

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

THE OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK NSW



Report from the Chair

Beverly Baker

In 2019, I commenced my report with the words “this year, as all years, has been a challenge”. Well, 2020 knocked that statement into a cocked hat – this year has been unlike any year in my 70 years of life.



COVID-19 exposed some deeply held ageist views - it was called the “Boomer Remover” when it was believed that it only affected the elderly. Our nursing homes were cast adrift as the virus ripped through their residents, and the fragility of hospital system was exposed when the risk of being swamped became real.

But COVID-19 also offered some amazing opportunities. It demonstrated that older women are not technically illiterate as hundreds of our members took to online classes to keep connected and fit. It showed that the reach of our online newsletter, dOWNtime, was growing and popular. It built relationships and brought networks together as it drew into sharp focus the enormous burden carried by women in our society.

COVID-19 offered us a chance as a society to do better, to share the wealth, to recognise that women of all ages make an enormous contribution that outweighs anything any business can or will contribute. It exposed to everyone the inadequacy of the Newstart daily rate, and the fact that the bulk of those on Newstart were not “lazy” youth unwilling to work, but women over the age of 50 and struggling to find jobs in an increasingly ageist society. It identified and unified the voices asking, no begging, for the Newstart rate to be permanently raised, for an injection of funds to do something about the lack of community housing and the individual cost of continuing to raise the retirement age.

Sadly, after waiting an additional 6 months for the federal budget, we, as older women together with women of all ages, faced a budget that has completely ignored us, our needs and the value we add. This is despite the reality of unemployment and underemployment, the complete fallacy of trickledown economics, and the unified voices calling for more investment in social housing. The incentives for employers do nothing to encourage the employment of those over the age of 35. We are seeing a massive increase in women over the age of 45 seeking unemployment support. To say that women can drive on the new roads the budget promised is an insult to women everywhere and a return to the view of a male dominated society with women being an unpaid and unrecognised part of the infrastructure.

In spite of nation-wide calls to invest in social housing, the government has not provided for this essential need or, in fact, looked at any of the services required by women to empower them to lead their own lives, follow their own desires and to build their own secure futures.

To say, on behalf of older women, that I am severely disappointed in this massively expensive budget and see its chance for positive more cohesive and fairer society lost, is an understatement.

At last year’s AGM, we determined that the Indue card should not be rolled out any further and its cost and impact should be reviewed, that Robodebt should not be applied to the aged pension due to its documented failures and flaws, and that the family home should not be included as an asset for means testing the aged pension. We will continue our advocacy on these issues because the impact on the quality of life of our members is enormous.

In closing I would like to acknowledge and thank out amazing staff Yumi Lee, Christine Hall, Katy Kavanagh and our volunteers and trainees.

I look forward to seeing you and hearing you for our zoom AGM.

OWN NSW Financial Report 2020

Larissa Bergmann

After what has been a very challenging year due to the Corona virus Pandemic, the Older Women's Network has come through strong, resilient, and resourceful.

During the financial year ended 30 June, 2020, a small surplus was achieved on the previous year, after excluding government support. The surplus achieved was \$70,859 (Govt. Support \$39,270), (2019 \$31,530).

For the financial year ended 30 June, 2020, there was a revenue increase of 4.15% to \$628,225 (2019 \$603,166). Our main sources of income are derived from Department of Community and Justice (previously known as FACS), and South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD), for Bankstown Wellness.

The biggest contributor towards the increase in revenue was Other Grants, \$60,483 received, (2019 \$30532). Service User Contributions and donations were less than last year, but now that Covid restrictions have lessened and we are able to get back to some normality, we will hopefully see a reversal.

Operating expenses totalled \$596,636 (2019 \$571,636), an increase of 4.4%. This increase was due to an increase in staffing hours needed to manage our Zoom online Wellness Classes.

The City of Sydney continues to support OWN by providing rent free premises, thereby giving space not only to administer the day to day running of the office, but also space for meetings, wellness classes, as well as a variety of other activities.

We would like to thank the Department of Community and Justice who believe in our work and continue to support us. Thank you also to South Western Sydney Local Health District for funding Bankstown Wellness Centre.

Thank you to Pat Bazely (former Board Member) for her generous donation of \$10,000. Pat Bazeley gave us the \$10,000 donation from her work with the publisher of a textbook she wrote as a world expert on a software for qualitative research. This will be put to our advocacy work on poverty, homelessness & violence against older women

Thank you also to all our OWN Group and Wellness Centre Co-ordinators for all their hard work in these trying times. A big thank you to all our staff including Yumi, Christine, Lisa and Katy. Last but not least, thank you to Seng at Refuge Accounting for her invaluable financial advice, and My Hoa for providing prompt and efficient day to day accounting support, and who doesn't get fazed when I ring her on a Public Holiday, thinking it's just another working day.

Larissa Bergmann
Treasurer

Managers' Report

If ever there was year in recent memory which could wear the title of 'The Year of Living Dangerously', 2020 would probably win hands down. It proved to be dangerous for those who were in the line of fire, literally, when the most horrific bushfires burned through pristine forests and towns. It has been dangerous, and continues to be so, for all of us with COVID-19 ripping through countries and spreading chaos. It has been especially dangerous for residents of nursing homes with Australia registering one of the highest rates of deaths in the world.

Despite the shutdown of groups and Wellness Centres, OWN NSW has not stopped working. The following is an account of what has been undertaken, from July 2019 – June 2020 on the issues which matter to older women.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of groups like OWN in providing an essential service for older women. As one of five ageing peaks in the state, OWN was involved in weekly meetings with the acting Minister for Seniors, Geoff Lee, where we raised emerging issues for the attention of the government. It was also a year when we took the step to invite Caroline Baum to become OWN NSW's inaugural ambassador. She has generously agreed to assist OWN NSW to bring issues of concern to the attention of the media, the community and to government.

Much of the work which was undertaken in the year is funded by the NSW government under its Ageing Strategy, which expires in 2020. OWN NSW has been involved in consultations for the new Ageing Strategy and we hope that funding can continue to support the work of OWN NSW in the future.

Homelessness

The statistics continue to haunt us – that older women are the fastest growing cohort amongst the homeless in Australia. We joined forces with other organisations in the Ageing on the Edge Alliance, including Mission Australia and Uniting, to call for the following:

- (i) Reduction of the age for priority housing from 80 years to 55 years.
- (ii) Increase in investment in social housing – a build of 5000 houses/year for the coming 10 years.
- (iii) The establishment of a specialist housing service for older people so they can be assisted before they fall into homelessness.

As part of the work on this issue, we met with the Department of Housing and the Minister for Women. We have also written letters and wrote a submission to the NSW Housing Strategy. We took part in the Homelessness Roundtable hosted by Jodi Mackay and Ryan Park in Parliament House. We also spoke to Ryan Park and Jo Haylen (Labor MPs); and Robyn Preston (Liberal MP) separately, to discuss our concerns about older women's homelessness. We launched our fundraising campaign, "Buy A Brick", in March to raise funds to build a housing for homeless older women, in partnership with Women's Housing Company. We also published "Older Women in Australia: Housing Insecurity and Homelessness" which outlined our perspectives on the housing situation and what policies should be put in place to address the issue.

Economic Security for Older Women

Closely associated with homelessness is the fact that there is a growing number of women retiring into poverty. Some of the work we undertook included being on the committee organising Anti-Poverty Week in New South Wales. We voiced our concern over the early withdrawal of superannuation through social media.

Violence Against Older Women

In November 2019, we launched the #InHerShoes campaign with Dr Catherine Barrett in Parliament House in Canberra. We are acting to bring attention to the fact that while older women are being sexually assaulted in nursing homes in increasing numbers, nothing is being done to acknowledge and address this.

It was also a year that the Theatre Group travelled to Narrabri to perform at an event jointly hosted by the Seniors Rights Service and OWN NSW on elder abuse. The Drumming Group from Newtown Wellness Centre also came along. Held at the Crossing Theatre, it was an opportunity for people to learn about the various forms of elder abuse. As anticipated, the Theatre Group's performance of 'Don't Knock Your Granny' was a hit.

OWN NSW also hosted a consultation meeting for Good Shepherd for domestic violence support agencies to provide input into the shaping of their interest free loan scheme which was to roll out in 2020 for domestic violence survivors.

In October, we took part in the Domestic Violence Roundtable held in Parliament House, chaired by Trish Doyle where we made the point that without adequate social and affordable housing, we are asking women fleeing violence to fall into housing insecurity and homelessness.

In November, we participated in a Linking Heart's event for 16 Days of Activism, through our contribution of a drumming workshop. Linking Heart is multicultural domestic violence and homelessness service initiative of the Muslim Women's Association.

We also met with the Ageing and Disability Commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald, to raise the issue of sexual assault of women in nursing homes, and our concern of housing insecurity more generally for older women.

Aged Care

OWN NSW has made the following submissions to the Aged Care Royal Commission:

- (i) Oral submission by Beverly Baker when the Commission held a hearing in Sydney
- (ii) Submission on the consumer rights of residents in aged care
- (iii) Submission requesting the Royal Commission to examine the issue of sexual assaults in residential aged care facilities
- (iv) Submission on "Aged Care Program Redesign: Services for the Future"

OWN has also posted regularly in both Twitter and Facebook on the state of aged care in Australia, especially during the pandemic.

Communications/Media

It has been a big year, communications wise, for the organisation. We 'rejuvenated' our website, making it easier to navigate and launched our Twitter and Instagram accounts. We are now on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, with postings daily for all platforms (but only on weekdays for Instagram). They serve different purposes, with Instagram aimed at changing the narrative on older women as it features older women doing things that break stereotypes. Our Twitter account is used for commenting on the political developments in the country as it pertains to our issues; and Facebook is a mix of both.

We also continued with the publication of dOWNtime, our e-newsletter fortnightly which now goes out to over 2000 people in the state. We introduced a rural/regional version of dOWNtime which is sent to rural/regional NSW. We also published OWN Matters, the members only magazine, quarterly. During the pandemic, we undertook to put together a special edition magazine called 'Together Connected' featuring interviews with older women of note, including Patricia 'Little Pattie' Amphlett. The aim of the

magazine was to entertain while also sharing details of the Elder Abuse Hotline. The magazine was distributed to hospitals, including in rural/regional NSW.

We managed to get media exposure for the following:

- Cate Turner on ABC Radio to talk about her facilitation of the Centenarian's Afternoon Tea with the Governor of NSW
- Beverly Baker on ABC Radio's FOCUS program with Cassie McCullagh together with Debbie Georgopoulos talking about the issue of homelessness prior to our national conference
- Christine Hall on flexible workplaces on ABC's 7:30 Report
- Beverly Baker on Radio Northside

We supported the establishment and provided input into the radio show, "Baby Boomers Guide to the 21st Century", produced by Jeff Furolo. We nominated the radio show for the Ministerial Advisory Council's Award and it won its category. Beverly Baker was a frequent guest on the program. We were fortunate to be involved in Radio Skid Row's initiative to assist NGOs produce media, and consequently have a new 30 second advertisement, 'Not Done Yet', which received its first airing at the Radical Womyn Film Festival.

National Conference

2019 was the turn of OWN NSW to organise the national conference and it was a great success, with Jane Caro opening the conference with a stirring speech about what it means to be an older woman today. We had three panel discussions, "Invisible and Unvalued: Let's Fix Ageism"; "How Feminism Changes the Narrative on Violence vs Women"; and "Affordable Housing: From Myth to Reality", on the first day; and speeches by the representative of the Nurses and Midwives Association, as well as by the late Susan Ryan on the second day. A Ministerial reception was held in Parliament House, hosted by Ministers Bronwyn Taylor and Geoff Lee, for the members.

Networking and Alliances

OWN NSW is a member of the following:

- Forum for Non Government Agencies hosted by NCOSS
- Sydney Alliance
- Aged Care Roundtable convened by the Nurses and Midwives Association
- Inner West Elder Abuse Collaborative
- Inner West Domestic and Family Violence Interagency
- Friendship Alliance (organised by Friends for Good which hosts Friend Line, an anti-loneliness initiative)

We assisted the Sydney Women's Fund in their information gathering exercise on financial literacy and challenges.

OWN NSW is also working with the Australian Health Consumers NSW on the issue of ageism in health care, following the complaints we hear regularly from members that they are being discriminated against in the area of healthcare.

Every Age Counts generously shared their table with us at the Seniors Festival held in March. It was a great opportunity to introduce OWN NSW to the many participants, and to get signatures for our petition requesting the Aged Care Royal Commission to look at the issue of sexual assaults in nursing homes during their inquiry.

We were a member of the 'Culture and Activism Working Group' of the Australian Association of Gerontology's annual conference. The committee was tasked with finding ways of increasing the engagement of older people in the conference. OWN's Theatre Group took part and performed during a break session at the conference. OWN NSW also hosted the screening of "Gen Silent" at the conference to raise the issue of LGBTQ and ageing.

We co-sponsored the inaugural Radical Womyn Film Festival in Australia.

'Generation Women', an intergenerational story-telling initiative, is in contact with us, regularly requesting members to be presenters.

We took part in the consultation of Diaspora Action Australia to provide input into their consultation to a Senate inquiry. We raised the issue of housing insecurity and violence perpetrated against older women in the diasporic community in Australia.

Partnerships

It was a year that saw our initially foray into partnerships as part of our attempts to generate income separate from our grant funding from the government. We teamed up with Lesley Gregg from Women and Wealth Club; and Gai Brennan and Lucy McLaren of Posh Active. As their business is only just starting up, we do not anticipate that these partnerships will yield significant income now. We believe that over time, the potential is there for their businesses to expand, and with it, their contribution to OWN's work.

OWN Groups

We were excited to announce that a new group had started up in Mullumbimby, but after some months, the group was disbanded due to the founder's changed circumstances. We note, however, that the friendships formed through the group continue and some of the women meet regularly.

Beverly Baker represented the Board and attended the special lunch held in honor of Barbara Malcolm's contribution to Illawara Wellness Centre.

A Japanese speaking group was in the process of being formed, but this has been put on hold due to COVID.

Beverly Baker and Larissa Bergmann went to Tamworth to speak to a group with the view of setting up an OWN Tamworth.

One of the most important actions taken by OWN NSW was to provide free online wellness activities in response to the initial lockdown. We advised all groups to stop their activities a week before the government did, in view of the medical evidence presented, and pivoted to the provision of classes such as Tai Chi, Yoga, New Moves, and Feldenkrais. There is also an online Movie Club and Chat Group. The Writing Group went online too. This initiative called for a lot of resourcing in terms of assisting members to get online, and has exposed issues related to the digital divide. The cost of being online is prohibitive for some members, and it is something which we will continue to lobby on.

Events/Workshops

Some of the events we held in the year include:

- (i) Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: An intergenerational forum, which was held during Women's Week in Parliament House. It was facilitated by Julie McCrossin, and featured a panel including Professor Shirley Randell, Wendy Harmer, Jenny Leong (MP) and Amani Haydar (Archibald finalist, NSW Woman of Year finalist).
- (ii) "No Laughing Matter"- Contenance Information Session. This was also attended by members of the Cultural and Community Connection. A Vietnamese translator was provided.
- (iii) "Not Shy But Retiring" with the Inner West Council for Seniors Week. It featured a panel discussion hosted by Lex Marinos.
- (iv) Presented a paper at "Dementia and Human Rights" forum organised by UTS Law department.
- (v) #MyGrandmother – an initiative to celebrate the contribution of grandmothers to our lives in collaboration with the Kindness Pandemic, an initiative of Dr Catherine Barrett.
- (vi) "Every Woman's Guide to Retirement" – an online discussion with Alice Mantel, the author of the book of the same name.
- (vii) Panellist in COMPASS' event for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on the sexual abuse of older women together with Catherine Barrett and Kerrin Bradfield.
- (viii) "Turning Up the Volume: Listening to the Voices of Older Women" – an online webinar with Hayley Foster, the CEO of Women's Safety NSW;

We also took part in The Oracle. It involved about 30 of our members in a Museum of Contemporary Art's evening event. This was an initiative of the artist, Willoh S Weiland, who we had collaborated with in the previous year in 'Lick, Lick, Blink', a modern art installation.

Staff and Volunteers

We said goodbye to Marlene Rouhana, coordinator of Bankstown Wellness Centre, who had to leave us due to a family emergency. We were fortunate that Katy Kavanagh, who was a volunteer, stepped up to the position. We also farewelled Yin Liang Li, who was initially a student placement who was later offered the position as part time administrative assistant. She returned to Vietnam following her studies. Lisa Patterson replaced Yin. Amanda Armstrong began volunteering for us, and made a big contribution through her work on the website. Fiona Ninnes also volunteered with the website, and helped us with organising the national conference. She is now the stage manager of the Theatre Group. We also had the assistance of Diana Harris for a few months until her health prevented her from continuing. The other volunteers who helped OWN over the year include Tana Cooklin Cevallos and Georgie Smith.

OWN NSW also provided opportunities for social work students to intern with us.

I would like especially remember Pat Zinn, the coordinator of the Aboriginal Support Circle who passed away this year. She was always a beautiful presence in our office when she dropped in, forever positive and encouraging of the work which was being done. We loved her and will miss her dreadfully.

The work which has been undertaken in the year was only possible because of the wonderful team – Christine Hall, Katy Kavanagh, Yin Li, Lisa Patterson, Larissa Bergmann and Beverly Baker as well as the Board. The support provided by My Hoa Tran, Seng La and Luan La, for our accounting, has been invaluable. Everyone has put in more than 100% to ensure that the vision of the founding mothers of this organisation is realised. There is still so much more work to do and we will continue to march upwards and onwards!

We are grateful to the government of New South Wales for supporting the many programs we run through the Ageing Strategy, as well as through the South West Sydney Local Health District for their funding for the Bankstown Wellness Centre. We also thank the City of Sydney for the accommodation grant that enables us to have the space to run both the Newtown Wellness Centre and the headquarters of OWN NSW.

Reports from OWN NSW Groups

Aboriginal Support Circle

Reading last year's Annual Report, written by our dear Pat Zinn, brings back so many wonderful memories, but makes it hard to write this year's with the same warmth and confidence. Pat was one of our founders, and the heart and soul of our group, and her death has left us utterly bereft. Several of us were able to be present at her funeral on 16th June, but the pandemic regulations have made it impossible for us to meet since then. Grief affects each of us differently, and sharing memories is an important way of coping, but we're deprived of the possibility of face-to-face gatherings, and email and snail mail are poor substitutes.



This report is to cover the year from July 2019 to June 2020, but in her report for last year, Pat already covered our meetings at the Coo-ee Gallery, Darlinghurst on 15th July 2019, celebrating with Elaine and

Gordon Syron the life of Mum Shirl; the State Library on 9th August for Flash Mob and Sydney Elders; and at OWN Newtown on 5th September, organised by our group to interest all OWN members in spreading the word about the wonderful Uluru Statement from the Heart. We watched a videorecording of Dean Parkin's inspiring TED talk, and welcomed a few new members. I believe the posters we put up that day are still in place, so the word can continue to spread.

On October 18th, we met at the State Library to visit Living Language: Country, Culture and Community, a brilliantly mounted multi-media display featuring many of the First Nations language groups in New South Wales, their voices, their stories and their country. Our 15th November meeting was at Boomalli to see their wonderful Anarchy and Alchemy exhibition: "We are Anarchy. Our people fought long and hard for recognition of our place in this country. Many artists have dedicated their careers to creating art that challenges the system that we live in. We are Alchemy. The magic of survival in this beautiful abundant land with an unbroken spiritual connection."



On 4th December we met at Pat's lovely home in Bondi Junction – our end-of-year gathering, and an early celebration of Pat's 90th birthday on the 7th. We all have fond memories of all our meetings at Pat's place, and that one was special, with our three nonagenarian members. *Pictured L-R Cate, 91; Pat, nearly 90; Jan, 92.*

Our February meeting was at the National Art School at Darlinghurst for their Fiona Foley exhibition, "Who are these strangers and where are they going?". It is part of the 2020 Festival of Sydney, challenging and inspiring works "so non-indigenous Australians are aware of what happened in this country".

On 21st February, Pat visited Lucy Porter at her nursing home in Maroubra Junction. It was a wonderful time of sharing memories, held just before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all our lives, and particularly our possibilities for gathering together. Lucy died on 15th April. Pat died on 14th June. Two great women who embodied the spirit of the OWN Aboriginal Support Circle. We will remember them.



At each year's end, we used to raise money for the **Kool Kids Club** at La Perouse. This year it will not be possible to run our usual raffle at OWN's Solstice celebration, but we have \$180 left from money donated for flowers when Pat was in Wolper Hospital, and we'll top that up and donate it through Weave Youth and Community services, the umbrella organisation that runs the Kool Kids program which aims to build "connections with community and family, creating a safe, comfortable environment that allows ... kids to

have fun, make friends, and learn new skills. Through this, [the] Kool Kids quickly develop their self-esteem and sense of independence, and are better placed to overcome hardships.”

Editors Note: If you would like to donate to the Kool Kids Club please email or phone OWN NSW on info@ownnsw.org.au or 9519 8044

Nowra

We have had a good twelve months of meetings in Nowra. Except of course, at the time of the COVID pandemic.

In October 2019, we held a Stroke and Parkinson information session for the public, presented by Nina Digiglio, a clinical nurse consultant. We all found the talk information very helpful.



We also had our yearly visit to our OWN member Joan Bray’s rose garden in Kangaroo Valley. This year we started in February, which was bushfire time down our way in the South Coast. We learned that one of our previous members lost her lovely Farmhouse in the fire. Four of our members have met monthly since July 2020 and hope we can all get together soon.

Yours,
Norma Bastock.

Theatre Group ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The financial year 2019/2020 was an unusual year and we were extremely fortunate to perform three shows at The Adelaide Fringe Festival before closing off rehearsals. Buoyed by the experience of having a record number of performers on stage in Adelaide, we were thrilled to receive a 5-star review from a leading arts magazine, on our show which shone a light on issues affecting older women with a mix of pathos and joy. The bar was raised ever higher by our talented and inspiring director, Jo Cahill.

The theatre group has 14 performers, a pianist and a director, and we performed at many varied events including the National Gerontology Conference, the Glen Street Theatre for the Northern Beaches Council, The National OWN Conference and a Conference for Dementia carers and professionals, achieving a total of 9 performances in a truncated year.

Whilst not being able to rehearse for three months, we met weekly on Zoom to create a new show. Our numbers and enthusiasm remain strong and we will continue to be an advocacy voice for all older women, whilst treading the boards with optimism, originality and relevance.



Penrith

If COVID-19 had not occurred, Penrith would have had a celebration for their 26 years in being an OWN group. But we are thankful that all of us have been free of the virus.

We managed to have our Christmas bus trip to Berowra Waters where we had lovely food and great entertainment. Also, we enjoyed the fellowship and fun we had amongst our group.

Because of Council buildings being closed for some months and we were unable to meet, we stayed in contact through a Newsletter. This was posted to the members so that they had a purpose to go out of doors, in safety. We have worked with the Council, who have allowed use of their centres, providing we follow social distancing. The Council has also supplied us with cleaning material to clean chairs, equipment and bench tops. This means that our Tai Chi and Gentle Exercise Group have resumed. Also, our monthly Saturday committee meeting and social afternoon have resumed.

The ladies are so keen on the exercise group that they meet at 7.30am, a time chosen to fit in with the leader who works. The ladies are in different stages of health but always manage to have a good laugh. Ann always has a joke for the group.

Outings and trips have been cancelled but hopefully things will improve for next year. I do not know if other groups have similar facts as our group. We have in the group; a mother, daughter and mother-in-law, 2 sisters, 2 sisters-in-laws. Also 5 have been members for the 26 years since Penrith started.

We would thank the staff and volunteers of OWN NSW for keeping us informed of OWN matters.

Thelma Anderson

Brisbane Waters

For the first 8½ months of the 2019 -2020 membership/financial year, our group was 'normal', with regular monthly meetings or outings.

Prior to March, our group had the following:

- guest speakers from Service NSW (Cost of Living), Ability Links and Radio 50 Plus (93.3);
- we had outings to Mt Penang Gardens at Kariong and the Gosford Regional Gallery to see the 2019 touring Archibald Art Prize;
- our group also enjoyed a joint Christmas lunch with the Wyong OWN group. Two of our members attended the NSW OWN AGM in October 2019; and
- made a donation to 'We Care'.

Our March 2020 meeting was additionally our AGM. Carol Jones, our Co-ordinator (from 2017) retired. All of us would like to thank Carole for her dedication and hard work with the group.

Then Covid-19 hit with a vengeance with lockdown! Since then, our group has not met. I have hopes that we can start up sometime soon.

Anne Dunn
2020/21 Co-ordinator

Wyong

We're a small but active group in an area of mild climate and natural beauty.

This year we gained two new members, Dianne Downton and Ann Watson. Sadly, a valued member, Norma Phillips, passed away last year. Norma was one of the earliest members of OWN Wyong and is greatly missed.

We have been meeting for many years at the Women's Health Centre, but with its temporary closure due to COVID-19, we have relied on outdoor meetings with picnics. Hopefully, 2021 will see us back "home".

Before the closure we were fortunate to have several guest speakers: Derryck Wokalski, from We Care Connect (a charity supporting families in need), and Sharon Burgess, from the Wyong Neighbourhood Centre. Both spoke of their work with people on the fringes of society. Then Crystal, from Hearing Australia, reminded us of the need to have regular check-ups, as loss of hearing can be very isolating

Finally, Marlene Davidson, from the Brisbane Waters OWN group, brought our attention to the importance of newspapers, and how they are a valuable resource for people researching family histories. Each month we have an outing, with local cafes and gardens always popular. Our Christmas Party, at the Bateau Bay Sports Club, included members of the Brisbane Waters OWN group, and was well attended as usual.

2020 – Bushfires, floods and COVID-19 notwithstanding, we were determined to keep connected. Our Secretary, Pat Carlton, started a '**Cheer Up**' Newsletter to which members have contributed jokes, memories of holidays and past lives, and what we have learned from living with regulations keeping us apart. We now have "information overload" about something we once knew little of, if anything.

We have stayed connected and are determined to stay the course. We are currently planning a picnic Christmas party, and looking forward to a less dramatic year in 2021.

Pauline King, Convenor



Wollondilly

Well, what can I say? This year has certainly “tested our mettle” as my parents used to say. It started off quite smoothly until November 2019, then all hell broke loose. The fires around Christmas certainly affected the community around here, but it sure made us all rally together, didn’t it? Then we had the rain.

The group went on a short one week holiday to the Snowy in early March and had a fabulous time even without snow.....**then we came back to Covid.**

We have all tried to keep in touch either by phone or email (when it is working, that is). Of late we have had a small gathering...Covid Safe...to have lunch and we plan to keep this up until we are able to have meetings again.

As most of our group activities are combined with and/or run by others and most are still not back, there are difficulties; but I am sure that we can overcome soon with careful planning and the right protocols put in place.

Regards to all,

Sutherland

Classes ended abruptly early in the year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As our hall was also closed, we were unable to access our records until recently. The Club on East who generously lets us have the use of rooms was also very restricted and could not let us use their rooms.

With the limited resources available to us, we continued to contact those we could and they in turn contacted others. The Karimbla monthly lunches continued throughout with many new faces joining the regular group of mostly 80 – 90 year olds.

We are now in the process of arranging our return to classes. This has taken a lot of planning and hopefully it will be appreciated. We have all the necessary products for cleaning etc. We will keep the kitchen closed as it has never been left clean enough for our standards in the past.

We are having a registration day the first day of term so that the ladies can choose a class and hopefully get a place. Numbers are restricted to 15, and one class per person unless classes are not filled. We will be having 3 classes on Mondays and 3 classes on Wednesdays. Our trainers live locally. We will have casual payment instead of the usual registration fee.

Some of our members will not be returning until next year, particularly those who travel on public transport. Quite a few people have had operations (mostly knees) so they will not be able to return yet. Those who are returning say they will be glad to do some exercise besides walking. We do not know of anyone who has had COVID-19 and hopefully it stays that way.

Patricia Patterson
Coordinator

Bankstown

The Bankstown Wellness Centre continues to thrive with members who have 20 years under their belt and others who've just signed up. Ours is a very multicultural community, united by a love of line dancing, ukulele, yoga, exercise and being together.

Our volunteer committee is generous with their support, particularly Vivienne Manson who keeps on giving. Thank you, Viv! Our facilitators are caring professionals who love teaching our women. Petra, who facilitates a discussion group, says "the women are wise from life experience, they support each other and make each other laugh".

Our line dancing teacher, Robert, said "dancing helps in reducing the risk of dementia and the social aspect of making new friendships certainly is a plus as many in our group can attest to".

We collaborate with local organisations to celebrate and support women with events like International Women's Day, 16 Days of Activism Garden Party, the Elder Abuse Awareness Collaborative, Strength For Life with COTA and Canterbury Bankstown Council and Say No to Violence.

During Covid 19, we've kept in contact with our members by phone and online classes and plan to help more women get online in the future. "Connecting online has been my salvation – mentally, emotionally and physically," one member said.

Now we're excited to be back together for term 4!

Katy Kavanagh, Coordinator

Illawarra OWN

It's not been an easy year for OWN Illawarra, but then it hasn't been an easy year for any OWN Group, during this time of COVID 19.

I became co-ordinator on Thursday 5th September 2019, and the group continued to meet fortnightly in the Corrimal Community Centre. The first meeting of each month is devoted to business issues, and the second meeting of the month is divided between fun activities or a speaker presenting relevant health issues, suggesting where to get help, or how to manage health problems.



A representative from Hearing Australia was particularly helpful with information on the latest hearing devices. The University of Wollongong Human Resources department arranged a morning devoted to market research into older persons in the digital age. For this, the members taking part received a gratuity and their bus fare. They reported it was a fun morning, if a little confusing. It involved a fun supervised shopping trip to a local supermarket, looking at the difficulty in opening various jars and food packaging.

We continued with our monthly luncheons organised by Patricia Visage. Nan Stansbury continued to organise the monthly bus trips to local areas of historical interest, and the monthly games morning at one of the members home was enjoyed by all who attended. The twice monthly coffee morning at the Fraternity Club in Fairy Meadow was an opportunity for members to drop in and catch up.

Of course, all activities came to a halt in April 2020.

I sincerely thank my executive colleagues, Janet Scott and Margaret Chadwick, for their assistance, which I sorely needed as a very new co-ordinator.

Pamela Peacock, Co-ordinator

Illawarra OWN Wellness Centre

In August 2019, I was admitted to hospital with what started out to be a long and complicated illness that is on-going. Since then, my involvement with the day to day running of the centre has been very limited. The Wellness committee had six members and when I became ill, the other five stepped up. The classes and administration went on uninterrupted and continued until Covid arrived early in Term 2 and we were forced into lockdown.

In September 2019, we celebrated our tenth year since becoming the sixth OWN Wellness Centre to be established in NSW, with a gala lunch at the Fraternity Club in Fairy Meadow. Together we had 30 members who were joined by our guests of the day, our foundation members of the wellness centre, Yumi Lee and Cate Turner from OWN NSW, Tony and Thelma Prescott and Thelma's brother who was visiting from the UK and last but not least, some members from Wollondilly OWN.

In September, we were excited but not surprised to see our own wellness team member Lily Gulati, receive the Illawarra Volunteer of the Year Award. Lily is a foundation member who joined the committee in September 2009 and has been one of our hardest-working members ever since. Together with Lily, the other four coordinators of team Wellness are Lynne Williams, treasurer and book-keeper extraordinaire, Anne Jones, Sharon Bannon and Dell O'Brien. All wear many hats and contribute enormously to the smooth running of Illawarra OWN Wellness.

On the 10th of December, 61 members and volunteers went to the Coniston Hotel for a Christmas lunch. Awards were presented to the Wellness Warriors for 2019. Connie Girls strummed their ukes, making sure we were entertained with a lively collection of Christmas Carols. Thus ended 2019 and 2020 started quietly enough, with none of us knowing about the tsunami that was hurtling towards us.

In February, our Seniors Week celebrations were held over three days with open days on Monday 17th and Tuesday 18th. On Thursday 20th, an event we called "CELEBRATE OUR DIFFERENCES," gave us the opportunity to share tastings of cuisine from other countries, presented by some of our own members, Nali, Lily, Smita, Sue, Bertha, Yvonne and Sharyn who prepared and presented their favourite stories and recipes which were compiled in a booklet and presented to all who attended. It was a very popular event funded by the Department of Family and Community Services Seniors Week Grants.

Seniors Week also saw us participating at the Premiers Lifestyle Health and Ageing event, "Older and Bolder", which was held at a club in Wollongong. It's important to be invited to events like these as it presents us with an opportunity to raise our profile and generally inform the public on what OWN does in both the Corrimal and Coniston locations. We were proud of our Connie Girls' Ukulele group for their performance on the day.

It has been the custom to take turns to host the International Women's Day event with Illawarra OWN in Corrimal library and as the host for 2020, we chose a theme of language to honour "The International Year of Indigenous Languages". The day featured as guest speakers Franki Thompson, who spoke on her love of words and language and a Auslan sign interpreter who finished the day by leading us in a sing-a-long of sign and voice of "You Are my Sunshine," which ensured everyone finished the day with a big smile .

Two Meditation workshops were held during the last terms in 2019, one by the Reverend Miao-You from the Nan Tien Temple, the other by Mignon Lee Warden on "Finding our Inner Peace." We received some funding for the workshops from IMB, and the last one was paid for by those who took part. All were very popular.

Early in the year, when the drought was at its worst and before the next two disasters arrived, one of our Connie Girls, Maggie, appealed to our members for donations for the Farmers Drought Relief Fund.

Members were most generous and an amount of \$500 was raised and presented to our local CWA who made sure it went to where it is most needed.

Despite being locked down early in term two, three Newsletters were put together and sent to Members and all can be seen on our webpage.

Barbara Malcolm

Greek OWN Bankstown

Monday morning meetings start with gentle exercises, followed by spending some time socialising over a cuppa and some light lunch. Our member numbers are lower than before: about 50 lately.

In April this year, we lost our tea lady Sofia. She was 88 years old, but very generous and young at heart. We are missing her. Back in August 2019, we treated our ladies with a lunch at the Greek Community Club at Lakemba.

For the last 20 years, we have been supporting the 'Breast Cancer Foundation' by organising a big event and donating money for the Cancer Foundation, as we did in November 2019. We had our Christmas party luncheon at the Greek Community Club again before the summer break.

Our dancing group performed at 2 venues for "Seniors Week 2020," at Earlwood Community Centre and Bankstown Sports Club. On Monday, the 2nd of March 2020, a new committee was elected. The new members are:

Co-ordinator: Georgina Fassoulas

Treasurer: Christina Tsompanidis

Secretary: Connie Kondilios

Public Officer: Jenny Kaporis

Committee Member: Despina Lekamidis

To mark the beginning of Lent on March 9th, we went for a picnic in a Local Park and we had a great time.

Connie Kondilios

Newtown Wellness Centre

We closed off 2019 with a Christmas party celebration at the Newtown Wellness centre and commenced Term 1 with a full program of classes and activities. It has been a busy year for OWN Newtown. With the resignation of Newtown's coordinator Lyndell last year, Pauline Manley has worked with some volunteers and the OWN NSW team to keep the centre on track. We wish Lyndell all the best on her new ventures and thank her for all the work she has done! Pauline had formed a new committee when COVID struck. The membership base has grown significantly over the last year and we now welcome just short of 100 members and supporters of OWN Newtown.

With Covid-19 and the closure of the Centre, our members suffered the loss of their social interactions and face to face wellbeing activities. We have been able to stay engaged and connected with members through Zoom with many of our Newtown members embracing the challenge of getting online or getting more comfortable with technology. New Moves, Feldenkrais and Tai Chi were offered online and were attended virtually by many of our members. Writing with Rivka also continued online and grew significantly during this period as many people now found the time to get creative. There have been some great pieces that have come from the writing group, many of which have been featured in OWN Matters. Although it has been a particularly challenging time, the courage of our members to get online and adapt to the new structure is commendable. Many embraced the online classes and managed to stay connected and engaged, which has been so important to everyone's mental and physical health.

OWN Newtown has reopened and resumed face-to-face classes at the Newtown Wellness Centre for Term 4 and we know that many are excited to be returning. However, with some classes also being offered online, members who are not keen on face to face classes yet due to the pandemic are still able to keep fit and connected. Newtown members were joined by women from all around Australia for their online classes and it is great to be continuing to build this network.

The Newtown Wellness Centre has been a great home to the Newtown Group and as COVID restrictions ease we hope to continue to build this community going forward and make the most of this space. We welcome ideas and suggestions.

Sydney

I was honoured to become the Coordinator last year at the AGM on 12th September 2019. Besides myself, the new committee included Anna Logan (Secretary/Treasurer), Cate Turner and Anne-Marie Kestle (members).

We have had approximately 50 members over the past few years but the presence of Covid-19 this year and being unable to have many events since March 2020 has made it hard to serve our members. Lower numbers have come about as our members age and find various ways to be social (in person) and remotely via zoom seminars and other online activities.

With regard to our events last year, in December 2019, we had our Summer Solstice party. Our entertainment consisted of a rendering by the Mooncatchers' Choir (of which our Secretary/ Treasurer, Anna Logan is a part), followed by the reading of a poem by Toni Rycroft of University of the Third Age, a report on the OWN History Project, highlights of the OWN Conference (see below) and an overview of a new Macquarie University 'Cocount Oil and Alzheimer's Disease' with a call for volunteers to take part in it (I have joined them in the study). We ended with a Raffle to support the Aboriginal Support Group overseen by our beautiful member, Pat Zinn, who has since passed away. (Vale Pat, we miss you.)

I must report on the National OWN Conference, attended by many members of Sydney OWN, and all our Committee members. This took place in October 2019 at the Masonic Centre in Sydney. I would like to note that while I was only able to attend one day of the Conference (due to conflicting appointments), I thoroughly enjoyed it with great speakers such as Jane Caro and Jenna Price, journalists, panel discussions on issues such as women's homelessness, lack of superannuation discussion with women who had been at the Parramatta Girls Factory and other notable issues. Then we had a performance called

'Manspread' choreographed and led by Dr. Pauline Manley with a cast of some of us from OWN including myself and Yumi, Manager of OWN office. I must say I enjoyed expressing myself and performing for the audience.

We had planned a few events for 2020. One event to be held in April 2020 was to be an overview and discussion on Climate Change. We had speakers willing to come to speak to us including the Climate Change Council, a Sydney University researcher and a Climate Justice activist. This was cancelled due to the onset of Covid 19 and ensuing lockdown from late March onwards.

Quarterly events since – one planned for July 2020 have had to be cancelled. Another was a social event planned for August as a group outing to the musical 'Come from Away', which had to be cancelled till further notice.

In the meantime, we continue to be in touch via phone and Zoom including attendance at the regular OWN Coordinators meeting.

We do not know whether we can have our December 2020 event yet due to Covid-19 restrictions. As soon as we know, we will update the membership. In the meantime, I hope you continue to receive your National OWN newsletters electronically as well as dOWNtime and OWN Matters. If you have any problems with these, please let one of us on the Committee know.

We have decided that membership fees will be delayed till the 1st of December this year. (Usually, these are due on the 1st of July of each year.) A reminder will go out in November 2020 from the Secretary/Treasurer.

In the meantime, we want to gauge your interest in what you wish to do in this time of the 'new normal' with the continued existence of Covid-19. What are your ideas and wishes? We can do small group events (Government and Public Places restrictions permitting) e.g. plan for an outing to a musical next year at the Lyric or State Theatres which are taking some bookings. Would you like virtual tours on the internet to galleries and events? Some Art Galleries and Museums around the world are arranging these. And would you like some zoom seminars on subjects such as Climate Change and perhaps a Social Justice issue. All suggestions are welcome either via email or at the end of the AGM.

We hope to have a future meetings – the first one being in December 2020 (9th Dec)so please pencil this in your diary but we will let you know as soon as we receive an ok to go ahead.

I would like to thank the committee (Cate, Anna and Anne-Marie) for their support over the past year as well as Yumi, Christine and Lisa in the office for their support. Thank you for your support and please keep in touch and giving us your ideas,

Menaka Iyengar Cooke
Coordinator, Sydney OWN

Woy Woy

Our main fundraiser was held at the Woy Woy Roosters Leagues Club on Saturday 30th November at which we cleared \$2,095 for the Kariong Women's Refuge. Nell and I delivered 2 carloads of household items to the refuge in January and they were very well received. The list of items donated by our members was published in the January 2020 minutes along with the financial records of the fundraiser.

There has been an issue with security of donated items at the refuge, and Nell and I will be working through them with Coast Shelter as soon as possible. I personally took two large laundry bags of single sheet sets and quilt sets, blankets donated by Elaine Gribble, a bag of soft toys donated by Gail Muxworthy and pillows to Coast Shelter in early July.

The Women's Health Centre Project was launched on Wednesday 5th February at 1:30pm to 3:30pm which saw a small gathering of women come together who seemed to enjoy the coffee and chat. The next meeting was Wednesday 11th March which was a "Learn to Crochet" session led by our member Fay Maitland, which was a great success. This was a much larger meeting with 19 in attendance. We have not been able to hold another session as everything went into lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak. We will restart this project when we can have more than 7 women in the group room.

We held an International Women's Day luncheon at the Peninsula Retirement Village on 10th March with our OWN Chairperson, Beverley Baker. Although this was not a fundraiser, we still managed to raise \$491. This lunch was the launch of our project at the Village to address isolation and loneliness amongst some of their residents. Unfortunately, because of the lockdown, we will have to relaunch when the restrictions have been lifted. The PVL project is on hold for the time being.

Vicki Halliday and I have also sewed/crocheted/knitted together bags and bags of squares for lap rugs for people in wheelchairs at PVL. Jan Bradbury put a lovely crocheted edge on all the rugs as well as knitting some extra ones herself to be donated. These will be donated to PVL when they open up again.

We have all been affected by the COVID-19 restrictions and have not been able to hold a meeting since our last meeting in February this year. In the meantime, as soon as Diggers reopened its doors, we held coffee afternoons in lieu of coffee mornings and meetings. This has provided an opportunity for members to gather together and enjoy some fellowship. We will move back to coffee mornings as Diggers now opens earlier and continue with coffee afternoons in lieu of our monthly meetings.

We are living in unprecedented times and it is very important to adhere to social distancing rules and to get a COVID test if we are feeling unwell. This virus is very contagious and we are all potentially at risk. There will be time enough in the future to pursue our worthy causes. In the meantime, please stay safe and well.

Jennifer Brown

Northside

We continue to offer Feldenkrais and Qi Gong each week, though we have had to change our programme during the pandemic. Our facilitator for Feldenkrais has offered to continue Feldenkrais online and a number of us have accepted her offer. We now no longer have guest speakers but continue to have the book club each month. These has been great as we have been able catch up with a number of members. We have been having Qi Gong for a number of weeks as we have been able to socially distance. We have a monthly birthday lunch for a number of years at Chatswood RSL on the last Saturday of the month and we reintroduced this in September 2020.

It will be great when we can get back to normal.

Annette Bray





The Older Women's Network acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and sea on which we work and live; and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation.



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