macquarie. More than one hundred people, including councillors, holiday makers and locals supported the anti-war rally on the Town Green.

Speeches focused on the question: "Do we want peace by force or peace by justice?" It was suggested that if wealthier countries redirected money they currently spend on military weapons into economic aid for poorer countries, most terrorists would soon disappear. During speeches, the rally was reminded of Gandhi's words, "An eye for an eye makes both parties blind" and Martin Luther King's advice to the American people, "Returning violence with violence multiplies violence – hate cannot drive out hate – only love can."

The rally received very positive press reports in local newspapers. Congratulations to Noreen and others for taking the initiative and showing that many older women do care deeply about these issues and are prepared to speak out loudly and in public against war.

Reporter, Dorothy Cora

A Peace Loving Woman

The Mosman Daily recently ran a generous feature article on Greek-born peace crusader and OWN member, Dorothy Buckland Fuller, who will be eighty early next year. The article outlined Dorothy's amazing dedication to peace throughout her life. More than ever, in today's uncertain climate, Dorothy's passion and commitment to peace and her contributions to so many diverse organisations is inspiring.

Dorothy's profile in the Mosman Daily is a good example of how gaining publicity at the local level can help raise awareness of important issues, including older women's issues, and OWN itself.

June West

Theatre Group



Oh, What a feeling!

Thursday 18 October. Picked up by mini bus at Central and whisked off at breakneck speed to Mount Druitt College where we entertained the spokeswomen for TAFE teachers. Received a standing ovation and requests for an encore. After a tasty lunch we headed home. Our intrepid driver, full of praise for our performance, pointed out the lovely roadside landscaping which she had helped develop.

Friday 19 October to Sunday 21 October. Central Station on Friday morning. Travelled by train to Hawksbury. After lunch at the pub, we made our way by ferry and bus to Broken Bay recreation camp where we joined other OWN members from far and wide for a weekend of fun and games and good company. Saturday night, Ann Cunnynghame entertained us with her ukulele and Barbara Robertson, a Nowra member, won the talent quest. Arrived home at 9pm on Sunday, happy, tired and weary.

Monday October 22. Left Central at 11am and travelled by train to Canberra. At 6 pm three cars driven by women from OWN Canberra escorted us to Joy Robinson's lovely home where we were treated to a delightful dinner, which included red and white wine and champagne. Back to our Hotel about 10.30pm.

Tuesday October 23. After a short rehearsal at the Hotel, a taxi delivered us to the Canberra Centre. From there we walked to nearby shopping centre where the Governor General, who was to open Carers' Week. He arrived with his entourage on the dot of 2.15. Several chairs were placed at the back of the makeshift stage where the dignitaries were seated while the Governor made his speech. Called on to perform our two songs, we found ourselves on stage facing the audience and our backs turned to the Governor General and dignitaries! "Making Whoopee" and "I've Always Worked" were warmly received – the Governor General remarked later, "The ground trembled beneath my feet..." (I suppose he had to say something

flattering!) Then, a short walk to the Legislative Assembly to perform our half-hour show, 'Doing Our OWN Thing', for the Carers' Association. They loved us. After a long wait in the heat for a taxi to take us back to the Hotel for our bags, we finally caught the 5.15pm train back to Sydney! Oh! What a week!

At the Wellness Open Day on Thursday, November 15 we performed 'Doing Our OWN Thing' to a warm and extremely appreciative audience of more than 150 older women from Sydney and beyond. Wow!

Marie Williams

Friends of the Theatre Group: A reminder that the Theatre Group's Xmas Lunch is at 12.30 on Wednesday 19 December at Kirribilli RSL Club. Meet at Milsons Point Station, Alfred Street entrance, at 12 noon. Call Jo Allon 9520 2854 for more information.

OWN NSW Management Team Report

It's been a big year for all of us with the establishment of OWN NSW and OWN Sydney, but it seems we've done it very well! We expect 2002 to be a buzz!

A great disappointment has been the collapse of Mountains OWN – we regret the loss of a feisty OWN group, and celebrate their achievements and the difference they've made to the lives they've touched.

Cate Turner and Sam Smart are back the deck. In December, we plan to evaluate the Team's performance during its first six months.

The Public Relations group of the Management Team is down to the last draft of the new OWN NSW brochure. A redesign of our website is also under way.

Our apologies to Josephine Conway who so generously donated a computer to OWN NSW, I should also have mentioned that it came with a printer attached. Thank you again, Josephine.

Pam Ledden, Betty Murphy & Sam Smart

Building a Bridge

In October, fourteen of us listened to Cleo Lynch, Manager of The Transitional Centre for Women at Parramatta Correctional Centre introduce us to a world few of us know anything about – women in prison. It was enlightening and sobering to realise the difficult lives some women live.

Five years ago Cleo was appointed manager of the centre and had to start from scratch to set up a system enabling women to acquire skills to help them to be reinstated in the community.

Cleo spoke about the many problems that families face when the primary carer, usually the mother, is incarcerated – problems that have a negative effect on children.

The Transitional Centre comprises two houses accommodating twenty one women, some with children. Each house is furnished like a home to avoid an institutional look, and staff don't wear uniforms. Women in the last year or so of their sentences can apply to live in the Transitional Centre, where they are expected to clean the houses, shop and cook their meals. They have to seek employment or be prepared to study for a career – studying horticulture is popular.

Many of the women come from difficult backgrounds and have often experienced abusive relationships with a spouse or defacto. As their self-esteem is often low and they have few life management skills, the women are taught budgeting and planning.

Many of them have older children staying with them at weekends and have to commit themselves to planned activities with the children, for example, movies, picnics, a trip on the River Cat. Pre schoolers may stay at the centre with their mother and arrangements are made for them to go to preschool whilst mother works.

Several groups – Lone Parents, a minister of the church, and counsellors from Cumberland Women's Service – visit the centre and work with the women. One of the women's biggest

problems on release is finding appropriate housing.

The good news is that, over the five years the Centre has been operating, only two women have re-offended from the eighty-eight who have gone through the system.

Mollie Smith

Better Late than Never

Penrith OWN wanted to celebrate Federation along with everyone else, so in conjunction with the Kingswood Park Community Centre, in 1998 they applied for and received a Federal Government grant of \$10,000 to create a 'meeting place' for indigenous, non-indigenous and overseas-born Australians.

Three years later the celebration took place and was it ever worth working and waiting for? They now have a beautiful outdoor meeting place surrounded by lush native bushland and dramatically set against the panorama of the Blue Mountains. A plaque set into the base of the flag-pole acknowledges the work of Penrith OWN.

Opened by the Minister for Sport and Tourism, the celebration attracted Councillors, the deputy mayor, an official from the RSL and, of course, people from the Community Centre, three of whom were also members of Penrith OWN. It was a wonderful day that involved the whole community and lived up to everybody's expectations.

The Lions Club was corralled into cooking the sausages; the Christian Gospel Church provided the music and also the craft activities for the children. The local primary school performed lovely dances.

Cindy Drummond, a Torres Strait Islander, and her two grandchildren provided a charming traditional welcome.

A great day that was enjoyed by this great community of Penrith.

Reporter, Muriel Hortin

Women's Right to be Safe

At a recent public forum on sexual assault which I attended during *Week Without Violence*, service providers in the Sydney area reported having seen 600 victims last year – 200 more than the previous year. They do not know whether the increase is due to more sexual assaults taking place or greater willingness to report them. Sexual assault and domestic violence are among the most frequent and under-reported crimes in Australia. It seems surprising at first that over a hundred of the victims were men, assaulted by other men.

Students from two high schools attended the forum and, probably for their benefit, the panel talked extensively about a current problem, spiking of drinks with drugs to induce unconsciousness and vulnerability to assault in young teenage girls. It was suggested girls should sit in the bar with someone they know. If a girl starts to feel dizzy or sick she should immediately tell someone responsible (bar tenders are not always responsible!) who might act to prevent her being taken advantage of.

Several horrific and moving personal experiences were related to us. The most harrowing was the story of an Aboriginal woman who said she and her peers had always been seen as the lowest of the low and therefore as fair game sexually for any male white or black. Being told from an early age that all Aboriginal women are of no value is hardly conducive to them gaining a feeling of self worth which could help to prevent them from being easy prey. There did not seem to be any way out of this predicament for Aboriginal women.

It was emphasised that empowerment and feelings of self-worth are the best way of healing and recovering from sexual assault. And empowerment and feelings of self-worth in women is also essential if education and prevention strategies are to be effective.

Margaret Sargent

Enthusiasm Keeps Growing!

Enthusiasm for the activities that are offered at the Sutherland Older Women's Wellness Centre continues to grow. In recent evaluation forms, participants describe their experiences as: "wonderful opportunities for bonding through getting to know one another better;" "I've appreciated the friendship and solution to loneliness and isolation;" "International dancing has made me feel young again;" and "I feel so much happier and stronger... I feel valued by my peers and I, in turn, value them."

Four activities – Feldenkrais, Gentle Exercise, International Dancing and Information/Discussion groups – are conducted on Wednesdays between 10.00 and 2.30 and an Internet Computer Course was held on four Thursdays at Sutherland TAFE in partnership with TAFE Outreach.

Enrolments at the Centre have increased by 38% this term. Of the women who completed the registration forms and filled in the demographics, 50% were under 70 years of age and 50% were aged 70-87 years. The participation of women aged between 80-87 is significant in that this older age group is often seen as dependent on community services and/or having chronic medical conditions.

We have attracted new members by word of mouth, publicity in *The Leader*, *Shire Life*, community newsletters and distribution of programs through libraries, doctor's surgeries and the OWN Newsletter.

Upwards of twenty volunteers are regularly engaged in welcoming new women to the Centre, taking enrolments, monitoring attendances at each session and organising morning and lunch refreshments. They also send get well cards to ill participants. A Social/Caring Activities group is currently being formed to explore and coordinate possible card days, theatre parties and outings requested by members outside of the normal program.

Barbara Burnham and Noreen Hewett

Villawood and Beyond

A few weeks ago I was seeking donations for a sum of money to be spent on drawing materials including sketch pads to take to refugee children detained at Villawood Detention Centre. Women from OWN that I approached gave generously and now I want to tell the story of the outcome.

The group who collected the money ended up with about \$500. We bought pads, pencils and coloured pencils for an estimated thirty children. We spent all the money at Parkers Art Supplies at the Rocks, who just happened to be having a half-price sale of a discontinued line in sketch pads and who threw in more of this and that when they found out where it was destined to go. A very generous addition to a satisfactory supply of stuff.

That is where satisfaction ended. The material was taken to Villawood a few days later and there we discovered not so much a detention centre as a gaol – razor wire, broken glass, fences, dilapidated buildings, segregated compounds and surly, obstructive guards. It is not possible to meet a group of people so it is necessary to have the name of one family who you are there, ostensibly, to visit. We mentioned the name we had been given and a woman eventually appeared and later two of her children.

One of the children had been drawing for some time and while they were interned at Curtin in WA one of his drawings was taken out of the centre by a journalist and published. Since then he has been drawing portraits of the guards and has since had his drawing materials confiscated. He is now a very angry young man and rates his experience of Villawood the worst he's had since the family left their home country two years ago.

We believe that there is rudimentary English being taught in the centre but nothing else. The children have very little to distract and occupy them. We see it as a human rights abuse that they are being kept in what is virtually a prison. It is impossible to imagine the tensions such confinement creates, with lack of privacy, purpose and continual uncertainty inherent in the situation.

We intend returning to visit each week though our hopes of being able to run classes and even

show the drawings produced are not very great. It seems that what first needs to be addressed is the cruelty of the detention itself.

The only piece of good that came out of this effort so far is that there was a bit of money left over and we are investigating ways of sending it to the Revolutionary Association of Afghanistani Women who have a website. www.rawa.org if you are interested.

Pam Ledden

Press Pickings

How often do you read of or hear information in the public domain that moves you or makes you angry? You can now share it on Press Pickings, an occasional column in OWN Matters. Please include the source.

There's No Business like Health Business

A Central Coast Hospital recently turned away a very ill woman, 88 years old. She had no private health cover and consequently there was no bed available. She went home but was brought in shortly after, as her condition had deteriorated. For the second time she was turned away because "she was too ill". Her husband was told that the hospital couldn't take people who were dying. The woman died the following day. This hospital is owned by a well-known private company and is, as the Federal Health Minister, Michael Wooldridge gleefully chortled, the responsibility of the State Government.

Sourced from an ABC TV report

The big loser!

"Australia lost the federal election. Yes, the ALP lost it. Kim Beazley lost it. Pauline Hansen and One Nation lost it. But the big loser was Australia. Because malignancies of fear and bigotry are spreading through the body politic, and the nation is deeply, bitterly divided between, it would seem, the bulk of the population and the people contemptuously and contemptibly described as the chattering classes."

From Phillip Adams' article in the Australian 10 November 2001. If you would like a copy of the article, please contact the OWN office 9247 7046.

Two Grandfathers

My maternal grandfather had left my grandmother some years before I was born. He was living with another woman, but my grandmother refused to divorce him, and he had no grounds. We, that is, my parents and me, lived in the same house as my grandmother. She was a very difficult, hard woman, and, as an adult, when I thought about it, I didn't blame my Granddad for leaving. It was not good living in the same house, but we had no choice. This was the thirties, and my father was out of work.

Granddad had left my Gran provided for. He owned the house, which was a London terrace house with a shop and living quarters on the ground floor, and two storeys above that. The shop and living quarters were let, and Gran received the rent as income and continued to live in the house.

Granddad visited Gran regularly to make sure there were no problems, and these were the only occasions when I saw him. I know I liked him, but don't remember a lot about him. At each visit, he used to ask, "Joyce, what is your natal day?" The first time, I was puzzled, but I learnt, and from then on answered correctly, "June 30". I was then presented with a shilling, which was riches indeed. On another occasion, he told me, with a perfectly straight face, that I must be very careful crossing the road on Fridays, as it was very unlucky to be run over on a Friday. I believed him absolutely, after all, he was a grown-up, he knew these things. I told all my friends, and they believed it as well. It was some years before the penny dropped, and I realised it was indeed unlucky to be run over, on Friday or any other day.

When the war started, I was evacuated from London with my school, and never saw him again.

I didn't see much of my paternal grandparents in my younger years, as there had been some sort of rift, but this was eventually patched up, and I got to know them and my Dad's two unmarried sisters, who lived at home. But this was cut short when my grandmother and two aunts were killed in an air raid. They lived

opposite a park in which there was an air raid shelter. On this evening, when the air raid warning sounded, Grandma and aunts said to Granddad, "Come on, Dad, we're going to the shelter." But he refused, saying if he was to die, he'd rather do it in his own home. As Grandma and the aunts reached the entrance to the shelter, the bomb fell, and they were killed. Granddad, at home, was safe.

He came to live with us after the war. It worked out pretty well. We had a dog called Sammy, and he and Granddad took to each other. Every morning, he took Sammy out for a walk. We thought this was great, it gave Granddad exercise and an occupation, and saved us the chore of taking Sammy out. One day, Granddad was ill in bed, and I took Sammy for his walk. Just around the corner was a pub, and as we came to the open door, Sammy dragged me inside. Three men were sitting at a table, and seeing the dog, said, "It's Sammy, but where's Jack?" (My grandfather.) Now we understood why the morning walks were popular.

I didn't really know either of my grandfathers well, and now I wish that I had.

Joyce Chapman

Book Review

'*True Stories*' by Inga Clendinnen, is published from her Boyer Lectures, delivered in 1999. Inga Clendinnen is a member of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and talks with passion, about good history and its importance – good history where each side acknowledges the truth of stories different from their own preferred versions. She was shocked by the Prime Minister's 'white out' of our history concerning Aboriginal people. 'What Howard wanted, transparently, was a simple tale of triumphs of the Anglo-Celts over deserts and empty places, ignoring the mosaic of different peoples we have always been, ignoring our first people. He wanted bad history.' This is an excellent book. Read it, lend it to friends and give it to sceptics. Inga Clendinnen also wrote '*Reading the Holocaust*'.

Joan Johns

NOTICE

**Come to
The Indigenous and Refugee Women's
Human Rights Court**

Through personal testimony, song, poetry and ceremony, indigenous and refugee women will tell their own stories about the failure of the current human rights system.

You are invited to listen, support and to celebrate!

Two sessions: 9.30 - 4pm and 5.30 - 9.30.

Tuesday 4 December

Lecture Theatre 5B.1.11
Building B, Markets Campus UTS,
1-59 Quay St Ultimo.
(Opp Paddy's Market) \$10/\$5

Platform for Action
Launches its
Success Report
which provides detailed
coverage of the second year
of the Pfa 3-year plan.

9.30 for 10

Wednesday 12 December

Mechanics School of Arts
2/280 Pitt Street, Sydney
RSVP Emma Jobson
2986 3860

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
PEACE RALLY

Sunday, 9 December

12 noon

Hyde Park North (Archibald Fountain)

then march to Festival against War and Racism

2pm Belmore Park (opposite Central station)

For more info: 0407 114 762 or 0408 619 152

Organised by Network Opposing War and Racism

(NO WaR) Sydney

WELLNESS AT RYDE
Join older women for

- ◆ **Feldenkrais**
- ◆ **Morning Tea**
- ◆ **Discussion**

10 am to 12 noon

St Columbs
Cr Bellevue and Dixon
Avenue, West Ryde.
Enquiries to Joan 9858 3222
or Cara 9926 6951

corks corks corks corks corks

Please save your bottle corks and put them in the desk drawer marked 'CORKS' in the meeting room at 87. The Girl Guides collect them and they are recycled into cork tiles, mats, etc.

Thank you

To all those members who have made donations – they are very much appreciated.

Ernes Solari, Membership Volunteer

Bequests to the Older Women's Network

If you would like to include a bequest to OWN in your will, the following options will guide you in its wording. Please specify which Older Women's Network you wish to be the recipient of your gift: the Older Women's Network NSW or the Older Women's Network Sydney

Option No. 1 I devise the sum of \$to the Older Women Network for the general purpose of the Older Women's Network OR for the specific purpose of such purpose being consistent with the aims and objectives of the Older Women's Network, to be administered by the Older Women's Network.

Option No 2 (for a proportional bequest) I give to the Older Women's Network for its general purposes or the specific purpose of % of my estate (or% of the rest of my estate).

The gift you make to the Older Women's Network will be an enduring record of your generosity.

BOARD

***OWN Matters* in Audio**

We are currently exploring the possibility of offering *OWN Matters* on audio cassette at no extra charge. We hope to be able to offer 90-minute cassettes playable on any cassette player to women with dimming sight so that they have the opportunity to go on reading our lovely newsletter as the years go by.

Margaret Sargent

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by Zelda D'Aprano \$21.95

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Lost The research paper on incontinence has taken a walk from the OWN office.
Can we have it back, please?

FREE

Crime Prevention for Seniors

A Guide to Personal and Financial Safety, published by the Dept. of Health and Aged Care with assistance from OWN NSW and COTA.

Phone 9247 7046 for a copy.

Deafness Resource Guide

A complete guide to deafness-related products such as books, CD-ROMS, TTYs, education material, loop systems, decoders, alarms, videos, devices to assist hearing and much more ...

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**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**