

Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.

Annual Report

2007—2008

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Chair's Report

It has been a year of intensive work for the board and staff of the Women's Centre for Health Matters. At the start of the year the board resolved that we would strengthen our governance processes and develop a new strategic plan for implementation in July this year. Both goals have been achieved.

During the 2006-07 financial year, the board reviewed the WCHM strategic plan and commissioned several reports, the first on needs assessment and analysis and the second on capacity building for women's support groups and organisations, to assist in setting the centre's strategic directions. The receipt of those reports, along with an evaluation of current programs, allowed us to begin a thorough strategic planning process in January this year. The new strategic plan was adopted by board at its April meeting, focusing on three key areas of work – unmet need, social isolation and social connectedness, and increasing women's access to gender-sensitive health and wellbeing information.

There is strong evidence pointing to the

negative effects of factors such as poverty, lack of relevant information, and social isolation on women's health and wellbeing. Therefore, WCHM believes that the focus on these three key areas of work will further assist women in enhancing their health and wellbeing. It will also assist health related services in their responsiveness to ACT women's needs.

WCHM has also developed a new set of guiding statements, including mission, vision and values. Our mission encapsulates the work we do - "Empowering women to enhance their health and wellbeing". Using research, community development and advocacy, WCHM will build knowledge about women's health needs. We will continue to assist women's access to a broad range of health related information and advocate for responsive and flexible health related services.

During the year WCHM has published two significant research reports, *Marginalised and Isolated Women in the Australian Capital Territory: risk prevalence and service provision, February 2008* and *Health and Wellbeing Issues for Women in the*

Australian Capital Territory, March 2008. Both have increased the knowledge base on women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and both are excellent examples of the work WCHM is doing to improve women's health and wellbeing, using thoroughly researched data and information collected from women themselves.



Margo Mitchell and Kiki Korpinen at the 2007 Annual General Meeting

The board has also undertaken the development and implementation of a number of governance policies, which we have underpinned with a comprehensive governance framework detailing board responsibilities and processes. We have also done an organisational risk assessment, followed by a risk register, plus a register of legislation applicable to WCHM. This work has given the board an excellent framework of policies and procedures to guide us in leading and stewarding WCHM effectively now and in the future.



Judith Manning at the May 1st launch of the two research reports

Members are an integral part of WCHM, and the board has given considerable thought to the benefits members bring to and can receive from WCHM, keeping in mind the available resources. A broader membership base, which includes women, men and organisations, is being proposed, with voting rights continuing for women only, as is the current situation. WCHM values its members and so is working to improve members' access to information about WCHM work and any opportunities for involvement.

Reflecting the board's view on the importance of members, changes to the Constitution have been made for consideration at the annual general meeting. As well as the above broadening of the membership base, it is proposed

that membership fees be reduced to \$5 for individuals and that proxy votes be introduced.

Last and certainly not least, warm thanks to everyone who has been involved with WCHM in 2007-08. Thank you to the deputy chair and each WCHM board member for their unstinting hard work over the past year. Thank you to the executive director and staff for their work in support of the board's work, and their commitment to carrying out the WCHM charter for the benefit of ACT women, especially in areas where there may be disadvantage. Thank you also to WCHM members and to other organisations which WCHM has worked with over the past year for your support. It's been worth it, and may we all have continuing success in working with women to enhance their health and wellbeing.

Margo Mitchell
Board Chair

2007/08 Board Members

Margo Mitchell (Chair)
Judith Manning (Deputy Chair)
Carol Benda (Treasurer)
Jo Bothroyd
Mandy Nearhos
Eve Burnes
Wendy Mason
Thi- Nha Tran
Kiki Korpinen (Public Officer)
Sonya Davidson (resigned Oct 07)
Ruth Hilton-Bell (resigned Aug 07)
Steph Louise (resigned Feb 08)
Kerry Silcock (resigned Feb 08)

Executive Director's Report

It has been an exciting and productive year for WCHM, with many opportunities and achievements.

We have operated with an experienced and skilled team, with Robyn James in the position of Senior Project Officer and Prilisia Duignan continuing in the Community Development Worker position. Biljana Petrova joined us for a period of 6 months in the Senior Policy Officer position and Penny Becker in the position of Administration Officer from July to September, replacing Wendy Ji who resigned in July 07. Sarah Maslen joined us from September to February until she commenced PHD studies, and Karen Borchers commenced with the team in February 08.

We have evaluated the Centre's core competencies and future directions and began documenting unmet health and wellbeing needs of ACT women. This has been an important process for building on WCHM strengths and determining how we can best support both the community and government sectors, and through this ACT women.

By collaborating with numerous organisations and individual ACT women significant outcomes have emerged, some of which I would like to outline through the following pages.

Well, Able and Mobile (WAM)

A meeting was held with two former participants and the WCHM *Well and Able* project worker Catherine Seattle, to discuss follow up to the project which ended in 2005.

Following this meeting a Christmas *Well*

and Able reunion was held in December, attended by 13 former participants. A steering group was formed to look at possible future programs and funding opportunities for a *Well and Able* like project. Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT), Mental Health Consumer Network (MHCN) together with WCHM submitted a funding proposal to the Health Promotion Grants round. The submission was unsuccessful, however the group managed to secure funding for a one year period to carry out a *Well, Able and Mobile* program which will concentrate on advocacy, a fitness program and access to local sporting facilities by women with disabilities and/ mental health issues. The group is working together with ACT Government to obtain ongoing recurrent funding.

Submissions

WCHM invited ACT service providers to attend a focus group, and prepared a submission to the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Disability from the information gathered. WCHM represented 14 community organisations, and appeared before the standing committee, successfully bringing forward the voices and concerns of marginalised and disadvantaged ACT women.

WCHM supported the ACT Women and Prisons Group to contribute to a submission lodged by ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) on health and wellbeing policy issues impacting on incarcerated women. This was a valuable submission prepared with expertise from women

with lived experience.



Participants at Well and Able reunion lunch

MAJOR EVENTS

Health and Well Being Week

WCHM held a Health and Wellbeing Week in November to obtain feedback from individual women and organisations on their experiences of ACT health and well-being services, identify current and emerging issues, and act on the feedback obtained. A number of collection methods were used including surveys, interviews and focus groups. 180 responses were received and the data was disseminated, categorised and analysed.



The reports have had a positive effect on the community sector and are being used as a lobbying tool, quoted in submissions as well as reports. These reports have increased WCHM's understanding of what areas to concentrate

Above: participants at the May 1st Forum

Reports

WCHM published two reports in 2008. *Marginalised and Isolated Women in the Australian Capital Territory: risk prevalence and service provision*, which presents a range of data aimed at exploring the nature of women's marginalisation and isolation in the ACT. WCHM commissioned this research with the specific purpose of facilitating greater understanding of women's marginalisation and isolation in the ACT, and working towards improved support for women within this target group. The second report titled *Health and Wellbeing issues for Women in the Australian Capital Territory* is based on the survey findings undertaken in the November Health and Wellbeing Week.

The reports were distributed to government, community and private sectors and were launched at a forum titled *Women of the ACT – working together to improve our health and wellbeing* on May 1st, at which issues impacting on ACT women's health and wellbeing were discussed and future strategies identified. More than 50 women and organisations attended, and following overviews on each of the reports, two workshops were facilitated.

on over the next 4 years, and will assist in looking at unmet needs and collaborating with like minded organisations to jointly pilot future projects.

Strategic Plan 2008-2012

Board and staff with the aid of Cathy Wilson a facilitator from Victoria, developed a strategic plan for the next four years. The focus of WCHM will be in 3 of the following Key Areas:

- 1. Unmet need:** identifying the health and wellbeing needs of women that are not fully understood or are unmet or inadequately responded to by current policy and service responses; and using this evidence to inform practice and influence policy over time.
- 2. Social isolation and marginalisation:** better understanding the impact of isolation and marginalisation on specific populations of women; and working to inform responses that will promote authentic social connectedness.
- 3. Increasing women's access to gender-sensitive health and wellbeing information:** in a manner that supports women in making informed health and wellbeing choices.

Community Collaboration

Collaboration and the development and strengthening of community partnerships are important principles for WCHM. In 2007/08 many partnerships, collaborations and consultations with community and government service providers, as well as individual ACT women were conducted. Some examples of these are as follows:

National Women's Services Network (WESNET)

A WCHM staff member was nominated to represent the ACT on WESNET. In this capacity, WCHM attended and represented the ACT at the national conference on domestic violence and homelessness. WCHM prepared the ACT sector wide report on current domestic violence (DV) issues impacting on ACT women which was published in the national WESNET report.

Domestic Violence Interagency (DVIA)

WCHM continued to provide secretariat support to the bi-monthly DVIA group which meets to discuss issues impacting on women, and ACT DV services. The network provides a space for organisations to share information, seek training opportunities, identify trends and gaps in the ACT, and provide input to DV policy development.

ACT Women's Services Network

The Centre continued to provide secretariat and coordination support to the monthly ACT Women's Services Network meetings. This network consists of non-government and government ACT women's service providers. The women's sector has commented on a number of occasions how beneficial it has been to have WCHM consistently attend meetings, provide a venue when necessary, facilitate the email list, prepare draft agendas and take minutes. The service provided is greatly appreciated by the sector. A number of joint events were held by WSACT in 07/08. These included an antipoverty week

display at the Canberra Centre with the theme 'feminsation of poverty' and 'reclaim the night', an annual event lead by the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. WCHM successfully assisted in securing \$10,000 funding for WSACT future joint events through the ACT Women's Grants.

Community Coalition on Corrections (CCC)

CCC hosts a broad and diverse membership of interested organisations on corrections, and meets on a monthly basis. WCHM's Executive Director was appointed into the position of chair in 07/08. The CCC held a number of forums at the ACT Legislative Assembly Reception Room around issues which will have significant impact on ACT prisoners and their families, including mental health and the controversial needle and syringe exchange program. CCC continued to agitate, advocate and maintain dialogue with the ACT Attorney General and Corrective Services, particularly around proposed policies and procedures for the ACT prison, directly impacting on prisoner's health and wellbeing.

Secretariat/governance support

WCHM provided secretariat and governance support to two groups in 2007/08.

ACT Women and Prisons (WAP)

WCHM together with ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) provides support to WAP. WAP is made up of individual women with lived experience of incarceration and organisations providing support to women within the legal system. This year the group has worked on policy issues and service planning for the upcoming ACT prison. Through this process marginalised and vulnerable women have participated in decision making on health policy and service planning. WAP was granted *authorised visitor status* for the ACT prison, which is particularly of significance as women with lived experience are often denied access to prisons post release. WAP will be looking to provide a peer support service to incarcerated women in the new ACT prison.

ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group was established in October 2007, by WCHM, as a result of consultations on mental health (MH) issues for ACT women, and how to better work together as a sector on addressing matters impacting on women.

The group, which has a membership of 60 individual women and organisations, is working on four major strategies—

- ◆ improving the treatment of women with MH issues in the legal system
- ◆ addressing concerns for women with MH issues and their children,
- ◆ development of a MH legal centre and,
- ◆ ensuring that the Canberra Hospital Psychiatric Unit becomes more women friendly.

The group secured funding for a 6 month project worker position to support the work of the group, which will commence in the 08/09 financial year, and be stationed at WCHM.

Mothers Time Out

The Multicultural Mothers Group held a mother's time out event at the end of June 08 in collaboration with YWCA, and Multicultural Women's Advocacy (MWA), at Lanyon, with 22 women and 25 children attending. Activities included dancing, skin care testing and chocolate tasting. MWA surveyed culturally and linguistically diverse women, to identify future needs, and a children's program was provided by YWCA (singing, face painting, piñata, art and craft). After activities all shared a great lunch together.

Canberra Midwifery Program (CMP)

WCHM has continued to support CMP Southside and Tuggeranong - and associated pregnant women, through the use of a permanent WCHM room for clinics and groups. CMP staff were supported by WCHM administration in using fax, telephone, photocopying and internet services.

Psychologist—Susan Dalby

Susan Dalby a registered psychologist in the ACT, has continued to lease a permanent consultation room from WCHM.

Celebrating Our Diversity as Women

An all women activity was run by WCHM during October's Mental Health Week. The afternoon was the sole women only activity provided in the ACT during MH week. 15 women from varying backgrounds participated in the afternoon's activities, which included beading, T-ball, bollywood dancing, massage and afternoon tea. Individual women and services reported the afternoon provided a safe space and activities for women who accessed/resided in MH facilities and services in the ACT.



Above: Women playing T-ball at the Celebrating Our Diversity as Women event, October 07.

Ministerial Advisory Council on Women—Health Roundtable

WCHM was invited to participate and present information and findings gathered through the consultations, forum and reports carried out on health and wellbeing issues impacting on ACT women, at which Senior ACT Health Executives including Mark Cormack were present.

CALD Women's Network

WCHM assisted in the rejuvenation of the CALD women's network. The purpose of the network is for CALD women employed in community organisations to get together to discuss issues impacting on CALD women (including workers), seek support around issues of case management, identify training opportunities and provide guidance in areas of ACT service and policy development.

Women's Health Service Planning Steering Committee.

WCHM actively participated in this ACT Health planning process, bringing to the forefront issues directly raised around concerns impacting on marginalised and disadvantaged women.

WCHM GENERAL

WCHM Meeting Space

The Centre continued to support a range of groups through the provision of free or low cost meeting space. They included the Domestic Violence Interagency meetings, the Post Polio Support Group, various Self Help Organisation United Together (SHOUT) groups, disability support groups, childbirth education classes and many more.

WCHM Library

Last year WCHM made a decision to donate the majority of library resources to other women's services, which were more centrally located and had a high demand for relevant resource materials.

This decision was based on the limited use of the library within the Centre - with women voicing their preference for a more central location, as well as WCHM identifying that information in written format quickly becomes outdated.

Books were sorted (with some references kept at the Centre), and distributed to topic related services. Services have made great use of these resources, and through this increased access to information for women, including vulnerable and isolated women in the ACT.

Public Computer Access

Three computers were maintained and made available for ACT women. The majority of women accessing this service identified with being marginalized. Some were residing in refuges, others reported being financially disadvantaged with limited funds hence not in a position to purchase a computer or be connected to the internet. Women used the computers for matters such as resume/CV writing, preparation of job applications, seeking possible employment and keeping in contact with support networks. All women stated they felt welcome and comfortable within a women only space.

WCHM Website

WCHM website was monitored and updated fortnightly (or more regularly when required). Feedback from website users has continued to be positive with individual women and services stating "it is easy to access" "informative and updated regularly".

Information to women about upcoming health and well being related events within the ACT as well as WCHM events was regularly uploaded in this period and additional links were provided to improve information provision.

The team has developed a proposal to further improve the website to make it more interactive in 2008/09. A grant application for funding has been submitted to ACT Health Promotion Capacity Building Grants, for this one off purpose.



WCHM team members—Kiki, Prillisia, Robyn and Karen.

Evaluation

An evaluation framework was developed in the latter part of 2007 to ensure that the priorities of WCHM are based on careful evaluation of all aspects of service provision. Procedures are in place for evaluating each element of WCHM activity, i.e. centre-run groups, events and initiatives, and other internal activities including: analysis of incoming phone enquiries, drop-in requests, computer use, needs analysis activities, secretariat and governance support, policy development and staff development.

WCHM GROUPS

Women's Wellbeing Group (WWG)

WWG group met fortnightly and focused on empowering women through sharing skills, activities and the provision of health related information. The group was consistently attended by 8 women. Activities consisted of banner making, presentation on sexual assault and 'Reclaim the Night', discussions about health and wellbeing issues, crochet, games and scrapbooking.



Members of the women's wellbeing group and WCHM staff with the Reclaim the night banner

Supporting Asian Mothers Friendship Group (SAMS)

The Supporting Asian Mothers Friendship Group is a partnership between Parentline and WCHM. The group is open to all women from an Asian background. Women are provided with health and wellbeing information through a range of guest speakers from community and health organisations. The group also offers support, friendship, fun activities and new skills. During 2007/08, SAMS became incorporated and changed its name to Supporting Asian Women Friendship Association Inc. (SAWS). SAWS continues to be supported by Women's Centre for Health Matters with issues such as governance and a free meeting space.

Multicultural Mothers Support Group (MMSG)

MMSG is a community social support group for all mothers and grandmothers. It provides information on health and wellbeing issues, how to access health information, and community services, reduce social isolation and strengthen parenting skills. Meetings were held fortnightly at the Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre.

Pearce Older Women's Group (POWG)

POWG is a fortnightly social group, aimed at reducing older women's isolation, which has been meeting in Pearce for over 10 years. Current average age of group members is 81, which is something the group is (and should be!) very proud of.

In 07/08 activities included outings and presentations by guest speakers on relevant information of interest to group members.

During this reporting period the group was encouraged and supported to become responsible for their own activities, planning, advertising and membership. An understanding/agreement between WCHM and POWG was developed with WCHM continuing to provide POWG with a free meeting space, access to a telephone, photocopying and computer support.



Women form the Supporting Asian Mothers Friendship Group.

WCHM groups continued

Having a Baby in Canberra

Having a Baby in Canberra (HABIC) information sessions provide information on models of care and options available to women in early pregnancy and to women thinking about having a baby in the ACT. In order to expand these sessions and make them available in various ACT locations it is anticipated that by January 09, YWCA will take on the facilitation of future HABIC sessions. A transition plan for HABIC has been discussed with YWCA, and WCHM will continue to support YWCA until the delivery of the sessions has been established.

Sew and Needle Club

The Sew and Needle Club was a time limited fortnightly group facilitating the exploration and development of women's creativity.

The group provided an opportunity for women to meet and share skills and experiences, while working on a sewing project. The last meeting of the Group was held in December 2007.



Community Development Worker, Prillisia Duignan and group participant, Sue Carbone

Femme Friday (Previously known as Pamper Evenings)

Femme Fridays were held bi-monthly at WCHM. The evenings provided an opportunity for women from all walks of life to meet new people, talk about health and wellbeing issues, and participate in activities such as belly-dancing, yoga, meditation, singing and massage. All women were provided with information about WCHM, membership forms, flyers about the Centre's activities, events and other health information.



Above: The popular massaging by CIT students

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the WCHM 07/08 team for the tremendous effort and endless commitment towards improving ACT women's health and wellbeing—ranging from the individual right through to government, policy and systems levels. Thank you to the board for their robust governance and support over the last 12 months, ACT community and government service providers for their enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate with WCHM, individual women and all WCHM members for their time and expertise. Finally, I would like to thank and acknowledge ACT Health—particularly Joan Scott, Robyn Jensen and Stephanie Leishman for valuing, encouraging and supporting the work of WCHM throughout 07/08.

Kiki Korpinen
Executive Director

Treasurer's Report

It has been a pleasure to be involved as the treasurer of the WCHM for this past financial year. The centre's finances were well taken care of under the professional expertise of Brazen Books and the Centre's Executive Director.

The Centre's main source of funding once again was received from ACT Health. This year the Centre had a full complement of staff for the 12 month period which is reflected in the finances and in the volume of work produced by the Centre.

Staff worked extremely hard at dealing with a back log of work, a two day strategic planning session and a number of professionally compiled reports which will go a long way to assist in how we can work towards better health outcomes for women.

The Centre allocated funds for board training which was well received by the board. This training not only added to the professional development of individuals but also meant board members could bring new skills to their role as board members.

There were no major purchases this year with wage expenses clearly being the main cost to the Centre.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mandy Nearhos who has assisted with the treasurer's duties. The Centre is fortunate to have a dedicated committed board and it has been a pleasure working with all the board members over the past year.

Carol Benda



'Women of the ACT— Working together to improve our health and wellbeing', forum held in May 2008.