

Southern Women's Action Network Facilitator's Report 2021-2022

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In the month that SWAN officially turned 25, November 2021, our Speaker Event was held at Mt Eliza Community Centre. Fiona York, the Executive Officer of Housing For The Aged Action Group spoke to us about the rise in women over age 50 experiencing homelessness, and the barriers and bureaucracy around getting help for homelessness. There is history and deep connection between our two groups, as a few of our current SWAN members demonstrated at the event with photos, booklets and shared memories.

For International Women's Day, our March Speaker Event this year, we were back here at Mt Martha House, listening to Joanna Hayter's incredible stories about the women who made a lasting impact on her during her professional and personal life of activism here and overseas. Joanna stressed the importance of female connection and partnership, across cultures, in war prevention strategies. She also drew our attention to Australia's appalling performance in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report. After a career in international development, peace and security and her own anti-war activism, she has "retired" and now spends her time landscaping people's gardens along the Mornington Peninsula.

We also sang Happy Birthday and celebrated SWAN's belated 25th with a delicious cake.

Our May Speaker Event saw us welcome Judy Carrol and Katie Shafar from the Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association (BRASA) and they shared some very personal stories about their on-the-ground help here in Melbourne for refugees – supplying mobile phones, accommodation - often in their own homes, money, clothes, even fencing and deck-building for one refugee toddler's safety. Katie also related some very confronting observations from her time as a nurse on Nauru.

Even though COVID19 restrictions had been lifted for some time, all government health reports were predicting the 2022 Winter season to be quite serious with the possibility of infections creeping up again. The Committee decided to hold our July NAIDOC Week Speaker Event via a Zoom meeting. We welcomed Alice Ugle and Stephanie Ross, Engagement Project Officers from First Peoples' Assembly Victoria. The Assembly is the independent and democratically elected body to represent Aboriginal people and communities in Treaty discussions. Stephanie and Alice showed videos of their work and talked us through a brilliant slide presentation describing the importance of the upcoming Treaty negotiations and of having First Nations Peoples' voices heard.

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SWAN members attended a number of events in the 2021-2022 period, including Walk Against Family Violence, Survival Day Festival, Reconciliation Week Walk and March For Justice.

SWAN launched letter campaigns to the Prime Minister and various State and Federal ministers regarding "Raise The Age," "Change The Date," SWAN's Position Paper on Indigenous Voice and Australia's Gender Gap Report status.

The Supporting First Nations Group has been very active again and their rep, Diane McDonald, will report separately.

The SWAN Bursary this year was awarded to Nicole Holding who will use it towards a Master's degree, studying African-American birthing. Upon her acceptance, Nicole related an example of the poor treatment of African-American women who suffered birth trauma.

This year also saw the instigation of SWAN News – our monthly newsletter which relies on input by SWAN members, especially for website links to local events and matters of interest and activism. A huge thank you to Viv Daniels for drawing all the threads together for this one.

A big thank you goes to Erica Churchill for organising all of our brilliant Guest Speakers, to the Catering Crew for our wonderful morning tea each meeting, to Susan Hillman-Stolz for looking after our Raffle, and to Secret Garden in Mornington for their lovely bouquets.

As the outgoing Facilitator, I would also like to thank all the Committee members I have worked with over the last 4 years – learning from you and working beside you for SWAN has been an absolute privilege.

And lastly, two of SWAN's former Guest Speakers were award winners this year! Ronnie Gorrie took out the top prize at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and Nyadol Nyuon was given the Medal of the Order of Australia at the Queen's Birthday Awards.