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LAUNCHING PREVENTING VIOLENCE TOGETHER 2030

Women's Health West, as lead partner in the Preventing Violence Together Partnership, were excited to welcome dignitaries, partners and community members to launch the partnership's new strategy in August.

Above: Cr Sandra Wilson, mayor of Hobsons Bay, with Chris Eddy, CEO of Hobsons Bay City Council, at the PVT 2030 breakfast launch event.

Stephanie Rich Team Leader – Prevention of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is rooted in gender-based power inequalities between women and men. We know that by tackling the drivers of violence against women, namely gender inequality, we can prevent violence before it occurs.

In the western region of Melbourne, we work together to end violence against women through the Preventing Violence Together partnership. Led by Women's Health West, this is a regional partnership made up of 19 organisations, including local councils, community and health organisations, Victoria University and the Western Bulldogs.

On 15 August 2017, Women's Health West

were delighted to welcome dignitaries, senior leaders from across Melbourne's west, and members of the Preventing Violence Together partnership to the Newport Substation for the launch of the partnership's new strategy.

The strategy, 'Preventing Violence Together 2030: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women' (referred to as Preventing Violence Together 2030), will guide the work of the partnership by outlining actions and a shared vision. The vision is that 'women and girls across Melbourne's west live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect'.

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A WORD FROM THE CEO



Farewelling a fearless advocate; welcoming a new strategy

Dr Robyn Gregory CEO, Women's Health West

It is poignant timing that the theme of this issue of the WHW newsletter is prevention of violence against women. In August we held a wonderful celebratory launch of Preventing Violence Together 2030, a new regional strategy that is explored in more detail on the cover of this edition. Only days after the launch, however, we faced shock and deep sadness following the death of Fiona Richardson MP; an extraordinarily dedicated and tireless advocate for prevention work.

Minister Richardson was a fierce and fearless campaigner for women and for victim/survivors of family violence. Minister Richardson's legacy is enormous, and we will strive to make true her vision of a world where women and children live free from discrimination and violence.

A key way we work to do this is through our role as the lead organisation of the Preventing Violence Together partnership. We know Minister Richardson would have been

extremely proud of the new strategy (indeed, she was due to speak at the launch event before taking extended leave due to her illness), and we also know that she would have wanted us to uphold her legacy and continue to advocate for funding for prevention work.

Minister Richardson was committed to the establishment of an independent prevention agency to drive an enduring focus on the prevention of violence against women. In light of this, the chair of our board of directors, Samantha Merrigan, recently wrote to Premier Daniel Andrews outlining how proud we are to share this commitment; calling for government to commit to funding the agency so work can continue to realise the minister's vision. Minister Richardson's legacy is enormous and we will strive to make true her vision of a world where women and girls have equal status,

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Women's Health West acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the people of the Kulin Nation, and we pay our respects to Elders and community members past and present. We express solidarity with the ongoing struggle for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty and the recognition of past injustices. We express our hope for reconciliation and justice.

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About Women's Health West

Women's Health West is one of Victoria's only organisations that provides services and programs that encompass every level of response to family violence – from primary prevention, to intervention and response.

Our work has actively contributed to improving the health, safety and wellbeing of women and their children in the western metropolitan region of Melbourne since 1988. Our work covers the local government areas of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham. Our work covers:

Prevention

- Prevention of violence and discrimination
- Mental health and wellbeing

- Sexual and reproductive health

Intervention

- 24 hour crisis response
- Risk assessments
- Housing and refuge

Response

- Case management
- Safety and security support
- Children's counselling



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IS GOOD MEDICINE

Women's Health West's Sunrise groups are for women in Melbourne's west who are living with a disability, who want to feel connected and meet other like-minded women. We recently had a chat with one of the group's members about her experiences with Sunrise and her involvement with her community.

Gert Geyer Communications Worker
Tess Stewart-Moore Health Promotion Project Coordinator

Vanessa is part of Women Health West's Sunrise group, a group of women with a disability who meet fortnightly in Melton. Since joining the group, Vanessa has been invited to get involved with a number of other community programs and projects in the western region. Not surprisingly, she just keeps saying yes.

Vanessa has four kids under 10, a dry sense of humour, and a cane nicknamed 'Wally' that she uses to navigate her Melton neighbourhood. Being blind certainly doesn't stop Vanessa from getting involved in her community. She has been attending the Melton Sunrise group since September 2016; she joined because she had been looking for a way to regain her independence.

'I've been a mum at home for the last ten years, now my baby has started kinder I wanted to do something for myself,' Vanessa says. 'I thought to myself: I don't know where, but I'm going to do something and I don't know how, but I'm just going to do it. And I started by joining Sunrise.'

Sunrise has been running since 1991. Over 80 women who live in Melbourne's west come together every fortnight in groups taking place in Laverton, Melton, Wyndham Vale and Sunshine.

Vanessa says that even when she's had a bad week or day, Sunrise is a welcome interruption. 'I like to go there and make them [the other women in the group] feel like there's nothing wrong, to just keep going. We all have down days but I don't want to be the one to make you feel sad - I want to try and pick you up and that's what helps me too.'

Vanessa tells the story of how she

knew Sunrise was the right place for her: 'I'd been there about a month, and one of the ladies turned to me and said, 'you know what Vanessa? You're our good medicine' and when they said that, it helped me.'

Since she joined the Sunrise group, Vanessa has branched out further and increased her community participation through another of Women's Health West's programs - she took part in Our Community, Our Rights in mid-2017, a human rights advocacy program. Our Community, Our Rights was delivered this year with Pasifika and Polynesian women; the program runs with a different culturally-specific group of women each time. Vanessa said the program had helped her to 'learn more about the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. I didn't know much about my rights until then. We had information provided firsthand from Centrelink and we had lawyers from immigration visit'.

While Vanessa feels she's gained a huge amount from both the Sunrise and Our Community, Our Rights programs, she told us there is some way to go, especially considering what women with a disability are up against. Through her involvement in Women with Disabilities Victoria's Enabling Women program as well, she's witnessed just how prevalent discrimination can be.

'A lot of the women want to get back into the workforce but because they have disabilities they are being discriminated against. Women with a disability are seen as low down on a scale, and it's sad.' Even Vanessa, with all her exuberance and good humour, isn't immune to this discrimination. 'Sometimes my self-esteem drops, and



Gert Geyer

Vanessa, pictured at Women's Health West's offices with her cane, 'Wally'.

I get scared to ask people for help. Sometimes out in public, while I can't see, I just feel stared at', she says.

But ever-resilient Vanessa won't let strangers' stares stop her. The world holds too many opportunities; there's an advocacy group to join, a band to go and listen to, a Costco adventure to take the kids on.

Vanessa has some very practical advice for anyone wanting to get more involved in their community, but may not be sure where to start. 'Don't think about it, just do it', she says. 'I know we're all different but just start at the bottom. Ring your local council and ask how you can get involved.'

Sunrise women's groups are for women of all ages who have a disability, want to meet other women and feel connected. For more information, contact Tess at Women's Health West on **(03) 9689 9588** or email **theresa@whwest.org.au**. ■

A WORD FROM THE CEO

Farewelling a fearless advocate; welcoming a new strategy

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rights, opportunities, representation and respect.

Further to this, Women's Health West are busy planning and organising for this year's 16 Days Activist Challenge. We undertake this yearly challenge as part of the wider, internationally-held '16 days of activism to eliminate violence against women', which takes place between 25 November and 10 December every year.

We are looking forward to the challenge being bigger and better than ever – read more about what's in store on page 15.

This edition of the newsletter also features a 'day in the life' of our Aboriginal family violence case managers, Joan and Tracy. This piece highlights the valuable partnership these two workers bring to Women's Health West, their ability to draw on their different experiences,

and their dedication to supporting Aboriginal women in our community who are experiencing family violence. We're keen to share more stories about our committed, hardworking team and the work they do in the community – look out for subsequent instalments.

We're also delighted to share stories about some of our recent health promotion programs – the financial literacy courses we run with newly-arrived women to help

them navigate Australian financial systems, and the Lead On Again leadership program for young migrant and refugee women, which is currently recruiting for the next course.

As many of these articles show, we will certainly be working hard – now and well into the future – to make Minister Richardson proud by achieving safe, equitable and just communities for women and children in the west. ■

BEHIND THE SCENES

MEET THE STAFF



Sophie Mast
Project Manager, Keeping Safe Together

After completing my bachelor degree in social work, I worked in the community sector for eight and a half years, primarily with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people and communities. My previous roles have included complex case management, women's financial literacy work, and community development. In the last five years, I have worked in leadership roles managing CALD family and newly-arrived settlement programs.



Shelley Tait
Health Promotion Project Coordinator, Preventing Violence Together

Before joining Women's Health West, I enjoyed a career break and spent time travelling Europe, the Americas and living in the Canadian snowfields, working as a nanny and ski instructor. Prior to travelling, I studied a bachelor of health sciences and worked in community health and local government settings, focusing on food security, community safety and women's leadership. I am most passionate about providing community with

opportunities to empower themselves and others to bring about positive change. Outside of work, I love to visit my family and friends, cook delicious 'foodie' meals at home on a shoestring budget, sing and work in the garden.

Tracy
Aboriginal Family Violence Case Manager

After managing a ladies' clothing store for a few years, I started my own family day care business in Chiltern. I grew up with my dad and step mum on a dairy farm with six siblings. For as long as I can remember my parents took in welfare children; we grew up seeing children that had been through things I could not even imagine. I always knew I would end up working in an industry where I could help and empower people.

In 2011 I completed a Cert III in community services, while undertaking voluntary work at Betty's Place, a women's refuge. I was offered employment and stayed there for another three years. During that time I went on to complete a diploma in community services. In 2013, my CEO suggested I complete my Masters of Public Health at Deakin University, as she believed it would help both myself and the community. The thought of university was daunting, however I completed my degree in October last year. My passion is family violence support with particular interest in health promotion, and education for our younger generation in all primary schools. I have really enjoyed my short time at Women's Health West and look forward to what challenges and career advancements are in store.

FINDING OUR WAY IN A NEW COUNTRY

Women's Health West's Financial Literacy Program is designed to build newly-arrived women's knowledge, skills and confidence to navigate money systems in Australia.

Kirsten Campbell Health Promotion Coordinator

In 2017 Women's Health West, in partnership with Spectrum migrant resource centre in Sunshine, implemented two financial literacy programs; with Chin women from Myanmar and Assyrian women from Iraq. The programs were designed following community consultation to respond to needs identified by members of these communities and service providers working with them. The programs brought together a range of specialists to facilitate sessions with the groups.

Chin women

Between May and June 2017, Women's Health West and Spectrum brought together 15 women from Chin State in Myanmar. In the first workshop, we asked the women to discuss how managing money in Myanmar is different to Australia. The women's responses illuminated stark differences between the countries. Some of their comments are in the box on the right.

These responses alone indicate so many different challenges for women to navigate as they settle in Australia. We brought together local service providers from Centrelink, banks, WEstjustice (community legal service), financial counsellors, SaverPlus and others to facilitate workshops with the group, and to help the women feel more confident and safe to access services, ask questions, and get the help they need.



Chin women participants in the Financial Literacy Program

Kelly Ventress

At the end of the program, women spoke of feeling more determined, more able to make decisions, more confident, and more able to plan ahead. One woman spoke of feeling more confident in her understanding and questioning of financial matters, rather than relying on her husband to explain it to her: 'I hear and see for myself. I can look through and understand bills, ask questions, look at bank statements, know about different services and where to get help'.

Assyrian women

'Everything's different in Australia'
— Assyrian Financial Literacy Program participant

Between August and September 2017, we brought together 35 Assyrian women from Iraq, again forming a program based on needs that they (and service providers who work with this community) identified during consultations. This resulted in a program that was quite different to the Chin program: the women's experiences in their home country were different, and their settlement challenges are different. While we

still had facilitators from Centrelink, WEstjustice, the banking sector, and financial counselling, women were very keen to know more about employment and how they could successfully find jobs. We therefore spent a day together with Westgate Community Initiatives Group, learning more about resume writing, interview skills and how to access support to find employment.

During the evaluation of the program, all of the women said they felt more confident to access these services, and demonstrated an increased understanding of how to manage things like contracts, bills, and Centrelink. All of the participants indicated that while the program was very useful, they would like to learn more, and develop their skills further. Spectrum will continue to work with this community to support their learning and settlement.

To find out more about Women's Health West's Financial Literacy Program or other work we undertake to support refugee and migrant women's economic participation, visit www.whwest.org.au or email kirsten@whwest.org.au. ■

In Myanmar

'There are no banks in village areas where participants are from'

'There is not always enough money to save, just enough to get by day by day'

'Money is usually kept at home or in a box, there is not enough to loan to others'

'There are no formal bills in the village'

In Australia

'It is more equal in Australia in regards to who manages money between couples'

'Most of the time, men find work first'

'There are more bills to pay; internet, phone, registration, car, water'

'[It is] difficult to pay bills when they come all at once'



All photos: Chloe May

Above: Representatives of the Preventing Violence Together Partnership with the Governor of Victoria and local mayors

Below: Attendee reading the new strategy

The vision is that 'women and girls across Melbourne's west live free from violence and discrimination and have equal status, rights, opportunities, representation and respect.'

The governor's speech was personal, insightful and moving. She shared her own reflections on family violence, speaking about her significant experience working in the judiciary and legal sectors, her concern at the rate of violence against women in Australia and in turn the growing awareness of the problem of family violence. The governor also congratulated the Preventing Violence Together partnership for the important, collaborative work it is undertaking to prevent violence against women in the west.

Gail O'Donnell, the chair of Preventing Violence Together and Executive Officer of HealthWest Primary Care Partnership, provided an insight into the processes and principles that informed the development of Preventing Violence Together 2030. Gail gave an overview of the long-term goals of Preventing Violence Together 2030, which include:

1. Eliminate the norms, practices and structures that condone men's violence against women.

Continued from page 1

Launching Preventing Violence Together 2030

The strategy was launched at the spectacular Newport Substation, a wonderful and atmospheric venue. The event was attended by over 70 guests including a number of local mayors, councillors, CEOs and senior executives from the partnership and beyond. The event also brought together a range of experts and practitioners in the field of prevention of violence against women from across Victoria.

Women's Health West's CEO, Dr Robyn Gregory, hosted the event. We were also honoured to have the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, and Marsha Thomson, MP for Footscray, speaking at the event.

Robyn got proceedings underway by providing an overview of the partnership's history, noting that when Preventing Violence Together was originally launched in 2010, it was the first primary prevention regional partnership designed to prevent violence against women in Victoria. She highlighted the partnership's many achievements to date, including being awarded best project in the 'building health through community and local government' category in the 25th Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Awards. Robyn also covered the successful implementation of the United project, which was one of eight regional projects funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation's Reducing Violence against Women and their Children grants program, which ran from 2012 to 2015.

Marcia Thomson MP gave a thoughtful, heartfelt keynote address, providing an overview of the state government's work and commitment to redressing violence against women. She spoke about the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the launch of 'Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy' and 'Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women'.

The Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, officially launched Preventing Violence Together 2030.





Above: Hon Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria

Above right: Dr Robyn Gregory opening the event

Right: Melton mayor Cr Sophie Ramsey with Jane Sultana and Dorothy Perry of Melton Women Making it Happen.



All photos: Chloe May

2. Promote and support women's decision-making and independence.
3. Challenge rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity.
4. Strengthen and promote positive, equal, gender-equitable, respectful relationships.
5. Normalise gender equality in theory, practice and public discourse.

Jane Sultana, from the 'Women Making It Happen' community group, facilitated by Djerrirwarrah Health Services and Melton City Council, also gave a presentation of their project. Jane did a fantastic job of sharing how this group of 16 women have taken up leadership roles in their local community, to raise awareness and challenge violence against women.

The strategy and its development

Preventing Violence Together 2030 builds on the momentum and achievements of the first regional plan (which ran from 2010 to 2016). The strategy draws on key evidence and theoretical frameworks to ensure a strategic and evidence-based approach to preventing men's violence against women.

It was developed following consultation with partners, service providers and communities of interest, to ensure the strategy is relevant and tailored to the unique needs and

context of Melbourne's western region. Preventing Violence Together 2030 also seeks to align with key state and federal government policy frameworks and platforms related to advancing gender equality and preventing violence against women.

Preventing Violence Together 2030 includes a variety of mutually reinforcing strategies, which will be implemented within partner organisations and in collaboration with communities. All actions in the strategy are evidence-based, and work to redress the gendered drivers of men's violence against women.

Next steps for the strategy

The Preventing Violence Together partnership has already begun the work of developing its first annual action plan. This will set out partners' commitments to implementing Preventing Violence Together 2030 for the coming year. The

partnership has also begun the process of developing an evaluation framework for the strategy, to help measure its collective efforts.

Preventing Violence Together 2030 marks an increased commitment across partner organisations to undertake the long-term work required to end men's violence against women.

Our partners and our community across Melbourne's west both have a key role to play in preventing violence against women and advancing gender equity, and we look forward to working with you.

For more information about the Preventing Violence Together partnership and how you can get involved, please contact Stephanie Rich by email on stephanier@whwest.org.au.

Preventing Violence Together 2030 is available to download from www.whwest.org.au/resources. ■



'We've worked hard to build trust in the community'

Tracy

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Women's Health West's Aboriginal family violence case managers

Women's Health West currently employs two Aboriginal family violence case managers, Joan and Tracy. They work to provide culturally-sensitive services and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in Melbourne's west who are experiencing family violence.

Kelly Ventress Manager – Communications

Mondays are a busy day for Joan and Tracy; it's an outreach day for them, when they are based at the Gathering Place in Werribee. The relationship with the Gathering Place is hugely important in enabling us to provide a culturally-safe and responsive service to the Aboriginal community. Joan and Tracy's clients today will be a mixture of drop-ins and pre-arranged meetings with women who have contacted Women's Health West by phone. They might also see clients who have been referred to us after seeing a doctor at Gathering Place.

The women Joan and Tracy work to support often hear about our services by word of mouth in the community, and the number of women they support varies from day to day. Aboriginal women who are experiencing family violence can also access our Aboriginal case management support by phoning Women's Health West's Footscray office. Women can meet with Joan and Tracy there, or other locations across the west where they are most comfortable, if they prefer.

On this particular Monday, Joan and Tracy meet with a woman named Tricia* and her daughter, Leah*. Leah was experiencing family violence and had come along with her mum to meet with Joan and Tracy and find out more about accessing support and advice. Tricia told Joan and Tracy that she knew of a number of other women in her community in need of support like this. While it's terrible that this is the case, Joan and Tracy are glad that they're able to provide support where and when it is most needed.

Joan and Tracy conducted an intake meeting with Leah and her mother, in order to assess the level of safety and risk in Leah's current situation, and to work towards developing a case plan to support her safety and recovery. There is no wait list to access this support – which means that right from the following session, Tracy and Joan can take into account Leah's needs and start enacting a case plan to support her. They can provide case management support to women like Leah for as long as they need it, or for as long as women remain engaged with Women's Health West.

Developing a relationship of trust with the Aboriginal community in the west is a key aspect of the work Joan and Tracy do. Over the next few months, Joan or Tracy will work to develop a relationship with Leah, and will tailor the support they provide to her, based on her needs. Joan and Tracy approach working with Aboriginal women flexibly, and they'll adapt how they work with different women as their relationships and the woman's needs develop and change over time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience higher rates and more severe forms of family violence; they are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than other women in Australia. The recent Royal Commission into Family Violence highlighted a number of reasons why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not access support services, which include a fear of the consequences of reporting, lack of access to support

**Names of clients have been changed for safety reasons.*



services, discrimination and racism. The commission highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should have the opportunity to participate in family violence prevention and response initiatives through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. If people from these communities seek services through non-Aboriginal controlled organisations, such organisations should be capable of providing culturally-safe services.

Women's Health West recognises that Aboriginal women have the right to seek support from Aboriginal organisations and can refer women to Elizabeth Morgan House or the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) for family violence case management support. However, if women choose to seek support from WHW, our Aboriginal family violence case managers will work with women and their children to develop case plans. They will continue to support Leah as her case manager, but will link her in with the support she needs from other organisations. For example, Joan and Tracy have worked to build strong partnerships with both Koori and mainstream services, such as Relationships Australia, Anglicare and Odyssey House (a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service), amongst others. They have also been able to successfully advocate to the Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection, housing services and the police on behalf of the women they are supporting.

The ongoing case management support Joan and Tracy provide to

women like Leah varies depending on their individual needs. They recognise the ways that Aboriginal women prefer to be contacted (many don't like to take calls from an unknown number, and so Joan or Tracy will text or call from a mobile instead). The frequency of their contact with Leah will vary depending on her needs and level of risk too.

Joan and Tracy bring different strengths, experience and skills to their work and both will draw on these and work together to ensure women get the support they need. Joan and Tracy have observed that they are in a unique position as Aboriginal workers at Women's Health West, a mainstream organisation. This enables them to provide a level of anonymity to Aboriginal women, who might be worried about bumping into other community members, or that others may find out what services they are accessing. Joan and Tracy are clear from the outset when they meet with Leah and Tricia that confidentiality will be upheld at all times, and that they understand how crucial this can be for the women they are supporting.

Joan went on to provide case management support to Leah for four months, offering housing options and advocacy, court support and flexible support package grants to allow her to move on to a safe, secure life, free from violence. Despite the fact that Joan and Tracy are incredibly busy and often supporting women who are experiencing trauma or violence, they work to bring positivity to their roles, build camaraderie with women, and add in a bit of humour too, whenever they can. ■



Illustrations: Isis and Pluto

To find out more about Women's Health West's Aboriginal family violence services, phone **(03) 9689 9588**.



YOUNG WOMEN LEADING THE WAY

Women's Health West are currently recruiting for the next iteration of Lead On Again, our successful leadership program for refugee and migrant young women in the west.

Kelly Ventress Manager – Communications
Kirsten Campbell Health Promotion Coordinator

Women, particularly women from diverse backgrounds, continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Lead On Again is a program designed to enable young women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to recognise their strengths, develop new skills and connections, and become active community leaders. Women's Health West have run the program since 2006, and it has been run in partnership with the Western Young People's Independent Network (WYPIN) since 2007.

Lead On Again is a fun and supportive program. Together Women's Health West and WYPIN encourage young women to make friends while participating in workshops, learning about event management and being supported to participate in community and leadership activities. Following an

interview process, young women participate in a week-long series of workshops in the January holidays. Participants are supported to plan and implement their own community event or activity several weeks after the workshops. Ongoing mentoring and support to access leadership opportunities is provided by WYPIN.

The 2017 program ran with a wonderfully talented and enthusiastic group of eleven young women from Somalia, Kenya, India, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Australia and Vietnam, who were living, working or studying in Melbourne's west.

The workshop component of the program kicked off with sessions about leadership values and styles, team building, self-confidence, public speaking and event planning. Participants said they appreciated

that the workshops took on a broader approach than just leadership skills; with sessions covering sexual health, body image, mental wellbeing and stress, story-telling and human rights.

Participants were supported to write and tell their own stories during the workshop phase, and to plan and implement an event. Instead of planning and running their own event, this year the young women were invited to prepare a spoken word piece and perform it at the Women of the World (WOW) festival at the Footscray Community Arts Centre.

Young women took part in preparation and rehearsal sessions with professional spoken word artists Alia Gabres and Mahogany Browne. These artists worked with the young women to hone their skills in developing and delivering their pieces to a live audience, and were able to share their common experiences of settling in another country and of being women of colour in a white-dominated society.

Six of the young women performed at the festival, and their performances were uplifting, inspiring, moving and thought-provoking. Their pieces touched on themes including racism,



violence against women, and pursuing careers in male-dominated industries. The performances were incredibly well-received, and the young women involved described the opportunity as 'scary but amazing'! They reflected on how being involved would help them with future public speaking engagements, to overcome fears, and enable them to feel more confident to tell their stories.

Every young woman who took part in the 2017 Lead On Again program reported that they felt more confident and capable to exercise their leadership skills and participate as leaders in their community. They highlighted that they were better able to have conversations with a more diverse group of peers, had developed better communication skills and were more confident when speaking in public. After this positive experience of getting to know other young women from a range of backgrounds, they were even keen to try new food and new experiences!

Women's Health West documented this iteration of Lead On Again in a short film, which can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/leadonagainvideo>. ■



Participants on the 2017 Lead On Again program

The next Lead On Again program will begin with a six day workshop series over the summer holidays in 2017-18. If you'd like to find out more about the program and how to apply, please contact Kirsten Campbell on Kirsten@whwest.org.au.

'Since Lead On Again I have been selected as a house captain at my school, continued mentoring female students, and I have joined my local council committee. Lead On Again has assisted me to develop and expand on my communication, mentoring, leadership and public speaking skills. Through the opportunities and activities offered, I have become much more confident, and have come to believe that I really can do anything if I put my mind to it.'

'It was pretty nerve-wracking to speak in front of the group. However the general vibe from the audience was really warm and encouraging. I learnt everyone had a great story to tell and despite our different backgrounds, it was easy to relate to them all.'

'After Lead On Again, I have noticed that I am more willing to hold conversations with people and am curious yet understanding enough to know their story. This has increased the number and variety of people in my social group, helping me to become more patient and accepting.'

'I learned it's important for women, especially those with power or a platform to influence, to build other women. We must support and build each other.'

'Lead On Again helped me boost my confidence because I was exposed to so many new environments like the panel session, and the WOW performance. Also, talking to new people helped me with my communication skills.'



Pictured: Young women participating in the question web activity in July 2017



CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO CULTURES PROGRAM

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, INDEPENDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

The Caught Between Two Cultures (CBTC) program is designed to build young African women’s confidence and independence. It builds young women’s capacity to make informed decisions about their health, safety and wellbeing – now and into the future.

Ayaan Omar FARREP Health Promotion Worker

The CBTC program is tailored to the unique needs of women and girls affected by female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and works to create positive social change by building on the strengths of individual women and their communities.

Community consultations identified the need for a health and wellbeing program that was culturally-appropriate for young African women, enhanced sexual and reproductive health knowledge, and was delivered by someone who understood the needs of the community.

Fourteen young women attended the CBTC program in July 2017. It was run over seven days in the school/university holidays at the Phoenix Youth Hub in Footscray. The program was informed by community consultations, and was designed to:

- **Empower young African women to make informed decisions regarding their own sexual and reproductive health**
- **Develop young African women’s confidence, independence, leadership skills and pride in their African and Australian identities**
- **Promote attitudes and behaviours among young women that support and promote the elimination of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) for current and future generations**

As a result of the CBTC program, the young African women identified that they had considerably increased their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health topics (including contraception, STIs, pregnancy and informed consent) and also saw a significant improvement in their understanding of FGM/C.

The young women also identified the ongoing need for culturally-appropriate sexuality education. In the absence of comprehensive health information from school, some participants raised concerns about potential misinformation from their peers.

‘Honestly the whole sexual health thing, I learnt from my friends... not from school, not from anybody else older than me, it was always friends’
— Program participant (young African woman aged 19)

A key benefit of delivering a week-long program with a group of young African women is that it builds trust and their confidence to speak up, and creates a safe space to access information and seek support. Tailored, targeted sexuality education is therefore necessary to ensure the health gap decreases among this group of young people.



'I feel like the internet has really helped - going and googling and doing your own research takes courage in the sense that you have to be made aware of these things. You have to have exposure'

— Young African woman, 22

Young women expressed their new-found confidence to be a voice of information for younger women, including sisters, friends and other relatives.

'I guess it's up to us as the younger generation to speak about this topic and shed light on it so it's not as taboo. Because you're a woman you shouldn't feel shameful for something that can affect your health'

— Young African woman, 22

This successful program will continue to be delivered to young African women in the west. The next iteration of the program will take place in early 2018. To find out more, please contact shukria@whwest.org.au. ■

THE INAUGURAL AFRICAN DIASPORA WOMEN SUMMIT

Using an Inclusive Empowerment Approach

Women remain underrepresented in leadership, in the political sphere, and in other areas of life. For women of colour this gap is even wider. Women's Health West's deputy chair, Dr Mimmie Claudine Watts, discusses how the Inaugural African Diaspora Women Summit brought together a diverse range of voices to discuss this topic – and more.

Dr Mimmie Claudine Watts Women's Health West's deputy chair

Women of African ancestry in the diaspora have shared aspirations and desire recognition for their participation and inclusion. It is within this context that the Inaugural African Diaspora Women Summit was convened on the 26 and 27 June 2017 at the Victoria University Convention Centre in Melbourne.

The summit was directed at women of African ancestry, and was put together with the support of youth, service providers, academics, community members, and political leaders. It was designed to bring women of African ancestry together with these groups, to generate discussion, propose solutions, and develop strategies to enhance the inclusion and presence of women in leadership. The summit attendees also discussed and identified health issues pertinent to this group, and equally importantly, were able to meet and network with others working towards women's emancipation and gender equality.

The summit was held over two days, and its theme was 'celebrating African women, their voices'. Participants came from near and far, with attendees present from Africa, Europe and America, and the African diaspora in Australia was well represented, with attendees visiting from almost every state and territory. The summit pioneered an inclusive, mentoring-based approach. It was organised by a 12 person committee, which included representation from young people.

As the committee's chair, I wanted to ensure that young members of the committee were mentored during the process. Some of the young people involved were still at university,

and others were recent graduates; being part of the organisation of an international event was treated as a professional development opportunity for them.

Women from the diverse African diaspora led the 'women in leadership' session. Some of what was reflected on, acknowledged and debated by delegates was the diversity of the women present, their shared challenges as women of colour and as high achievers, and a common feeling that there is a lack of recognition for their skills and aspirations.

Women entrepreneurs present spoke of their experiences in a male dominated field. Others spoke of race and identity, self-belief and how their failures had all contributed to their achievements and successes.

During the women's leadership and entrepreneurship sessions, women leaders shared their journeys. They spoke of how reaching some of the lowest points in their lives had made them 'take the pain and direct it to doing good for others'.

The summit was a great success, and fostered numerous positive conversations. At the end of the summit, there was a call from delegates for there to be future summits, with the suggestion that these could be held in different states in Australia – and further into the future, in different parts of the world.

This summit brought together many professional women leaders, young women, community leaders of African ancestry, and supporters, with a shared passion and vision. It was diverse and inclusive.

To find out more about the summit, please visit www.africandiasporawomensummit.org.au. ■

MORE THAN JUST HOUSING

A holistic approach to family violence recovery

Women's Health West's housing team have recently changed their name to reflect that their work encompasses more than managing our refuge accommodation. The team is now called the client and residency management (CARM) team, reflecting that their work involves providing case management, and a more holistic approach, alongside supporting women's housing needs.

Eloise Tregonning Team Leader – CARM

Escaping family violence is one of the biggest contributors to women's and children's homelessness in Victoria. Women and children often remain living in a violent home situation because they don't have access to alternative accommodation. The primary focus of Women's Health West's CARM team is to provide women and their children with a safe refuge when they are at risk of imminent harm.

Women's Health West manage two kinds of supported accommodation in Melbourne's west. One property is a secure refuge, offering a communal living space (which can accommodate up to four families). This is called Joan's Place, in honour of the late, great premier of Victoria, Joan Kirner. Women's Health West's staff are outposted to Joan's Place, which has an office on site. In addition, we have two supported accommodation properties, which can accommodate

one family per property, or two single women, dependent upon need. Both properties are high security premises, and the length of residency is up to six weeks.

The support we provide doesn't just stop at safe accommodation, however – all women staying at our properties are allocated a family violence case manager, and children are allocated a family violence children's case manager. A case management approach is taken for women who are staying in our crisis accommodation services, to support them with counselling, court visits, and whatever they might need when moving into medium or long term accommodation.

The team's case managers work with women to develop safety plans, and a collaborative approach is taken to ensure women are central to planning the next steps for themselves and their children. There are primarily two main goals for a short-term intervention for women accessing the CARM team's support. First, that women and their children are able to move into medium or long term accommodation, whether

that is transitional housing, back into the private rental market, community housing, or back into the family home if it is safe to do so. Second – but equally importantly – is ensuring the physical and mental health and wellbeing needs of the family are responded to, with referrals made to other teams within Women's Health West, or to other agencies, for support such as counselling.

The team's children's family violence case manager works to support the physical and psychological health and safety of all babies, infants, children and young adults in our crisis accommodation. She links families into maternal child health services, and liaises with and advocates on behalf of women to protective services, relevant government departments and community health services

to make sure that the relationship between the mother and her child/children is maintained.

The CARM team also work in partnership with Women's Health West's children's counsellors to

respond to the emotional needs of the children accessing our accommodation

services. The CARM team

recognises how vital it is to go beyond providing safe accommodation, and ensure that we support children to recover from their experience of trauma and loss following family violence.

Our case managers also work closely with magistrates courts across the western region, ensuring that women's rights are upheld in court, and working with women to support them to understand legal processes and their responsibilities. They also work to take into account the cultural needs

In 2016-17 we provided 75 women and 52 children with crisis accommodation and support to escape and recover from the impacts of family violence.



of women and children. Women's Health West has two Aboriginal family violence case managers (read more about their work on pages 8 and 9). The team also has a CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) case manager. They work to ensure that a culturally-safe and sensitive approach is taken to working with women from diverse backgrounds.

The biggest challenge for the team is the lack of appropriate, affordable, safe and longer term housing options for women who are escaping violence. The team recently welcomed a housing case manager, and a key part of her role is working with the other case managers to identify exit points for women and their children. The housing case manager liaises with local housing providers, cooperative housing services, the Office of Housing, and advocates on behalf of women to these services.

Demand for our services is always high, and continues to grow; in 2016-17 we provided 75 women and 52 children with crisis accommodation and support to escape and recover from the impacts of family violence.

If you'd like to make a donation towards repair work and cosmetic improvements at our refuge properties, we would be extremely grateful. You can do so at www.whwest.org.au/donations.

Extreme weather recently caused a flood at Women's Health West's refuge, putting two of the family rooms out of action temporarily, while repairs took place and the rooms dried out. In light of this, we're launching an appeal to help with repairs and cosmetic improvements at the refuge. Please donate if you can via www.whwest.org.au/donations



Take the challenge to prevent violence against women in the west

Kelly Ventress Manager – Communications

Women's Health West have launched this year's 16 Days Activist Challenge!

Each year around the world, people take action to eliminate gender-based violence during the 16 Days of Activism. The 16 Day period runs from 25 November to 10 December. Women's Health West are once again organising the 16 Days Activist Challenge, as part of our role in the Preventing Violence Together partnership (see our cover story for more).

The challenge has been a great success for the past couple of years. In 2016, over 200 activists pledged to undertake a total of 1500 actions. This year we're determined to make it bigger, better, and more impactful than ever, and thanks to the Victorian State Government for its support via a Victoria Against Violence grant.

How to get involved

It's easy to join others taking action to end violence against women by signing up for the challenge. As a 16 Days Activist, you'll be pledging to undertake actions to promote gender equity and prevent violence against women throughout the 16 Days of Activism. There is a different suggested action for each day of the challenge, or you can create actions of your own.

The actions are designed to be achievable, thought-provoking, practical – and fun, too. The actions are pitched at different levels depending on the amount of time and effort you're able to put into it. This year, we've consulted with

partners and community members to refine and update the actions. You can check them out and sign up on the 16 Days Activist Challenge website at <http://16daysactivist.whwest.org.au>.

How do these actions prevent violence against women?

The idea behind the challenge is that many small actions, when combined, contribute to raising awareness, starting important conversations and supporting community advocacy - in this case, by challenging common myths and assumptions about gender and violence against women. That said, we know campaigns like this are only part of the solution, so the 16 Days Activist Challenge website lists additional tips to support you to expand your activism and continue it beyond the 16 day period.

Sign up now open!

The 16 Days Activist Challenge is open for sign ups, and it only takes moments to pledge to undertake actions – you can choose as many or as few as you like. We'll be sending out email updates to remind you about the actions, and suggesting things you can do or read to complete them.

It takes only a couple of minutes to sign up. You're also welcome to sign up to the challenge as a group – why not spread the word and get your family, colleagues and friends involved? **Find out more and pledge to make violence against women disappear at <http://16daysactivist>.**

'We need accessible ways to bring people into the conversation about ending violence against women, and to help show people how they can take action. This challenge does just that.'

— 16 Days Activist Challenge participant, 2016

WOMEN'S HEALTH WEST

PRESENTS THE...

2017 AGM and annual conversation

‘why be happy when
you could be normal?’

...PERSPECTIVES ON FEMINISM AND DISABILITY

FEATURING THE FOLLOWING SPEAKERS...

CARLY FINDLAY ... writer, speaker & appearance activist

JAX ‘JACKI’ BROWN ... disability and LGBTIQ rights activist

LEAH VAN POPPEL ... manager, Youth Disability Advocacy Service

KERAN HOWE ... as chair ... executive director, Women with Disabilities Vic.

WITH MC NELLY THOMAS

join us at the...

FOOTSCRAY COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE
in the PERFORMANCE SPACE
at 45 MORELAND STREET, FOOTSCRAY



on...

WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER, 2017
PLEASE ARRIVE AT 4PM FOR A 4:30PM START

RSVP FOR YOUR FREE TICKET: <http://bit.ly/2017WHWAGM>

further info...

EMAIL: INFO@WHWEST.ORG.AU | PHONE: 03 9689 9588
WEB: WWW.WHWEST.ORG.AU