

National Council of Women of Victoria



“Caring Women Make a Difference”

President’s 2010 AGM Report

As the first year of my NCWV presidency draws to a close, I reflect on the past twelve months believing the difficult and busy challenges have been an extremely worthwhile experience, where I grew in both commitment and confidence in the task. The welfare of women, their families as well as children in general has been the focus and priority of the NCWV since inception in 1902. This year we have definitely followed this principle and ensured each of our programs reflected this. We celebrate our 2010 achievements with a great sense of pride, not only our official functions but also the work accomplished behind the scenes updating all necessary aspects of our organization.

Straight after the AGM I flew to Papua New Guinea to follow the footsteps of the World War 2 soldiers and walk the Kokoda Track, to some it could have been seen as irresponsible. I returned exhausted yet prepared for the work in front of me. I was determined that the words etched into the monument at Isurava would be my motto for the NCWV in 2010. “Courage, Endurance and Sacrifice and Mateship” were essential to achieve the goals for the advancement of our organization.

I send my greetings and best wishes to all our valued affiliated groups and our associates and thank them for their on going participation, cooperation and support in our wonderful historic organization. Not only do I look forward to this continuing but hope for an increased participation by all to ensure more of our programs are run in conjunction with the work of our affiliates.

The executive and many council members have worked diligently in the past year to achieve the necessary update of the council's basic requirements. Our executive had reduced numbers so the burden of work load was increased. I must especially thank those who took on important official positions in an acting role to enable the council to continue smoothly. In particular my thanks go to Judy Ryles as Acting Treasurer and Elisabeth Newman as Acting Convener of Standing Committees, thank you very much.

A constitutional review has been undertaken to bring it in line with the new “Victorian Consumer Affairs Model Rules”, the website is being revamped and a new strategic plan has its outline completed and the details for the next 3 years are currently being discussed. The council’s Standing Committees have worked well with Elisabeth Newman at the helm while she undertook her important national and international duties at the same time.

The desire for NCWV to remain relevant well into the future and the need for internal improvements saw an invitation extended to all its past Presidents to attend a luncheon. Here they expressed their ideas for our future and gave us much food for thought.

On November 3rd 2010 all presidents of our affiliated groups as well as our own past presidents will be honoured when we celebrate Presidents Day at the Methodist Ladies College (MLC) Restaurant with a High Tea. Students will provide a background of music and song.

The 2009/2010 year started with five NCWV representatives attending the Triennial Conference in Adelaide. The South Australian NCW must be congratulated for their successful organization and running of this event. Members from all states enjoyed spirited debate and wonderful receptions while also catching up with old friends.

One of the conference speakers was so impressive the Victorian delegates requested she speak at the NCWV Christmas Luncheon. Mwajemi Hussein told a harrowing story of her fifteen years as a refugee and of

supporting her seven children. She sang a very moving song in Swahili taught to her by her mother, a song we could all relate to. This poignant moment ensured our luncheon was a great success and spoken fondly of later.

Our first major event for 2010 was the Australia Day Pioneer Women's function held on 21st January in the King's Domain sunken garden named in honour of the Pioneer Women. Our guest speaker, President of the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association (AVWA), was Cam Nguyen. She spoke of her emotional departure from her homeland and final settlement in Australia as well as the pioneering work in establishing the AVWA.

Our Patron Mrs Jan De Kretser generously allocated us time in her amazing busy schedule while playing host to Prince William and laid Australian native flowers at the Pioneer Women's Plaque. These flowers were later taken to the Shrine of Remembrance for another small dedication reinstating an original practice.

One of the first items discussed by the NCWV in 1902 was the welfare of children; sadly this has rarely left our discussion table and is still a necessary agenda topic now. Because of the continued inadequate care and conditions for all children, the Adelaide NCWA Triennial Conference chose for their 2010 theme, "The Protection of Children". In Victoria we selected the title "Children, Our Future". With NCWV's desired goal of involving younger women and encouraging them to embrace activities within the greater community, we decided to concentrate on aspects of adolescence in "Children, Our Future".

The NCWV International Women's Day held in the Upper House Chamber of Parliament was the first function to follow this theme. It was a triumph for all involved especially the young women. Not only did it bring together four affiliated NCWV groups but it witnessed the amazing strengths of girls under fourteen years of age. Seven female finalists of the Legacy Junior Public Speaking Awards presented their winning speeches followed by those of two outstanding young women from Girl Guides Association Victoria in this their centennial year. After lunch the League of Women Voters gave 70 students from four government schools the opportunity to discuss and present their deliberations at the "Speaker chair" in the chamber.

May is traditionally our month for a Standing Committee Forum. Our theme "Children, Our Future" continued, this time looking at the great need for protection of children from internet bullying. The State Commissioner for Girl Guides, Noella Kershaw acted as facilitator with four very well qualified speakers giving an understanding of the immense problem of cyber-bullying faced by children today.

The speakers were:

- Jackie Van Vugt, General Manager, Alannah and Madeline Foundation.
- Dr June Kane AM, UN Human Rights and International Labour Organization and UNICEF
- Michelle Blanchard, Senior Research Officer, Inspire Foundation
- Elly Robinson, Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The seriousness of these topics led to a lively discussion on 'privacy and child protection against abuse' after council.

In July we held an excursion visiting the Richmond and Footscray offices of the AVWA. Mrs. Cam Nguyen explained the vital community and counseling work carried out by her organization within the Vietnamese and other migrant communities. This was followed by a Vietnamese Lunch; Cam gave an informative and interesting description of Vietnamese ingredients and their use.

NCWV were thrilled with the inclusion of Dame Marie Breen (1902-1993) on the Victorian Honour Roll for Women's list for 2010. Dame Marie fulfilled many important roles and her vast contribution to community work is well documented. She was Victoria's first female federal senator and was appointed Officer of the Empire in

1979 for her work during her presidency of NCWV. It is my wish to see more hard working NCWV women honoured in this manner.

Our monthly council meetings have enjoyed hearing an excellent range of inspiring guest speakers, topics discussed were:

1. Recognizing United Nations: Jo Hayter spoke on the "Changing face of Burma"
2. Breast Screen Australia and Radiation Issues in both the Private and Public Health services: Dr Pam Williams and Dr Nicola Bruce.
3. Celebrating Young Women's Christian Association: Rosemary Hehir, CEO, YWCA.
4. Social Impact of Drought in Rural Communities: Janet Congues, Goulburn Valley
5. Bowel Cancer Screening Program: Associate Professor Mel Korman.
6. 2010 Year of Women in Local Government and Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA): Noelene Duff and Coral Ross.

At each meeting at least two of our affiliate presidents or their representatives have given an outline of their organization. Within this report they highlighted the group's history, the work presently undertaken and where they see their future directions leading them. This valuable inclusion allowed the true meaning of an umbrella organization to take its proper place and enables us all to work more closely. It is vital that through the affiliate delegates the communication channels remain active and open for genuine progress to be made on behalf of all women.

NCWA President Margaret Findlater-Smith from ACT has kept all states in close contact especially with the coordination of this year's many programs. One program related to the high incidence of violence against women and children, where at least 1 in 3 suffer and 1 in 5 experience sexual assault some time in their life. Much work must be done to highlight such issues.

Communication around the Australia has been made by teleconferencing again; it is a great opportunity to hear first hand what each state is presently undertaking and enables the interaction of ideas.

In December the NCWA board decided to tender for the right to organize and auspice one of the six new alliances proposed by Office of Women Policy replacing the present system. Unfortunately the tender was unsuccessful and NCWA are in discussion with Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) to join that alliance.

Under the umbrella of the NCWA, the NSW NCW in partnership with the Sydney based Garvan Medical Research Institute held a most successful seminar on osteoporosis. In the near future this seminar will travel to all states. With the high incidence of osteoporosis in both men and women, the NCWV will be pleased to host the seminar and hopes to attract doctors to attend.

NCWA's history, a project currently being researched and written by Associate Professor Judith Smart and Professor Marian Quartly is progressing well. This project required access to NCWV's extensive archival material, we eagerly await the results.

The membership base of our organization, both affiliates and associates, must widen and increase. I undertook this task with vigour so we truly can represent all women. Many previous members, new organizations and individuals have been contacted by letter with this hope in mind. Although some groups have folded, others have newly formed; we need to remain vigilant in our quest to encompass all groups.

We are always saddened by the passing of NCWV members and definitely feel this loss greatly within our organization. The long term loyalty and service to NCWV by such members will always be warmly acknowledged and greatly appreciated. We send our condolences to the families who have lost these women.

As previously mentioned NCWV has coped with a very small executive yet we have successfully carried out all the council tasks. I thank all members of the executive, the standing committees and the council for their commitment throughout this difficult time. As all positions are voluntary, much is asked of women's time, ability and energy, I want all to know this has been greatly appreciated. My special thanks must go to Dr Pam Williams who has performed the role of NCWV secretary for the past 5 years along with her other standing committee and NCWA duties. During her secretarial years and now including the role of public officer, Pam worked with four different presidents, quite an ask along with an onerous responsibility. She has a wealth of knowledge and information at her fingertips to be shared with others following in her footsteps.

Sadly the NCWV must vacate its present office and find new premises in the very near future as the Christian Women's Temperance Union have sold their building. All archives and historic material must be catalogued and stored in the State library; old files must be checked and packed, a very daunting prospect! You will be informed of all new changes as they occur.

My hopes and dreams for the NCWV in the coming year are many. I wish the new executive a fruitful, harmonious and productive year, one where all their new projects and functions are successful, thus ensuring the ongoing triumph and relevance of the Council.

Jennie Rawther
President