

Annual Report **2015-16**

Funding Bodies 2015-16

ACT Health Directorate

- Women, Youth & Child Health Policy Unit
- Mental Health Policy Unit

ACT Community Services Directorate

- Disability ACT
- ACT Office for Women
- Community Participation Group

ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate

Mercy Foundation

Sisters Of Charity

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WCHM turns 25!

In December, WCHM turned 25 years old and celebrated the birthday with a launch of the Women of Canberra exhibition showcasing some of the images from the Women of Canberra project which had documented women's insights into their life in Canberra in 2015

<http://www.womenofcanberra.org.au/> .

Over 100 ACT women generously shared their stories and images, and worked with the three emerging volunteer artists, Nicole, Liz and Josey during 2015.



The exhibition was hosted by the Tuggeranong Arts Centre from November 19 – December 4, and during this time, the exhibition was well attended.

WCHM's Birthday celebration at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre was attended by over 60 guests made up of new and long-term WCHM members, WCHM staff and Board members, partners from the government and community sectors, the three photographers and many of the women who were featured in the exhibition.



The Women Of Canberra photographers Nicole Zimmermann, Josey Carnovale (with Noah) and Liz Thompson



Several speakers reflected on the work of WCHM over the 25 years:

- WCHM life member Sue Andrews talked about the Centre's beginnings, and of the key action areas which became the parameters for the development and funding of the Centre back then: Improvements in health services for women; provision of health information for women; research and data collection on women's health; women's participation in decision making on health, and training and education for effective health care. She noted that initially the Centre was established as a resource hub and drop in centre for women, which provided personal health care services and a Women's Health Information telephone line for women and health professionals, and that - apart from direct service provision to women - the Centre still works within those key action areas.
- Jane Pepper, representing the Women, Youth and Child Health Policy Unit of ACT Health, (WCHM's funder) spoke about the original ACT Health recurrent funding to WCHM which was for the provision of information and resources to women regarding health services, and for a community development component aimed at addressing gaps in service provision. She noted that this work was still fundamental to the work of the Centre today, and that so much of the Centre's work is about encouraging the health system and other services to be more responsive to the needs of women.

- Angie Bletsis from ACTCOSS reflected on the value of WCHM's work to ACTCOSS - tapping into women's lived experience to inform their work, and having a loud and strong voice as an advocate for disadvantaged women in the ACT. *'The great achievement of the WCHM's advocacy work is that it manages to ... celebrate women, and their achievements both extraordinary and every-day, while never failing to highlight the social, economic and political institutions that continue to mean that women experience disadvantage in their lifetimes.'*

Gai Brodtmann MP also spoke, and formally launched the exhibition.



Jane Pepper (ACT Health) and Renee Toy (Deputy Chair, WCHM) cut the Birthday cake

You can see the photos of the birthday celebration and launch and read an updated history of WCHM at <http://www.wchm.org.au/about-us/our-history/>.

A Summary of WCHM'S Achievements in 2015/16

Listening to ACT women's voices

WCHM informs our work by collecting information and stories about the attitudes, assumptions, experiences and views of ACT women. This year WCHM undertook several social research projects to identify the needs of women in the ACT and surrounding regions:

During 2015-16 WCHM released four major reports:

- *Hear Me Out: Women's Experiences of Seeking Help for Domestic Violence In the ACT* research report;
- *Women and Maternal Care in the ACT* Consultation Report;
- *Not a Label. More than a Diagnosis – Borderline Personality Disorder* research report; and
- *Transforming domestic violence support in the ACT: Improving accessibility for same-sex-attracted, transgender, intersex and gender diverse clients* report.

These reports are important because they add depth of understanding about ACT women and their lived experiences, and provide data and evidence that reflect women's views to and to assist services and policy to better meet ACT women's needs. You can access these reports on WCHM's website.

Empowering and supporting women

To ensure that women have access to local information so that they can make informed choices, WCHM also developed and launched several resources:

- In early September 2015 WCHM launched the *Cyber Safety for Older ACT Women – A Guide to Staying Safe Online*; and
- the *Bloggging for Women with Lived Experiences of Mental Health Issues* project for women with lived experiences of mental health issues and health issues.

Consultations and Submissions

WCHM continued to advocate on behalf of ACT women through relevant consultation and submission processes, and to use these opportunities to disseminate the findings from our work with ACT women about their needs.

Throughout 2015-16, WCHM contributed the following submissions:

- A submission on the draft ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2016-2020 (December 2015) which focussed on Action 29 of the Strategy which correlated with research by WCHM on domestic violence; and
- A submission to the Health (Patient Privacy) Amendment Bill (September 2015) which drew attention to the impacts of the protests on women and their support people when accessing termination of pregnancy services in the ACT.

WCHM was also involved in informing and providing views and expertise by:

- Meeting with MLAs to inform the discussions about the creation of privacy zones around health services that provide termination of pregnancy in the ACT;
- Informing the ACT Government's independent review of ACT Government system responses to family violence;
- Informing relevant Ministers about the findings of WCHM's research reports relating to domestic and sexual violence;
- Contributing to a national evaluation of the Second Action Plan;
- Participating in a consortium of 4 peak community sector organisations to research housing and homelessness issues; and
- Advocating as a member of several ACT committees - the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women; the Domestic Violence Prevention Council, the Steering Group for the ACT

Community Sector Industry Plan; the ACT Primary Health Network's Community Advisory Council; the ACTCOSS Peaks Group; and the ACTCOSS Justice Reform Group.

Events and forums

WCHM, with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, worked with relevant groups to deliver two screenings of *The Hunting Ground* film to raise awareness of sexual violence on ACT campuses and help clarify the universities and ACT's approach to sexual assault in regards to prevention, intervention and response, as well as data reporting.



WCHM also held a forum for Mental Health Week 2015 titled *Women and Borderline Personality Disorder: consumer voices, multiple perspectives and current thinking on best practice* which shared the high-level early findings from the Centre's research into women's experiences of being diagnosed/labelled with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) in the ACT.

Chair's Report

2015-16 has been a productive and important year for WCHM, particularly from the point view of the Board.

We were pleased to welcome back Renee Toy (Deputy Chair) and Alyssa Shaw to the Board following their re-election at the

last AGM. Throughout the year we have gained two wonderful and well-equipped Board members in Anita Krikowa and Erin Gillen. We also unfortunately lost from the Board throughout the year Sue Salthouse, Louise Kearins and Kathy McFie. I want to sincerely thank these three women for the valuable contributions and commitment to the Board during their terms.

The 12 months since the last AGM have been somewhat of a transitional year for the WCHM Board. Consistent with recent years, WCHM has continued to be enormously successful in providing critical information and research about the health and wellbeing of women in the ACT to our funders. Through the careful thought and work of WCHM staff and through the valuable social determinants approach, WCHM has been key in highlighting issues, often prior to there being widespread public attention. This includes, for example, a key focus on domestic violence in the current strategic plan, developed over five years ago, and the more recent focus on links between housing for women and their health and wellbeing. The strong, evidence-based research, complemented by stories from women with lived experience put together by WCHM, remain critical to putting these issues on the agenda in the ACT, particularly at a time when our community is becoming more and more affected by inequality.

However, there are a number of diverse pressures in our operating environment that WCHM must be in a position to adapt and respond to. This has been the focus of the Board this year. These include general changes in the non-government sector, such as the establishment and processes of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission; the ongoing roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme; as well as both ACT and Commonwealth government elections this year. Most importantly for WCHM is the need to adequately respond to the upcoming changes in processes for ACT Government service funding, which is currently our key source of income.

Ordinarily, 2015-16 would have seen WCHM develop a new strategic plan. However, the Board recognised that the first step to address these recent and emerging challenges and changes in our environment was to ensure strong and contemporary governance arrangements. A key outcome for the Board this year are the proposed changes to the WCHM constitution that will be presented to you as members for approval at the AGM, and which will ensure the constitution, as WCHM's key governance pillar, is brought up to date and in line with best practice. Considerable effort has gone into the consideration and drafting of the proposed changes, and I'd like to pay particular thanks to long-standing Board member, Robyn McClelland, along with Deputy Chair, Renee Toy and Executive Director Marcia Williams for their hard work.

Further, the Board has found great value in having spent the year focusing on and contemporising governance processes, establishing and ensuring a strong discipline with which the Board operates, and continuing efforts to build the capacity of the Board. Our external environment will continue to change and evolve, and it is important that WCHM stays well-informed, prepared and equipped with the necessary capability to adapt and respond to both the risks and opportunities that will eventuate. However, with our governance structures now well-considered and brought up to date, we look forward to WCHM maintaining the best of its strengths and continuing the valuable local research-based advocacy to highlight important and emerging issues impacting the health and wellbeing of women in the ACT. We will see in the next 12 months the development of a new strategic plan that will take into account identified and upcoming changes and challenges. We will also be further progressing work to ensure more active and regular engagement with WCHM members.

As always, I'd like to acknowledge the high standard of work again delivered by WCHM staff, including a number that have left WCHM throughout the course of the

last year. And a particular thank you to our Executive Director, Marcia, who continues to provide exceptional commitment to the work and objectives of WCHM, and support to myself and the Board.

Finally, I'd like to give my thanks, both personally and on behalf of the Board, to Robyn McClelland who will be standing down from the Board at the AGM following three consecutive terms. It has been a pleasure to work with and learn from the exceptional experience of Robyn, and WCHM has been enriched through her valuable contribution.

Lauren Gale, Board Chair

2015/16 Board Members

(at 30 June 2016)

- Lauren Gale (Chair)
- Renee Toy (Deputy Chair)
- Lynner Gray (Treasurer)
- Robyn McClelland
- Helen Swift
- Alyssa Shaw)
- Erin Gillen
- Anita Krikowa
- Marcia Williams (Public Officer)

WCHM farewelled the following Board members during the year:

- Sue Salthouse
- Louise Kearins
- Kathy McFie

WCHMs Governance

The Board Structure—The Board comprises 10 elected members. At each Annual General Meeting five Board members are elected for two-year terms. Each elected Board member holds office

from immediately after the Annual General Meeting at which they are elected until the second Annual General Meeting of WCHM after their election. No members of the Board may retain their position for more than three consecutive terms.

A replacement Board member may be co-opted to fill a vacancy, and they serve until the Annual General Meeting following their appointment or until the Board deems that their involvement is no longer required (whichever comes first).

Once elected the Board selects from its members, by a majority vote, a Chair, Deputy Chair and Treasurer.

Board Role—Board members serve on a voluntary basis and do not receive remuneration. The Board is responsible for:

- Setting the policies and strategic directions for the organisation
- Approving and monitoring the annual budget, and establishing the overall financial delegations
- Monitoring overall organisational performance
- Ensuring the organisation meets its regulatory and statutory requirements

Board Meetings—The Board is required to meet at least six times in each calendar year, but generally meets more often to conduct the business of WCHM. This year the Board had nine Board meetings during the year, and one day focused on training and development.

Board Committees—Where necessary the Board sets up committees to conduct various aspects of organisational operation and management. There were three sub-committees of the Board:

- Governance Sub-Committee
- Finance Sub-Committee
- Engagement Sub Committee

Board Training—New Board members receive an induction and a comprehensive series of fact sheets, training and access to a Board members' secure page on the

WCHM website to access all the core WCHM documents.

Board Performance—Board performance is assessed annually, through a Survey of Board members. This is used to evaluate the Board's effectiveness. This helps to highlight priorities for further focus and improvement.

Executive Director's Report

It has been a very challenging and busy year for WCHM, as the Centre celebrated a great milestone - 25 years and still going strong!

At our Birthday celebration in December we were reminded of the priority health issues that were identified for women 25 years ago - reproductive health and sexuality; the emotional and mental health needs of women; violence against women; the health of ageing women; and the health needs of women as carers among others. While there have been many achievements in these areas during that time, more than 25 years later these are still issues which are concerns for ACT women and which the Centre has needed to again work on in the last year.

For example, while abortion was decriminalised in the ACT in 2002, the right for women to safe physical access to these services was being challenged in the ACT, and the Centre led a campaign which resulted in the ACT Legislative Assembly passing the Health (Patient Privacy) Amendment Bill (2015) in October. This means that the ACT now has protected areas around termination of pregnancy services to ensure safe and private access for women and their support people.

Violence against women is again high on the agenda nationally and in the ACT and the Centre is involved in awareness raising and influencing and informing responses and service models that are appropriate for ACT women and their children experiencing different forms of violence.

And we continued to work with partners to raise awareness of sexual violence

against young women on ACT campuses and to work with the universities about their approaches to prevention, intervention and responses.

Maternity and birthing services were a key issue 25 years ago with concerns about the medicalised model of birthing and the lack of continuity of care, and the resulting Community Midwives Program and the Birth Centre were established in the ACT around the same time as WCHM. But these same issues are still of great concern to women in the ACT, and the Centre is again involved in highlighting the views of ACT women about their experiences and their needs.

And the mental health is sure for women are still an issue which WCHM continues to work on. We finalised a report exploring the lived experience of women who had been diagnosed or labelled with BPD in the ACT, and which highlights several areas of future work needed to improve experiences and health outcomes, which is important given the high prevalence and the social and economic costs for women diagnosed with BPD.

These issues are a reminder that *the more things change the more they stay the same*. And of the need to continue the work that the Centre does, together with others to ensure that women's health and wellbeing remains a priority along with a strong commitment to the social determinants of health.

It is reminder that we need to maintain our work with other sectors and government; and continue our research and work with women to inform policy and service delivery in the ACT and provide insight into the issues that ACT women are facing. And, most importantly, that we continue to ensure that we facilitate the voices of women whose voices would otherwise not be heard.

That is why the Centre continues to explore different ways of working and of sharing the views, experiences and needs of ACT women.

The Women of Canberra photo documentary was a great example of this,

as the images and stories explored health and life through the eyes of local women, and the diverse experiences of those women. WCHM staff hope that the stories of those 100+ women help to challenge existing stereotypes, which imply that all women in Canberra are a homogenous group.

And during 2015–16 WCHM explored alternate innovative ways to communicate health messages and advice to women in the ACT, and utilising WCHM social media to promote health events and messages to ACT women.

The Centre was pleased that the hard work of staff this year was recognised at a local level when WCHM won an ACT Violence Prevention Award. The Centre was recognised for *'the quantity and quality of resources and research based reports available to inform and assist community members, policy and law makers and the private sector'* and for *engaging key stakeholders in the DV sector and parts of the ACT community that typically have had little involvement in domestic violence matters, the WCHM is promoting better understanding of domestic violence and is advocating for the varied needs of domestic violence survivors.*



WCHM staff receive the Award from Minister Berry.

It has been a busy and challenging year for the Centre, and my thanks goes to:

- our members for their continued support and their contribution to, and involvement in, our research, forums and events;
- our community and business partners who have provided the expertise and

knowledge which supports our projects, our events and our advocacy and research work; and

- the funding bodies who have supported our work over the last year, which has enabled us to continue our work to enhance women's health and wellbeing in the ACT.

And also to our volunteer members of WCHM's Board, who continue to contribute their time, skills, experiences and views to WCHM, my thanks for their continued commitment to the organisation and its good governance, and for their support of the staff and myself. For those who are leaving the Board this year thank you for your contributions and commitment, and best wishes for the future.

And last but not least thank you to the staff of WCHM, who bring their unique and diverse skills, experiences, passion and ideas to the Centre and its work.

I hope that for many years to come WCHM can continue to meet the changing needs of women in Canberra, and to the changing external environment in the ACT.

Marcia Williams, Executive Director



WCHM staff at the launch of the Women Of Canberra Exhibition

2015/16 Staff (at 30 June 2016)

- Executive Director—Marcia Williams
- Health Promotion Officer—Angela Carnovale
- Health Promotion Officer — Jenni Gough
- Health Promotion Officer — Jane Yang
- Community Development Officer (WWDACT)—Nicole O'Callaghan
- Principle Policy Officer (WWDACT)—Emilia Della Torre
- Administration Officer —Margaret Ross
- Administration Assistant – Frances McNair
- Temporary Project worker — Amy Jowers-Blain
- Social Work placement student - Charo Gallacher

WCHM farewelled the following staff during the year:

- Mel Greenhalgh
- Temporary Project workers — Jill Scanlon, Mel Tulloch, and Jocelyn Perry



The Key Areas of Focus

The WCHM Strategic Plan focussed on five key areas for 2012-2017 which will further our work in supporting ACT women to make informed health and wellbeing choices, and to assist health related services and policy to be responsive to ACT women's needs.

1. KNOWING WHAT MATTERS!

2. COMMUNICATING WHAT MATTERS!

3. INFLUENCING WHAT MATTERS!

4. EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WHAT MATTERS!

5. DOING WHAT MATTERS!

The Year in Review

Our progress against our Strategic Plan

Key Area 1: **KNOWING WHAT MATTERS!**

Work with women in the ACT (especially those who are vulnerable to disadvantage and marginalisation, or who have specific gender-related needs) to:

- Gain knowledge and evidence about the economic, social and environmental issues affecting women's health and wellbeing in the ACT
- Understand the lived experience of women and the way this impacts upon their health and wellbeing
- Identify the health and wellbeing services and support available
- Identify new and emerging issues in women's health that are not adequately responded to by current policies and services

Our strategies and actions include: the use of research, forums and consultations with ACT women; working with networks, service providers and peer led groups to identify emerging issues; gender analysis; safety audits; attending conferences; and using gender based data from other sources to inform our work.

Feedback from a range of women and women's groups informed WCHM's projects over the year.

WCHM also continued to develop strong relationships with other community sector stakeholders in order to build our knowledge and to influence policy and service design and to advocate to create change where needed. In particular we work closely with ACTCOSS, members of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council, the ACT Women's Services Network, Shelter ACT, the ACT Youth Coalition, Health Care Consumers ACT, and community sector peak bodies to raise the profile of issues relating to women and to

develop approaches to working together in relation to services and programs for women.

In our work on the issues for the LGBTIQ community, WCHM collaborated with domestic violence service providers and LGBTIQ community representatives and we were informed by members of the LGBTIQ Ministerial Advisory Council; the Domestic Violence Crisis Service; the AIDS Action Council; A Gender Agenda; Legal Aid; Canberra Rape Crisis Centre; the Women's Legal Centre; Families ACT; the Queer* department at ANU and Northside Community Services.

WCHM continued to work closely with CRCC in the coordination of the Summer of Respect in relation to the prevention of sexual violence in the ACT, and with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the women's refuges in relation to domestic and family violence.

Social research: Women's experiences of finding help and support for domestic and family violence in the ACT

This report presented a summary of the findings from WCHM's research into women's experiences of seeking help for domestic violence in the ACT, because research like this has not been undertaken with ACT women before. Despite the diversity of the 17 women who participated in the research, their experiences of seeking help for domestic violence were remarkably similar, and their words echoed a great deal of what has already been documented elsewhere, through research, policy reviews and national plans. This made it no less important to hear directly from ACT women regarding the service responses designed to meet their needs. In fact, this was an important opportunity to ensure that any ACT reforms were based on tangible concrete suggestions made by women based on

their direct experiences of utilising services, and not by abstract ideals and well-meaning generic statements and responses.

There were four key ideas embedded in the overall themes:

1. All parts of the ACT human service system need to take greater responsibility for identifying and working with victims and perpetrators of violence, this work must be informed and coordinated by those agencies with specialist knowledge and expertise of DV.
2. Resources must be maintained for existing responses to DV, and investment made to fill the gaps identified through this and other research.
3. DV help-seeking is a process, not an event. Responses would be most effective if tailored to the type of violence a victim is experiencing and the particular point in the journey they are at.
4. To be effective responses must trust women, fully inform women, and then listen to what they say is best for their lives.

Areas for improvement were:

- Formal responses to and the community's understanding of DV are overly oriented toward physical violence, which can make it difficult for women experiencing non-physical forms of violence to receive appropriate help and support.
- There is a lack of a systemic focus on those who use violence, with the women reporting that those who use violence are often not held to account for the harm they cause to others.
- Many of the women felt that some formal responses to DV hold them responsible for ensuring their own and their children's safety.
- There are a range of factors—particularly isolation—that contribute to women remaining in DV relationships, and there was a need for help pre-separation.

- Current formal responses to DV need to move from being primarily focused on 'post-violence' crisis support to providing medium and long term support that will enable women to rebuild their own and their children's lives, and prevent homelessness and poverty.

The Report on the findings was launched in early April using a short video which was viewed online 117 times and accessed from the website 61 times in the first week. WCHM received good media coverage for the report in the Canberra Times with an article by Megan Gorrey (<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/act-womens-experiences-highlight-need-for-domestic-violence-reforms-20160405-gnyqds.html>), and ABC News Online with an article by Georgia Hitch (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-06/act-police-response-falls-short-domestic-violence-victims-expect/7304306?site=canberra>). WIN news also covered the launch with an interview with the WCHM ED.

Social research: *Women and Maternal Care in the ACT Consultation Report*

In late 2015, WCHM conducted a consultation to explore women's experience of accessing maternal care in the ACT, to collect the stories from women about their experiences, to inform how well the current levels of care meet the needs of women in the Canberra community, and to explore where there might be opportunities to improve local responses.

The Report summarised the results of the consultation, and provided the feedback and narratives of 171 women who had given birth for the first time in the ACT or Queanbeyan, since August 2013, and who participated in an online survey and/or focus groups. Women were asked about their experiences of 3 areas – pregnancy, giving birth and post-natal care. The report provides an analysis of the key issues identified by the women directly which is

supported through the use of quotes from the women's voices.

The consultation identified that whilst some women appear to have positive experiences and are able to safely deliver their babies with the support available, there still appear to be areas for improvement.

- Women wanted consistency in the information they are able to access about the options and care choices available in the ACT.
- Women identified that continuity of care stills remains an important aspect of having a baby as does women being included in practitioner's decision-making about their bodies and their babies.
- Breastfeeding was a strong theme and women talked about the social and emotional pressures on women to breastfeed and that the information they received was that breastfeeding was natural and therefore easy, and clearly the best option for babies. But the majority of women participating in the consultation wanted to breastfeed but many felt frustrated by a lack of support, information and referral.
- The consultation reinforced the importance of General Practitioners as a key source within the community in providing information to women about pregnancy, birthing and post-natal supports and the options available to them.

WCHM hopes by documenting women's stories about what worked and what did not, we hope the report also provides an opportunity to understand what aspects of the maternal care system in the ACT the women valued.

Social Research: Transforming domestic violence support in the ACT: Improving accessibility for same-sex-attracted, transgender, intersex and gender diverse clients

The objectives of this research were to analyse the barriers, gaps and strengths in service delivery for LGBTIQ communities

who are victims of domestic and family violence and to develop recommendations to improve service provision to the LGBTIQ community in the ACT.

The Report was launched in September 2015. Whilst the collection size was small, the responses provide insight into the experiences for this group within the ACT context, and the findings of this report are consistent with other national and international research. The key themes were:

- That local LGBTIQ respondents were less likely to identify domestic and family violence in their relationships, because of a lack of understanding that what was happening to them was domestic/family violence (DFV).
- There was frustration that the LGBTIQ community was forgotten within the context of DFV, and a lack of understanding that DFV is an issue within the LGBTIQ community -
- A consistent theme was a feeling from respondents that they did not belong within mainstream or DFV services, and there was a lack of understanding about the service delivery system and whether as an LGBTIQ person they would be accepted or indeed able to access support within that system for DFV.
- The need for education and inclusion campaigns for the general community, and the development and the displaying of LGBTIQ resources within mainstream and specialist services was also raised.

An outcome of the research was to develop a resource for service providers which identify a set of 'best practice' principles from the research, and ideas for how to put these principles in place. An audit tool was also developed which can be used by services within the ACT to assess whether their services are accessible to the LGBTIQ community, as measured against the principles.

Social Research: Women's experiences and perspectives on being diagnosed or labelled with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) in the ACT

The need for this research was identified by women with lived experience and the ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group. The gendered nature of the BPD diagnosis is widely recognised - of people diagnosed with BPD, the vast majority are women, and a history of trauma is very common. BPD is a costly disorder as it can lead to frequent hospitalisation and repeated use of mental health services and resources. People with the diagnosis of BPD are among those with the highest levels of unmet need in Australian mental health services, due to a lack of services, misunderstandings of the disorder, and stigma. Given the high prevalence and the social and economic costs, and the fact that with appropriate treatment people diagnosed with BPD have a high recovery rate, WCHM explored the experiences of ACT women relating to their BPD diagnosis; their ability to access information, services, support and treatment; and their service experience of health professionals and the mental health system. It also sought the views of services in the ACT who supported women.

The findings of this report highlight several areas of future work that we hope will assist in helping the ACT Government, health service providers and the range of other services who provide support to women who have been diagnosed or labelled with BPD in the ACT to improve their experiences and health outcomes.

Young women with autoimmune disease in the ACT

WCHM is conducting a scoping project that aims to highlight the voices of young women aged 18 to 40 years old with autoimmune diseases in the ACT and their experiences with ACT government and non-government programs, courses and services specially funded to provide information and support on chronic conditions. The project aims to help identify the degree to which information, services and support are relevant to younger women living with autoimmune disease(s) in the ACT and whether there

is a need for further research. This project aims to gather insight and understanding into:

- Young women's knowledge and experience of pre-existing local programs, courses and services which are specifically funded to provide services, information and support for chronic conditions;
- The suitability and age-appropriateness of these supports for young women with autoimmune diseases;
- Their ideas for ways to facilitate and improve young women's access to information and involvement in activities in the ACT.

Through this project WCHM aims to inform improvements in service delivery and in policy planning in relationship to the suitability and life-stage appropriateness for young women with autoimmune disease(s) in the ACT.

During May 2016 three focus groups were conducted with 20 young women aged from 18 to 40 with autoimmune disease(s) in the ACT. The focus groups attracted significant attention with over 40 women expressing their interest, including some who did not fall into the age bracket of 18-40 years old. Participants identified a number of challenges and barriers in the management of their health in the context of living life as a young woman with an autoimmune condition(s) in the ACT. This includes a lack of information regarding autoimmune disease, the difficulty in juggling the illness and the demands of life as a young woman, and the need for improved social connectedness and information sharing amongst peers.

In June a focus group for service providers was also conducted with 6 representatives in total. Representatives from ACT Health, MS Australia ACT, the Diabetes Clinic, the ACT ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Society and Arthritis ACT were in attendance. This session shed light on the many challenges of reaching this specific group and the need for information and service provision to this age group,

particularly in regards to prevention of co-morbidity and disease management. Service providers identified lack of resources as a major barrier to connecting with this group. They also were enthusiastic about working together to meet the needs of this constituency and had a specific interest and energy in making it work.

Social Research: Women’s Health Utilisation Survey

WCHM also began a community consultation survey with ACT women around their health service utilisation and to learn more about their health needs, so that we understand women’s views about what is needed to maintain their health and wellbeing; how they manage their needs; which health services are being utilised, what gaps and barriers they face; and their preferred methods of seeking health information. The survey was launched on 17 May and was open until 31 July 2016.

Housing Consortium research

WCHM’s work with the Housing Consortium considered how to capture data and identify evidence of the issues for and impacts on women in relation to their housing needs.

Key Area 2: COMMUNICATING WHAT MATTERS!

Communicate the evidence and insights gained from women in the ACT, particularly from our own research, but also from research conducted by other organisations to inform and educate others—including government—about ACT women’s health and wellbeing needs.

Our strategies and actions include: developing/launching reports using evidence and lived experience; submissions and advocacy to consultations, committees, advisory groups and working groups; media releases about the issues and the evidence; support for specific sectors/services about the needs of women; training/awareness raising to build an understanding of the gender issues for services/sectors; supporting health literacy in women/groups of women; online support/information for women; health promotion events; providing information to women about policy/service changes; skills development/training of vulnerable groups of women; and awareness raising in the broader community about specific gender and equity issues.

Submissions

WCHM has disseminated its findings from all its work through the following submissions to consultations:

- Submission on the draft ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2016-2020 (December 2015) which focussed on Action 29 of the Strategy as it correlates with WCHM’s research on domestic violence; and
- Submission to the Health (Patient Privacy) Amendment Bill (September 2015) which drew attention to the impacts of the protests on women and their support people when accessing termination of pregnancy services in the ACT.

Cyber Safety for Older ACT Women: A Guide to Staying Safe Online

In early September 2015 WCHM launched the *Cyber Safety for Older ACT Women: A Guide to Staying Safe Online*. The guide

was developed to provide appropriate, targeted and local information for older women in the ACT about staying safe online. This is because older women in the ACT are increasingly using online technology to access information and services, manage finances and assets, communicate with family and friends, and access social networking and dating sites. Without the right knowledge, older women may be vulnerable to scams and cyber abuse.

Blogging for Women with Lived Experiences of Mental Health Issues

With this project, women with lived experiences of mental health issues and health issues were supported to learn new skills and ways of engaging online through blogs. This allowed the women to develop some new skills and participate in an initiative that can help in their positive mental well-being. It also helped to raise awareness about and promote mental wellness, and to represent positive attitudes towards mental illness and decrease the stigma surrounding mental illness. From reading these blogs, it is hoped that readers will connect on a more personal level with the women and it will humanise the women and their illnesses, thus, reducing stigma and discrimination. The blog was launched during Mental Health Week in October 2015.

Digital mapping project

With the assistance of *Black Swan Productions Pty Ltd*, WCHM progressed the development of an online digital mapping tool to gather information from Canberrans (particularly women) about the public places and spaces in the ACT where they feel safe or unsafe. This will help us to understand what elements contribute to those spaces being perceived to be safe or unsafe. It is hoped that the information gathered in this Safety Mapping Tool can help to influence the future design of public spaces and facilities in the ACT, by addressing any

identified safety issues or addressing the perceptions of safety.

Improving awareness of domestic and family violence in the LGB Community

In order to address the recommendations from the Report *Transforming domestic violence support in the ACT: improving accessibility for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) clients* WCHM received funding under the Women's Safety Grants to develop and produce specific resources aimed at increasing awareness and understanding in the ACT about family and domestic violence (FDV) within LGB relationships and helping to build more inclusive pathways for these community members seeking help through formal support services. WCHM sought input from same-sex attracted and gender-diverse community members, who would be willing to participate in focus groups to provide their views on the language and 'look and feel' of the resources should be to ensure they are appropriate and work well to raise awareness about FDV and;

- what it looks like in relationships;
- what they can do, and
- where they can seek support.

The resources will be finalised and launched in October 2016.

PTSD Launch

In August 2015 the ED spoke at the Mental Illness and Education ACT's launch of their new education program on PTSD, which is designed to promote an understanding of PTSD as it is related to trauma, and to expand the understanding of who experiences PTSD, and how it happens. The ED's speech focussed on the fact that Australian women are almost twice as likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, that many women experiencing domestic violence experience PTSD, and that it is estimated that women who have experienced sexual violence may constitute the single largest group of people affected by PTSD.

Families Week Seminar

WCHM facilitated and organised a seminar on 19 May 2016 during National Families Week in conjunction with the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and Families ACT about the impact of domestic violence on children. The seminar aimed to strengthen local knowledge and understanding in the ACT community sector about the impacts of domestic violence on children and provide information about the support services available to families experiencing domestic violence.

Key Area 3: INFLUENCING WHAT MATTERS!

Use the evidence to work with others to:

- Encourage services and systems to be responsive to women's needs
- Promote women's participation in decision making and management
- Promote health equity among women
- Build knowledge about gender, from a women's perspective
- Ensure that ACT policies and services are gender sensitive, from a women's perspective

Our strategies and actions include: advocacy and lobbying, awareness raising, and highlighting gender and equity issues in the design and implementation of policies and services; writing submissions; participating in consultations; representation on committees, advisory groups and working groups; providing support to community sector in responding to any reviews or policy changes that impact on the delivery of services.

WCHM continued to advocate about women's access to gender sensitive health and wellbeing information and the need for better navigation tools for ACT women to assist them to find their way

around the health system and to access services in and outside the health system that lead to better health outcomes. In particular, the findings from WCHM's recent reports have been and are being used to provide input to planners and policy makers about the preferences of ACT women about access to health and wellbeing information by women, the gaps and barriers which impact on this, and the recommended changes that would better meet the needs of women.

In particular the findings from the *Women and Maternal Care in the ACT Consultation Report* released in May 2016 identified that women wanted consistency in the information they are able to access about the options and care choices available in the ACT. The information from the Report has proved valuable in discussions with the ACT Maternity Services Advisory Network, PANDSI, the ACT Capital Health Network, and input to the review of the ACT Women's Plan through the Ministerial Advisory Council for Women.

Sexual and reproductive health access advocacy –access zones

In March 2016 ACT Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury announced he was drafting a Bill to give a relevant Minister in the ACT the power to create a protected area around any approved health facility that provides termination of pregnancy services.

While termination of pregnancy has been legal in the ACT since 2002, and is regulated like other health services provided by a medical practitioner to their patients, many women accessing termination of pregnancy services in the ACT have had to pass Right to Life protestors. WCHM believes that by staging their protest outside a health service, Right to Life protestors engage in behaviour that violates others' rights to unimpeded access to health services and to medical privacy. There are no other health services in the ACT for which patients and health professionals are

subject to such public commentary, protest and condemnation. Protests at the location where termination of pregnancy services are provided do impede access. Women and their families can feel considerable distress when exposed to anti-choice protestors as they enter clinics. Even silent vigils convey disapproval and judgement, and contribute to distress in women and their families.

On 28 July 2015 the ED contacted all MLAs by email regarding the exposure draft of the *Health (Patient Privacy) Amendment Bill*, advising them that WCHM was supportive of this Bill, and why – and that we would be preparing a submission on the exposure draft to this effect. We also offered the opportunity to meet in person to discuss our respective views. WCHM met with Chris Bourke, Giulia Jones, Yvette Berry, Meegan Fitzharris, Joy Burch and Simon Corbell. Angela talked to a range of pro-choice groups who have since made supportive submissions including Liberty Victoria, Human Rights Law Centre, Reproductive Choice Australia, student groups from across the ANU, and many more.

People often assume that the issues surrounding access to reproductive health services have been resolved in the ACT. Too often those within our community that support access to reproductive health services are silent—they may assume that where additional work needs to be done, someone else is taking care of it. So in August WCHM launched the website www.rightofway.org.au which allowed supporters to show their support in three ways: write a letter, sign a petition, or contact the Women's Centre for Health Matters with views. Within an hour of emails being sent through WCHM networks over 30 letters had been sent to individual MLAs, and by the end of the campaign the petition had attracted nearly 800 electronic and hard copy signatures.

The bill was tabled in September to create a protected area around any approved health facility that provides termination of pregnancy services. On Thursday 29 October 2015 members of the ACT

Legislative Assembly passed the Health (Patient Privacy) Amendment Bill 2015. This means that the ACT will now have protected areas around termination of pregnancy services to ensure safe and private access for women and their support people.

Summer of Respect and the prevention of sexual violence in the ACT

WCHM again supported the Summer of Respect Campaign which began with Reclaim the Night on October 30th 2015 and concluded on International Women's Day, March 8th 2016.

As part of the Summer of Respect, WCHM partnered with Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and relevant groups to deliver two screenings of *The Hunting Ground* film to raise awareness of sexual violence on ACT campuses and to help clarify the universities and ACT's approach to sexual assault in regards to prevention, intervention and response, as well as data reporting. The Hunting Ground offered an expose of rape culture on American campuses and detailed the lack of institutional response. This was relevant to Australian audiences because a 2015 study conducted by the National Union of Students revealed alarming figures that mimic those found in the film, suggesting that our campuses are plagued by their own rape culture. While American universities have their own police services and are required by law to report, Australian campuses have no such facilities or requirements. Our statistics are driven by what is reported to police at state and territory levels, leading to skewed ideas about prevalence and a chasm between what is happening on the ground and in university and community responses. A concerning factor is that much of the low reporting rate concerns a lack of awareness about what constitutes sexual violence, where to report to on campus and fear over what the response will be like.

For the ANU Film screening WCHM worked with the ANU Women's Department, ANU Chancellery and the

Hunting Ground Australia Project to deliver an evening screening of the educational version of The Hunting Ground followed by a panel discussion and Q and A. WCHM's Health Promotion Officer, Melanie Greenhalgh, facilitated the discussion.

Attendance on the night reached the full capacity of 300, including the participation of many young men who have been a key target for Summer of Respect.

A public screening of the Hunting Ground was also arranged. The WCHM Executive Director welcomed attendees. The evening's moderator was Veronica Wensing and panel members included Dr Helen Watchirs OAM, ACT Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner; Chrystina Stanford, Chief Executive Officer of the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre; Allison Henry, Impact Producer of the Hunting Ground Australia Project; and Alyssa Shaw, Women's Officer and Acting Vice President for the Postgraduate and Research Students' Association and WCHM board member.



83 people attended the screening and the panel discussion which followed the screening was rich in content, drawing many similarities between the film and the safety of women on Canberra campuses. Audience engagement was strong with many attendees asking questions of the panel and also offering their own insights.

These discussions have highlighted areas for WCHM and CRCC to concentrate on the future and to work in collaboration with ACT universities to better prevent, respond and deal with sexual violence on campus.

Business and Industry Engagement on Domestic Violence

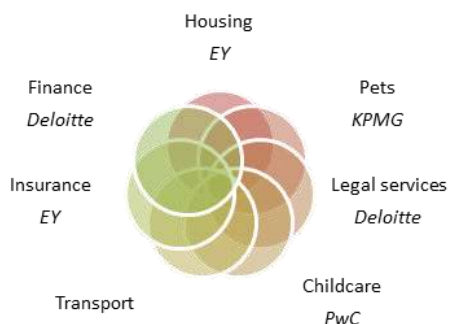
WCHM has been undertaking a project (funded by an ACT Women's Safety Grant) – supported by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service - aimed at engaging local ACT business and industry leaders in forums to identify opportunities and solutions to reduce barriers for women who have experienced domestic violence and are resettling post-crisis. WCHM is working with professional services firms in Canberra and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to facilitate these forums with business and industry. The professional services involved are Ernst and Young, Deloitte, KMPG, Price Waterhouse Coopers and Protiviti.

The objective of the forums is to explore what industry and business can do to meet the needs of a woman leaving domestic violence so that they do not tip into homelessness or financial insecurity or return to an abusive relationship because it is too hard to keep themselves and their children safe and secure. The forums are also about having conversations between sectors that have not previously discussed the impacts of domestic violence. This is because:

- Community services and government cannot address domestic violence alone
- The vast majority of Government funding targets 'crisis' services and responses – refuges, police, medical services, courts, specialist homelessness services
- There is a large gap in domestic and family violence service delivery that occurs post-crisis, and broader support than that provided by Government needs to be available post crisis

Many of the solutions to the issues lie with business and industry and they can play a vital role in identifying ACT wide opportunities and solutions.

There are seven areas of focus for the *BEYOND CRISIS: Canberra professionals making safer choices easier for victims of domestic violence* forums. These seven areas of focus for the forums have been informed by the feedback from women in the ACT gained through research and consultations by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Women's Centre for Health Matters.



A common approach has been used across all 7 forums in terms of the look and feel and giving importance to what ACT women said were the barriers, including a common Agenda for the forums, using similar invitations, the use of common video introductions by Rosie Battie and David Morrison, common participant packs (including topic/industry specific ACT statistics, and examples of ideas/solutions from other states, overseas, and identified by women themselves) and the use of a video of a local ACT survivor talking about their experience with the topic. There is also a common survey used at the end to evaluate each forum.

Representing the views of ACT women on advisory bodies, reference committees, and working groups:

WCHM continues to advocate through representation on committees for greater inclusion of gender sensitive policies,

practices and infrastructure relating to women:

- Angela Carnovale represented WCHM as a member of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women (MACW)
- The Executive Director continued her role as the Chair of the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council (DVPC), the ACT Ministerial advisory body responsible for providing the ACT Attorney General with advice on preventing domestic and family violence in the ACT
- The Executive Director was a member of the ACT Primary Health Network's Community Advisory Council.
- The ED was a member Steering Group for the ACT Community Sector Industry Plan.
- The Executive Director represented WCHM as a member of the ACT Council of Social Services peak groups' forum.

WCHM contributed to the project *Enhancing supports for women affected by harmful alcohol and other drug use and domestic and family violence* which is being conducted by ATODA with the support of Dr Anna Olsen from the ANU.

The ED contributed to a national evaluation of the Second Action Plan and ANROWS under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and provided local input. WCHM is a member of the Justice Reform Group and has used findings from our reports to inform the introduction of non-custodial sentences in the ACT, and to support community based sentencing as a way of addressing some of the social determinants of offending and re-offending for women – such as alcohol and other drug issues, mental health issues and lack of economic opportunities.

Mel from WCHM attended the ACT Seniors Health Roundtable in May 2016 as an opportunity to discuss health services and support issues of importance to provide input on key topics including

end of life care issues; health decision-making, e-health; health promotion, wellbeing and healthy living, and health pathways.

Key Area 4: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WHAT MATTERS!

Support women and women's groups:

- To make informed health and wellbeing choices
- To understand how to access appropriate gender-sensitive services and information that support their health and wellbeing
- By providing capacity building and organisational support for small NGOs and peer-led support groups

Strategies and actions include: developing and delivering support for specific sectors or services about the needs of women; training and awareness raising to build understanding of gender issues for services/sectors; capacity building for small organisations; building health literacy in women/groups of women; information provision for women; online support for women; health promotion events; support for women to understand changes in the environment (changes to Medicare, e-health, NDIS); community sector planning, and training and support; skills development/ training of vulnerable groups of women.

Informing women and their supporters about the impacts of living with endometriosis

WCHM has supported the Canberra Endometriosis Network with access to WCHM's facilities for meetings and assistance with organising forums. WCHM hosted an information night on Tuesday 26 August 2015 WCHM exploring the impacts for women of living with the illness endometriosis.

Attendees heard from endometriosis researcher Maryam Moradi, Dr Omar Adham and Melissa Parker from the Canberra Endometriosis Centre, and a member of the Canberra Endometriosis Network. The speakers addressed the questions: What are the personal impacts of living with endometriosis? How does endometriosis impact upon women's relationships with lovers, family, friends and work colleagues? How does society's attitudes toward and understanding about endometriosis impact the women living with this condition? More than 100 women, partners, family members and friends attended the event.

The event was also an opportunity for local artist Margaret Kalms to launch her photographic project *Life with Endometriosis*.

WCHM also worked with the Network to organise an event on Tuesday 31 May 2016 which focussed on sex and Endometriosis, and which covered how to negotiate sexual relationships while living with chronic pain and how to maintain intimacy in relationships (especially when partners often become carers as well as lovers).

WCHM supported the Canberra Endometriosis Network by hosting an information night exploring the impacts of living with the illness endometriosis on Tuesday 26 August 2016. Attendees heard from endometriosis researcher Maryam Moradi, Dr Omar Adham and Melissa Parker from the Canberra Endometriosis Centre, and Katie Williams, member of the Canberra Endometriosis Network.

Auspicing and capacity building /organisational support for Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT)

The WCHM team continued to provide administrative, IT and financial and reporting management support to WWDACT, day-to-day supervision for the two WWDACT employees, as well as recruitment and support of a temporary project worker.

WCHM worked with Women With Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) to finalise and publish the results in September 2015 from the *Women With Disabilities ACT Have Your Say! Forum & Interviews*. The report aimed to assist government, policy makers, service providers and the broader community to better meet the needs of women with disabilities in the Canberra community.

WCHM maintained WWDACT's website as a sub-site of the WCHM website, which provides information about WWDACT, what they do and their achievements, and access to WWDACT submissions, reports and other documents relating to women with disabilities.

WCHM also provided assistance to WWDACT to support specific projects.

Key Area 5: DOING WHAT MATTERS!

Ensuring that WCHM:

- Represents a strong and diverse membership
- Is actively engaged with the women we represent
- Is a well governed and managed organisation with accountability and transparency for members, staff, funders and stakeholders
- Has controls in place which ensure compliance with its obligations and legislation

Using the WCHM website and social media WCHM to communicate with members and stakeholders about women's health and wellbeing

The WCHM website is used to ensure up-to-date access to current news and information about events, services, programs, reports, consultations and all other matters that may be of interest to ACT women. The website had over 21,700 page views over 2015-16.

The WCHM Social Media Plan also identifies the important use of social media by WCHM to:

- Link women to health and wellbeing information;
- Link women to information about key women's issues;
- Promote the Centre and engage women in the Centre's work;
- Inform women about the ACT community sector;
- Inform women about the ACT Government initiatives etc; and
- Connect with similar organisations and initiatives.

During 2015–16 WCHM committed to exploring alternate innovative ways to communicate health messages and advice to women in the ACT, and utilising WCHM social media to promote health events and messages to ACT women.

From our own research we know that women often use the internet to find and connect to personal stories from those with similar health issues or circumstances.

To respond to women wanting information that is accurate, up-to-date and relevant, WCHM undertook a Women's Health Matters Blog Project. The blog is health information written for women by women with lived experiences in the ACT community. A redesign of the Women's Health and Wellbeing Hub was undertaken to include blog posts of between 300 – 800 words to be written by women with lived experiences on predetermined topics. This strategy not only enhanced the sharing of relevant information, but also engaged women with lived experiences of health issues that they were willing to share. Facilitated workshops were held with women which allowed the process of writing a piece for a blogging environment to be explored and the limits and editorial rights, responsibilities and parameters clearly

explained. An example is the *Blogging for Women with Lived Experiences of Mental Health Issues project* which WCHM undertook during Mental Health Week in October 2015.

WCHM also used Facebook to complement our main channels of communication - the WCHM website, the Weekly and quarterly e-Bulletin, as well as our use of media. Facebook is used to provide regular and up-to-date information on women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and to raise awareness about issues relating to women's health and wellbeing; local events, activities and forums; WCHM's activities, women's health promotion information and events; link with other community events and campaigns (eg such as important weeks for women and women's health, and Domestic and Family Violence campaigns with other organisations such as DVCS); to promote more widely the work we do and our projects, research reports and findings; and to raise awareness around current issues.

With health promotion days occurring regularly and a steady flow of news, research and events relating to women's health and wellbeing WCHM is never short of items to post. This included health information from trusted sites, women's health news and research, highlighting quality health sources and awareness raising during key health promotion dates.

WCHM also ventured into the of Youtube videos for the Launch of the Hear Me Out report which was viewed 117 times and for the March Quarterly which had a total of 33 views.

Maintaining the WCHM Website and Weekly and Quarterly publications

Throughout the year WCHM staff worked to maintain the high standard of the WCHM website to ensure up-to-date access to current news and information about events, services, programs, reports, consultations and all other matters that may be of interest to ACT women.

The WCHM team prepared and released four editions of the Quarterly e-bulletin in 2015-16. This electronic newsletter provides an opportunity for WCHM members and supporters to be updated about issues affecting women's health and wellbeing in the ACT and nationally, be informed about upcoming WCHM events, be introduced to the WCHM staff and find out about WCHM projects.

Maintaining the highest level of professionalism

The WCHM Board continues to maintain and review organisational policies and governance processes to ensure efficient, effective and accountable management practices.

Treasurers Report

The operating result for the financial year ended 30 June 2016 was a surplus of \$26,425 (surplus for 2015: \$56,857), representing a decrease of 54% on last year. This result was consistent with budget expectations and takes into account a number of fantastic events and opportunities throughout the year including the Centre's 25th birthday celebrations and the Women of Canberra project. The Centre was well placed to be able to support a number of conference attendances by staff early in the financial year over and above that of last year. It is also reflective of decisions made by the Board and the Executive Director to continue to capitalise on the ability to invest in the future with a new up to date telephony system and further investment in our online platforms. The ability to invest in current and supported capability is a prudent financial risk management strategy.

The revenue for WCHM increased by 10% during the year, noting that after removing recoveries the increase was 4%. During the year the WCHM (including Women with Disabilities ACT [WWDACT]) was

successful in receiving a small number of grants. It would be fair to say that the availability of grant opportunities this year was significantly tighter than in the previous year.

As noted in previous years, employee expenses continue to be our largest expense. This remains consistent with the sector. We received the fourth year of funding from the ACT Government to supplement us for the impact of the equal remuneration pay increases and the resultant additional on-costs and this will continue for 2017.

The major source of income continued to be received in the form of recurrent income from the ACT Health Directorate. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Board Members for their continued passion and commitment and for the opportunity to continue to work with and learn from such talented women.

I would also like to acknowledge the projects that the WCHM staff have worked on, with a number of significant reports and projects having been delivered during the year.

I look forward to continuing my role as Treasurer into 2017.

Lynnere Gray, Treasurer