

when women meet



celebrating

SWAN

1996 - 2022

Southern Women's Action Network

striving for social justice

Diane E McDonald with Judith Couacaud Graley & SWAN members

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SWAN

acknowledges

the Bunurong / Boon Wurrung people, the Traditional Custodians of these lands and waters where we meet. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. In line with our commitment to social justice, SWAN unequivocally supports First Nations People in their campaigns for sovereignty, self-determination, treaties and truth-telling.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Thank you to the many remarkable women who contributed to the successful development of this book. This includes some of the foundation members of SWAN as well as several other women who participated in the organisation in the very early days. Their recollections and insights provide us with a valuable window into the past, giving us some appreciation of the context in which SWAN was established and the rationale for its focus.

We also thank the many other members, representing various generations in SWAN's lifespan, who have generously shared their SWAN experience with us. Our warmest appreciation is extended to Mary Crooks AO the Executive Director of The Victorian Women's Trust, who so readily agreed to pen the Foreword for our publication. In this role and as one of SWAN's earliest guest speakers, Mary's reflections about SWAN come from a unique vantage point. So too, we are most grateful to the other former guest speakers who shared their recollections of meeting SWAN members and hearing about their social justice concerns.

In my role as Coordinator of this 'history project' I want to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by several SWAN women in particular. This includes Marg Darcy who helped me to scope the original project and to conduct the initial interviews, together with members of the SWAN committee who supported the extension of the original single chapter project to become a book. My special gratitude is given to Erica Churchill and Vivienne Daniels who spent long hours scouring hard copy material in archive boxes and investigating electronic files to locate often illusive historical information to help me (a relative 'newbie' to the organisation) to tell the SWAN story. I also appreciate the support given by Moz Lucas who applied her research skills to gather, collate and summarise input from a sample of former guest speakers.

The enthusiasm, wisdom and support provided by founding member Judith Couacaud Graley has been instrumental in realising this final product. Her unfailing belief that SWAN's journey is well worth documenting, combined with her enduring passion for the empowerment of women and promoting the fundamental role that women play in community development, inspired me to keep going with what seemed to be a never ending task.

At a more technical level, the editing skills of Erica Churchill, Fran Rule and Moz Lucas have helped to improve the readability of the text; the artistic skills of Cath John have created an attractive cover for our publication; and the graphic design skills of Heather O'Brien have enhanced the layout, photos and images. The expertise of our publisher Yanni Dellaportas from *Two Tails Publishing* has ensured that the SWAN story that you are about to read has been presented in a high quality format. We thank them all for their generosity and support.

My apologies are extended to any other people who I have not recognised personally who have contributed to the successful preparation of this book. Your understanding is also sought for any errors and oversights that you might identify. We would greatly appreciate your feedback in this regard to help us to correct this historical record.

- Diane McDonald

LETTERS OF
CONGRATULATIONS
& AWARDS

Harriet Shing MP

MEMBER FOR EASTERN VICTORIA REGION



Southern Women's Action Network

PO Box 72 Bittern 3918

Dear SWAN members,

It is a privilege as a Member of the Victorian Parliament representing the Eastern Victoria Region to congratulate SWAN on such an extraordinary history, and the release of *'When Women Meet'*.

A history which has been characterised by the great courage and determination of many local women, particularly in sharing the impact of often very difficult issues affecting their lives.

A history which has not only described the momentum for positive change, but brought it to fruition.

The role that SWAN has played in building and growing a safe environment for women to share ideas and actions has brought hundreds of women together over SWAN's twenty six year history to discuss a wide range of issues including family violence, asylum seekers and refugees, environmental action, multiculturalism and engagement with First Nations communities.

This work has in turn led to community and organisational action and enabled others to pursue their own objectives in meeting social justice challenges and opportunities.

'When Women Meet' shares work undertaken over many years, and tells the unique stories of participants; it also paves the way for SWAN to evolve and reflect the needs and priorities of our changing communities.

Support for women remains of vital importance in a range of ways as we continue discussions on progressive social reforms, and I offer my congratulations to everyone who contributed to this book, and to the work of the Committee.

Yours faithfully,

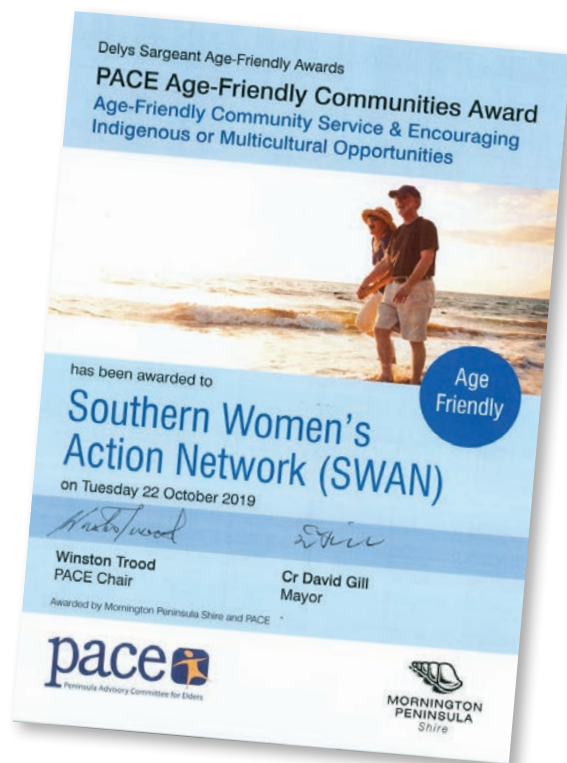
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Harriet Shing'.

Harriet Shing MP
Minister for Equality

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In 2019 the Mornington Peninsula Shire presented SWAN with two Awards entitled the 'Peninsula Advisory Committee for Elders (PACE). Awards for 'Age-Friendly Community Service & Encouraging Indigenous or Multicultural Opportunities'. These annual tributes are named in honour of local, leading female advocate, Delys Sargeant OAM who was instrumental in shaping the Council's approach to aging well. These awards are presented to individuals, groups and services in recognition of their contribution to building stronger communities for older people. In 2019, around thirty percent of Mornington Peninsula residents were aged over sixty years, the second highest older population in Victoria.

9 February 2023

Dear Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN),

On behalf of the Mornington Peninsula Shire, it is with great pleasure that I congratulate SWAN on your 26th anniversary. I wish to acknowledge the significance and hard work behind your volunteer-led community organisation, thriving for more than a quarter of a century to support women on the peninsula.

SWAN has provided a forum for women of all ages and backgrounds to gain knowledge, discuss current affairs and advocate for social justice issues. You provide an important platform to promote women's active involvement in the community and empower women to work together to address issues that contribute to inequality, disadvantage, racism and other forms of injustice. This aligns strongly with the Shire's aim of achieving 'a healthy and self-determined community where everyone feels valued, supported and safe' - a strategic objective of our Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25.

We are proud to have partnered with, and supported SWAN in the delivery of your important work over many years. Of particular significance, your events and projects aimed at promoting human rights, gender equality and age friendly environments.

This publication details the history of SWAN over the past 26 years, sharing with the broader community the important work they have achieved.

Once again, congratulations on this significant milestone and thank-you for your inspiring contributions to our local community. I wish you continued success into the future.

Kind Regards,



Councillor Despi O'Connor
Briars ward Councillor
Mayor 2020-2021

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F O R E W O R D

I feel very honoured to pen a foreword for this commemorative milestone booklet, celebrating over a quarter of a century of achievement by the Southern Women's Action Network.

In 1996 I commenced working for the Victorian Women's Trust (VWT) as its Executive Director at about the same time that SWAN formed. Indeed, it was a few years in on both sides that I was asked to be one of the early speakers to travel down to the Mornington Peninsula and spend time with SWAN, to discuss ideas and to enjoy the group's warm hospitality.

To be able to help build a feminist organisation like the VWT as well as support the activities of a group like SWAN has been an absolute privilege. Among many things, it has provided me with a sparkling, clear window into women's capacities, unambiguous leadership, their invaluable roles and social contributions like no other.

The Purple Sage Project (1998-99) was one of the VWT's first major forays into the world of politics, social justice and public policy. The unique and striking public engagement which unfolded relied for its success on the appetite and talent of local women everywhere (including from the Mornington Peninsula) to stand up and be counted, to join a collaborative conversational process to give voice to their issues and concerns.

Not long later, we staged a first ever exhibition called *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*. We designed this as a means of celebrating women's roles and contributions to society, coinciding with the centenary of Federation. Originally, we planned to include twenty women, selected from a state-wide public nomination process. We received over 260 nominations. When we sat down to cull this list, we realised the foolishness of our endeavour and agreed to include them all. The subsequent exhibition that toured Victoria brought to public light the truth about women's lives – their life-long commitments, dedication, selflessness, immeasurable amount of unpaid work in families, neighborhoods and communities, heroics, stoicism, richness and courage.

When Professor Marilyn Lake wrote of the exhibition with the following insight, she could also be describing the local endeavor of the women who set up SWAN, and all the women since who have helped it thrive and support one another as women, year after year:

"The achievements of women documented in this exhibition range from community service, to politics, to sport, the arts and education. The women come from a range of classes and nationalities. The energy and creativity of their pursuits are remarkable. They provide inspiration for us all. The exhibition is an occasion to celebrate Victorian women's audacity and stamina. But it should move us to ponder, not just the nature of our collective past, but on the nature of history, which is the representation of that past, in textbooks, museums and film. For how adequate can history be as a record of the past when it so singularly fails to grasp the significance of women's lives?"

The Age, 2 June 2001

Apart from these major public initiatives, I have constantly thrilled at what it is women do day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year. I have seen women use a small amount of grant funds to realise big ideas, such as supporting those who have experienced sexual assault to pursue justice right through to the High Court, and winning landmark rulings; and women gathering thousands of signatures to petition the Federal Parliament about climate change.

I understand that women are not a homogeneous group and do in fact subscribe to views and values across the political spectrum. But at the same time, I know there is a vast reservoir of women whose deep desire and passion for social justice and freedom from oppressive structures courses through their veins. This was no better on display than with the *Marches for Justice* across Australia in early 2021, in which SWAN participated. When the then Prime Minister reminded Australian women how lucky they were that they didn't live in a country where they might be shot at in the streets, he had absolutely no idea of the quiet fury held by women throughout their lives, a direct reflection of their experience and the disrespectful treatment they received at the hands of powerful and dominant men in their lives. This tension in the lives of many women is directly addressed by SWAN that supports and nourishes women's shared passion for social justice.

Let's not forget what it takes to maintain an organisation like SWAN. The recipe appears deliciously very simple. A safe place to be heard. Welcoming. Inclusive. Respectful. Shared food. But bi-monthly meetings year after year entail a watchful eye on values and practices, keeping the faith, securing good speakers, guaranteeing venues and catering, maintaining membership details and other administrative imperatives, and doing all of this on something less than the proverbial smell of an oily rag.

What we don't see are the less visible logistics, the relentless work by volunteers, the networking and the generous giving of time, effort and collective energies. And let's not overlook the time and effort given to SWAN by the long list of women who have accepted the invitations to speak, who have been prepared to travel outside of hours commonly, to give of themselves for the cause, and to value-add to the goals and activities of SWAN.

Warmest congratulations to SWAN on reaching an illustrious milestone. What a bunch of canny *social capitalists* have been at work on the Mornington Peninsula – building and maintaining social connection and well-being; nourishing and strengthening ties that bind; practicing the values that make for a vibrant and engaged civil society; and helping create a better world for the next generations. Women's work might never be done – but we are nothing without it!

Mary Crooks AO
Executive Director
Victorian Women's Trust

This book is dedicated to all women who:

Seek the companionship
and support of like-minded sisters, are willing to share and
learn from one another and who strive to achieve social justice
and equity in their own communities and beyond.

The focus is on the power of a volunteer-led
community network to raise awareness and facilitate the
empowerment of women.

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

A L P	Australian Labour Party
A S R C	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
C B D	Central Business District
C W A	Country Women's Association
G W V	Graduate Women Victoria
M P S C	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
N G O	Non Government Organisation
R A P	Reconciliation Action Plan
S F N	Supporting First Nations Group
S W A N	Southern Women's Action Network
V C A T	Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
V W T	Victorian Women's Trust

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O N E

INTRODUCTION

Enabling women to soar by Judith Couacaud Graley

The Southern Women's Action Network, affectionately and powerfully known as SWAN, is now in its twenty seventh year. The history of SWAN has not been told, other than by the stories passed on by SWAN members to each other; at anniversary meetings, some of which are reported in the SWAN newsletter; and in abridged form in some of the publications of SWAN or other community compilations. You will read in the following pages the story of its beginnings and its journey over the years through the voices of women - SWAN founding members, those who came after them and through to the present day. Women speaking clearly, and with pride, and in distinctly feminist tone. That so many women have spoken so that we could piece together a history of SWAN, provides for a pitch-perfect telling of the SWAN story.

*“One’s life has value
so long as one attributes value to the life of others,
by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion”*

Simone de Beauvoir - *The Coming of Age* (1970)

SWAN's longevity is significant. Research suggests that very few women only organisations led by volunteers, that still resemble their original structure and initial focus, have survived as long as SWAN. Amongst them are the Country Women's Association (CWA) and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). This places SWAN in rather auspicious company as one of few non-partisan political/ community organisations to survive for longer than a quarter of a century in Victoria. But SWAN stands out again as it does not have a national or even a state infrastructure to support it, thus suggesting strongly that SWAN is unique. It's the creation of the amazing women who live south of the Melbourne CBD. So again, it's very important that we tell our own story.

Much is spoken in this book about the isolation that many of us felt when we came from elsewhere to make our home in the southern areas of Melbourne, especially the Mornington Peninsula. One of the main motivating forces behind SWAN was an almost desperate desire for like-minded women to get together and discuss contemporary, political and community issues. *When Women Meet* is the title of this book because fundamental to everything about SWAN, is the gathering of members on a Sunday morning. There was, from the outset, a deep need to learn from other women and share ideas in a safe women's-only space. Even today women arrive on the Peninsula and find SWAN, to discover, as founding members did, the relief and joy of the SWAN sisterhood, a meeting of fine minds and good hearts.

The place we live in with its natural beauty and quality of lifestyle on one hand and its often-overlooked inequality and social and economic disadvantage on the other, has been fundamental to SWAN's existence. Despite the disconnection and isolation, SWAN members were not unhappy about their choice of residence. On the contrary SWAN members still often express a genuine affection for their locality and its distance from a crowded and busy CBD. But SWAN members have never been about blandly accepting the status quo. From the outset SWAN has always been about addressing social and economic disadvantage, not by peddling charity, but rather through community action. SWAN has always been about striving for social justice.

Notably, many SWAN members are involved in other community organisations, often environmental protection and climate change emergency groups and political parties, mostly the ALP, the Greens and Independents. Very rarely has this created any division or discord. Rather SWAN has always been about the freedom to express a view and being respected, indeed admired, for putting forward one's own perspective. Women have commented that a SWAN meeting was the only place where they felt comfortable to speak out. Not all SWAN attendees were or are involved in other groups away from family or work. For some, SWAN is their community group - one that we can say has always welcomed any woman from any background. SWAN's inclusivity and kindness has produced a female bipartisan stoicism that has ensured both its success and its longevity.

SWAN's foundational principles, have, with a little tweaking, continued to reflect a fast-changing world. The particular character of our committee structure and operation has fundamentally remained the same. From the initial meetings around my kitchen table, other women have hosted committee meetings in their homes. A key focus has been to ensure the smooth running of the bi-monthly meetings that are open to all women. These are at the core of SWAN's existence. It was always the aim to keep the committee structure flat, i.e. non-hierarchical, with less emphasis on titles, and for the decision making process to be based on consensus and be a vehicle for empowerment. SWAN's founders were more influenced by the notion of a feminist collective rather than by the traditional structures encountered in most community organisations, including the ones in which they were already members.



ABOVE: Early Committee meeting at Maureen McPate's kitchen table, 2002. From left Jane Hildebrant, Val McKenna, Barbara Lindner, Carole Ford, Debbie Roberts.



LEFT: Early Committee meeting at Val McKenna's kitchen table, 2001. From left Val McKenna, Debbie Roberts, Alleyne Lacey, Maureen McPate, Jo Diplock, Carole Ford.

In this sense SWAN was a bellwether organisation that has survived the tyranny of structure-less-ness that has stricken other community groups. This success is illustrated by SWAN member's comments over time, and reflected throughout this book highlighting the fact that SWAN women have wanted to make consensus decision making work.

Right from the start there were a number of important decisions made that continue to guide SWAN today. These can be summed up by the fact that, as women we would do our very best, but also have the very best. The best speakers, the best coffee, the best room ambience the best experience of sharing time together. And the best we could do to bring about social justice. Issues relating to refugees, domestic and family violence, gender inequality and human rights, especially for minority groups, have never slipped off the SWAN agenda.

As you will read, the SWAN guest speaker at our bi-monthly meetings has been a draw card for attendance and a major element of SWAN's successful times. It is truly remarkable to note that some 150 amazing women¹ (and a few men) have given of themselves to visit the SWAN outpost. They have given high quality, often overwhelmingly, outstanding inspiring presentations that have had SWAN members applauding loudly their appreciation or moved to tears, to ask what they could do to advocate for change or by providing donations to support a good cause. It is no exaggeration to say that the information relayed at a SWAN community meeting changed the way many women thought and felt. It also gave many women the courage to live the life they wanted for themselves and assist others to do so too. Good friendship and loyal comradeship took root at SWAN.

SWAN was established just after the renowned sociologist Eva Cox had given her Boyer Lectures with the title *A Truly Civil Society*. Many of the founders had been influenced by these lectures, mainly because they provided a powerful, alternative academic paradigm to the prevailing neo-liberalism of the late 1990s, that was so evident in their local conservative neighbourhoods. Eva Cox said:

*“Let me put my values on the table:
I believe we are responsible for each other, as well as ourselves.
I act for others so I can live with myself. This position runs counter to some
of the prattling on about the politics of difference by postmodernists...
I believe it is up to us to make up our minds about the world
we want and to take some responsibility
to make this world happen”.*²

Hannah Arendt, a favourite political scholar of mine, was also referenced to explain that, to be fully human, one must balance family life, paid work and public life. Viva activa, for together in balance they provide the basis for new beginnings, the possibility of hope. This was the type of thinking, the style of the values, the permission given, that was put on the SWAN kitchen table from the very beginning.

¹ This includes guest speakers at SWAN bi-monthly meetings and women who spoke at public seminars and community forums facilitated by SWAN.

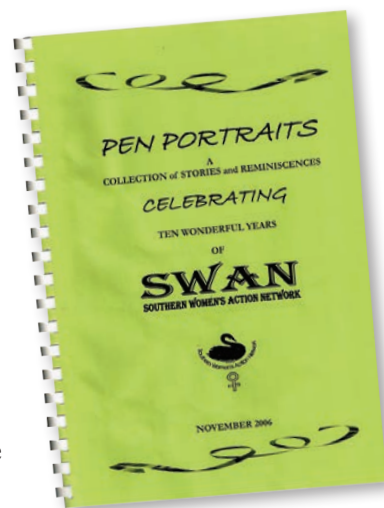
² Cox, E. 1995. <https://ldb.org/boyer11.htm>

Of all the things that SWAN has given to the hundreds of women who have met together, learnt together and taken action together, perhaps the most important is discovering that with their heads and their heart they can bring about change, in which lies the power of HOPE. It's a wonderful story you are about to read and there is still no end in sight! Indeed, with typical SWAN elegance and endurance our SWAN might hopefully continue to reach out and fly upwards for the next generation of women.

Why this book was written by Diane McDonald

In 2006 SWAN published *Pen Portraits: A Collection of Stories and Reminiscences*³ to celebrate its tenth anniversary. This was a fitting testament to the amazing contribution made by women living on the Mornington Peninsula and in nearby suburbs, regarding a wide range of social justice concerns. Activity of this nature can be considered particularly progressive, being undertaken within a fairly conservative context.

In 2020 SWAN Committee Members discussed the possibility of producing a second publication to bring SWAN's history up to date. After careful consideration it was agreed to build on the original record, by producing a living history that could be updated and extended over time.



ABOVE: Initiators of the 'SWAN History' project, from left Marg Darcy and Diane McDonald. Photo: Moz Lucas.

The aim was to capture the recollections of the women who founded SWAN; document the views of SWAN members about the benefits for themselves of participating in this local, community based women's organisation; and record the insights gleaned from some of the other people who engaged with SWAN during the past quarter of a century. This would be supplemented with information obtained from SWAN archives, newsletters and other memorabilia.

Easy said! But those who volunteered to take on this task were soon confronted with the difficulty of gathering input from women who were already overstretched with work and family responsibilities, and whose lives were further constrained due to the COVID-19 pandemic and long periods of lockdown.

³ Roberts, D. 2006. Pen Portraits <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/about-us/history-of-swan/pen-portraits/>

As well as this, they found that the words that Debbie Roberts, the author of *Pen Portraits* wrote in her introduction, continued to ring true: “*To get women to write about their lives is nigh on impossible! My life is so ordinary’ and who would want to know about me*”?

But after more than a little ‘coaxing’ we are delighted to say that first-hand accounts have been gathered from fifty women, mostly through telephone interviews and via written contributions. Beyond this, many other SWAN women have contributed to the success of this project in a variety of ways.

Importantly, this is a written record of the reflections of local women about the significance of this volunteer-led, social justice oriented, community organisation in their lives, together with their views on how SWAN can continue to contribute towards building a more just and equitable world. The wealth of information contained in these accounts forms the central basis of this book.

In addition we have taken the liberty to draw on information gleaned from Pen Portraits, SWAN newsletters, the SWAN website and other historical records to help fill out some of the background detail. This enabled us to develop a comprehensive list of speakers and the topics they addressed, starting with the inaugural guest speaker, The Hon. Joan Kirner AO.⁴

In *Chapter Two* we provide a summary of the recollections of several of the women who, nearly three decades ago, had the foresight to establish SWAN. They recall how SWAN began, what they hoped it would achieve and what it was that made SWAN so special.

Chapter Three is built primarily on the reflections of SWAN members about the significant value of engaging with ‘like-minded’ women to discuss thought-provoking and sometimes distressing topics within a safe and welcoming space. This is only a small snapshot of their views. To truly appreciate the value of the SWAN experience in the lives of these women, you are encouraged to read their full contributions that are located in *Annex A*.

The main subject of *Chapter Four* is the broad ranging benefit of women hearing about the social justice challenges being experienced by other women and of the actions that are being taken to address these concerns. Quotations from both SWAN members and guest speakers help to show the personal impact that can occur within this safe and grounded learning environment.

Chapter Five provides examples of some of the activities and actions that have been undertaken by SWAN at an organisational level, and by individual members and small groups in an effort to address particular social justice concerns. The financial support given by SWAN to help others to pursue their social justice involvements is discussed in *Chapter Six*.

⁴ See *ANNEX B* for a list of guest speakers. More detailed information about the guest speakers and the topics that they addressed is located at: <https://swanwomen.org.au/swan-guest-speakers/>

As well as recording some of the main highlights associated with the past, one of the key reasons for undertaking this history project was to encourage SWAN members to consider how SWAN might be further developed in order to remain relevant in the future context. *Chapter Seven* discusses the important on-going role played by the SWAN Committee in helping to strengthen organisational sustainability and summarises the suggestions made by SWAN members concerning the way forward.

As you read this book, it's worth considering that the world has changed a great deal since SWAN was established and that these days there are many other ways in which women can learn about social issues and participate in community concerns.

This begs the question: What difference would it make if SWAN were to fold? Would this be OK or leave a gap, depriving women on the Mornington Peninsula of 'something special' that they might not find in other ways?

We trust that as you read this record of SWAN's life over the past quarter of a century-plus, your own response to this question will emerge. When that happens, please share your views with us. Now let's go back to how SWAN began, what founding members hoped it would achieve and what made it so special.

Women's group writing for the record

By Judith Graley

MEMBERS of the Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) are compiling the story of the group's history of more than 26 years of social activism.

SWAN was founded by a group of Mornington Peninsula women looking to learn more about the justice issues facing women and working together to bring about social change.

Over the years SWAN boasts an impressive roll call of activism. For example, members have campaigned for the release from jail of Heather Osland; organised an Islamic women's fashion parade; and marched in rallies to promote human rights, to protest against family violence and to support asylum seekers.

Founding members Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate said they would sometimes join marches in Mornington, wearing a SWAN badge and dressing in purple, white and green. They also wrote letters to the media about social justice issues.

Bi-monthly meetings featured more than 150 inspiring women and such guest speakers as former Victorian Premier Joan Kirner AC; domestic violence campaigner Rosie Batty AO; former Chief Police Commissioner Christine Nixon AO APM; and Victorian Women's Trust executive director Mary Crooks AO.

SWAN has remained true to its original objectives.

"There is a forum; justice and equity issues are still actively promoted; women's active participation in community decision-making has surely



Looking back: SWAN members review material already collected for the book tracing the group's first 26 years, from left, Diane McDonald, Erica Churchill, Maureen McPhate, Judith Graley, Val McKenna, Fran Rule and Moz Lucas.. Picture: Yanni

been increased as women take up the battle in various ways," Fran Rule, another founding member, said.

Diane McDonald, who is leading the book project, said SWAN was a unique group run for more than a quarter of a century by women volunteering their time to enable local women to meet, to learn about social justice concerns faced by women from all walks of life and to become actively engaged in supporting women's causes.

The focus on empowering women to make a difference continues to

this day. Members participate in human rights marches; write letters to MPs on various social justice issues such as family violence and youth criminalisation; and advocate against racism and inequality.

SWAN is pro-actively supporting the key reforms of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including the enshrinement of an Indigenous voice in the Australian Constitution.

Women have commented that attending SWAN meetings was important to them, as they not only learnt new things but also formed long-term

friendships. It has truly played a significant role in the lives of many local women.

It is so important that their SWAN journey is recorded with our book. We have collected a lot of material from many members and speakers, but we are still looking for more recollections women may have from attending our meetings.

If you would like to share your SWAN experience or would like to come to our next guest speaker event email: swanwomen@outlook.com

ABOVE: 'Women's group writing for the record' article that appeared in The News 29 Nov 2022

T W O

FOUNDING MEMBERS RECOLLECT

How it all began

SWAN was founded in late 1996 when Jeff Kennett was Premier of Victoria and John Howard, Australian Prime Minister. It grew from an initial meeting at Mt Martha House attended by some thirty women from across the Mornington Peninsula. This meeting was inspired by Carole Ford, Breda Smythe and Eunice Cain, all members of the Southern Peninsula branch of the Australian Labour Party (ALP). It was promoted in their networks and via the local press in an effort to attract a wide range of women, not only those with party political affiliations:

“(They) put a notice in a local paper about the need for a forum of local interested women to gather together and act to improve conditions for their communities.”

- Val McKenna & Maureen McPhate

The principal speaker at this meeting was local resident Denise Hassett who had previously stood as the ALP candidate for Federal seat of Flinders, against The Hon. Peter Reith.⁵ She encouraged participants to become actively involved in social justice matters and to play a role in local government. It was clear that rather than attending more political branch meetings, most audience members wanted an opportunity to meet other women living on the Peninsula and in neighbouring suburbs to discuss their concerns and ways to contribute towards change. At this meeting Judith Couacaud Graley tentatively expressed interest in standing for the Shire Council, thereby launching her career in local and then, state politics.⁶

Following the meeting Carole Ford, Breda Smythe, Val McKenna, Maureen McPhate, Fran Rule and Lindsey Steele gathered around Judith’s kitchen table to discuss how to proceed. The main intention was:

“To get like minded women together to raise their voices about issues of importance to women on the Mornington Peninsula... primarily social justice issues.” - Carole Ford

⁵ Peter Reith served in the Federal Government House of Representatives, 1982-83 and 1984-2001 representing the Liberal Party, including as a Minister in the Howard government.

⁶ SWAN members supported Judith to be elected to the MPSC where she served from 1997-2003, including as Mayor, 2000-2001. They also supported her to be elected as the ALP Member for Narre Warren South in the Victorian State Government where she served from 2006 to 2018.

These women who became known as SWAN's founding members decided to form a

"Women's only organisation with a progressive social action agenda that would enable the voices of local women to be heard." - **Judith Couacaud Graley**

They drafted the principles, purpose and structure of the proposed organisation for consideration by the broader group. According to Fran Rule, who took notes at this inaugural meeting, the intention was to support women's 'empowerment'. Although her original notes are lost in time, she recalls that the goals were *"to provide a forum; promote social justice and equity; support women candidates for all levels of government; and increase women's active involvement in community decision-making."* - **Fran Rule**

It was agreed that the main activity would be to provide opportunities for women from various backgrounds to meet to hear from prominent and socially active female speakers and discuss their own views and ideas for follow-up action. It was decided to involve women from the 'southern suburbs' as well as those living on the Mornington Peninsula. Ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment was a high priority. Discussion of alternate viewpoints was to be encouraged.

Founding members recall what stood out for them about SWAN in the early days

"We tried to be a-political. But at the same time, we recognised that we were living in a super conservative area... We tried to encourage conservative women to become more aware of various social justice issues." - **Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate**

"The decision to make the forums open to all women, as opposed to suggesting a specifically Labor/political bias, was a wise one, I believe." - **Fran Rule**

"The diversity of women joining... women of all ages... The sexism evident of those early years. Eg. the time that a man became aggressive towards us (at a public meeting). He objected that women were asking more questions than men - but he was the only man!" - **Carole Ford**

The name Southern Women's Action Network was chosen as a perfect title for the fledgling organisation. It was felt that the word 'action' emphasised the fact that the focus was to be more than just talking about inequality and discrimination.

"The name SWAN gives the right emphasis, Southern Women's Action Network; it opens out the possibility of change in our part of the world." - **Fran Rule**

Fran applied her artistic skills to design the SWAN logo, encapsulating the group's core values such as cooperation, kindness, compassion and partnership. Moreover this logo sought to celebrate women and their contribution to society.

The first official SWAN Meeting was held at Mt Martha Primary School. Victoria's only ever female Premier (1990-92), The Hon. Joan Kirner was guest speaker. The forum was:



“Promoted in local networks (eg. sporting clubs, school committees, social groups) as well as via the Union of Australian Women. Over one hundred women attended from across the Peninsula and beyond. Those who attended were not necessarily interested in politics, but they liked the idea of participating in a women’s only forum where they could learn about and discuss justice issues and ways in which they could help to promote change.”

- Judith Couacaud Graley

ABOVE: Extract from SWAN newsletter: Victoria's first female Premier, The Hon. Joan Kirner A.C. was the inaugural guest speaker in 1996 and also addressed a SWAN meeting in 2009s.

When asked what had motivated them to take a leading role in developing SWAN it was evident that each of these women had a strong, long-term commitment to work with others to address inequality and prejudice. For most, this was expressed via their ALP membership or their involvement in other community organisations, such as the Mornington Peninsula Ratepayers and Residents Association, the Save the Mornington Peninsula Alliance and Community Aid Abroad.

For Fran, involvement in establishing SWAN was part of her personal learning trajectory about social justice concerns that began early in her teaching career. Indeed, life experience and personal connections with people who were victims of poverty and injustice propelled many other women to join SWAN. For example, Debbie Roberts who attended her first SWAN meeting in 1999 found that it aligned well with her lived experience of growing up in a vibrant, multicultural community in Fitzroy where she witnessed many of the *“difficult and puzzling social issues that continue to challenge us today. Many of these matters have been tackled by SWAN speakers who have pointed the way to actions that we might take as individuals or as a group to bring about desired change.”* - Pen Portraits, p20

What makes SWAN so special

The philosophy that underpinned SWAN

From the start it was decided that SWAN would be frugal and that members would not be required to pay fees. But when the meeting venue changed from the primary school to Mt Martha House and then the former Mornington Secondary College, running costs increased. Participants were then invited to give a gold coin donation.

SWAN was designed with a flat governance structure, a more communal or collective way of working in which all women were welcome. This model of community development was very different from the ‘modus operandi’ of many other organisations. SWAN aimed to be inclusive. Unlike other community groups members were not obliged to think, act or contribute in a particular way. The focus was on “... *women (who might otherwise feel isolated) getting together... getting better informed, enjoying each other’s company... a gathering where women felt supported and they had an enjoyable time, where they talked about things that they didn’t get a chance to talk about with other people*”. - **Judith Couacaud Grale**

For some, just the opportunity to get out of the house, meet other women and enjoy a delicious morning tea, was enough. The fact that a woman could listen to a stimulating presentation, join in a discussion, and go away with a changed perspective, was an important action in itself. But there were always some who wanted to be more active. The choice of what action a member might take, if any, was completely up to them.

The SWAN committee and member meetings

Initially founding members took on committee roles and were responsible for the many tasks required to host the bi-monthly meetings. “*We had a proper committee right from the start... the same committee members for several years, no one wanted to leave.*” Being on the committee was much more than just a job. It became a central aspect of life. “*We didn’t all know each other (at the start) but over the years we became good friends... SWAN became such a big part of our lives.*” - **Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate**

Val McKenna became Treasurer, then Speaker Coordinator as well, a role that she fulfilled most capably for around two decades. She is widely acclaimed for her fearless ability to use all opportunities at her disposal to attract a variety of interesting and often high ranking women to address SWAN meetings.

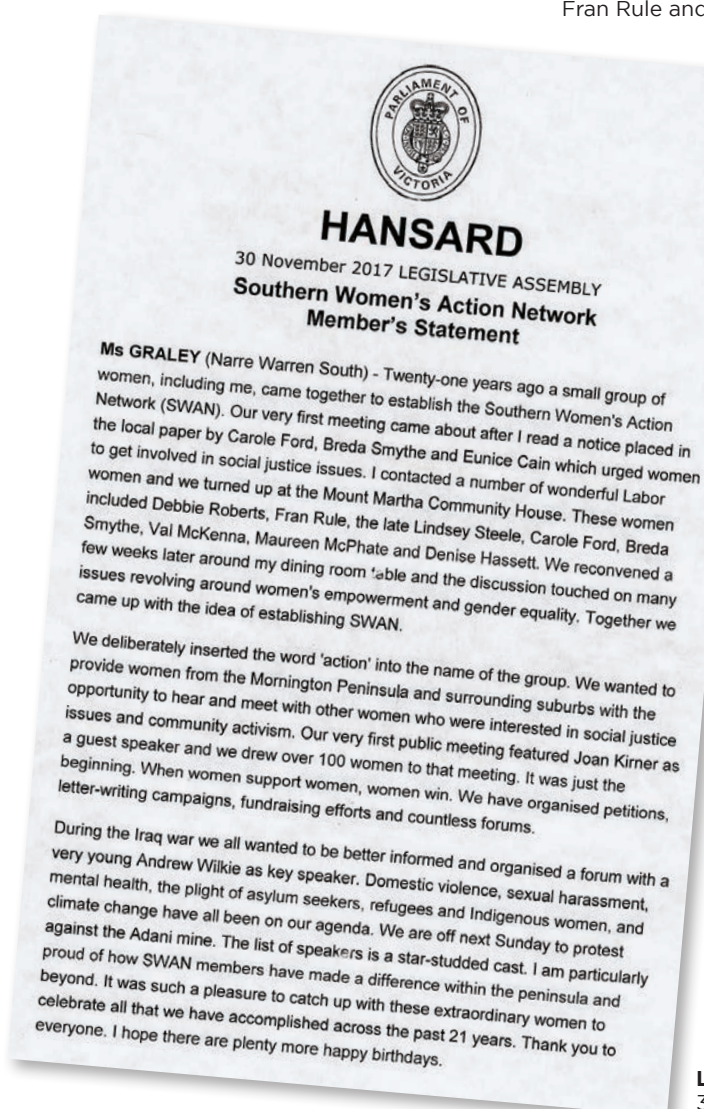
Meetings were held on a Sunday morning, a timeslot that made it easier for women with children to arrange childcare. In the early days some thirty percent of members were in the younger age bracket. Meetings often attracted sixty to seventy women, an audience of forty was considered to be a ‘very poor crowd’. Committee members were “*Filled with zeal in their efforts to extend the SWAN membership and they were constantly on the lookout for new ways to recruit more women.*” - **Judith Couacaud Grale**

Members were encouraged to bring information and flyers about social justice matters to display on *The Share Table*. Between 2000-2008 a SWAN newsletter was mailed out three to five times a year. Once the Internet took hold, newsletters and other information about meetings and events were generally circulated electronically to those with computer access and by mail to those who did not have email.

Founding members agreed that one of the most important features of SWAN gatherings was the delicious morning tea that was provided. *“The decision to have... breakfast meetings on a Sunday, when interested women may get a chance to attend was, and still is, a positive, practical emphasis.*



ABOVE: SWAN Founding members meet to share their recollections, from left, Maureen McPhate, Val McKenna, Fran Rule and Judith Couacaud Graley. Photo: Yanni.



Sharing food and beverage before the session begins seems to de-stress the audience in a way that is important. The chance for women to socialise with other women surely helps create a positive, co-operative environment as they prepare to listen to the speaker.” – Fran Rule

“We used to have beautiful breakfasts with pastries that we bought from a local shop to make it as interesting and enticing as possible... We hired glasses from the supermarket and we had big wicker baskets for cheese and platters to make it attractive. Our husbands would help us to set up, then go away and come back to clean up! We (took) everything to the meeting ourselves - cups, plates and food.” – Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate

LEFT: Hansard Parliament of Victoria 30 Nov 2017

The women who participated

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of SWAN has been the women who participated, both as speakers and as members. SWAN provided a place where local women could meet, not only to hear from inspirational female leaders and activists, but where they could share their views, experiences and stories with like-minded peers in their local area. Importantly, members were willing to listen to, learn from and respect one another. They worked together even when their views differed. The power of both personal and group action was valued and celebrated, and sometimes led to surprising outcomes.

The quality of speakers and the variety of topics that they addressed contributed to the recognition so often given to SWAN and to the growth in membership. Many of the topics presented by speakers were matters that members knew very little about. Val recalls:

“We chose speakers partly because they were politically influential but also because of the particular issues in which they were involved... We did not have any money to pay them – we explained what sort of group we were and that we didn’t have any money. We did not have any rejections.” - Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate

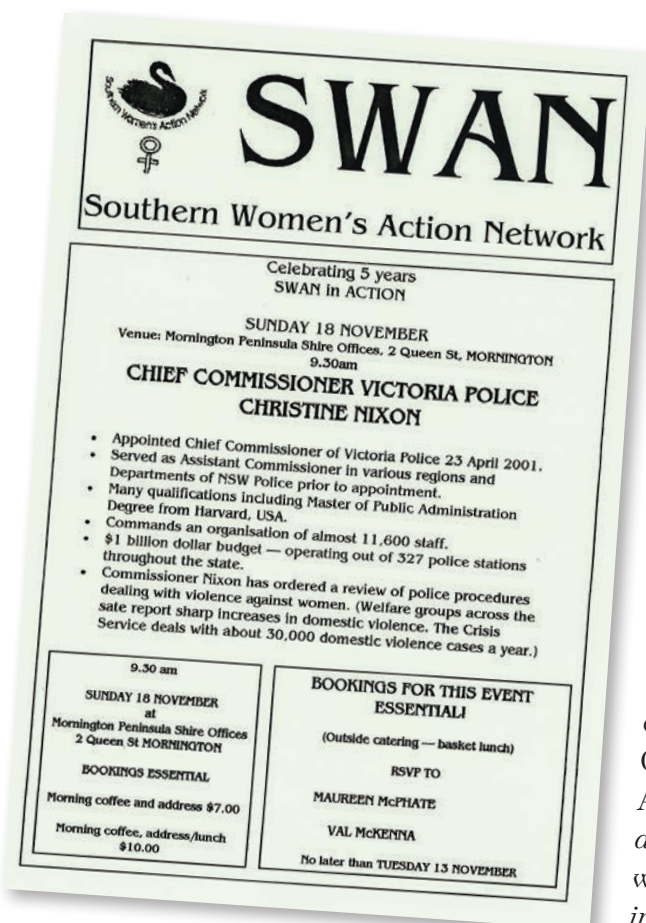
In fact those invited were delighted to have an opportunity to address a group of women who were concerned about social justice. *“We provided an avenue for these women who would otherwise not get an audience... We always worried about what we would do if a speaker didn’t turn up. But this never happened”* - Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate

Meeting SWAN women left its mark on guest speakers too. For many years, Joan Kirner continued to enquire how SWAN was going. It is noteworthy that right from the start speakers were presented with an attractive bouquet of flowers donated by Mornington florist, ‘Secret Garden’. This show of womanly support and generosity by the florist continues to this day.

For Fran *“The marvelous speakers that Val managed to secure each took us to another place for a while. It helped enormously... for an audience to share the knowledge of women who are willing to tell their story straight, often with wit and compassion... many of us gained a wider understanding of real-world machinations, not only via the issues and the challenges explored, but also by seeing, in front of us, a living example of someone actively involved at a high political/social level and prepared to share their personal experiences so others could learn and absorb. They became models, in a way.”* - Fran Rule

Debbie also applauded Val’s ability to attract such prominent and moving speakers. *“Val was astounding in getting amazing guest speakers to address SWAN meetings. She had a fantastic ability to relate to people. We found that the people we invited to present were delighted to have an opportunity to meet with a group of women who were interested in social justice. They didn’t often get such an opportunity.”* Prior to joining SWAN, Debbie had never attended a political meeting, but that soon changed. *“I learned a great deal, not only from the speakers but from the other members... who shared their wisdom with me... I became politicised... I wrote a letter to the newspaper (The Age or Herald Sun) for the first time... (It) was published!”* - Debbie Roberts

Fran speaks of *“The dedication, passion and involvement of many women at an individual and collective level”*. For her SWAN was and still is at its best when people respond, ask questions, probe, announce and pronounce, comfortable that they have a voice that will be listened to... Sometimes it’s the ‘magic of the moment’, at others, it is discussing what is serious and confronting. For me... these moments have a lot to do with creating a sense of solidarity and purpose, including the laughs.” - Fran Rule



Particular speakers who stand out for Fran were:

Christine Nixon AO, the newly appointed Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. *“We could not help being aware of the hostile circumstances she had met as a woman in such a high-powered position. Her struggle at the ‘top end’ of the Victorian Police Force highlighted the massive problem of equity that we all know about, whether or not we have experienced such resistance ourselves. She was frank and fair. It was good to hear about the debacle from her viewpoint.”*

And also, Sharon Burrows, ACTU President and the first woman elected President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Asia-Pacific Region, whose *“honesty and determination pulled me into her world as we got a glimpse of how she navigated it in an effective way... to do her difficult job well.”* - Fran Rule



ABOVE LEFT: SWAN newsletter

LEFT: Chief Commissioner of Victorian Police, Christine Nixon AO with SWAN members after addressing a SWAN meeting in November 2001, from left Jane Hildebrandt, Allyene Lacy, Carole Ford, Christine Nixon, Val McKenna, Debbie Roberts.

For Val and Maureen another particularly memorable speaker who received a standing ovation was Irene Bolger, the Secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation, Victorian Branch: *“who led a fifty day strike that altered the way nurses were viewed personally and professionally. She spoke about when she was raped in her home and police did not believe her – the audience all stood to applaud her.”* - Val McKenna & Maureen McPhate

SWAN gave women on the Mornington Peninsula an opportunity to learn about the struggles of those who faced injustice and discrimination and to hear first-hand about the extraordinary commitment of those who offered assistance and support.

They also heard about the efforts being made by women to expose social justice concerns and about their actions to influence change. Importantly, *“SWAN gave women the space to develop their own critical and creative thinking.”* Those who attended SWAN meetings were offered *“an opportunity to participate in a way that was right for them.”*

- Judith Couacaud Graley



ABOVE: Irene Bolger, former leader of the Australian Nurses Federation (Vic Branch) who led the 50 day nurses strike in 1986, with SWAN Committee members, Nov 2000. From left, Maureen McPhate, Barbara Lindner, Val McKenna, Carole Ford, Irene Bolger, Jane Hildebrandt, Debbie Roberts.

BELOW: The Mail Mornington and Southern Peninsula article, 16 Nov 2000, 'Talk about being a feminist'.



Some volunteered for committee roles; some made cakes and helped to serve morning tea; others took responsibility for arranging flowers on the speaker's table. Through SWAN, women grew in confidence to speak out at meetings and to express their views within their local communities. Before long their voices were being heard within local government.

Founding members emphatically agree that in SWAN, the importance of the amazing relationships formed between like-minded, concerned and compassionate women has always been front and centre. For many SWANs what so often became life-long friendships have been especially significant.

The actions taken by SWAN and its members

Meeting discussions about the issues raised by guest speakers often led to follow-up actions, either at a group or individual level. Sometimes SWAN declared its collective support for a particular cause or joined campaigns and protests led by other human rights activists. For example, holding a demonstration outside the office of a State or Federal MP or joining marches organised by other social justice advocates, usually distinguished by their SWAN badges and their purple, white and green attire.



ABOVE: SWAN hosts a public forum on Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq with guest speaker The Hon. Andrew Wilkie MP, From left, Val McKenna, Andrew Wilkie and Judith Coucaud Graley, 2004.

On some occasions SWAN facilitated a public forum to enable broader discussion about a matter of widespread concern. For example, in 2003 SWAN attracted a large audience to a public meeting that it hosted in Mornington, with guest speaker the whistleblower Andrew Wilkie (one of the very few male speakers hosted by SWAN) who exposed information about Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq. He spoke to a packed house about the deterioration of Australian governance and the decline of Australian democracy post 9/11.



ABOVE: Denise Hassett & Fran Rule two of SWAN's earliest members, cut the 25th anniversary cake (delayed due to COVID), March 2022. Photo: Melissa Kelly.

As the first decade rolled by: "SWAN became more vocal about controversial issues like the proposed introduction of nuclear power in Australia. The (public) meeting about this issue drew many more people than they had anticipated - including many men." - Carole Ford

Carole is adamant that SWAN was at its best *"when advocating for reforms in health, education, domestic violence. Women wrote letters, used local radio to make their voices heard"*. Examples include: *"When we ran a successful campaign to save Mt Martha House when it was proposed to demolish it and make the surrounding bush land available for housing. We (also) organised the first state-wide women's conference with the support of the Bracks Labor Government."*

Follow-up actions were also initiated by individuals or a small group of members supporting causes that were of particular concern to themselves eg. in response to a presentation by June Factor, President of the Friends of the ABC, some members committed to personal action to support the national broadcaster. Another example was when some SWAN members joined in 'the wharfies' demonstrations.

SWAN action was also evident in political and municipal forums. For example, in the early 1990's three SWAN members contested all three Victorian Government seats on the Mornington Peninsula. During this period SWAN filled all executive positions on the Peninsula Health committee and Carole Ford became deputy chair of the Mornington Peninsula Community Health Service. SWAN advocacy worked to improve dental health for those unable to afford it by obtaining access to the underutilised naval dental chairs and organising dentists to provide free care.

Examples of some of the other most memorable public forums and collective actions undertaken by SWAN members are provided in *Chapter Five*.

In 2006 SWAN inaugurated an annual bursary to support young women to encourage them to be actively involved in community concerns. More detailed information about these awards is provided in *Chapter Six*.

What's stayed the same, what's changed and the wisdom of Elders

After more than a quarter of a century the fundamentals of SWAN remain the same. From the perspective of founding members, women still generously volunteer for committee roles and help out at meetings. SWAN still attracts outstanding speakers but there is now a greater emphasis on attracting speakers with backgrounds in non-government and community organisations, with less focus on getting women in political roles.

“SWAN has and still is achieving its aim and objectives. There is a forum; justice and equity issues are still actively promoted; women’s active participation in community decision-making has... increased as women take up the battle in various ways, such as the present support for First Nations truth-telling efforts... The support of women for all levels of government is still relevant, although back then I think we were more specific.” - Fran Rule

SWAN continues to be a good rallying forum that gives women the strength to take action. It provides a place where they can connect with peers and share common concerns. But although SWAN publicises justice issues and activities in the wider community, *“It is often difficult to get people to come out of their comfort zone.” - Denise Hassett*

Founding members agree that these days SWAN has ‘moved with the times’, adapting to technological advances. The mode of communication has changed significantly. In the early days members were contacted by mail, phone and ‘word of mouth’. Letters, minutes and newsletters were written on a typewriter. Today most members can access a computer and email. SWAN pivoted well when COVID-19 hit, ensuring that members could attend bi-monthly meetings via Zoom. As well as this SWAN now has a presence on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

SWAN has achieved even more than the founding members had intended. In fact: *“Way beyond! Because (members) took up and campaigned for...people’s issues, underpinned by the social justice and environmental values.” - Carole Ford.*

But according to some, these days SWAN could have a stronger focus on activism, such as the work done by the Supporting First Nations group (2020-22).

“The fact that SWAN is still going shows that there must be something right.”

- Judith Couacaud Graley.

Today over 280 women are on the SWAN database. Importantly, SWANs are still making friends and many continue to keep in touch with and support each other as they grow old.

When asked about SWAN’s future, founding members shared valuable insights that are well represented in the following words.

“Just keep expanding and working towards worthwhile goals that are up to date and relevant. Hopefully the fundamentals will remain. Be current and realistic, keep empowering women, engage as many younger people as possible. Keep up the speakers, the Share Table, the scholarships and ethical considerations. Live”! - Fran Rule

Founding members proposed the following ways on how SWAN could be further developed.

- Continue to strengthen the focus on social action.
- Ensure that sufficient women volunteer to join the Committee.
- Develop new strategies to attract younger women. For example, as well as continuing to provide an annual student bursary, host guest speakers who talk about the issues that concern a younger cohort.
- Strengthen SWAN’s ability to engage with younger women through social media and other modes of communication that are more commonly used by them. Promote SWAN with organisations and in places where young people are found.
- Provide opportunities for members to hear more about each other’s backgrounds and experience. Many members have been involved in a wide range of community, social and political activities and groups. This provides a valuable opportunity to learn from one another and enable new members to meet others.

As you read on you will find that the above insights are often mirrored in the comments made by other SWAN members who have contributed to this publication. The central principles on which SWAN was established are also evident in the views expressed by the guest speakers, bursary holders and others whose comments are documented in this book. Many extracts of the words that they have shared with us are recorded in the following chapters. Their full transcripts are located in *Annex A*.

Brief background on some early members

Dr. Carole Ford received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2016 for her tireless service to women and the community. She received the National EMILY award in 2010 and her name was added to EMILY's list Australia.⁷ Carole's interest in promoting women's rights saw her appointed deputy chairperson of the Mornington Peninsula Community Health Service. After relocating to Cairns she became a strong advocate for abortion to be legalised.

Val McKenna was a primary school teacher before entering the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She taught piano classes until she was eighty years old. An active environmentalist, she founded the Broadford Environment Action Movement. Whilst living in Seymour Val was appointed Justice of the Peace, a position she held for thirty years. A long time ALP supporter, Val has been involved in many political campaigns. Val has been married to Gerry for seventy one years.

Maureen McPhate migrated from the UK to Australia as a young woman and worked as a Secretary, mainly in health services. Following that Maureen worked in the electorate office of Barry Cunningham MP. She is a Life Member of the ALP. Married to Dr Alan McPhate, together they pursued an active involvement in many social justice organisations including the 'Rationalist Association', whilst raising five children.

Frances Rule, after various jobs and travel, started secondary school teaching in 1972. Seconded for extended curriculum work before returning to teaching, she became involved with equal opportunity issues. Retiring from full-time work brought a direction towards art and design, but also time for informed social justice action such as that which evolved as SWAN. The injustice that drove the Mornington Shire's Friends of Lospalos committee, also became a focus.

Judith Couacaud Graley was the first girl in her family to attend university. Working as a secondary school and university teacher, Judith went onto be a MPSC Councillor and its first female Mayor. She then entered the Parliament of Victoria as a Labor MP where she served for twelve years. Judith is married to Dr Stephen Graley and has three children all of whom are interested in politics.

Lindsey Steele was a trained accountant who used her skills to provide SWAN with early advice as to setting up accounts, bookkeeping and maintaining a small but strong financial basis. Lindsey's strong sense of social justice was illustrated in her support for the ALP and community activism on the Mornington Peninsula.

Eunice Cain (17 Sept 1944-17 April 2017) was an environmental activist who co-founded the Friends of Rosebud Beach and Foreshore. Eunice was also a driving force in establishing the Mornington Peninsula Ratepayers and Residents Association. A local obituary described Eunice as a *"fighter of people's causes, combining immense energy, a whipper-crack intellect and dauntingly direct manner with a wonderful human warmth"* - **Mornington News 23 May, 2017.**

⁷ EMILY's List is Australia's only financial, political and personal support network for progressive Labor women in Australian politics: <https://www.emilyslist.org.au>

T H E S W A N L O G O

The original SWAN logo was designed by Fran Rule. Her creation was inspired by the work of Riane Eisler⁸ who presents a vision of a society based on cooperation rather than competition. Eisler says that although the women's movement has achieved some successes, this has often been by proving that women can be like 'the ideal man'. In a world where domination and hierarchy triumph, qualities such as kindness, collaboration and compassion that are generally associated more with women, are rarely celebrated.

As well as SWAN representing the acronym for the name of our organisation, the image of the swan has symbolic significance.

"In certain traditions the swan is seen as the bird of life; while in others it represents breath and spirit, benevolence and love." Fran's inclusion of a chalice, that cradles the swan "symbolizes a partnership model of governance... The symbol used to represent the female sex – the hand mirror and comb of the Roman Goddess Venus forms the base of the chalice."⁹



More than a decade later SWAN member and local artist Cath John was asked to create a contemporary design for the SWAN banner. This image that features a small copy of the original logo in the centre, was subsequently adopted as the new SWAN logo.

⁸ Eisler, R. (1987). *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. Harper and Rowe, USA.

⁹ Rule, F. (2006), *Pen Portraits*. P. 7.

T H R E E

NETWORKING AND COMPANIONSHIP

The essence of SWAN

Based on information obtained from the SWAN archives, by the end of 2022 over 400 women had joined the organisation at some point of time. This does not include the countless women who participated in one or more SWAN meetings and forums without registering as a ‘member’. It could be argued that this is not a large number given that SWAN began more than a quarter of a century ago. However this total needs to be considered in light of the fact that a high proportion of members steadfastly participated in SWAN activities for many years, often for decades. In general, those who left SWAN, had either moved away from the Mornington Peninsula or could no longer attend meetings due to changed life circumstances.

At the time this book was published, the SWAN database listed 280 current members. We directly invited a sample of fifteen of these women to respond to a series of questions about the significance of SWAN in their lives. Many other members spontaneously shared information about specific SWAN activities in which they had been involved.

This chapter provides a summary of the key reflections contributed by the women who responded to our survey. Overwhelmingly they said that SWAN gave them an opportunity to meet women with whom they could discuss a wide range of social justice concerns. Important too, was the value of being welcomed into a safe and supportive atmosphere and the long-term friendships that were formed. This atmosphere, together with the inspiring presentations given by deeply committed female social activists, helped to strengthen members’ resolve to become engaged in individual and collective action for change.

Following is a selection of the deep and heartfelt words chosen by these women to describe the most valuable characteristics of their SWAN encounter. Their full responses can be found in *Annex A*.



ABOVE: An attentive audience listens to a guest speaker at a SWAN meeting

A safe and welcoming space

Janice Gray: I saw SWAN as an important, safe gathering space for women interested in social justice issues; somewhere that we could be supported in concerns we raised, and inspired not only by the range of incredible speakers but by fellow members and the causes that were important to them. The atmosphere was always warm and welcoming and many speakers commented that it was a very special and perhaps unique organisation.

Lynette Wilks: One of the main features of SWAN is the companionship of like-minded women. The amazing way in which everyone pitched in to help – that is so typical of the way that women work together to make something happen. The friendly and collaborative manner in which we engage with one another on the Committee and at SWAN meetings is always evident.

Thalia Collard: I like the fact that we can challenge political issues without being party political... It is important that everyone can participate - the speakers raise issues that we can all debate and contribute to... Anyone can contribute ideas for meetings, suggest speakers... We can all invite others to participate in an area of particular interest eg. collections for refugees, for particular needs for families on the Peninsula.

Heather Boundy: Through SWAN I met an ever-expanding number of similarly passionate local women. Sunday morning meetings were a safe place for women to congregate and talk about things that mattered to us as women of all ages and backgrounds. It was always fascinating to hear women stand up and speak about their lives, some tentatively at first, but grateful for the opportunity to share in a welcoming, non-threatening environment... There were a couple of occasions when someone turned up without the ability to pay the small entry fee... this was never an issue.

Gail Price: For me, the most significant benefit of SWAN in my life, has been the opportunity to share the company of a diverse age group of women from many different life experiences who are also concerned about social justice and the environment. SWAN counters the view that ‘no one cares’. SWAN was always so welcoming and comfortable, making it possible to listen to and talk about difficult issues. There was always social time – and delicious contributions of food and coppers, to debrief about what we had just heard.

Connecting with like-minded women

Vivienne Nicholson: This organisation’s significance in my life has been the opportunity to meet with like-minded women who have a great commitment to social justice. This has also been evident in the impressive guest speakers SWAN has invited over the years... Another important and enduring feature at SWAN meetings is the camaraderie evident amongst the members.

Jane Hildebrant: Although a feminist from a very young age, my participation in SWAN was a wonderful opportunity to join with other like-minded women in listening to the experiences of the women speakers and discussing the issues raised. I looked forward to the camaraderie of the lively bi-monthly Sunday meetings.

Thalia Collard: We decided that once every two months we could attend SWAN and miss church. I think we made this decision because SWAN women are passionate about the issues that we believe need to be addressed, both in conversation and action. Meetings always offer a challenge to care, protect, and create opportunity to better our community.



ABOVE: SWAN was the source of many long-term friendships between like-minded women. From left, Val McKenna and Maureen McPate, 2011.

Lynn Carpenter: As a child I was instilled with a fierce sense of right and wrong which evolved into a fundamental desire to seek social justice in every direction that my life took me... I was introduced to SWAN a few years after migrating from the UK... It was the most wonderful revelation for me. To find a diverse group of like-minded women who care passionately about social justice issues close to my heart was both uplifting and nurturing... SWAN has been a constant during my life in Australia, uppermost for me is that, as a group, it has provided me with a uniquely safe welcoming space. I love the fact that it is a group solely for women, many of whom continue to inspire me.

A sanctuary within a sea of conservatism

Erica Churchill: So many women have said to me on attending their first meeting, or hearing about SWAN, that they had thought the Peninsula was a social justice desert. It is clear SWAN provides much needed input for these women, as well as for those who have been members for many years. In addition SWAN is a great opportunity to network with like-minded, generous women.

Val Campbell: On moving to Mornington, I was delighted to join SWAN, a like-minded, ready-made group of intelligent and activist women that fitted well with my own social justice ideals and lifetime of feminist activism in roles with the former Union of Australian Women, the Australian Labor Party, and other key organisations.

Marilyn Godley: Having moved from a more ethnically diverse area... I became increasingly discouraged by the Peninsula's conservatism and lack of diversity. So this encounter with a large group of women who shared the same values and convictions as me was a Godsend... and remains so. SWAN women were energetic and dedicated to improving life for everyone, most especially those disadvantaged in some way, locally, nationally, or internationally.

Melissa Kelly: It has been wonderful finding a social justice group with like-minded women on the Peninsula. I have been amazed at the skills, organisation and dedication of the women with whom I've been on the committee.

Rosemarie Draper: SWAN meetings were the first events I attended since moving to the Peninsula in March '97, where I met other women who had similar social justice commitments. Prior to that I had struggled to meet new people who I felt any connection to, except on a very superficial level, as our life interests were so different... I have developed strong friendships with some other members who I met at SWAN.

F O U R

LEARNING AND GROWING

Inspired by stimulating speakers

Feedback received from the group of SWAN members who shared their views during the preparation of this book, shows unanimous appreciation for the inspiring and stimulating presentations made by guest speakers at bi-monthly meetings. Respondents, representing different eras in SWAN's timespan, acknowledged the valuable contribution made by these remarkable women to a wide range of social justice causes. Their commitment and generosity by dedicating a Sunday morning to travel to the Mornington Peninsula to give their address was also applauded. So too, was the ability of those SWAN members who took on the Speaker Coordinator role, to attract such outstanding speakers.

Janice Gray: So many speakers made an impression on me. In the early days it was Val McKenna who, along with Maureen McPhate, approached very busy and important women who I would have assumed would have politely declined the opportunity to give up their Sunday morning to travel to the Peninsula to address a relatively small group of women. However, Val managed an exceptionally high acceptance rate. Joan Kirner of course was memorable. Christine Nixon, Police Commissioner, made a real impression on me. Marguerite Ryan, Women for Women in Africa, was one woman who, together with a group of like-minded friends made a huge difference to the education and lives of girls in the Kibera slums of Nairobi.

Heather Boundy: Our early meetings were at the Mt Martha Community House and the visit by Joan Kirner was a pivotal moment in my participation... Her passion for social justice and equality really rang a bell with me... Other highlights were Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, Mary Crooks (I later became a volunteer at Victorian Women's Trust), Bronwyn Pike, Morag Fraser, Kate Durham, Sushi Das, Leslie Cannold ... and so many more.

Rosemarie Draper: The diversity of inspirational women guest speakers has led me down many long-lasting paths in both my personal and professional life... There have been quite a few, including an Islamic Fashion Parade called 'My Dress, My Image, My Choice' and an event co-sponsored by SWAN involving some newly arrived refugees from Myanmar... I've loved finding out more about different causes that I previously knew nothing about prior to listening to the diverse range of guest speakers we've had. This has enhanced my engagement with the local, and further afield, Aboriginal organisations and refugee communities.

The ability to attract notable, motivating women to share their knowledge and discuss their social justice advocacy work with their contemporaries who lived on the Mornington Peninsula was a hallmark of SWAN from the start. The role of the Speaker Coordinator was instrumental to its success. Committee members who took on this responsibility drew on their own networks and used their broader personal engagement skills to secure inspiring speakers.

For example, SWAN's Speaker Coordinator, Val Campbell (2018-2020), secured many outstanding speakers. Women such as: Gillian Triggs, Nyadol Nyuon, Rosie Batty, Celeste Liddle and Pamela Curr. Val explains some of the strategies she used to attract them to address a SWAN meeting.

Val Campbell: Some of the women I approached were quick to agree, especially those who lived locally. But there were also some who I had to chase and convince that they would personally enjoy meeting SWAN members and be a role model for us. One of the women I invited to speak was the acclaimed journalist and filmmaker, Santilla Chingaipe. Born in Zambia, she came to Australia as a child, lived in the western suburbs and had never been to the Mornington Peninsula. Initially Santilla was reluctant to travel so far to an unfamiliar area. I offered to pick her up from Seaford station and drive her to the meeting. Thankfully she agreed to come! She was a great success, sharing her life story and telling us about the shocking racism experienced by African refugees and those seeking asylum in Australia. Women such as this gave members some important insights into ways that they could become involved in trying to address specific justice issues. But nothing was imposed. It was always up to each individual how they might respond.



Story to tell: Lawyer and two-time nominee in the 100 most influential African Australians Nyadol Nyuon will give the address. Picture: Supplied

Advocate's women's day talk

LAWYER, writer, community advocate and regular ABC Q&A panellist Nyadol Nyuon (pictured) will speak at the next Southern Women's Action Network meeting to mark International Women's Day.

Ms Nyuon arrived in Australia in 2005 from a Kenyan refugee camp and now holds a law and an arts degree from Melbourne University. She has been awarded for her work in assisting refugee and migrant women and combating racism.

This SWAN meeting starts 9.30am, Sunday 10 March at the Mornington Peninsula Shire Chambers, corner Vancouver and Queens streets, Mornington. Cost \$10. Three days after that meeting Ms Nyuon

will again speak about human rights when giving the 2019 Human Rights Oration at Peninsula Community Theatre, 6-9pm, Wednesday 13 March.

Organised by the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group, the event will celebrate International Human Rights Day.

Ms Nyuon volunteers extensively and has worked with governmental and non-governmental organisations, particularly the South Sudanese Australian community. She is a board member of the Melbourne University Social Equity Institute.



ABOVE: Media article: 'Advocate's women's day talk,' SWAN guest speaker, Nyadol Nyuon in Western Port News, 20 February 2019.

RIGHT: Guest speaker Nyadol Nyuon addresses a SWAN audience, March 2019.

Beyond ‘simply learning’

The chance to meet women at the forefront of advocating for social change clearly made an impact on SWAN members that went beyond ‘simply learning’. It raised their awareness about a broad range of human rights concerns and how these affected individuals and communities. As well as learning about these injustices and the efforts being made to address them, members learnt from the personal experiences and social justice involvements of one another. Members were also supported to expand their personal skills in public speaking and by taking on Committee roles. The following reflections provide a window into the value of these broader benefits for SWAN members.

Lynn Carpenter: The amazing array of guest speakers that I have been privileged to hear, have opened my eyes to so many facets of life that I would otherwise never have been aware of. So many different speakers but a few that stood out for me were: Dur-E Dara, Kate Baillieu, Dr Caroline Taylor, Marcia Neave, and more recently Mel Gillon, Nicky Mih, Natalie Collard, Lois Peeler, Aline Burgess, Gillian Triggs, Ronnie Gorrie and Coralie Alison. As an isolated migrant, I had never heard of any of these women but I was utterly enthralled and inspired by all of them, hearing about their vastly different experiences and observing their courage. This in turn enabled me to contribute in small ways like participating in petitions, fund raising and rallies and even, on one occasion, to find the courage to stand and address a meeting for a few minutes on a particular injustice that I was deeply passionate about.

Melissa Kelly: Shen Narayanasamy’s presentation was phenomenal! Her harrowing story of trying to help refugees on Manus Island while being shot at chilled me. Coralie Alison’s Zoom presentation had me gob-smacked at the portrayal of women and girls in advertising and mainstream media, and what advertisers are allowed to get away with. I’m convinced we are ALL completely desensitized to the appalling treatment of women and girls in media that feeds misogyny. I loved hearing Ronnie Gorrie’s brilliant stream of consciousness presentation of her book, *Black and Blue*.¹⁰ Such an honest, down-to-Earth speech and book.

Erica Churchill: In the time I have been a member, I have learnt so much more about our society from wonderful speakers on a huge range of topics including Muslim women, housing and homelessness, women and overseas aid, domestic and family violence, refugees and asylum seekers, First Nations issues and many more. I have also met so many caring, passionate women who encourage me to believe that grass roots advocacy can make a difference. So many speakers have been fantastic... I doubt there are any (that I have heard) who have not improved my knowledge and assisted me in my social justice advocacy.

¹⁰ Gorrie, V. (2021) ‘Black and Blue: A Memoir of Racism and Resilience’. Scribe Publications, Victoria. Winner of the 2022 Victorian Premier’s Prize for Literature

Rosie Batty to talk on women's day

ROSIE Batty will speak as part of International Women's Day at the Southern Women's Action Network, 9.30am, Sunday 4 March. Her talk – expected to be one of her final public engagements as CEO of the Luke Batty Foundation – will cover domestic violence, including current initiatives and future proposals.

The meeting will be at the Mornington Peninsula Shire's offices, corner of Queen and Vancouver streets, Mornington. Donation: \$8 includes refreshments.

Ms Batty, Australian of the Year in 2015, has worked to raise national awareness of domestic violence since her 11-year-old son Luke was killed at Tyabb in February 2014 by his father, Greg Anderson.

Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) is a social-justice organisation which aims to

inform and empower women and to provide a means of networking on key social issues. It celebrated its 21st birthday in November with Narre Warren South MP Judith Graley attending as a founding member.

Details: visit swanwomen.org.au or see details on Facebook. February



TOP: 'Rosie Batty to talk on women's day', Media article in Western Port News 27 February 2018.

RIGHT: Media article: 'Police racism', article promoting the presentation by Ronnie Gorrie at a public forum organised by SWAN'. Chelsea-Mordialloc News, 19 May 2021.

BOTTOM: Guest speaker Shen Narayanasamy tells SWAN members about her work supporting refugees on Manus Island, March 2020



Police racism

AUTHOR Ronnie Gorrie, pictured, will discuss her book *Black and Blue* at a forum in Mount Eliza on Sunday 23 May organised by the Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN).

The book is described as being a confronting true story of her experience as a Queensland police officer and of the intergenerational trauma of family violence and sexual violence.

"While joining with hopes of increasing trust in the justice system for Aboriginal families, she found a system with entrenched racism," SWAN member Marg D'Arcy said.

The Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) aims to raise awareness of social justice and provide a forum for women on the Mornington Peninsula to come together and discuss the issues that affect their daily lives.

"SWAN members work to ensure women's active involvement in the community."

The forum starts 9.30am Sunday 23 May at Mount Eliza Community Hall, 90-100 Canadian Bay Road., Mount Eliza. For more information about SWAN go to swanwomen.org.au.



LEFT: Rosemarie Draper with First Nations health professional, Irene Fisher, SWAN NAIDOC week guest speaker, 2019.

CENTRE: Media article promoting SWAN guest speaker Jill Hennessy

BOTTOM: Former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Professor Gillian Triggs (centre), with from left SWAN members Lyn Carpenter and Gillian Adams

Women's rights discussed at gathering of SWANS

A DIMINUTIVE, ebullient human dynamo, Jill Hennessy, spoke at a gathering of intrepid SWAN (Southern Women's Action Network) women who braved the chilling elements on Sunday May 21, to attend the first Annual General Meeting of that organisation since its inception.

Jill has packed a lot into her twenty-eight years! An industrial and human rights lawyer with a particular interest in women's rights and indigenous Australians, she has been frequently called upon as a media commentator on aspects

of discrimination law. As well as being a director of the Legal Industry Superannuation Fund, Jill is also a member of the Australia Asia Young Leaders Board, a cross-party political board aiming to consolidate links

between young political leaders on a regional basis. Jill Hennessy is also the youngest recipient of the 2000 US International Political Visitor Program which she is due to commence in Washington in July of this year.



Lynette Wilks: One of the highlights was the stimulating talks given by our guest speakers about the solutions that they had found to support disadvantaged and at-risk women and their efforts to help to address the social justice issues that they experienced. This helped to stimulate our thinking and to energise us to take action in various different ways, often personally and quietly - without fanfare.

Susan Blackburn: Gail Price (MPSC Community Development Officer) and I developed 'A Just Peninsula' with profiles of organisations and groups that undertook support or advocacy for social justice issues. We also did a couple of public forums about refugees under the SWAN banner. As part of this focus we had regular collections at meetings of clothes and other items, perhaps even food. This was then delivered to the Asylum Seeker Centres in Melbourne and Dandenong.

Jane Hildebrant: My involvement with the Social Audit research project being undertaken by SWAN was my first experience of participatory action research. SWAN's engagement with Peninsula women was a rewarding experience for our committee and, I hope, for the participants.

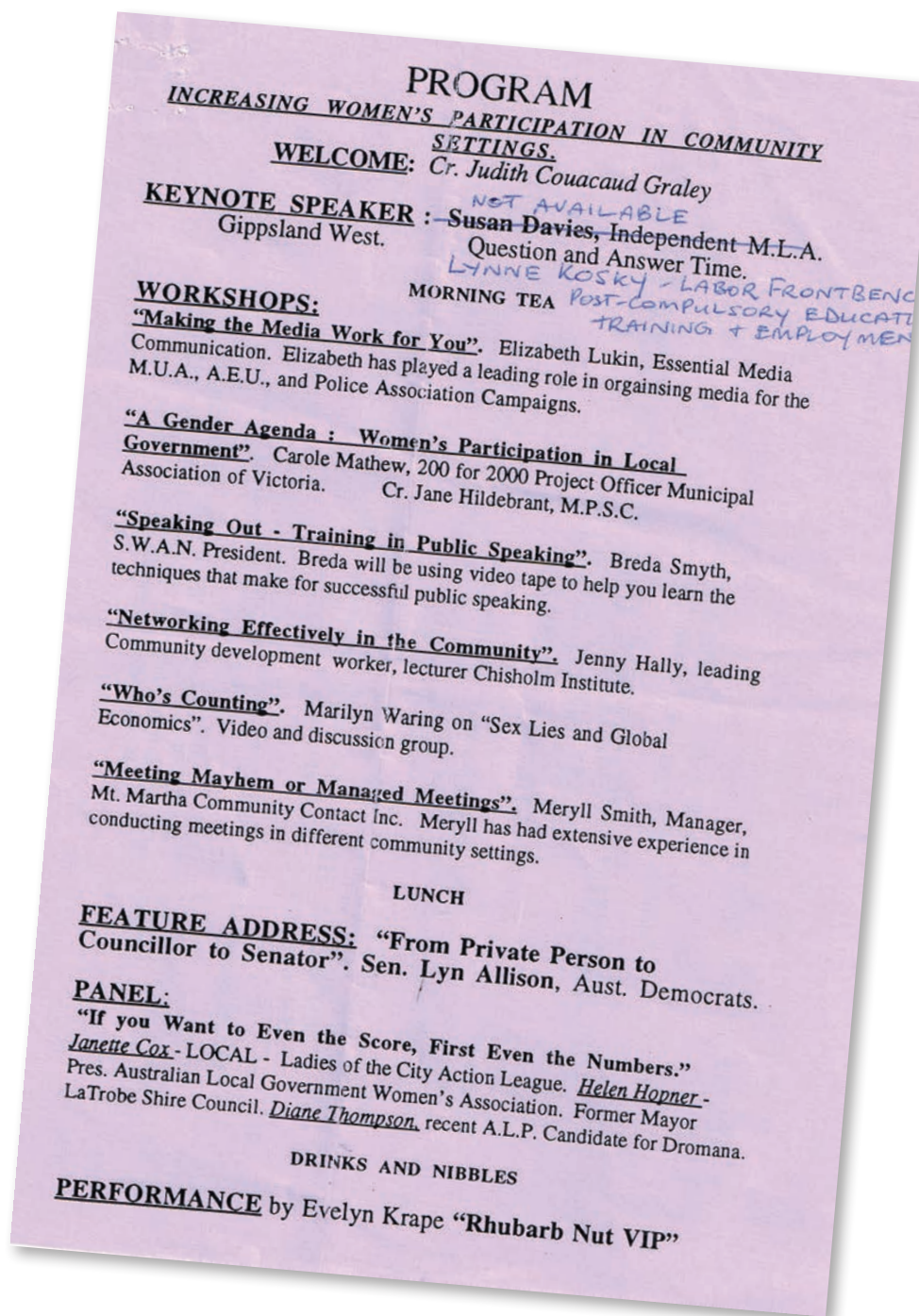
Gail Price: SWAN didn't shy away from challenging issues, such as family and domestic violence, the pre and post arrival experiences of asylum seekers and refugees or the broader experience of migrating to Australia and female genital mutilation. SWAN's support for the Islamic Women's Fashion Parade was crucial to the success of the event. There was also a strong link between the Friends of Lospalos and SWAN, which enabled cross over between the two groups.

Expanding personal skills

Listening, learning, talking and sharing information are at the heart of SWAN's existence, and contributed greatly to SWAN members expanding their personal skills. At their first meeting, when founding members discussed possible names for the new group, the word ACTION was purposefully included. They wanted members to be able to apply what they learned from guest speakers and from each other, to initiate or join in with well-informed community action. Following is one example of how SWAN helped to enable women to become more actively engaged in their communities.

By 1999 the SWAN Committee was aware that many members wanted support to build their confidence to become more actively engaged in local level change making. It was evident that SWAN was well placed to help empower women in this regard. It was decided that SWAN would host a one-day forum with speakers experienced in community leadership, communications and media engagement. This would be both a personal development and 'campaign training' exercise.

Consequently, with the help of a community grant from MPSC, a one-day forum, entitled 'Increasing Women's Participation in Community Settings' was organised. It was held at Mt Martha Community Contact and attracted over seventy local women. The program included presentations and workshops on topics such as: public speaking, how to engage most effectively with the media, networking, and conducting meetings in community settings.



ABOVE: Program of guest speakers at the one day forum facilitated by SWAN entitled: 'Increasing Women's Participation in Community Settings' 1999.

Judith Couacaud Graley: Not all Councillors were happy about the grant being awarded to SWAN. They had a view that SWAN was ‘a bunch of radical feminists’ ie. too political, or worse still for some who were Liberal Party members, a front for the ALP. That somehow we were a threat to the normal order of things on the Mornington Peninsula. It was laughable but real and took some even-handed support from Council officers to show them that SWAN had in fact, scored very high against the independent criteria applied for allocating grants, and as such it was justifiable to award the grant to SWAN.

The forum helped to fill a gap that was accentuated by ‘the tyranny of distance’ and by being located in a ‘so-called social justice desert’ where few such training opportunities were available for women, unless they joined conservative, mainly male-dominated organisations, such as Rotary or Toastmasters. The workshops also aimed to encourage women to ‘put up their hand’ and stand for election to Local Government. Facilitators from the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Australian Women’s Local Government Association and Ladies of the City Action League provided excellent tips on how to campaign successfully. It was a stellar group of presentations by women who had themselves been elected, were using their power to ‘get things done’, and were enthusiastic about teaching other women how they too could become local Councillors and community leaders.

Val McKenna secured Senator Lynette Allison, whom she had met at a city-based forum, to deliver the feature address. I had worked at Footscray High School with Lynne Kosky, who was later elected to State government and was one of Joan Kirner’s ‘rising stars.’ Liz Lukin from Essential Media who had been Communication’s Advisor for the waterside workers in 1998, gave an outstanding presentation on how she had turned Peter Reith and Pat Corrigan into the villains in the dispute with the militant Maritime Union of Australia. Some 15 years after the workshop Liz told me that she remembered her visit to the SWAN gathering, saying that she could not believe that she was meeting with such a group of ‘feisty progressive women’ on the Mornington Peninsula – the home of Peter Reith!”

The event was sponsored by MPSC and the Victorian Women’s Trust but like all SWAN events was mainly due to the extra hard work of the SWAN Committee, who also organised delicious refreshments and good coffee! Evelyn Krape entertained the group with her performance of ‘Rhubarb Nut VIP’ in which she portrayed a wild Australian feminist in a man’s world. Judith remembers this as both very funny and motivational, a perfect finish to an inspiring day... There was a fighting spirit in the room and renewed and confident energy for the next challenge.

As well as attending training programs such as this, the very act of joining the SWAN Committee provided members with an opportunity to extend their personal and professional skills. Sometimes, in unexpected ways!

Susan Blackburn: Really it was SWAN that was a catalyst for my foray into studying Community Services at Frankston TAFE. It was being inspired by the women I met and heard from and the variety of social justice issues that I became aware of, that literally ‘lit a fire’ in me to be a conduit for positive change in our society. With this impetus I went on to work in the community sector and the public service but it really was SWAN that started the journey.

Melissa Kelly: Broadly, SWAN has made me feel far more connected to my local community... On a more personal note, I have always been petrified of public speaking. The patience and respectfulness of SWAN women creates a very welcoming space and incredibly, I’ve learnt to be far more confident speaking up.

Lynn Carpenter: For me to get up, let alone open my mouth in front of any group would have been simply impossible before I found SWAN.

With the encouragement of other members, Lynn served on the SWAN Committee for almost a decade, in roles such as Secretary and setting up the website.

Christine Blakey: It was the late 1990’s when I joined SWAN, while completing my degree in Community Development. Participating in SWAN certainly provided me with a more informed understanding of local politics as well as party politics. I found my involvement and actions within this group of amazing women purposeful and enjoyable, complementing my studies at the time.

Learning from one another

From the beginning it was recognised that there was significant knowledge, skills and experience within the SWAN membership. Members were encouraged to share information and to discuss social justice involvements in various ways. One avenue was to display written material, petitions and flyers etc on the Share Table at the bi-monthly meetings. Members were also invited to stand up and tell meeting participants about their specific concerns and advocacy efforts or to inform their peers about these matters via the SWAN newsletter. This often encouraged others to become involved.

Jane Hildebrandt: Val McKenna’s perseverance with her campaign to secure Heather Osland’s freedom was inspiring.

Judith Couacaud Graley: SWAN members share information, speakers, company, empower other women, work together in sisterhood. They act knowing they are well informed, supported by others and can change things together. The newsletters are full of examples of SHARING and I think it's one of SWAN's defining characteristics epitomised by our very well endowed Share Table.

In 2017, in addition to a guest speaker, a new component was introduced at the start of SWAN meetings. This initiative called 'Sharing the Wisdom'¹¹ involved a short 'member interview' that was conducted by Lynette Wilks and Gillian Adam. This gave SWAN women the chance to hear about the advocacy work of some of their colleagues. It also helped women who were new to SWAN to get to know other members. But although some saw this as worthwhile, before long this session ceased to be on the meeting agenda.¹²

Support to reintroduce interviews like this or to find new ways to enable member-to-member sharing of social justice involvements is currently emerging.

Speakers reflect on their SWAN experience

The range and diversity of guest speakers who addressed members reflects the far-reaching scope of SWAN's social justice platform. In preparing this current publication, feedback was received from a small sample of the 150 women who inspired and activated SWAN over a 26 year period. Below is a summary of their reflections about their engagement with SWAN.

Contributors are:

- **Glenyys Romanes** AM, MLC, former Mayor of Brunswick, first female Deputy President of Victoria's Legislative Council, and State Director of Community Aid Abroad (that later became OXFAM Australia) gave an inspiring presentation in 2002, sharing her experience about 'The Long Road to Parliament'.
- **Pamela Curr** OAM, Victorian Women's Honour Roll. In 2004, as the Greens National Spokesperson for Refugees, Pamela spoke about the situation in Timor Leste and Australia's poor history in failing to prevent or even acknowledge the murder, rape and displacement of many thousands of Timorese people. One of several return speakers, Pamela also addressed SWAN in 2019 about her work advocating for people in community detention.

¹¹ This short member interview should not to be confused with the similarly named 'community environmental forum' facilitated by SWAN in 2000. That broader forum is discussed in *Chapter Five*.

¹² Lynette and Gillian interviewed the member prior to the meeting to determine the area of life on which to focus and to prepare a brief life history by way of introduction. The plan was for the introduction and interview to take around 15 minutes but it was hard to stick to this with such interesting interviewees. A member survey after the initial trial period showed that only half were in favour of continuing. Subsequently, a decision was made to discontinue this initiative.

- **Bea Edwards** Aboriginal health worker and celebrated Indigenous Artist presented SWAN's NAIDOC Week address in 2009, telling members about the justice and equity concerns of the First Nations community on the Mornington Peninsula.
- **Aline Burgess**, from Peninsula Carer Council and winner of Mornington Peninsula Shire Citizen of the Year 2016, gave a passionate speech outlining the power of grass roots organisations, explaining how she came to recognise the need to support carers of people with mental illness.
- **Leonie Morgan** AM who in 2019 discussed with members her passion for equal political representation, citing her co-founding of EMILY's List Australia and her work with the International Women's Development Agency.

These speakers were unified in their observations of SWAN audiences as very attentive, possessing a high level of knowledge, very responsive with insightful questions, organised and well informed. Leonie Morgan found SWAN to be *"A great community of women who come together to listen, learn, contribute and change the world for others. Something that started small and has grown and stood the test of time as SWAN has, is much to be admired."*

Pamela Curr recalled *"I could not refuse the chance to join such a group for a Sunday morning discussion and strategising."* For Aline Burgess having *"read the reports and appreciated the strength, courage, and breadth of knowledge the members shared..."* spurred her to come to SWAN and speak out on caring for carers. And for Glenyys Romanes *"bringing local women together..."* about women in politics excited her.

'Learning and growing' thrived at these Sunday meetings, not only because of the topics presented, but also due to the diversity and openness of the SWAN audience. Aline Burgess recollected *"At my first encounter with this broad group of women I was very impressed with the wide range of discussions which revealed such respect and tolerance for wide ranging, sometimes conflicting, beliefs and opinions."*

Many guest speakers referenced the thoughtful, lively exchange of ideas for action with their SWAN audience, both during their presentation and afterwards in individual conversations. For example, Pamela Curr reflected *"I know that many actions and letters and activities followed on behalf of refugees."* Glenyys Romanes noted that SWAN members *"came to speak to me personally afterwards. So my conclusion was that I must have hit a chord"*. For Aline Burgess it was: *"an unforgettable experience... I was heartened by the individual conversations we had."*

This environment of acceptance was evident, according to Aline Burgess in: *"the confidence and comfort of the (SWAN) audience."* Leonie Morgan acknowledged members' kindness and desire to do much more to support women in less democratic countries than Australia as *"extremely gratifying."* In Pamela Curr's view *"I found this broad group informed, caring and wanting to act for change."* Bea Edwards, descended from the Pyemmairrener clan of Tasmania and manager of the Winja Ulupna Women's Recovery Centre in St Kilda, explained how she

was often the speaker and advocate for the Aboriginal community living on the Mornington Peninsula, through her association at that time with Kaala Koori Association in Hastings. In her experience *“SWAN allowed a space for the Aboriginal Community to be respected and recognised, and as an Aboriginal woman I was very grateful to come along... (SWAN) allowed me to express the concerns of our Community living on the Mornington Peninsula.”*

Reflecting on the value of SWAN and its future, these speakers were unanimous in their experience of SWAN as a safe and accepting space for learning and growing but also as a dynamic change-maker. Because SWAN speakers tap into a range of topics Glenyys Romanes believes these bi-monthly meetings are: *“a good model that has stood the test of time.”*

A key factor in SWAN’s longevity and assurance for the future, informs Leonie Morgan is SWAN’s sourcing of *“women speakers from a broad range of backgrounds, but with a common interest in action to support women’s equality.”* Glenyys Romanes concurs seeing SWAN as *“a great initiative, bringing lots of women together to discuss a wide range of issues and actions... to make their community a fairer, friendlier place”*. For Aline Burgess *“There never seems to be any discrimination, all women are welcome regardless of race, colour, politics, health. They share a thirst for learning and a determination to try to make our world a better place.”*

Highlighting SWAN’s significance in social justice advocacy and activism, Pamela Curr asserts *“Groups like SWAN are so important in challenging the lies and misconceptions. Ultimately it is the letters and actions of good people who will create change. This is why SWAN is so important”*. Aline Burgess concluded that the value of SWAN within the peninsula community cannot be overstated. Furthermore, Bea Edwards affirmed that SWAN’s organisation and dedication to social justice are *“grounds... much needed for all communities.”* And finally, Leonie Morgan provides an important insight concerning the long-term value of the contribution made by SWAN *“Thank you to the small group of women who came together to form SWAN. Your work has stood the test of time and reaped amazing benefits for others.”*

These reflections from such socially, culturally and politically diverse women speakers about their experiences of engaging with SWAN members during different moments in SWAN’s life time, show that the original aspirations of the founding members were and still are being realised. Not only have SWAN members heard about the social justice and equity concerns discussed by women at the forefront of working to build a better world, but the bi-monthly meetings and the very experience of being part of SWAN have provided opportunities for local women to extend their personal skills and to become more actively engaged in advocating for change.

Several examples of the contribution made by SWAN to help raise awareness and empower women to take action can be found in *Chapter Five*.

F I V E

ADVOCACY AND ACTION

Introduction

The following pages document examples of the collective social justice advocacy and actions undertaken by SWAN members since 1996.

SWAN's tenth year anniversary publication *Pen Portraits* listed several public forums and special projects conducted by SWAN between 1999-2006. These are recorded below.

Public forums, seminars and reports in the first decade

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1999 | 'Increasing Women's Participation in Community Settings', a conference. |
| 2001 | 'Sharing the Wisdom Community Environmental Forum'. |
| 2001 | 'Mornington Peninsula Community Audit', community consultation. |
| 2002 | 'The war in Afghanistan', a public meeting with leading Afghani activist Tahmeen Faral as guest speaker. |
| 2003 | 'Women Against Domestic Violence', a public seminar co-presented with Chisholm TAFE students. |
| 2004 | 'Iraq, Intelligence and the Decline of Australian Democracy', a public meeting with guest speaker Andrew Wilkie. |
| 2005 | 'Domestic Violence Seminar', run by Mornington Peninsula Shire and actively supported by SWAN. |
| 2006 | 'Islamic Fashion Parade: Debunking Myths about Islamic Culture', public forum in Mornington. |

Since then SWAN members have been involved in numerous activities, both as individuals and as a group, on a wide range of social justice issues that negatively impact individuals, specific target groups and communities at a local, national and international level. As you will discover, proactive work by SWAN on these and many other human rights issues continues to this day.

Advocacy against domestic and family violence

SWAN has had a long-standing concern about domestic and family violence. Since SWAN's inception, members have voiced their demands for legislative change and increased community support concerning this critical human rights issue. This included strong advocacy against the appalling situation of women in the criminal justice system, especially the treatment of women in Victorian prisons. Indeed, over the years SWAN members have actively participated in many of the campaigns that contributed to law reform on rape and domestic and family violence.

Following is an account of the first actions undertaken by SWAN to seek justice for victims of domestic and family violence and demand systemic change.

In the late 1990's, SWAN founding members, Val McKenna and Maureen McPhate attended a public meeting at the Royal Women's Hospital where the keynote speaker was feminist lawyer Jocelyn Scutt (who later became a leading human rights barrister). The topic was domestic violence, the number one killer of Victorian women then and now with specific reference to the case of Heather Osland. Jocelyn had defended Heather in her trial for the murder of her partner Frank Osland. Heather was convicted of this crime and sentenced in 1996 to fourteen and a half years in jail. In fact, she had not committed this crime. Her son had killed him *"in self-defence fearing for his life and that of his mother."* - Hawkins, B. 'The Age', 27 October 2005.

Val recalls, *"I'd never heard anything like this before. It was an eye opener, unbelievably unfair."* Val and Maureen approached Jocelyn at the end of her talk and asked what they could do. She suggested joining the 'Free Heather Osland' (FHO) group and writing letters to MPs and the media. Val and Maureen were expert letter writers and so the many letters they wrote over the years increased with a new focus, as they were ... *"fired up."*

SWAN soon heard about Jocelyn's presentation and the work of FHO. Members joined in the long advocacy campaign to achieve justice for Heather. Val's unstoppable determination to fight for Heather's release led the way. As well as writing letters of support, Val visited her in prison. SWAN members also showed their support by sending Heather toiletries and personal care packages.

Val provided regular updates at SWAN meetings and relayed the degrading experience that women were enduring in Deer Park Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre. At times these updates raised hope of an early release, intervention from the Attorney General's law reform or another retrial. But each time this hope was met with disappointment and dismay. Petitions, letters, visits and care packages continued for over five years.

Directly linked to Heather's situation, SWAN partnered with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to host a public seminar where participants discussed community attitudes towards domestic and sexual abuse. The degradations, physical and mental abuse that Heather had suffered, together with the circumstances of her husband's death enraged many audience members to such an extent that they formed a support group to work towards Heather's release.

Val was there to meet Heather when she was released from Tarrengower Prison in 2005. Val presented Heather with a gift from SWAN to help with her new life. Later, Heather attended a SWAN meeting and thanked everyone for their determined efforts made on her behalf. There was not a dry eye in the auditorium.

After the meeting a group of supporters had lunch with Heather in Mt Martha, around the kitchen table where SWAN was established. It was a celebration for Heather and for SWAN.

"When Heather was released from jail we hosted a lunch at my place and welcomed her into the outside world with women who had never stopped fighting for her release. The level of gratitude she expressed was emotionally overwhelming for us all. A truly memorable occasion and I know she always valued that experience as she often mentioned it to Val." - Judith Couacaud Graley

The Age newspaper reporter Belinda Hawkins wrote: *"I'd met other women who'd killed abusive husbands but Osland was different. She'd captured the imagination of a huge and active support group"* Maureen said of the long campaign *"We never felt exhausted and it was never a burden"*. Val emphatically agreed, *"It was a challenge, we had to bring about change."*



SWAN was part of that group that did bring change in 2006. Changes were made to the domestic homicide laws in Victoria and a few years later to the use of the provocation defence by male abusers. If these law reforms had been in place when Heather Osland faced trial she would not have been found guilty or imprisoned. Val said, *"It means her time in prison hadn't been for nothing."*

ABOVE: Heather Osland (front row second from the left) attends a SWAN meeting to celebrate her release from prison.

The cause of Heather Osland ignited a quest for SWAN members to know more about domestic and family abuse and the unjust treatment of women in the criminal justice system. In 2000, former union leader of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation (Victorian Branch) Irene Bolger, told a packed SWAN audience about her personal experience of being raped at home. In 2005 SWAN hosted a successful public symposium with Phil Cleary, leading advocate to end violence against women, accompanied by a speaker from the Police Domestic Violence Unit.

Since then, SWAN has hosted several other notable speakers who have shared their personal stories of trauma, their experience of the legal system and the systemic bias against women and girls who are victims of domestic and family violence. This includes Dr Carolyn Taylor (2005), Hannah Jay (2015) and Rosie Batty (2018). In addition, in 2015 SWAN hosted a public event, entitled 'Peninsula Forum' at which several women spoke about local issues such as domestic violence, homelessness, palliative care and abuse.

But SWAN members have not only listened. Many have participated in marches and vigils demonstrating against such violence. In November 2020 and again in 2021, despite the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, they dressed in orange and marched through Mornington as part of the 'Safe Steps, Walk Against Family Violence' campaign to stamp out violence against women of all ages. They also joined the 2021 'March 4 Justice' in Rosebud led by Gender Equality Action Mornington Peninsula, this time dressed in purple, green and white. Members have also donated care packages to women fleeing domestic abuse, and collected hygiene items for 'Blessing Bags' at SWAN meetings. Additionally, many have taken personal action such as supporting relevant community organisations and posting about domestic and family violence concerns on SWAN's Instagram page.



ABOVE: SWAN members at the protest against domestic and family violence 2021.

Walking to get their message across

Stephen Taylor
steve@mpnews.com.au

WOMEN wearing orange marched along Mornington Peninsula streets in support of victims and survivors of family violence and to amplify the message that all forms of violence against women, is unacceptable.

The 12th annual Walk Against Family Violence along Main Street, Mornington, was on Wednesday 25 November – the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Members of Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) arranged two group walks through the town and encouraged others to walk closer to home in smaller groups. About 20 women, including at least one with "personal experience of family violence", walked about 42 kilometres.

SWAN is a social justice group of more than 200 women which has met on the peninsula over 24 years. Members say they tackle different social justice issues, with an awareness of family violence brought into sharp focus when they hosted anti-violence campaigner Rosie Batty in 2018.

"Family violence has escalated in frequency and severity during the lockdown, compounded by women having limited opportunities to report this," SWAN's Erica Churchill said. "We need to make sure women have the supports, the housing and the legal protection to be able to leave a violent situation."

This view amplified the concerns of family violence by victims' advocate Geraldine Bilston, of Dromana, who wrote that enforced isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic might lead to an increase in abuse. ("Fears of rise in family violence" The News 14/4/2020).

Ms Churchill said: "We walked because we want to achieve a state where everyone, on the peninsula, in Victoria and globally, can live their lives free from the fear of violence and be respected and valued."

"We need to challenge violence in all its forms; to promote respectful relationships, and to remove gender stereotypes and roles."



Hear us: Members of the Southern Women's Action Network go! Picture: Supplied

Peaceful street march against violence

SOUTHERN Women's Action Network (SWAN) rallied in Mornington on Thursday 25 November in support of Safe Steps 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and Mornington Peninsula 16ks in 16 days Steps for Respect. They called for an end to what they say is a "growing incidence of violence against women".

SWAN members marched along Main Street, chatting to interested bystanders, before being addressed by Cr Sarah Race in Mornington Park.

Cr Race said the Walk Against Family Violence "amplified a cause that is endemic on the peninsula".

With fragmented services exacerbated by COVID, there was a "critical need for longer-term and crisis housing, as lack of accommodation means that women often must stay and survive with their abuser, try to find a place to crash or end up homeless and/or sleeping in their cars".

SWAN member Maureen Donnelly said: "It is shameful that in our modern society, despite all its economic, social and technological advances, women and children are still subject to violence and abuse in their own homes."

"We need to stand together against sexism and violence in our community."

ABOVE: Media article 'Walking to get their message across', Southern Peninsula News, 2 December 2020.

RIGHT: Media article, 'Peaceful street march against violence', Southern Peninsula News, 8 December 2021.

BELOW: 'Domestic violence not wanted here'. Media article reports on public meeting auspiced by SWAN, involving students from Chisholm Institute, January 2004

Domestic violence not wanted here

CONSTANT frustration, fear, pain, anger, and humiliation, are the main feelings of those who experience domestic violence, according to the outcome of a public meeting at the Mornington Community and Information Centre, January 29.

Organised by the Southern Women's Action Network, Mount Martha, the forum aimed to increase community awareness and debate on domestic violence issues.

Students from Chisholm Institute conducted a satirical performance portraying the suppression of women during the Victorian era.

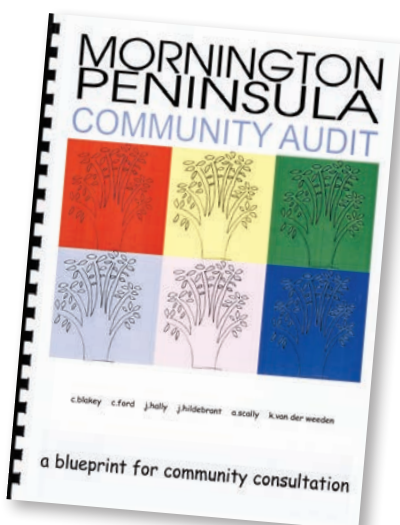
"The (Victorian era) was a time when women were not even allowed to decide for themselves who they wanted to marry," SWAN treasurer Val McKenna said.

"We were aiming to bring the issue of domestic violence to the (public's eye) through the meeting," Ms McKenna said. "It's far more prevalent than people realise."



Supporting community empowerment

Mornington Peninsula Community Audit



ABOVE: Report of the Community Audit conducted by SWAN, 2001

In 2001 SWAN received a grant from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to conduct a community audit. The purpose was: *“to examine the needs and requirements of people living within the Shire, seeking input about citizens who were most vulnerable in their ability to access key decision-makers.”* - Blakey et al, ‘Mornington Peninsula Community Audit’, 2001, p10. SWAN.

Priority was given to hearing from those whose voices were often not heard.

The project working group comprised: Christine Blakey, Carole Ford, Jennefer Hally, Jane Hildebrant, Ann Scally and Kathleen van der Weerden. They used a participatory action research approach to gather input from approximately fifty community members.

The social audit mirrored similar studies undertaken in several other municipalities to gather residents’ views and experiences, including *“to identify the local impact of government and organisational policies and provide key decision-makers with an accurate picture of community feeling and need.”* - Mornington Peninsula Community Audit’ p9.

Christine Blakey explains *“This audit contributed to raising awareness of the needs of this group to further inform Government decision makers.”*



ABOVE: SWAN Newsletter article announcing the Social Audit Launch, September 2001.

Jane Hildebrant notes that participation in this project was one of the more “*politically active*” moments she experienced during her involvement with SWAN. However both agree that many of the issues that they documented two decades ago have still not been adequately addressed. Christine feels disheartened that “*Many of the issues of concern identified in the community audit are still present today. Disadvantaged women and their children’s needs are often overlooked in broader community planning*”. Jane laments “*Although we presented our findings to politicians, I don’t believe anything came of it.*”

But Judith Graley who was an MSPC Councilor when this project was undertaken, believes that it did have an important impact on Council direction.

“MPSC was very much a roads, rates and rubbish focused organisation. There was strong lobbying on environmental and planning issues by well-organised groups, but the social and community issues were often assessed via a charity paradigm. Social justice as a concept was not at the forefront of decision-making. SWAN, with the social audit and its allied activities, helped to provide the necessary conditions and political support for MPSC to reorient its thinking and as a consequence become more community focused. This was evident in the subsequent appointment of Social Planners and Community Development Officers.”

“The project recommendations also led to the Shire providing opportunities for female staff to meet together to discuss issues they faced working in a very male dominated employment context. This prompted some to host the first International Women’s Day event at The Briars for their Shire work colleagues. This occasion was greatly appreciated by all who attended. Not only did this help to change attitudes, but also it made female staff more aware of each other and the value of getting together.” - Judith Couacaud Graley

Environmental education and action

SWAN’s leadership in hosting a public forum about the need to protect the natural, built, historical and cultural environments of the Mornington Peninsula was instrumental in motivating more broad-scale community discussion and action on this issue, enabling local people to share their environmental knowledge to help preserve our rich heritage.

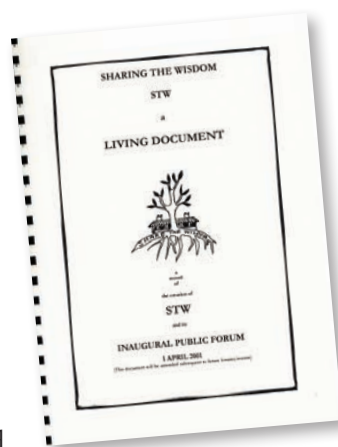
Sharing the Wisdom Community Environmental Forum

At the start of the of the new millennium, SWAN member Vivienne Nicholson gave a presentation to her co-members about the wide-spread environmental concerns on the Mornington Peninsula and in Port Philip and Westernport Bays. She encouraged them to raise these issues in the wider community. This led to SWAN initiating a public forum in 2001 to establish a Mornington Peninsula Environmental Collective. Following is Vivienne’s account of what transpired.

In 2000, I was asked to be a guest speaker at SWAN to talk about my experiences as a grassroots activist on the Mornington Peninsula. During that talk, I suggested that the many local environmental and social action groups should come together to share their accumulated collective expertise and knowledge about this region.

That talk resulted in the formation of a group named 'Sharing the Wisdom' with the organising committee made up predominantly of SWAN members. As a consequence, a very successful public forum was held in April 2001 bringing together keynote speakers and local community members to share their experience, knowledge, commitment, care and passion in safeguarding the many aspects of this special place, the Mornington Peninsula.

From that meeting, 'A Living Document' was created by Debbie Roberts, a SWAN member and a member of the committee of 'Sharing the Wisdom'. This publication incorporated all of the papers (that were) delivered. A subsequent forum was held later in that year. 'Sharing the Wisdom' continued to operate for the next couple of years. However, lack of funding changed its main purpose to organising evenings at the Mornington Court House with guest speakers, predominantly from Melbourne, delivering talks on diverse subjects such as education, theatre, gambling, and Australian history. All of which contributed to 'Sharing the Wisdom' amongst the enthusiastic audiences.



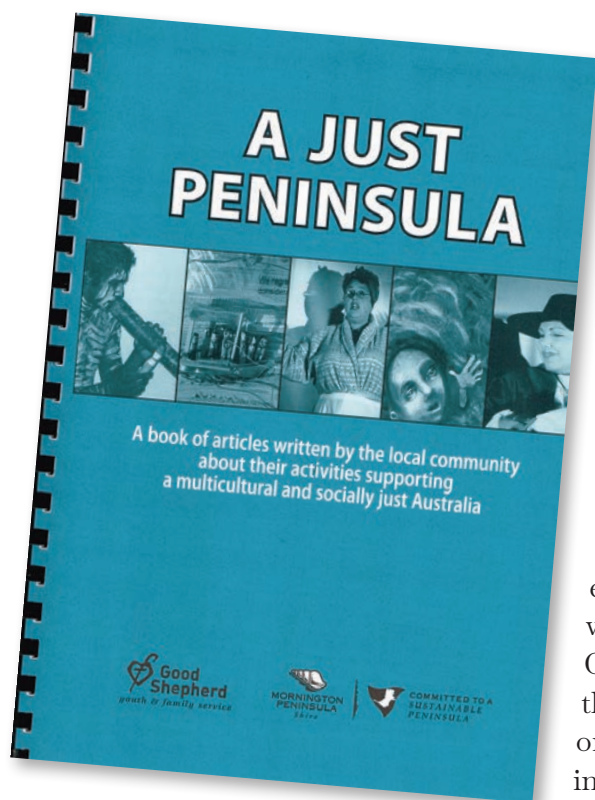
As stated by the then Facilitator Carole Ford, this noteworthy local initiative started by SWAN was *"a practical example of women being empowered to accept leadership roles in the community."* It provided a valuable community forum over several years through which residents from various walks of life could share their experiences, knowledge, commitment, care and passion about the precious natural environment in which they lived and how best to protect it for future generations.

Subsequently, many SWAN members have continued to advocate about an alarming number of environmental concerns evident on the Mornington Peninsula and beyond. Some have joined with neighbours to campaign about specific issues in their local area; others have become members of foreshore protection, land care and climate change action groups; and many have expressed their concerns via innumerable letters published in the media.

Years later, the title 'Sharing the Wisdom' was adopted for a very different activity that once again involved SWAN drawing on the wealth of knowledge and experience within its membership about social justice concerns, not only environmental issues. This initiative is discussed in the previous chapter.

Promoting multiculturalism

A Just Peninsula



In 2006, several SWAN members played a leading role in another community project funded by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and conducted jointly with Good Shepherd Peninsula. The project celebrated local level social justice and excellence in access and equity policy and practice. It included the publication of a booklet entitled ‘A Just Peninsula’¹³ that acknowledged the work being done by local groups, and other initiatives to support people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, that promoted intercultural understanding.

SWAN members Susan Blackburn, who was employed by Good Shepherd and Gail Price, who was the MPSC Community Development Officer, played a central role in implementing this project. The booklet included profiles of organisations, groups and individuals engaged in support and advocacy work, especially those pertaining to migrants and refugees.

Gail recalls the personal and professional impact of working alongside Susan on innovative projects like this and meeting many other *“inspiring, courageous women passionate about social justice who were /are part of SWAN... As a Community Development Worker for the Shire this became an important network for me to tune into community interests, skills and talents.”*

Similarly, Susan recollects how this initial project led to her involvement in *“public forums on refugees that were held under the SWAN banner. As part of this focus we had regular collections at meetings of clothes and other items, perhaps even food. This was then delivered to the Asylum Seeker Centres in Melbourne and Dandenong.”*

According to Judith Couacaud Graley, who was the MPSC Mayor at the time, this project also facilitated Council involvement in some other significant projects. *“Collaboration with the community groups that participated helped some Council staff and elected Councilors to have a better appreciation of the value of the community contribution. This helped the Shire to more proactively develop fairer, more socially diverse, community engagement policy and practice.”*

¹³ <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/about-us/history-of-swan/a-just-peninsula/>

Other SWAN members who contributed articles to A Just Peninsula about their activities supporting a multicultural and socially just Australia, included Rosemarie Draper, Fran Rule, Maureen McPhate, Val McKenna and Jodie Kewley. Recipient of the inaugural SWAN Encouragement Bursary for Young Women (see *Chapter Six*), Bonnie Einsiedel was also involved. Bonnie's article entitled 'From Awareness to Action' spoke of her introduction to social justice concerns via SWAN and her subsequent involvement in campaigns and personal endeavour to support asylum seekers and refugees.

"I first became interested in social justice when my mother and I attended an informative meeting about refugees and asylum seekers (with speakers such as refugee advocate Pamela Curr) on the Mornington Peninsula when I was twelve... I attended several SWAN meetings, wrote to politicians, started my own social justice group, attended rallies and visited Dandenong Asylum Seekers' Centre whenever possible, donating food and clothes and talking to asylum seekers."
- **Bonnie Einsiedel**

More than fifteen years later, Bonnie continues to be pro-actively engaged in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. She has also volunteered her spare time to help SWAN to promote its social justice advocacy work via social media.

Advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees

The initiative undertaken by SWAN under the banner of 'A Just Peninsula' provides 'a snapshot in time' of the organisation's long-term commitment to try to confront injustices experienced by people seeking refuge in Australia. Since its foundation, SWAN has provided many opportunities for its members and others to learn about the cruel situation faced by thousands of these vulnerable people. This resulted in many members taking personal action and joining collective advocacy campaigns to support asylum seekers and refugees.

In March 2003 SWAN hosted a public forum where political activist Kate Durham, joined by her husband Julian Burnside QC, spoke about the shame of Australia's refugee policy; the plight of asylum seekers and refugees; and of their own involvement in driving the community network 'Spare Rooms for Refugees'. Following this, many SWAN members joined campaigns to challenge these inhumane government policies and practices.



ABOVE: Media article: 'SWAN hosts refugee talk'. March 2003.

Val McKenna recalls: *"(We) worked with Julian Burnside to get the ABC to reverse a decision not to show a documentary about life at Australia's refugee centres on Manus Island and Nauru... (We) supported a church group to provide free white goods, like fridges, to refugee families who could not afford them and... we provided toys and sanitary pads to refugee women."*

Val also remembers joining a demonstration with friends outside the razor-wired fence at Maribyrnong Detention Centre. Notably, some SWAN members engaged directly with asylum seekers and refugees. For example, Maureen McPhate and her daughter sent writing paper and stamped, addressed envelopes to asylum seekers. They communicated with several refugees and were appalled to hear their tragic stories.

Later, in 2004, Pamela Curr from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre addressed a SWAN meeting leading to more members taking action. Some wrote letters to politicians to demand change; others joined support and advocacy organisations such as Grandmothers for Refugees; some gave monetary donations; and a couple of women set up a food collection tub in the Mt Martha supermarket that exists to this day.

Georgie Stubbs: About sixteen years ago I asked the Mt Martha Supermarket (later IGA) if they would have a large collection cage for food at the front. They kindly agreed and it's still going well! This wasn't done on behalf of SWAN or any group, just me initially and another SWAN member Thalia Collard helping. Then some folk from Mt Martha Uniting Church helped with transport to Dandenong. And later other SWAN members too.

I would speak regularly at the Share Table time at SWAN meetings and members started to bring items along. We were supporting a young Hazara single mother with things for her baby and SWAN members were very generous in support. We learnt of an Hazara women's group in Dandenong that asked for help with English conversation and for several weeks about five of us went to help... SWAN members showed ongoing interest in the asylum seeker and refugee situation. Fazila Tasmim, an Hazara woman spoke at SWAN some years ago.

The Share Table was a time to tell about local issues and projects, supported by the information on the table and helped us all keep in touch with actions and events... A few years back Erica Churchill and I went to a conference about refugee issues at RMIT. And over the years SWAN members and their friends have donated many material items too. The interest and support has been great.



ABOVE: Georgie Stubbs and Thalia Collard with the food donation tub at MT Martha IGA.

SWAN members also drew on their personal connections with asylum seekers and refugees to invite them to speak to the broader membership. This sometimes led to SWAN providing long-term support to help some refugees to help to improve the life circumstances of others. Vivienne Daniels tells of her relationship with Luz Restrepo a refugee from South America, who addressed a SWAN meeting in 2017. Luz spoke about the valuable work being done by SisterWorks to support migrant, asylum-seeker and refugee women to develop their own small businesses and achieve financial independence.



Vivienne Daniels: I was introduced to Luz Restrepo who was a political refugee from Columbia, in 2011 when I was volunteering with ASRC as English home-tutor. Luz went on to gather her refugee women-friends to start 'Hand-made by Multicultural Women' for whom I negotiated a Wednesday Main St Mornington Market stall to sell their jewellery, beanies, soft toys and baskets. Eventually, through help from several Red Hill SWAN members... the business was renamed SisterWorks and managed to get support from

Port Phillip Council with free space in their St Kilda Neighbourhood House. This made it much easier for women to come from the northern and western suburbs.

SisterWorks grew so large more space was needed and Yarra Council came to the rescue with a shop-front in Richmond. Continuing growth meant even more space was required... and now they're opposite Epworth Hospital. Meanwhile, Luz handed the thriving business over to a committee that is now headed by Ifrin Fittock from the Philippines, while Luz pursues another venture called Migrant Women in Business that sells products on-line.

ABOVE: Refugee advocate and founder of 'SisterWorks,' Luz Restrepo with SWAN member and friend, Vivienne Daniels

Val Campbell SWAN's Speaker Coordinator (2018-2020) noted that during SWAN's lifespan

"A good number of members have been involved in teaching English to refugees and asylum seekers."

She drew on her personal engagement skills and networks to facilitate some very thought-provoking meeting presentations on topics concerning these long-suffering people.

"I organised for Pamela Curr to speak to SWAN members... I had worked with her at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre where I was English Coordinator for five years." Pamela spoke about her advocacy for people in community detention; her volunteer involvement with the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project; and as a member of Refugee Advocacy Network and the Liberty Refugee Policy Group.

"I also arranged for Dr Dalal Smiley, the CEO of Wellsprings for Women in Dandenong, to speak at a SWAN meeting... I had worked at Wellsprings for four years as an ESL teacher." Dalal highlighted the valuable work being done by this community gathering and learning place in supporting migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women.

A few months later, Val secured Nyadol Nyuon OAM, a Sudanese-Australian lawyer, writer and human rights advocate to address a SWAN meeting. Nyadol was born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia and spent part of her childhood in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. She spoke of her passion for social justice, multiculturalism and the need to call out prejudice.

Subsequent speaker coordinators organised further powerful presentations by committed female activists who were deeply engaged in challenging the systemic injustices faced by refugees. In 2020, Melissa Kelly facilitated an inspiring talk by a refugee advocate Shen Narayanasamy. Two years later, Erica Churchill welcomed Judy Carroll and Katie Shafar from the Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association, who spoke ardently about their personal experiences of engaging with refugees and asylum seekers and supporting those in offshore detention.

Challenging racial prejudice and discrimination

In 2006 SWAN hosted a community event with a difference! This creative activity was supported by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and held at the Peninsula Community Theatre in Mornington. Entitled: 'Debunking Myths about Australian Islamic Culture', it involved a fashion parade featuring women in Islamic dress. The purpose was to help broaden community understanding about Muslim women and their choices. This function included lunch and the chance for attendees to engage directly with the models and other guests. It was well publicised and drew a large audience of women who would otherwise have had to travel to the city to attend such an event.

To ensure that participants did not feel inhibited about freely discussing matters such as Islamic dress codes, and cultural and religious practices, it was essential that only females join in. Although the topic presented a challenge for some who had never met a person of Muslim faith, it was hailed as a great success. Fran Rule recalls *"It broke important ground in a vibrant and enjoyable manner... The joyful mood, reinforcing a sense of solidarity, was unforgettable."*



ABOVE: Media Article 'Life's rich fabric.' Herald Sun, 28 August, 2006.

To hold this women-only activity SWAN needed to obtain an exemption from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) from State anti-discrimination laws. This involved a written application and verbal submissions from several SWAN members. The permit was duly granted.¹⁴ Even so, SWAN had to skillfully deal with opposition from some members of the media.

¹⁴ Victoria Government Gazette G28, 13 July 2006. No. 1443. Exemption Application No. A183/2006. Issued by The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Rosemarie Draper who was instrumental in organising this event explains:

It is difficult today to understand how controversial it was in August 2006 for SWAN to organise and hold a women-only Islamic fashion / intercultural-faith exchange event, at the Peninsula Community Theatre. However, this was in the post Iraq Gulf War era, when we had been flooded with negative Muslim stereotypes in the media. It was also a time when there was a backlash against the Sex Discrimination Act 1984. Still alive in many SWAN members' memories was the verbally abusive man who had demanded to attend a SWAN meeting, stating we could not legally ask him to leave.

Holding this event ... was not met initially with unanimous enthusiasm. I had helped organise a similar event at my workplace and was convinced that it was worth pursuing. So, when it was agreed that I could explore the possibility further, I contacted the then MPSC Community Development Worker, Gail Price, to see if she was willing to come on board and assist the SWAN committee with this.

This led to the event becoming a reality, with the Shire co-sponsoring the event, helping with funding, venue hire and a successful application to VCAT to hold a women only event, which was a requirement of the young Muslim women organisers.

These women, who came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, had joined together to try and increase the wider community understanding of Islam and its attitude towards women, in the Australian context. It was designed to be an educational event which included a fashion parade, guest speakers and a panel discussion which allowed Muslim and non-Muslim women to interact in a relaxed, open and non-threatening environment and ask any questions of interest. And the SWAN women attending had so many questions and delighted in the experience, including the fabulous multicultural lunch.

But while we were enjoying ourselves inside the theatre, the media (TV and print) had gathered outside and were focused on why SWAN had a win at VCAT and why we should be allowed a women only event. However, thanks to Judith Graley's media expertise, the eventual coverage was very positive and became one of the most widely publicised SWAN events in our history.- **Rosemarie Draper**

Since then, many of the guest speakers at SWAN meetings raised concern about the racist attitudes that are embedded in our society. For example, in 2006, award winning journalist with The Age, Sushi Das impressed SWAN members with her ability to directly confront racism, telling of her efforts to ensure that discrimination is challenged by society at large and is being addressed by our politicians. In 2016, the committee arranged for the screening of the film 'No Burkas Beyond Bars' at the Mornington Cinema.



ABOVE: Media Article 'Cultural exchange over headgear and hummus.'. The Mail Mornington and Southern Peninsula, 31 August 2006

Men excluded from fashion parade

by Fergus Shiel. August 3, 2006, The Age

A sell-out women-only Islamic fashion parade has been exempted from Victoria's anti-discrimination laws to allow men to be excluded. More than 150 women have booked to attend the parade of leisurewear, wedding dresses and headscarves at Mornington's Peninsula Community Theatre.

The Southern Women's Action Network has organised the August 27 parade to help foster greater understanding among the broader community of Islamic culture. SWAN committee member Judith Graley said: "Muslim women of all ages from across Melbourne will model traditional Islamic wear and then there will be a Middle Eastern lunch."

"Mornington doesn't have a big Muslim community. The idea is for more people to learn about Muslim women and their choices," Ms Graley said.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal deputy president Cate McKenzie said yesterday there was a strong public interest to justify granting the parade an exemption from the anti-discrimination laws. Ms McKenzie said: "The function includes a lunch. Women of all nationalities, races and religions can attend, and it is proposed that these women, by discussion with each other . . . will be able to find a way into understanding Islamic culture and religion."

If men were present it could inhibit the discussion of matters such as marriage customs and the question of female circumcision. The presence of men would also stop women touching the various dresses that were being worn, including the wedding dresses.

First Nations women speakers at SWAN meetings have raised countless examples of discriminatory government policies. In 2021 Gunai / Kurnai woman and author Ronnie Gorrie told a SWAN audience how she joined the Queensland police force hoping to increase the trust of Indigenous people in the justice system. Ronnie explained how devastated she was to find a system deeply entrenched in racism. She shared her story about the personal impact that this had on her and how eventually she decided to resign.

Both SWAN and individual members continue to advocate strongly against all forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. In 2022, the committee wrote to the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews expressing deep concern about the incarceration of children as young as ten years old, particularly the over-representation of First Nations children in the youth justice system. Ongoing advocacy and action are needed to achieve the systemic reforms that are long overdue.

Walking with First Nations Peoples



ABOVE: SWAN NAIDOC week guest speaker First Nations Elder, Aunty Helen Bnads. Photo: Yanni

RIGHT: SWAN NAIDOC meeting 2019, from left guest speaker Irene Fisher, Robyn Oxley and Deb Mellett

Since its inception SWAN has actively supported efforts to address the human rights concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. More than twenty First Nations women have addressed SWAN meetings, most often to celebrate NAIDOC week. Over the years, many individual SWAN members have also been involved with local Indigenous organisations and advocacy campaigns.



Speaker an expert in health, wellbeing

A HEALTH professional and academic who practises a holistic approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians will speak in Mount Eliza next month.

The talk, by Southern Women's Action Network's NAIDOC Week speaker Auntie Helen Bnads, will especially suit women interested in deepening their knowledge of community issues and promoting action for social justice.

The venue is Mount Eliza Community Hall, 90-100 Canadian Bay Road, Mount Eliza, on Sunday 11 July at 9.30am.

Auntie Bnads is a Birri Gubba woman from the Bindal Group in Ayr, Queensland, with direct family ties to the Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission.

Ms Bnads is focused on helping the Aboriginal community. She worked for Link-Up Queensland Aboriginal Corporation as the social, emotional and wellbeing counsellor; at the City of Melbourne in public policy; at Monash University in the Aboriginal Research Unit and for the AFL as a mentor. She has also worked with Aboriginal youth in the justice system.

She is now at Peninsula Health, Frankston Hospital, and in the wider community as elder and cultural lead, after four years as the Aboriginal hospital liaison officer.

She is a board member of Willum Warrain and was inducted into the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll in 2019 in recognition of her work in health, academia and reconciliation.

ABOVE: SWAN NAIDOC week address presented by First Nations Elder, Auntie Helen Bnads'. Southern Peninsula News, 30 June 2021

RIGHT: SWAN NAIDOC meeting flyer, 2020'.

TOP RIGHT: SWAN NAIDOC meeting flyer, First People's Assembly, 2022'.

ALICE UGLE & STEPHANIE ROSS

SWAN's NAIDOC Week speakers

Our NAIDOC Week celebration will be your chance to learn about Victorian Treaty negotiations from Stephanie Ross and Alice Ugle, Engagement Project Officers for the **First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**. This Assembly is the independent and democratically elected body to represent Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. They are the elected voice for Aboriginal people and communities in Treaty discussions which are expected to begin in 2023. Alice looks after South West Victoria and Stephanie takes care of the Metropolitan area.

Stephanie: "I love working in a culturally safe environment, connecting to community and culture, and learning from our Elders. Treaty will empower community to make decisions that affect them, enrich non-indigenous and more importantly First Peoples in culture, language and unity across Victoria, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain!"

Alice: "The focus of my role is to engage with community, to give knowledge and understanding of what Treaty is and how you can be a part of it. This will allow mob to have a full understanding of Treaty and encourage everyone to be able to vote and have their voice heard."

GET UP! This speaker event is a **Zoom Meeting**. You will be emailed to every member.

SOUTHERN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK

SWAN

Women striving for Social Justice

For women interested in deepening their knowledge of community issues and promoting action for social justice. Take a look at our website www.swanwomen.org.au

Sunday 8th November 2020

Commencing 10.00am with NAIDOC Week special guest speaker

Teela Reid

SWAN is delighted to welcome Teela as our speaker, via Zoom meeting, for NAIDOC Week 2020.

Teela Reid is a proud Wiradjuri and Wallian woman, a former teacher now criminal defence lawyer and most recently an award-winning junior fiction writer. Teela is a passionate advocate for enshrining a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution and a Makarrata commission to enable Treaty and Truth-telling. She was a working group leader on section 51 (xvii), the Race Power, in the constitutional dialogue process that underpinned the Uluru Statement From The Heart; an invitation issued to the Australian people on 26th May 2017. Teela also appeared on ABC programs The Drum, 7.30 and Q&A, and has an active presence on Twitter (@teelareid) and is the co-creator of the Instagram page [blackfulla_bookclub](https://www.instagram.com/blackfulla_bookclub/), a platform that honours First Nations Ancestors as the original storytellers.

Always Was, Always Will Be.

8-15 NOV 2020

2020 National NAIDOC logo

The Zoom link will be sent to all on our Member / email list. Please email swanwomen@outlook.com or contact Erica on [redacted] to be added to the list. If you wish to assist our social justice causes, a \$10 ticket can be purchased at <https://www.trybooking.com/BLXRX> or a donation can be made at <https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/swan>

By 2020, in contrast to its neighbours in the Bass Coast and Port Phillip municipalities, the Mornington Peninsula did not have a Reconciliation Action Group as a vehicle to amplify First Nations' calls for justice. In this context, SWAN's decision to create a dedicated 'Supporting First Nations' (SFN) group was significant. Val Campbell and Maureen Donnelly were instrumental in establishing this group to enhance SWAN's capacity to:

- a) Engage with local Indigenous communities, especially women;
- b) Advocate for social justice in support of First Nations peoples; and
- c) Raise awareness amongst SWAN members and within our local community about past and ongoing injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

SFN group membership soon grew. Regular meetings enabled information sharing and provided a valuable learning and advocacy forum for participants. The group prepared written contributions for SWAN Newsletters and reports for the SWAN Committee, and provided updates on concerns and actions relating to First Nations Peoples at SWAN meetings. This included details of books, podcasts and other resources that members were encouraged to access.

Subsequently, three key priority areas were established. Actions undertaken in each of these areas include:

Engagement and Cultural Awareness

- Participation in cultural programs and events hosted by Willum Warrain and Nairm Marr Djambana Aboriginal Gathering Places.
- Incorporating both contemporary and historical cultural awareness by facilitating guided walks led by First Nations organisation Living Culture, enabling participants to learn about local Indigenous cultural heritage and connection to country.
- Engaging in local cultural events and research, for example, attending Baluk Arts Indigenous-run Art Gallery exhibition openings, as well as visiting local Museums and Historical Societies to investigate historical sources regarding Bunurong and Boon-Wurrung Peoples.

“Willum Warrain made us so welcome. We were treated to a walk through the amazing natural area they have developed and were also invited to take part in a Smoking Ceremony. It was a real privilege to be included in this and a marvellous chance to learn more about the culture. - Erica Churchill

Learning and Truth-Telling

- For SWAN's NAIDOC Week meetings, supporting the SWAN Committee to host First Nations' women speakers, including proud Wiradjuri and Wailwan woman and Constitutional Lawyer Teela Reid (2020); respected local Elder and health professional

Aunty Helen Bnads from Peninsula Health (2021); and Stephanie Ross and Alice Ugle from the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria (2022).

- Developing a SWAN ‘Truth-Telling Resource’¹⁵ to support members to share information about our local colonial history, current injustices facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and to advocate against racism and for self-determination.

“I think your (truth-telling) document is really concise and informative and hard hitting – excellent work!” - Dan Turnbull, CEO, Bunurong Land Council.

“I am very impressed by this truth-telling resource. It is very comprehensive and I like its focus on the Peninsula. I particularly like the practical action component on a personal level.”

- Peter Aldenhoven, Executive Officer, Willum Warrain, Aboriginal Gathering Place.

“The truth-telling resource is brilliant ... your group is ahead of the curve here!”

- Otis Heffernan-Wooden, Projects Officer, Reconciliation Victoria.



BELOW LEFT: SWAN member Georgie Stubbs (right) and Peggy Gibson at Willum Warrain, 2021.

LEFT: Deb Mellett tells SWAN's Supporting First Nations group and Committee about Nairm Marr Djambana's programs

BELOW RIGHT: SWAN Supporting First Nations group member, Maureen Donnelly, at Willum Warrain, December 2022. From left, Ange Estcourt, Cultural Lead Women's Business, Maureen Donnelly SWAN, and Women's group members, Melissa and Possum.



¹⁵ <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/supporting-first-nations-peoples/truth-telling-resource/>

Action and Advocacy

- Preparing a submission to the Indigenous Voice Co-design process¹⁶ and a ‘SWAN Position Paper on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament’¹⁷; along with lobbying politicians and local Councilors in support of the three pillars of The Uluru Statement from the Heart: Voice, Treaty, Truth; and promoting a referendum to constitutionally enshrine an Indigenous Voice at a local, state and national government level and in the wider community.
- Liaison and advocacy with MPSC regarding the Shire’s Reconciliation Action Plan and supporting local campaigns of concern to First Nations Peoples, such as advocating for the inclusion of cultural heritage information and signage along the Peninsula Trail, replacing offensive place names, and supporting the selection of an Indigenous name for Rosebud’s new Aquatic Centre.

“Thank you so much for your advocacy, today we celebrate.” acknowledging SWAN support for the cultural naming of the Yawa Aquatic Centre - Yawa being the local Indigenous word for swim. - **Deb Mellett, Senior Planner, Aboriginal Cultural and Community Development Team, MPSC.**

- Writing letters to the Government and media concerning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaths in Custody, Raising the Age of Incarceration, Change the Date (Australia Day/Invasion Day), truth-telling about Australia’s colonial past, including on the Mornington Peninsula, and the protection of remote communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Participating in NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week and Change the Date community events held by Our Songlines and by Aboriginal Gathering Places WillumWarrain in Hastings and Nairn Marr Djambana in Frankston.

“We really appreciate your time and energy supporting us mob and uplifting Aboriginal voice!” - **Peter Aldenhoven, Executive Officer, WillumWarrain**

“Please pass on our respects to the (SWAN) alliance for what they do and what they stand for. We support and commend each of you.” - **Dan Turnbull, CEO, Bunurong Land Council.**

“I’ve seen the thoughtful and powerful work done by SWAN. The strong and influential voices of SWAN women make things change. Your support is greatly appreciated.” - **Deb Mellett, General Manager, Nairn Marr Djambana**

¹⁶ <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/supporting-first-nations-peoples/>

¹⁷ <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/supporting-first-nations-peoples/advocacy/>

Set a new date so all of us can celebrate

I support for Mornington Peninsula Shire councillor Kerri McCafferty, who declined to attend any formal Australia Day events on 26 January ("Councillor bows out on 'celebration'" *The News* 19/1/21).

Like her, I respect the heartfelt requests that are being echoed by First Nations peoples to choose an alternate date on which all Australians can celebrate being part of this ancient land.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 26 January is a day of deep sorrow. It is a tragic and painful reminder of the commencement of colonisation that ushered in inhumane and systematic policies and practices aimed at destroying Aboriginal culture and to dispossess them of their lands.

For more than 230 years Australia's First Nations peoples have suffered wide ranging injustice. The lack of progress towards achieving the Closing the Gap targets after so many decades, is shameful. The time for change is long overdue.

Some signs of hope are emerging. An increasing proportion of people of non-Indigenous heritage are choosing to walk alongside the First Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation. Today, some 90 per cent of all Australians believe that building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is critical to the future of our country.

If we truly commit to being part of this shared journey then changing the date of Australia Day will be just one step, but an important one, along this path.

All councillors and people who live and work within the shire should respectfully observe 26 January, for what it is, a day of mourning. Councillors should follow the lead of several other municipalities and demand that the federal government nominate an alternate date on which all Australians can celebrate being part of this great nation. **Diane McDonald**, Mount Eliza

Majority wants 'justice' for First Nations people

It is implied that a majority of Australians are opposed to justice for the "minority group" First Nations people when, in fact, these views are in the minority, not the majority ("Unequal rights" *Letters* 22/11/22).

At the state level, for example, the leader of the Victorian Nationals, Peter Walsh, has publicly stated that the Liberals and Nationals are committed to advancing the Victorian Treaty process. They have supported Victorian Labor's efforts to bring about justice and self-determination for First Nations people.

Mr Walsh has also urged closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, thus supporting the equality the writer objects to. The Victorian Greens likewise strongly support justice for First Nations people.

That leaves opponents in the minority.

At the national level, a clear majority of Australians are on board with an Indigenous Voice to parliament.

There is ample research, including from UNSW to substantiate this fact.

Maureen Donnelly, Mornington

FAR LEFT: Letter to editor, 'Set a new date so all can celebrate' MP News, Diane McDonald, 2 February 2021

LEFT: Letter to editor, 'Majority wants justice for First Nations People', Maureen Donnelly, 29 November 2022.

Other examples of SWAN's ongoing advocacy

Since SWAN began, members have written countless letters to the media concerning a wide range of human rights and social justice concerns. Additionally, letters, petitions and submissions that have called for systemic change have been sent to State and Federal Government Ministers and Senators on behalf of the broader membership. Recent examples include topics such as: Australia's abysmal position with regard to gender equality as shown in the 2021 'World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report'; the plight of Afghan refugees seeking permanent visas or citizenship in Australia, including increased intake and family reunions for those in danger; and demanding additional domestic and family violence prevention funding, particularly for Indigenous families.

At a local government level, prior to the 2020 Mornington Peninsula Shire Council elections, SWAN surveyed all candidates about their stance on a range of social justice topics. Collated responses were sent to SWAN members, published on SWAN's website, and referred to in a local newspaper article, with the website link for the public to access.

Social justice vote

Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) would like to thank the more than 20 Mornington Peninsula Shire Council candidates who responded to our recent survey, thus demonstrating a genuine willingness to respond to community concerns.

In addition to social justice issues, the candidates provided their reasons for standing for council and links to further information about themselves. The responses make interesting reading.

It is evident from the responses to our survey that SWAN's social justice concerns are shared passionately by many of the candidates: access to affordable housing, to adequate income/ income support, disability access, prevention of violence against women, reconciliation with First Nations people and humanitarian treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

Also evident was the commitment of many to the principles of access, equity and inclusion. A number of candidates expressed concern about services for young people and also vulnerable older people.

Significantly, the majority of responses reflect a deep commitment to climate action, environment protection and prevention of over-development on the peninsula.

Candidates unanimously rejected the idea that social justice issues are just state and federal responsibilities. All saw council as having a vital role in both advocacy and policy and program development at the local level.

Erica Churchill, SWAN facilitator, Bittern

Other examples of action undertaken by some members are providing support for the people of Timor Leste, collecting books for school children Fiji, helping to address local women's health concerns by joining the board of Peninsula Health and protesting against the portrayal of women in advertising.

For members, SWAN's monthly newsletter has been a constant advocacy and action resource, over time morphing from hard copy to online with information, links and invitations to join online forums regarding various social justice concerns, events and actions that may be of interest. SWAN's YouTube channel has allowed members of the public to view guest speaker presentations on Zoom and access video recordings of face-to-face presentations. Instagram posts have provided a wider focus for SWAN's advocacy work and SWAN's Facebook page has posted regular updates on key social justice initiatives.

Reflecting on the rationale for SWAN's establishment, the philosophy that underpins its operation and the activities in which SWAN women have been involved

in the last twenty six years, there is ample evidence to show that they have and continue to engage in a progressive social action agenda in a diversity of ways.

Closing Centrelink and Medicare will cost government votes

Southern Women's Action Network (SWAN) is a Social Justice organisation based on the Mornington Peninsula. We have more than 200 members, many of a mature age, who are deeply concerned that all members of the community should be treated decently.

We are very concerned about the federal government's decision to close the Mornington Centrelink and Medicare offices ("Signing up to save Centrelink" *The News* 18/2/20).

Mornington is the major population centre for the peninsula and many residents need to travel there for various purposes. It is reasonably accessible by car or by public transport from many places on the peninsula. Rosebud and Frankston are much harder to access for many on the peninsula, being many kilometres from most of the peninsula's population and with very limited public transport.

It is unlikely that residents will be able to combine a trip for another purpose with a visit to Centrelink or Medicare at Rosebud or Frankston.

This decision will cause great distress to many in the community, particularly those who are already struggling to survive on a pension or Newstart or who are disabled.

While more is being done online these days, many in this section of the community either do not have online access or need assistance to deal with it, meaning that visiting a Centrelink or Medicare office is unavoidable. This same group may not have a car or fuel or funds for public transport.

If this decision is not reversed, it will certainly have a bearing on the votes of many community members, including those of our membership.

The members of SWAN implore the federal government to reconsider this decision. The amount that would be saved is certainly not worth the distress it will cause.

Erica Churchill, SWAN facilitator, Bittern

ABOVE LEFT: Letter to Editor, 'Social justice vote'. Erica Churchill, Chelsea-Mordialloc News, 14 October, 2020

LEFT: Letter to Editor, 'Closing Centrelink and Medicare will cost government votes'. Erica Churchill, Southern Peninsula News, 26 February 2020.

S I X

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE JOURNEY OF OTHERS

Bursaries and scholarships

As well as providing opportunities for its members to learn more about human rights and justice concerns and to become involved in support and advocacy initiatives, SWAN has assisted countless other women to pursue their own social justice journeys. Raising funds was undertaken, not as a priority, but as something that members decided to do out of their own generosity. They knew that as individuals they could help in small ways. But they realised that by pooling their contributions they could provide a far greater level of support to encourage others in their quest for learning and activism in the social justice space. In return, members felt a sense of satisfaction from this involvement.

One way of doing this was to provide a small grant to enable secondary school girls to expand their confidence and public engagement skills. Another was to assist Indigenous tertiary students to gain qualifications to pursue the career of their choice. A subsequent way was by supporting disadvantaged Master's students studying human rights or social justice issues. The enduring value of these efforts is explained below.

In late 2004 SWAN initiated a 'Community Participation Encouragement Bursary'. Valued at \$300, it aimed *"To encourage young women aged between 16-26 years to take up training of their choice in the fields of public speaking, public presentation and media management."*¹⁸ Between 2005 and 2007 six youth bursaries were awarded to school students and one to a young woman, aged twenty three.

¹⁸SWAN Bursary Application Form, 2004

The first youth bursary recipient was sixteen year-old Bonnie Einsiedel (2005) who was encouraged to apply by SWAN members whom she *“met at meetings that she attended with her socially engaged mother.”* In her application, Bonnie expressed a passion for making a difference, especially concerning asylum seekers. She noted that she had visited the *Dandenong Asylum Seeker Centre*; corresponded with some of those in detention; written to politicians; and formed a social justice group with some friends.¹⁹

Following receipt of her award, Bonnie spoke briefly at a SWAN meeting. She put the funds towards an intensive French course after which she lived in France for five years. She became a qualified translator. After returning home Bonnie used her linguistic skills as a live captioner, predominantly for news bulletins for the deaf community.

Sixteen years after receiving her award, Bonnie says that the SWAN bursary *“Improved both my confidence discussing social justice issues with others, particularly the plight of asylum seekers, and my conversational French skills.”* She participates in SWAN meetings whenever possible and assists SWAN to develop its social media profile to attract a younger audience. She says *“I am always impressed by the interesting, intelligent, compassionate local members and speakers. I leave SWAN meetings feeling buoyed by its spirit of humanity.”*



BONNIE Einsiedel recipient of the inaugural encouragement bursary from the Southern Women's Action Group.
Photo by DARYL GORDON 9803

SWAN has a feminist voice

By DEB MORRIS

EIGHT years ago, a group of 25 friends met around a kitchen table. All of the women lived on the peninsula and were talking about social justice issues. There and then, they decided to form an action group.

Former mayor of Mornington Peninsula Shire, Judith Couacaud-Graley was one of those women. “We wanted to form an organisation for women interested in social justice and who wanted to become involved in its promotion,” she said.

“It took off almost immediately. I’m still on the committee and I have to say, I love these women. They’ve become my closest friends.”

Southern Women’s Action Group (SWAN) aims at providing a forum for women in the southern area of Melbourne and the Peninsula to discuss social justice issues, promote advocacy and encourage active participation in community affairs, including human rights and equity issues. It also aims to influence government policies and decision-making.

“The first meeting, with former premier Joan Kirner, drew crowds of around 80,”

said SWAN treasurer, Val McKenna. “We were astounded.” Other guest speakers to SWAN meetings over the years have included police commissioner Christine Nixon, Professor Marcia Neave, from the Law Reform Commission, barrister and feminist Jocelynn Scutt and human rights activists, Julian Burnside QC and his wife, artist Kate Durham.

“SWAN has addressed many vital concerns, such as the treatment of asylum seekers, decisions about the local environment, family violence and problems relating to the Iraq war,” said facilitator Dr Debbie Roberts.

“We aim to challenge entrenched views. A robust democracy depends on informed debate.”

Over the years, SWAN’s aims have branched out to include supporting women candidates at all levels of government and to increase women’s active involvement in community decision-making processes.

As a means of encouraging young women’s participation in public affairs, SWAN initiated an encouragement bursary, which enabled the recipient to take up a course of her choice to develop public speaking skills.

“The bursary is designed to encourage young women between the ages of 16 and 26,” Dr Roberts said.

Peninsula School student, Bonnie Einsiedel, was awarded the inaugural bursary. The 16-year-old from Red Hill hopes to study law and work in the area of human rights. She recently attended a World Vision Global Politics seminar and co-ran the 40-Hour Famine project for World Vision.

“I’m a 16-year-old with a strong sense of social justice and a passion for making a difference,” Bonnie wrote in her application.

The teenager is particularly interested in the issue of asylum seekers and has visited Dandenong Asylum Seekers Centre.

“I have corresponded with three asylum seekers in detention and have sent letters to politicians, as well as forming a social justice group with three of my friends.”

The bursary is supported by the Victorian Women’s Trust which will provide Bonnie with mentoring. “I used the SWAN bursary to fund an intensive course in French at the Alliance Française, as I believe a sound knowledge of that language will prove beneficial,” Bonnie said.

ABOVE: Bonnie Einsiedel: SWAN bursary recipient 2005. Photo: Daryl Gordon

¹⁹ SWAN Newsletter, Vol 5, Issue 1, Feb. 2005

In 2006, three Youth Encouragement bursaries were awarded. One helped Chloe John to strengthen her confidence in the performing arts. Some may wonder what this has to do with social justice? Chloe explains *“The bursary helped boost my confidence and encouraged me to sing at lunchtime concerts when I worked at the Supreme Court of Victoria.”* Chloe later co-wrote and performed in ‘Cabaret for a Cause’ raising money for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

After completing a B.A. and a Law degree, Chloe was admitted to the Supreme Court of Victoria as a Juris Doctor. Her studies included Indigenous Peoples and the Law and International Human Rights Law. Since then Chloe has worked with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning in both the Aboriginal Partnerships and Engagement Team and the Self-Determination Reform Unit. Her career also involved her in the Manus Island Detention Centre Class Action and traumatic Court of Appeal decisions. She has volunteered with community legal centres, including the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and provided policy assistance with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

The other two 2006 bursary recipients were Amelia Travers who used her award to support her participation in a European Space Camp in Norway and assisted Jacqui Holland to further her involvement in environmental and social justice issues by attending a ‘Strengths in Action’ workshop at Deakin Management Centre. In addition to these youth bursaries, SWAN gave \$200 to help with the travel expenses of local young woman Elise Klein, who was the Australian Youth representative to the United Nations General Assembly.

In 2007, the SWAN bursary sub-committee felt that none of the applicants *“displayed a really clear idea of social justice in the broader sense,”* saying that *“the insular Peninsula”* syndrome may be a contributing factor. Despite this, awards were given to Ellie Brown and Stella Thurbon whom it was thought *“had much to offer the community.”* This bursary program then lapsed.

SWAN’s strong desire to support disadvantaged Indigenous women to pursue studies leading to a fulfilling career was reignited a few years later. This was inspired by a talk given by a guest speaker from Monash University who had been involved in a scholarship program run by the Peninsula branch of the Australian Federation of University Women (renamed Graduate Women Victoria (GWV). SWAN member Marilyn Godley (who had funded her own annual scholarship for an Indigenous tertiary student for over a decade) helped to link SWAN with GWV.

Consequently, the SWAN Committee decided to raise funds to support disadvantaged Indigenous women. The inaugural recipient of a \$2,000 bursary was Olivia Slater (2011) who was enrolled in Indigenous Studies at Victoria University. An extract from a presentation that Olivia gave at a SWAN meeting follows.

*“As the recipient of the SWAN Bursary 2011, I am keenly aware that... I am only half way through my undergraduate degree... and as such my career path is not yet defined. I am studying at a tertiary level later in life, having worked full time for over 10 years after dropping out of high school and university in my late teens. In a nutshell, I am interested in exploring, understanding and reclaiming traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic expressions within post colonial Indigenous cultures, focusing mainly on Indigenous Australia, including my own Yamatji and Nyoongar cultural heritages.”*²⁰ Olivia later became a Charlie Perkins Scholar (2016), graduated with a MPhil in Social Anthropology from Cambridge University and went on to undertake a PhD in Education also at Cambridge.

Sarah Stephens won SWAN’s \$2,000 Indigenous Bursary in 2012. The following extract from the SWAN Newsletter²¹ provides a compelling testimony as to the value of this Award in supporting Sarah to achieve her career goals.

“I cannot begin to tell you how much this scholarship means to me. I thank you all for your donations, and hope that I can shed a little bit of light on how this bursary will help me reach my dreams. My ultimate goal is to become a maths teacher who actually makes a difference in someone’s life... I am currently in my second year of a Joint Degree in Mathematical Sciences and Education at the University of Ballarat... I am also hoping to complete a year of science subjects after my degree so that I can teach that also. I have just completed my first teaching rounds and absolutely loved it. Teaching is definitely the career for me. The relationships I formed with students in the short amount of time were very memorable.

In trying to gain some experience I stumbled across the Wannik Tutorial Program at a local school in Ballarat, Phoenix College. This program involves me helping young Koorie students who have been identified as below the expected standard in mathematics. I work one on one with these students in their classroom environment to help them grasp an understanding of the topic being taught by their teacher. I get the best feeling seeing the student’s eyes ‘light up’ when finally they understand...

This scholarship has already made the world of difference to me. I was able to focus on my recent exams without the worry and stress of my financial situation. I have been feeling this year that I might have to take some time off University so that I can earn some money to continue studying. With this scholarship, I know I can finish this year off without any further worry. Once again I would like to thank you all so much. This bursary has allowed me to continue on my journey to become a positive maths teacher, and hopefully make a difference in student’s lives like my maths teacher did for me.”

In 2013 the \$2,000 SWAN Bursary went to First Nations woman, Penelope Scott to assist her to complete her Masters of Employment and Labour Law at The University of Melbourne.

²⁰ SWAN Newsletter, 2011 Vol 11 Issue 3

²¹ SWAN Newsletter, 2012 Vol 12 Issue 5

During her academic studies Penelope had written many research essays on Human Rights Litigation and Advocacy and Principles of Employment Law. In her ‘spare’ time she gathered information through her blog relating to low-income housing concerns. Penelope’s thesis focused on the social justice issue of ‘junior wages’. She was also the recipient of the Marilyn Godley Scholarship. This financial support enabled her to spend more time on her studies rather than worry about meeting bills and taking on part-time work.

The following words written by SWAN’s Sue Weber in 2014 provide an insight into the significance of the Bursary in the lives of those who received it.

“If you need inspiration or feel that life is treating you unkindly then may I suggest you attend the next Graduate Women of Victoria’s Scholarship Presentation Day. I was lucky enough to attend this year’s event and agreed with one of the organisers – it was very difficult not to ‘shed a tear’ listening to some of the women tell their stories. Each person seemed to have overcome extraordinary difficulties – everything from medical, mental, cultural and financial difficulties. And every woman spoke with such humility and grace, telling their story and expressing their profound thanks for receipt of their scholarship. SWAN’s (2014) recipient Jennifer O’Sullivan (\$2,500), a Masters student from Federation University, spoke of... her great desire to finish her studies.”²²



ABOVE: Indigenous tertiary scholarship winner Robyn Oxley (left) with SWAN Speaker Coordinator, Val Campbell (right).

After a gap of a few years during which time no scholarships were awarded, the partnership with GWV recommenced. This new bursary was to be given to a woman (if possible an Indigenous student) whose study and career plans focused on human rights / social justice issues at the local, national or international level. The recipient of the 2019 scholarship (\$3,500) was First Nations woman Robyn Oxley who was undertaking her M.A. in Criminology at Monash University, with a focus on ‘Pre and Post release support programs for Aboriginal offenders and self-determination within the present programs’.

Robyn grew up in South West Sydney, in an 87% housing commission area. Although disinterested in school she returned to study in 2015 in her mid twenties through Monash University’s Indigenous Pathways program. She appreciated the study support provided

²² SWAN Newsletter, 2013 Vol 13, Issue 3

and felt a pull towards social justice and human rights. Her research compared NSW where offenders were brought out of prison into community before release with a sense of belonging and purpose, with the system in Victoria where nine percent of the prison population was Indigenous, despite them being only 0.8% in the general population.

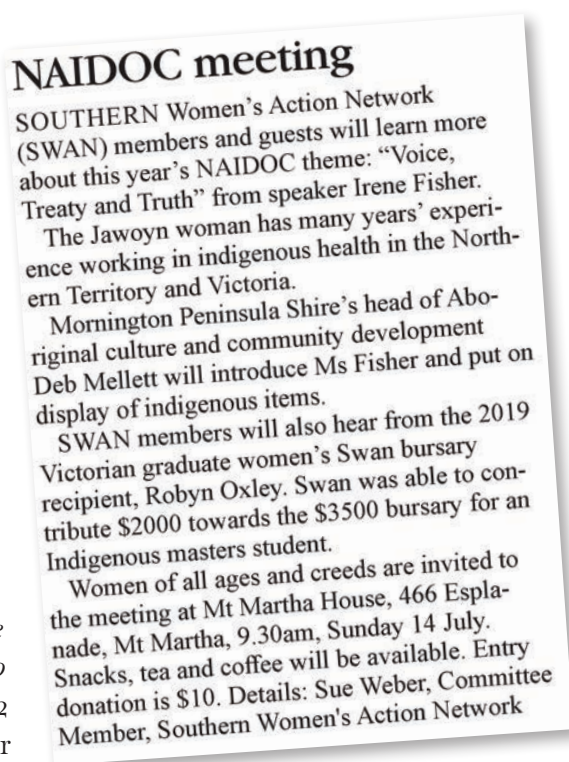
Robyn said that she felt honoured and privileged to have won the SWAN award particularly because it was linked to social justice. *“These awards push and drive us to be better people. It is also about the legacy the Ancestors have passed on to me and now onto my children and children’s children.”*²³ In 2022 Robyn was employed as an assistant Lecturer in Criminology at Monash University.

SWAN’s 2020 Scholarship (\$3,500) was given to Chloe Waddell to support her post-graduate study at the Australian Catholic University. Following is an extract from a presentation that she gave at a SWAN meeting.

“I am honoured to be awarded the 2020 SWAN Bursary. The Southern Women’s Action Network strives to promote social justice and the involvement of women in the community, and I am grateful that my educational and career plans have been seen to align with these important values and priorities.

I am currently a provisionally registered psychologist, undertaking a Master of Psychology... My psychology career will aim to improve the lives of those within the community. I believe education is important and should be considered a basic right for all without discrimination and therefore I feel it is important that all individuals are able to have the tools, guidance and opportunity for learning to be accessible. My career in Educational and Developmental Psychology can directly influence individuals’ learning opportunities across the lifespan, through assessments and psychological interventions.

I am also invested in improving the wellbeing of our older community members. It is important to me that our older population remains adequately stimulated (cognitively, emotionally and physically) and maintains a sense of purpose and wellbeing. I plan to implement workshops between children and older citizens, to encourage cross-generational peer-to-peer learning,



ABOVE: Media article: 'SWAN's NAIDOC week event'. Southern Peninsula News 3 July, 2019

²³ Graduate Women Victoria, Scholarship Presentation Day, 19 June 2019

*social connectedness, and general wellbeing. I feel that my goals to work with the young and old promote the notion of equality, whereby I feel that all people should have the opportunity to have social connection, informal learning, physical exercise, education, rich and fulfilling experiences, and healthy well-being regardless of their age. Thank you, GWV and SWAN for this support.”*²⁴

In 2021 the SWAN Bursary (\$3,500) was awarded to Hannah Petocz to support her Masters degree by research at La Trobe University. Hannah undertook a comprehensive study that explored the long-term impact of abusive intimate partner relationships and the social structures perpetuating it within Australia.

In acknowledgement of the assistance provided through this award, Hannah said:

*“I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to both Graduate Women Victoria and the Southern Women’s Action Network for the honour of this scholarship, and the support it has provided me in completing my studies and furthering my efforts to fight against gender inequality and violence against women and girls.”*²⁵

In 2022 Hannah commenced a PhD with the Monash University Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre. The title of her thesis is ‘Digital Dating Abuse in Australia: Experiences of Managing Safety and Risk’. Her research aims *“to broaden understanding of digital forms of dating abuse in order to improve current methods of prevention, intervention, and advocacy, empowering young women to reclaim their use of technology and to take up their space online.”*

The winner of the 2022 SWAN Bursary (\$3,500) was Nicole Holding who was enrolled in an M.A. by Research at Monash University. As reported by Graduate Women Victoria, in accepting this award, Nicole said that she had commenced her career as a Registered Nurse, working primarily in the operating theatre and midwifery, then moved to breast cancer research. When she developed cancer herself and suffered from mobility issues, she decided to go back to university. Nicole completed her Honours thesis in prenatal care in the rural United States (1910-1929) finding that maternal and infant mortality rates in the US at that time were the highest in the industrial world and that they continue to be among the worst. Her Master’s thesis focuses on the faith-based practices of African American midwives and Black women in the same time period.

In thanking SWAN and GWV for the bursary, Nicole said that her research is relevant *“to women of all societies, especially those living in rural areas and from minority groups... monopolisation of childbirth by medical practitioners, a lack of midwifery-based care, and the undermining of women’s faith in childbirth practices leads to greater birth trauma and higher death rates among mothers and babies, particularly in areas that have limited access to maternal care”*. She hopes to complete a PhD on birth control and abortion that she says is ‘a pertinent topic considering the anti-abortion laws now dominating the US.’²⁶

²⁴ SWAN Newsletter, July 2020.

²⁵ SWAN archives, 2021.

²⁶ Graduate Women Victoria News, 2022.

Donations and in-kind support

Yet another way that SWAN has supported the social justice focused work of others has been to donate funds to hundreds of human rights causes and organisations. This support continues to this day. Guest speakers are asked to nominate an agency or community organisation to which a donation could be given as a way of recognising SWAN's appreciation for their presentation.

From time to time the SWAN Committee has also given one-off donations on behalf of its members to other worthwhile justice related and charitable initiatives. This too continues. Moreover, SWAN members have personally given various types of support to many worthy causes, including financial assistance, and the provision of much-needed goods and services. One example is providing toiletries for homeless women and victims of family violence who live on the Peninsula. Another example is the food donation tub in the Mt Martha IGA that was initiated by Georgie Stubbs and Thalia Collard around 2006. Collected produce is delivered by volunteers to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Dandenong. This tub is still being filled with food item donations, sixteen years later.

Some members with creative skills drew on their SWAN peers to raise funds to support those who are less fortunate. For example, Jo Diplock collected funds for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre from the sale of stained glass peace doves; and Meg Merton made many generous donations to welfare agencies locally and abroad, from the sale of her homemade jams and preserves. Recipients of her kindness included the Children of Phoenix Foundation, the Peninsula Carer Council, and a Centre for Street Children in Cambodia.

This is not to mention the countless personal donations, in-kind support and volunteer hours given by SWAN women to particular causes. One example is the long-term support given by Barbara Godfrey to assist Larimi Village in Timor Leste.

In summary, between 2001 and 2022, SWAN donated some \$40,000 to help finance the studies of seven young women, four Indigenous tertiary students and four Masters students pursuing careers in human rights / social justice; and to support the advocacy work being done by over 130 human rights focused organisations.²⁷ The support shown by SWAN through bursaries, donations and personal endeavours has encouraged countless other women in their quest for justice. It is impossible to quantify the ripple effect of these efforts in the broader community.

²⁷ <https://www.swanwomen.org.au/donations-by-swan/>

S E V E N

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

The important contribution of the SWAN Committee

Central to SWAN's longevity has been the time, commitment and skills so generously given by nigh on one hundred women who joined the SWAN Committee for a period of time.²⁸ Indeed some of the original committee members served for over a decade. From the outset it was intended that SWAN would not have a hierarchical style of leadership such as the type of committee structure that was commonly used by other organisations.

Committee roles were many and varied and often required that members move outside their comfort zone, learn new skills and find extra time in busy schedules to attend to SWAN matters. Tasks included overseeing organisational legal requirements, compliance and the preparation of the necessary documentation; developing and maintaining a website; preparing regular newsletters; managing finances and donations; maintaining member communications and dealing with other correspondence; committee meeting preparation, minute taking and general administration.

Additional responsibilities associated with bi-monthly meetings and public forums included securing guest speakers; liaison with the venue providers; preparing name badges; collecting flowers for the speakers; conducting raffles; and ensuring that the technology and overhead projector always functioned! The work required to ensure the smooth running of such events was made much easier by the voluntary participation of many other members. Their willingness to contribute must be celebrated! Without fanfare or fuss, SWAN women were always ready to lend a helping hand. Everyone 'pitched in' to help stack chairs and tidy meeting rooms, not to mention the time and cost involved in making the delicious sweet and savory refreshments that were always provided. In recent years a small, very hard working catering group has ensured the supply of delicious fruit, cheese and other delicacies at meetings.

But it must also be acknowledged that the generous efforts made by the women who joined the SWAN Committee, often led to unexpected reciprocal benefits for the incumbent themselves. Committee members were regularly challenged to take on new roles and to learn some previously untried or hidden skills, as can be seen in the following recollection from Lynn Carpenter who held a SWAN leadership position for almost a decade.

²⁸ SWAN Committee Members between 1997-2023 are listed in ANNEX C.

“For many years I was able to dodge the idea of joining the committee, reassuring myself that I was the least appropriate candidate in the room, but inevitably it became necessary for me to overcome my self doubt, due to lack of any other volunteers. However, as many of the ‘old timers’ on the committee started to retire their positions the situation became dire and I found myself in the unlikely role of Secretary. I admit that, not having one organised bone in my body, I was out of my depth, but I am proud that I was a part of setting up the website and was able to fill in during a particularly low moment in SWAN’s history to play a small part in enabling it to continue. This in turn led to some truly remarkable women taking the reins and ensuring the survival of SWAN.”

In addition to these ongoing tasks, committee members were responsible for the strategic direction, responsiveness and adaptability, and the sustainability of the organisation. An evaluation and planning day facilitated by the committee in 1999 enabled members to ‘have their say’ about SWAN’s strengths and the challenges that it faced. A survey conducted in 2008 invited members to comment on whether or not SWAN was achieving its purpose and to nominate their preferred style of taking action.

The 2008 Annual Report records the words of SWAN Facilitator Susan Blackburn speaking about the strong, ongoing commitment made by committee members.



ABOVE: Facilitator of SWAN 2021-2022, Melissa Kelly. Photo: Alina Kelly.



ABOVE: Welcoming participants at a SWAN meeting, 2018. From left Sue Parritt and Jan Taylor.

“SWAN will seek to continue to present to you, the women who are our membership, an opportunity to gather together, to find out what is happening and what the needs are in our community, be that local, state, Australia or the world. We will bring you speakers who are engaged and active in addressing social issues, who inform us and deepen our knowledge. We will take action on your behalf and support you with your actions and involvements. We will listen to what you are doing and encourage you in your ventures.”²⁹

²⁹ Annual Report, 2008. SWAN archives.

But it wasn't always 'smooth sailing'. A 'crisis' extraordinary meeting in 2014 canvassed the views of members on whether SWAN should continue and if so in what format. Based on their feedback, it was decided to 'keep going', but with a smaller committee. Other changes included replacing the quarterly newsletter with a flyer with information about the guest speaker and other relevant matters; discussing SWAN 'actions' at bi-monthly meetings and posting them on the website; and setting up volunteer rosters to provide meeting refreshments and to prepare and clean up meeting rooms.

In 2016 another special meeting identified the main challenges that faced the organisation. This included the need to recruit younger women to ensure renewal and sustainability; improve promotion and make better use of social media eg. Facebook; and attract new members to join the SWAN Committee. A list of suggested actions to address these challenges was compiled. This led, in 2017, to the preparation of an Action Plan to: help raise SWAN's profile; encourage increased attendance at SWAN events; and attract more younger women.

As the years passed and the lives of SWAN women became ever busier with additional paid work and family responsibilities, the challenge of finding sufficient members with time to take on committee roles has been ever-present. As their average age continued to increase, new ways of configuring committee roles were introduced.



ABOVE: Some members of the SWAN Committee 2021 and 2022, from left Marg Darcy, Erica Churchill, Diane McDonald, Vivienne Daniels and Marilyn Hoban. Photo: Moz Lucas.

These challenges were compounded even further in 2020 when SWAN, like volunteer-led community organisations worldwide, was confronted with the added difficulties associated with the COVID pandemic. Speaker meetings in May, July and September 2020 were cancelled due to the extended lock-down periods imposed in metropolitan Melbourne.³⁰ This was a major blow for the organisation. Not only did it mean that members could not meet to discuss their social justice concerns and to plan actions, but the primary source of SWAN's income disappeared.

³⁰ Metropolitan Melbourne endured a total of 262 days of lockdown between March 2020 - October 2021.

The fact that within a few months, SWAN pivoted from face-to-face to on-line bi-monthly meetings is testament to the adaptability, technical capability and resilience of its committee and membership. In November 2020, the delayed NAIDOC week meeting (normally held in July) was conducted electronically. A ‘packed on-line audience’ heard First Nations constitutional lawyer, Teela Reid, speak passionately from an interstate location, about the key reforms outlined in ‘The Uluru Statement from the Heart’.

Although navigating Zoom was not easy for some and internet connections were sometimes less than satisfactory, the fact that SWAN was forced to adopt a technology-based form of interaction opened up new possibilities. This enabled members to join in presentations from a much broader range of female social justice advocates situated in other parts of Australia and potentially, beyond. In 2021 and 2022, approximately half of the speaker events were held on-line, and members equipped with face-masks and hand sanitizer, attended face-to-face meetings only when stay at home mandates were not in place and ‘it seemed safe to do so.’

Future directions

In the months leading to the preparation of this book, members were invited to share their thoughts about SWAN’s future and to suggest ways that the organisation could best respond to the changing internal and external context. Many of their suggestions are similar to the ideas proposed by others in years gone by. Concerns such as the need to remain true to the organisation’s purpose; to find ways to engage younger women; and to continue to attract sufficient women with time to join the committee, are ongoing issues, echoed by many other community organisations that are run by volunteers.

But such is the reality that members are being asked to help address. The words of long-term member Rosemarie Draper shed light on the context in which SWAN is operating and highlight some of the constraints that must be tackled strategically if SWAN is to continue. *“I must admit that personally I’m wanting to ‘slow down’ and I’m stepping back from, rather than putting my hand up, from my many commitments. I think SWAN needs to factor in their planning that some members feel unable to contribute much more than their attendance at meetings and to listen to the wonderful speakers”.*

Amongst other things, new ways to maintain strong links with ‘SWAN elders’ and to continue to draw on their wisdom need to be considered. Following is a collation of the ideas that those members who contributed to this book, have offered. These fall into three broad and inter-related categories.

Strengthen advocacy and activism

Val Campbell: Continue to tackle and campaign about injustice and inequality, both statewide and nationally. Liaise with and monitor other social justice organisations on the Mornington Peninsula to engage in combined activism and/or campaigns.

Jane Hildebrant: The Victorian Government runs many parliamentary inquiries on various subjects to which SWAN could make submissions... SWAN should become more involved in supporting women of various backgrounds to get elected.

Develop working groups on specific actions

Rosemarie Draper: I've been heartened by the work and success of the Supporting First Nations group and think that smaller sub-committees working on projects that the members are particularly passionate about may be a way forward. These do not have to be long term committees but could be short term to plan an event or develop a submission to a Royal Commission of interest etc., which would need some level of committee / membership approval but not too much so that initiative and enthusiasm are not lost.

Marilyn Godley: SWAN has always had the dilemma of where best to focus its activities and priorities... I don't see that changing. I am happy, however, that more action is being taken. One former Facilitator railed at the fact we were an 'Action Network' in name only, with little or no action actually happening. I applaud the work of the Supporting First Nations group. However, we need to review priorities regularly to ensure the wider membership endorses those in place and have the opportunity to alter them and/or make other recommendations for future action.

Erica Churchill: The Supporting First Nations group has resulted in SWAN being very active in that area. It would be great to see further small groups supporting specific causes such as Affordable Housing, Aged Care or whatever individual members are most interested in, particularly when there is not already a group doing such support. Where there is such a group, for example Grandmothers for Refugees or Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association, we are better to support their work. Committee currently has very little capacity to take action on social justice issues, other than those actions arising as a result of a speaker's presentation or prepared by the Supporting First Nations group.

Val Campbell: Strengthen outreach to Multicultural women... who reside in Mornington Peninsula. We need SWAN members to take this up and potentially form a sub-committee or interest group to bring issues to the forefront.

Jane Hildebrant: I am involved in several community groups and overwhelmingly the impetus for action is driven by women of all ages and backgrounds. We understand the power of networking and working together to protect our communities and our environment. In particular, the impact of mining is a huge issue in country Victoria, something the media ignores. It would be good to see SWAN take an interest in what is happening in rural areas. Other big issues include: climate change action and the importance of individual behavioural change, political corruption, the declining health of our environment and the insidious erosion of our democratic rights, including the right to protest.

Engage younger women

Lynette Wilks: Now, twenty five years later, there is a new generation of women who have a different way of networking. They use different mechanisms to share information and connect. Rather than trying to identify how we can involve them in SWAN, we need to ask them to tell us how we can support and resource them to be involved in social justice concerns.

How can SWAN members share their wisdom and experience with younger women? How can we 'pass the baton' to those who want to learn about and take action to address the social justice issues in the current social-political context? We need to find ways to build bridges with younger women and identify those who see value in engaging with us. This might involve helping them to overcome any ageist attitudes they might have.

Rosemarie Draper: Recruiting new (particularly younger) members has been an ongoing challenge and one we do not seem to have found the answer to. So sustainability, let alone further development, is always a challenge.

Lynn Carpenter: Increasing the membership base I think is key. ESPECIALLY the younger generations, their energy and clarity are needed to help us all navigate this changing and increasingly alarming world. They have ideas and dreams that us older generations (especially women without children like me) are oblivious to, and in my mind their energy and points of view are crucial to the continuation and development of SWAN. I think that social media is the key to attracting younger members, ensuring that there is always a presence on Facebook and Instagram etc., advertising the meetings and the guest speaker on the Facebook Events page. Again young women are the key to this, they seem to connect on these forums as easily as breathing! For them it would be minimal effort. Perhaps once more try targeting local socially aware groups e.g. The Greens, 'Amnesty International', Save Westernport, Save Arthurs Seat, Friends of Lospalos Timor Leste, churches and schools on the Peninsula."

Susan Blackburn: There needs to be a 'younger women's' alternative. I put a lot of thought into these years ago. I thought small meetings in coffee shops, perhaps on Saturday afternoons. They could lead into the usual Sunday meetings at some point, for some people.

Jane Hildebrant: I am alarmed by today's misogyny which is vicious and dangerous and far worse than in earlier decades and borders on the pornographic... Young women should be made more aware of how their participation in social media forums makes them extremely vulnerable to hatred and abuse. I think this is a topic that SWAN needs to explore.

SWAN turns to youth

By DEB MORRIS

SOCIAL justice action group, Southern Women's Action Network's (SWAN) next meeting follows a September get-together, where newly-appointed commissioner to the Victorian Multi-Cultural Commission, Elleni Bereded-Samuel, spoke about her work as an advocate for immigrants from countries in the Horn of Africa.

The group's next meeting will see youth take the spotlight.

"Final year medical student at Monash University, Lauren Wimetal, will be speaking about her volunteer international elective in East Timor," Val McKenna said.

"Lauren grew up on the peninsula and attended Woodleigh College. For one so young, she has achieved much. She's active in the community, being a member of the Medical Subcommittee of the Mornington Peninsula Friends of Los Palos. She's also a volunteer interpreter as a fluent Tetun speaker to many Australian community groups, particularly a group of Australian medical students who organise for East Timorese to come here for life-saving medical treatment.

"In keeping with the emphasis on youth, Lauren will be introduced by SWAN's inaugural community encouragement bursary recipient, 17-year-old Bonnie Ensiedel.

"It's inspiring to have such young women address SWAN and to be able to support their efforts in making a positive difference to our world."

SWAN's next meeting will be held at 9.30am, at Mornington Secondary College Theatre, Nepean Highway.



LAUREN Wimetal will speak about her work in Africa to the Southern Women's Action Network.

RIGHT: MEDIA article: SWAN has a long history of trying to attract youth: Monash medical student Lauren Wimetal tells members about her internship in Timor Leste, November 2005

Find new ways to learn from each other

Vivienne Nicholson: Re-introduce a membership showcase. This was briefly trialed in 2016, but then dismissed. The high calibre of speakers at SWAN is indisputable but I also think the membership of SWAN should be highlighted. The experience and wisdom of individual members and their contribution to their communities should be highlighted in some way. The trial in 2016 was by way of a short interview at a SWAN meeting. But it could be a cameo piece in the SWAN newsletter. I just believe there is a wealth of untapped experience and knowledge in the membership that should in some form be showcased.

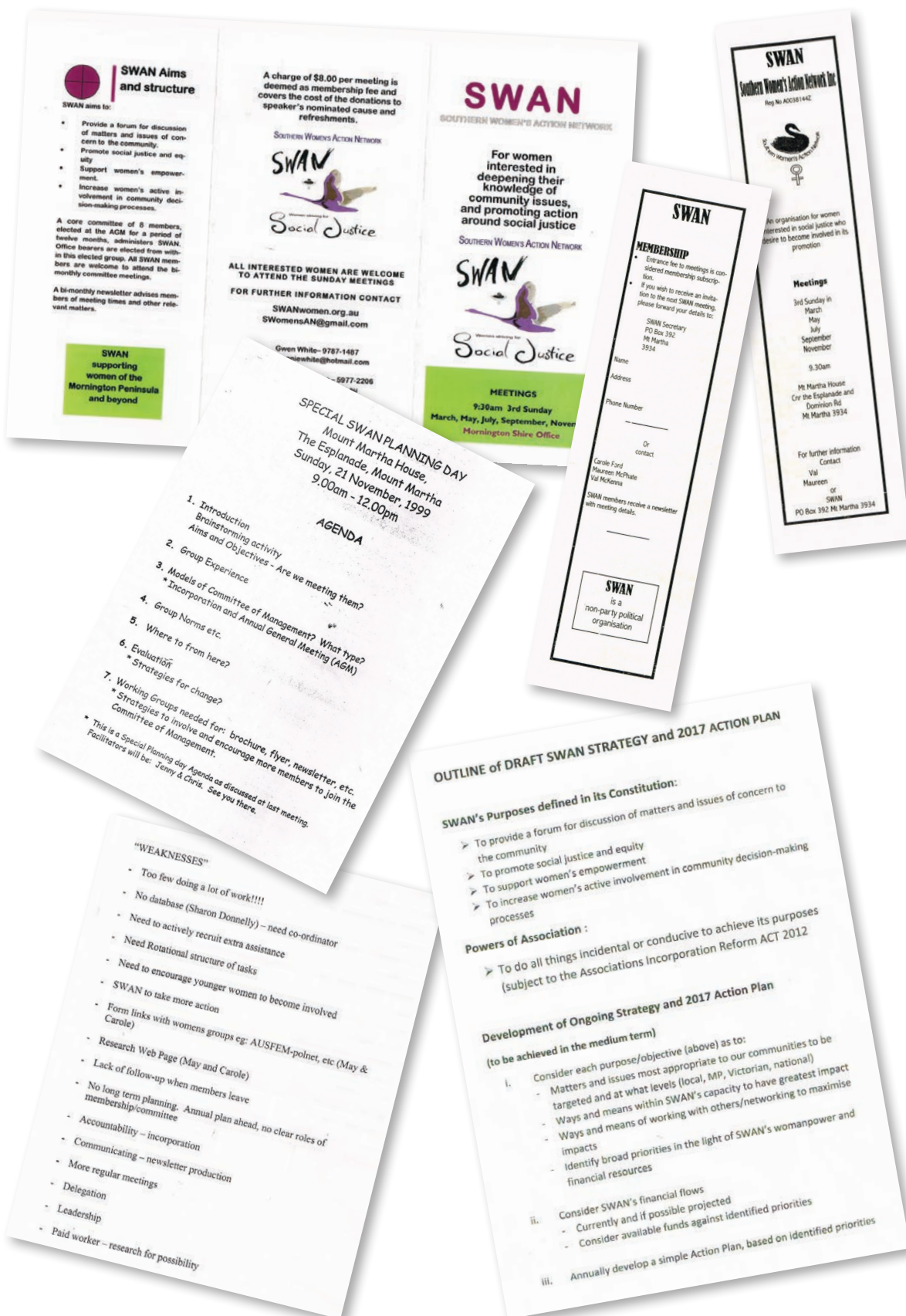
The above suggestions, gleaned from the contributions of those SWAN members who responded to our call for input, closely mirror the insights shared by founding members when they were invited to consider the future. In summary, these are:

- Continue to strengthen the focus on social action.
- Find ways to ensure that sufficient women volunteer to join the Committee.
- Develop new strategies to attract younger women.
- Strengthen capability in using social media for communication and promotion.
- Provide opportunities for members to share their own social justice experiences, enabling them to meet and learn from one another.

These ideas and others that may emerge as SWAN members read, reflect on and discuss the content of this book, will be discussed at SWAN meetings during the first half of 2023. The focus will be to engage members in:

- a) Celebrating what SWAN has achieved during the last 26 years in terms of providing a remarkable opportunity for women on the Mornington Peninsula to learn about and be actively engaged in social justice issues; and
- b) Dreaming about the future, considering the changed context in which SWAN now operates; how it can continue to be relevant; and how it might be further developed.

An underlying question to be considered is whether or not, in today's world, it would matter if SWAN ceased to exist? If the answer is 'YES' then what, if any changes need to be made to ensure that the essence of SWAN's purpose, its *raison d'être* and *modus operandi* will live on - perhaps configured differently to make it more conducive to the evolving social economic and political context that face women today.



SWAN

PURPOSE

- To provide a forum for discussion of community concerns.
- To promote social justice and equality issues.
- To support women as candidates for all levels of government.
- To increase women's active involvement in community decision-making processes.

STRUCTURE

- SWAN is administered by a committee of six core members elected at the AGM for a period of twelve months.
- The Admin Committee elects four office bearers from within the committee: Facilitator, Assistant Facilitator, Secretary, Treasurer.
- Executive positions are considered non-hierarchical.
- Members are encouraged to become non-core committee members for an agreed period.
- Meetings notified by mail of meetings and other events.
- Light refreshments.
- Cost: \$7.00 per meeting — deemed as membership fee.
- Guest speaker with time for audience response.
- Workshops may be held in conjunction with meetings.
- Research and other community-based activities such as seminars/forums may be initiated by individuals or groups.

SWAN

PAST SPEAKERS INCLUDE

- Mary Blunt
- Christine Campbell
- Justin Goussard-Grady
- Mary Crooks
- Susan Davies
- Susan Feldman
- Felicity Hampel, QC
- Irene Bulger
- Patricia Kerr
- Joan Kinnier
- Sally Mitchell
- Vivienne Nicholson
- Bronwyn Pike
- Janet Powell
- Dr Lynette Dumble
- Dr June Factor
- Morag Fraser
- Morag Loh
- Chief Commissioner Victoria Police Christine Nixon
- Sara Coward

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

- Conference — Increasing Women's Participation in Community Settings, 1999.
- Responsible for the creation of STW (Sharing the Wisdom), a group committed to safeguarding the unique environment.
- STW organised a public environmental forum at which Robin Williams (ABC) was keynote speaker.
- SWAN conducted a social audit of women's needs — report published 2001.
- SWAN members actively supported the Release Heather O'Neil Campaign.
- SWAN organised a public meeting March 2002 featuring Tahmeena Faruk, leading Afghan women activist.

Swan has Survived!!!



As a result of a very determined group of women voting YES at our extraordinary general meeting we are pleased to advise that in 2015 Swan will continue in the following format:-

1. A smaller committee
2. Our newsletter will be replaced by a flyer to announce our next speaker and any other relevant information.
3. Details of Swan "actions" provided on our web site.
4. Speakers to outline where Swan can support/assist their cause.
5. Volunteers Roster for shifting tables/chairs & tidy up.
6. Volunteers Roster to provide food platter for our breakfast.
7. Apart from our Open table, time allowed to emphasize "actions" taken/required by SWAN.

Please spread the good news to all your friends & invite them to join SWAN in 2015.

We look forward to seeing everyone at our first meeting on:
Sunday 15th March 2015.
Where our first speaker will be

Dr Philomena Horsley
Research Fellow,
Australian Centre for Sex, Health & Society,
Web page address: www.swanwomen.org.au

SWAN EVALUATION DAY

"STRENGTHS"

- New people - continuing
- Flexibility - eg. conference workshops
- Organisation
- Need theme for each year eg. 2000 more action
- Incorporated
- Successfully funded by Council Grant Scheme and Vic Womens Trust
- Mailout
- Sisterhood - diversity
- Venue - facilities
- Cultivated a positive reputation
- Quality of speakers
- Good networking
- Longevity of mship
- Great conference
- Hardworking committee
- Practicality of workshops

DRAFT 2017 ACTION PLAN

Strategic Priority: Promotion of SWAN in its 21 year

OBJECTIVES:

1. Raise SWAN's profile across the Peninsula amongst social justice organisations, networks and services
- Encourage increased attendance at our 'events'
- Encourage younger members for both their energy and the renewal of

Speakers

A guest speaker is the highlight of SWAN meetings. Founding SWAN sisters thought that women on the Mornington Peninsula deserved the opportunity to hear women speakers to inspire, inform and support them. Such women would act as models for others to emulate.

The wisdom of our founding sisters speakers have shared their wisdom, knowledge and experiences with the SWAN audiences. These invited many women of the Peninsula wide range of issues and causes at local, national and international levels.

Lyn Brodie, the Chief Executive Officer of the Lowitja Institute, was an inspiration for all who heard her talk about her passion to improve Aboriginal health.

Karen Toohy demystified the wide ranging role of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission with interesting projects they have tackled.

Special Activities

Occasionally, SWAN is involved in additional activities in line with current concerns and issues. These include:

- Organising a public meeting featuring Tahmeena Faruk, a leading Afghan woman activist
- Islamic Fashion Presentation in partnership with Mornington Shire 2006
- Presentation by the Hastings Women's Choir 2010
- Establishing a SWAN Bursary for an Indigenous woman through afunvic.org.au
- Featuring an Indigenous speaker for NAIDOC Week each year

Community Directory to:

Similar objectives & interests, and their contact

ed for this purpose) to all orgs via promotion

isations to attend as guests to each meeting

ce at our events

al newspapers 'What's On' coverage and attempt

emoting the speaker and topic

ew if possible on community radio

age and encourage members on Facebook to tell

aming events

irthday Bash' event (fundraiser) to promote SWAN

ents and submit articles after to local papers

s for energy and renewal

tions with a likely younger membership

and other social networking options — get help

to pamphlet with advice from younger people

E I G H T

A FINAL WORD

by Diane McDonald

In early 2021, peer SWAN Committee member Marg Darcy and I undertook what seemed to be a manageable task of ‘documenting SWAN’s history’ based on a few interviews with founding members. Our initial efforts to meet up with these women in person were significantly curtailed due to the ongoing restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

But slowly as we pieced together the collage of recollections and insights shared with us by these dedicated SWAN Elders, we realised that there was so much more that could be recorded about this most unique, long-term, volunteer-led gathering of local women, committed to discussing social justice and equity issues and taking action to address these concerns. And so, our small project grew into a much more extensive collection of input from a broad range of sources and has resulted in the publication of this book.

The information documented here can be seen as a rich tapestry depicting SWAN’s journey over the past twenty six years. It provides clear evidence of many of the remarkable achievements of this community-based organisation and the continuing efforts being made by members to address a range of justice and equity concerns at a local, State and National level.

Despite the passing of almost three decades, SWAN’s fundamental aims and underlying principles still remain. SWAN’s primary objectives in 2022 are to:

- Provide a forum for women of all ages and backgrounds to gain knowledge of and discuss social justice issues.
- Promote women’s active involvement in the community.
- Support organisations that assist and empower women.
- Advocate for social justice.

These goals mirror the lessons learned from the broad scale women's movement, key elements of which are voiced by a member of the *Country Women's Association* as follows:

*"The importance of service to one's chosen community, that grassroots democracy is the foundation of good process, that our successes come from standing on the shoulders of giantesses and that respect for our elders is integral to respect for oneself... above all else... service to women as a whole is something we can all aspire to."*³¹

SWAN continues to be welcoming and inclusive, to raise awareness and to empower women across the Mornington Peninsula and in neighbouring suburbs. Members are encouraged to act knowing that they are well informed, supported by others and that they have the power to bring about change. So too, they are enabled to experience the potential, exponential impact of women working in solidarity with one another within SWAN and the added value of networking with those in like-minded groups.

Indeed, the power of networks cannot be underestimated. According to my friend and colleague, Deborah Rhodes in her recent book about how change can be facilitated: *"The development, strengthening and support of networks within organisations and across sectors or borders are commonly used means to bring about and support change."*³² As such, SWAN is well placed to support women make a meaningful contribution.

In closing, the words penned by founding member, Carole Ford almost two decades ago cannot be surpassed, guiding SWAN in its future endeavours.

"Who would have guessed, all those years ago that the small group of women around a kitchen table could have had such a vision? The need for an organisation for progressive, socially aware women was apparent, but the efforts of this original group were astonishing. I am extremely proud and privileged to have been one of these women, and I commend to everyone the enormous contribution that this group made... Since those early days, many women have ensured that the purpose and integrity of the group has been maintained."

The list of speakers who have attended our Sunday meetings is a veritable 'who's who' of Victorian (and Australian) women all of whom have given their time voluntarily, and provided us with such knowledge and understanding on a diversity of issues. I feel confident that SWAN will continue to grow in its reputation and influence in the community."

Carole's thoughts about SWAN's future remain relevant today: *"Continue to harass and harangue the decision-makers as it is obvious that public pressure has become increasingly important in directing their actions... I feel privileged to have been part of SWAN. What I have gained in friendship, knowledge, self-esteem and enjoyment far exceeds any contribution I have made."*

³¹Ansara, A.'Alice joined the CWA to improve her crafting. She found it has plenty in common with feminism.'<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-22/country-womens-association-has-a-lot-in-common-with-feminism/101226568>

³²Rhodes, D. (2022). *Facilitating Change Across Cultures*. Practical Action Publishing Ltd. Warwickshire, UK

A N N E X A

**CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM SWAN MEMBERS
IN RESPONSE TO SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Erica Churchhill

I joined SWAN in September 2015 having read an article in MP News. I was excited to be part of such a special group of women who were passionate about Social Justice. With a career in IT, I had not had much experience with advocating for Social Justice so had much to learn. I was Treasurer from September 2016 for two years, then Facilitator for four years and Speaker Co-ordinator for a year. Being on Committee has meant getting to know more special women and learning more about SWAN and how to work for change.

In the time I have been a member, I have learnt so much more about our society from wonderful speakers on a huge range of topics including Muslim women, housing and homelessness, overseas aid to women, Family Violence, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, First Nations issues and many more. I have also met so many caring, passionate women who encourage me to believe that grass roots advocacy can make a difference.

So many speakers have been fantastic. Trying to choose from such a list is impossible. Having just read through the list of those I have heard, I doubt there are any who have not improved my knowledge and assisted me in my Social Justice advocacy.

The Supporting First Nations group (SFN), which started in 2020, has been a fantastic source of information about First Nations issues and I have been pleased to be part of advocating for better treatment and recognition. It has been great to learn more about the local Indigenous peoples, particularly the lovely Aunties who are so supportive of SWAN. The SFN group has resulted in SWAN being very active in that area. It would be great to see further small groups supporting specific causes such as Affordable Housing, Aged Care or whatever individual members are most interested in. Particularly when there is not already a group doing such support, for example Grandmothers for Refugees or BRASA. Where there is such a group, we are better to support their work.

So many women have said to me on attending their first meeting, or hearing about SWAN, that they had thought the Peninsula was a Social Justice desert. It is clear SWAN provides much needed input for these women, as well as for those who have been members for many years. In addition SWAN is a great opportunity to network with like-minded, generous women. For a couple of years recently, SWAN did much more advocacy work. Sadly this year we are short of Committee members and advocacy has been mostly limited to First Nations issues, thanks to the SFN group.

Lynette Wilks

Although not a founding member, Lynette joined SWAN in the very early days. She served on the SWAN Committee for over two decades. When asked to comment on the significance of SWAN in her life, Lynette said:

“Firstly, the excellent guest speakers who addressed SWAN meetings. They shared information with us about the social justice issues in which they were involved. This helped to stimulate our thinking and to energise us to take action in various different ways. Secondly, the companionship of like-minded women. The amazing way in which everyone pitched in to help – that is so typical of the way that women work together to make something happen. The friendly and collaborative manner in which we engaged with one another on the committee and at SWAN meetings.”

In particular Lynette recalls: “The stimulating talks given by our guest speakers about the solutions that they had found to support disadvantaged and at risk women and their efforts to help to address the social justice issues that they experienced. SWAN members responded to these presentations in various ways, often personally and quietly - without fanfare.”

Considering the current social / political context, Lynette suggests that SWAN should consider adopting the following strategies to ensure that it continues to contribute towards building a more just and equitable world:

“Now, twenty six years since SWAN began, there is a new generation of women that have a different way of networking. They use different mechanisms to share information and connect. Rather than trying to identify how we can involve them in SWAN, we need to ask them to tell us how we can support and resource them to be involved in social justice concerns that are of interest to them. How can SWAN members share their wisdom and experience with younger women? How can we ‘pass the baton’ to those who want to learn about and take action to address the social justice issues in the current social-political context? We need to find ways to build bridges with younger women and identify those who can see value in engaging with us. This might involve helping them to overcome any attitudes they might have concerning ageism.”

Vivienne Nicholson

I joined in 1996. Not sure of the date but it was the meeting when Joan Kirner was in attendance. My attendance since then has been intermittent as between 2003 and 2016 I relocated to South Gippsland. During this time I only attended an occasional SWAN meeting. Moving back to Mornington in 2016, I have attended more regularly.

The significance of SWAN in my life has been the opportunity to meet with like-minded women who have a great commitment to social justice. This has also been evident in the impressive guest speakers SWAN has invited over the years. Another important and enduring feature at SWAN meetings, is the camaraderie evident amongst the members.

In 2000, I was asked to be a guest speaker at SWAN to talk about my experiences as a grassroots activist on the Mornington Peninsula. During that talk, I suggested that the many environmental and social action groups on the Mornington Peninsula should come together to share their accumulated collective expertise and knowledge about this region. That talk resulted in the formation of a group named 'Sharing the Wisdom', with the organising committee made up predominantly of SWAN members. As a consequence, a very successful public forum was held in April 2001 bringing together keynote speakers and local community members to share their experience, knowledge, commitment, care and passion in safeguarding the many aspects of this special place, the Mornington Peninsula.

From that Forum, a *'Living Document'* was created by Dr Debbie Roberts, a significant committee member of Sharing the Wisdom. This publication incorporated all of the papers delivered at the Forum. A subsequent forum was held later in that year. Sharing the Wisdom continued to operate for the next couple of years. However, lack of funding, changed its main purpose to organising evenings at the Mornington Court House with guest speakers predominantly from Melbourne, delivering talks on diverse subjects such as education, theatre, gambling, and Australian history. All of which contributed to Sharing the Wisdom amongst the enthusiastic audiences.

There have been many other highlights during my participation in SWAN. In particular, the various speakers raising awareness on subjects that have so often been neglected or overlooked in our society. For example, the most recent talk by a Melbourne academic criminologist, on the subject of the incarceration of children in Australia.

A suggestion: Membership showcase. This was briefly trialled in 2016, but then dismissed. The high calibre of speakers at SWAN is indisputable but I also think the membership of SWAN should be highlighted. The experience and wisdom of individual members and their contribution to their communities should be highlighted in some way. The trial in 2016 was by way of a short interview at a SWAN meeting. But it could be a cameo piece in the SWAN newsletter. I just believe there is a wealth of untapped experience and knowledge in the membership that should in some form be showcased.

SWAN should also actively seek to recruit membership of a younger demographic of women to ensure its contribution in building a more just and equitable world. How best to engage this group requires a round table discussion.

Janice Gray

I remember being at the first official meeting with Joan Kirner and was a regular attendee from then. I think I joined the committee a few years down the track and took on the role of treasurer, then did my best to take over the secretary's role from the amazing Maureen McPhate, never quite living up to the wonderful letters she wrote (and still does!) I may have done that for four or five years and stayed on the committee for another year or two. Attended meetings irregularly after that but haven't been now for many years.

I saw SWAN as an important, safe gathering space for women interested in social justice issues; somewhere that we could be supported in concerns we raised and inspired not only by the range of incredible speakers but by fellow members and the causes that were important to them. The atmosphere was always warm and welcoming and many speakers commented that it was a very special and perhaps unique organisation.

So many speakers made an impression on me. In the early days it was Val McKenna who, along with Maureen, approached very busy and important women who I would have assumed would have politely declined the opportunity to give up their Sunday morning to travel to the Peninsula to address a relatively small group of women. However, Val managed an exceptionally high acceptance rate. Joan Kirner of course was memorable. Christine Nixon, Police Commissioner made a real impression on me at a time our daughter was in a domestic violence situation. Marguerite Ryan, Women for Women in Africa was one woman who, together with a group of like minded friends made a huge difference to the education and lives of girls in the Kibera slums of Nairobi. (Marguerite's daughter, Monique is the new Teal MP who defeated Josh Frydenberg.) Connections were built with the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre and a number of members volunteered there. One of our members, Meg Merton sold homemade jams at every meeting and those funds were donated to worthy causes... The Muslim women's fashion parade was another highlight.

Thalia Collard

My first awareness of SWAN was when it was Meeting at Mt Martha House at the same time as we were worshipping with the Anglican community of St Martin's that also met at Mt Martha House.

Eventually we decided that once every two months we could attend SWAN and miss church. I think we made this decision because SWAN women are passionate about the issues that we believe need to be addressed, both in conversation and action. Meetings always offer a challenge to care, protect, and create opportunity to better our community.

I don't think I can identify a speaker or one subject that has stood out for me. Over all

- I like the fact that we can challenge political issues without being party political.
- I value the huge range of topics that are explored and discussed at depth.
- It is important that everyone can participate - the speakers raise issues that we can all debate and contribute to.
- Anyone can contribute ideas for meetings, suggest speakers.
- We can all invite others to participate in an area of particular interest eg. collections for refugees, for particular needs for families on the Peninsula.
- For student scholarships.

I don't have any specific suggestions (about the future) but it is so good the way the committee, takes up suggestions as they arise - the most outstanding of which has to be the input regarding First Nations.

Marilyn Godley

We moved to Mornington in 2002, and I believe I saw a notice in the local paper about SWAN a few years later, probably 2005 or 2006. The meeting was at Mornington High School and I only remember attending at most two or three meetings there before the meetings were moved to the Shire Council Chambers in Queen St.

Having moved from the more ethnically diverse area around Monash University, I became increasingly discouraged by the Peninsula's conservatism and lack of diversity. So this encounter with a large group of women who shared the same values and convictions as I did was a Godsend... and remains so. SWAN women were energetic and dedicated to improving life for everyone, but most especially those who were disadvantaged in some way, either locally, nationally, or internationally.

I became a member of the Committee and worked with these inspiring women for about four years. Fellow committee members included Rosemarie Draper, Heather Boundy, Susan Blackman, Gwennie White and others. At the time, many groups from everywhere were writing to SWAN seeking monetary donations to further their causes. It was a bit 'open

slather' and SWAN received a lot of 'begging' correspondence. Monies were distributed as they seemed to correspond with the grant guidelines, but we would never have sufficient funds to provide for everyone, no matter how deserving - and not all of them were. And once you had donated some amount, regular requests for more funds were received. Speakers recommended potential recipients in accordance with their priorities, but the other groups seeking funding were more diverse and less clear.

The Committee undertook to review the grants program and came up with revised guidelines with specific recommendations to assess local, state, national and international requests. (The committee purchased an external hard drive to preserve documents such as these and which could be handed on to each new secretary. I don't know what happened to that.) The Committee also decided the constitution needed updating as much of the language was no longer applicable. President vs Facilitator etc. I and others put in a lot of work revising both these documents. We presented them to the SWAN membership at an AGM for formal approval. We were ready to submit the changes to Consumer Affairs, but I don't think that that ever actually happened.

SWAN has always had the dilemma of where best to focus its activities and priorities as seen in the grants program mentioned above. I don't see that changing. I am happy, however, that more action is being taken. One former Facilitator railed at the fact we were an Action Network in name only, and little or no action actually happening. I applaud the work of the Supporting First Nations group. However, we need to review priorities regularly to ensure the wider membership endorses those in place and have the opportunity to alter them and / or make other recommendations for future action.

Lynn Carpenter

I believe the first meeting that I attended was November 2003 where the speaker was Dur-E Dara. Apart from a few gaps here and there I have tried to make attending SWAN meetings my priority ever since."

When asked to consider the significance of SWAN in her life, Lynette replied: "For me this is a huge and deeply personal question. As a child I was instilled with a fierce sense of right and wrong which evolved into a fundamental desire to seek social justice in every direction that my life took me. Whilst I have been fortunate to experience much that life has had to offer a woman from a relatively privileged background, I am aware that my outlook and opinions have been heavily influenced by my chronic lack of self-confidence..."

I was introduced to SWAN a few years after migrating from the UK and as I said in the '*Pen Portraits*' in 2006. It was the most wonderful revelation for me. To find a diverse group of like-minded women who, care passionately about social justice issues close to my heart was

both uplifting and nurturing. As an isolated migrant I had never heard of any of the women who spoke but I was utterly enthralled and inspired by all of them, hearing about their vastly different experiences and observing their courage. This in turn enabled me to contribute in small ways like participating in petitions fund raising and rallies and even on one occasion to find the courage to stand and address a meeting for a few minutes on a particular injustice that I was deeply passionate about.

For many AGMs I was able to dodge the idea of joining the committee, reassuring myself that I was the least appropriate candidate in the room, but inevitably it became necessary for me to overcome my self doubt, due to lack of any other volunteers, and after all fair is fair. However, as many of the 'old timers' on the committee started to retire their positions the situation became dire and I found myself in the unlikely role of secretary. I admit that not having one organised bone in my body, I was out of my depth, but I am proud that I was a part of setting up the website and was able to fill in during a particularly low moment in SWAN's history to play a small part in enabling it to continue. This in turn led to some truly remarkable women taking the reins and ensuring the survival of SWAN.

Throughout my years as a committee member in either capacity, I was always supported and encouraged, even when we were a skeleton crew. It was nowhere near as demanding or arduous as I had expected. I learned heaps and developed in ways I never thought possible. I had plenty of fun in between my personal battles and learned definitively that many hands do indeed make light work. Anyone reading this who doubts if they have anything to offer the committee should know that if I can do it, literally ANYONE can!

SWAN has been a constant during my life in Australia, uppermost for me is that as a group it has provided me with a uniquely safe welcoming space – I love the fact that it is a group solely for women. Many of who continue to inspire me. The amazing array of guest speakers that I have been privileged to hear, have opened my eyes to so many facets of life that I would otherwise never have been aware of. I have made lasting and deepening connections and have developed as a person in ways I never thought possible. Through being a part of this wonderful group of women I have at last been able to shift my opinion of humanity and finally realise that I was wrong, and that there are indeed a lot of good people in this world.

Again, I humbly acknowledge that small group of women who met around a kitchen table all those years ago, with an idea and a desire to make a difference – they certainly have in many and far-reaching ways, and I thank them most sincerely.

So many different speakers but a few that stood out for me were: Dur-E Dara in 2003, Kate Bailieu and Natalie Collard in 2004, Dr Caroline Taylor and Marcia Naeve in 2005, and more recently Mel Gillon and Nicky Meh in 2013, Natalia Collard and Lois Peeler in 2014, Ailine Burgess in 2016, Gillian Triggs in 2018, Ronnie Gorry and Coralie Alison in 2021. On a personal level: for me to get up, let alone open my mouth in front of any group would have been simply impossible before I found SWAN.

Increasing the membership base I think is key. ESPECIALLY the younger generations, their energy and clarity are needed to help us all navigate this changing and increasingly alarming world. They have ideas and dreams that us older generations (especially women without children like me) are oblivious to, and in my mind their energy and points of view are crucial to the continuation and development of SWAN.

I think that social media is the key to attracting younger members, ensuring that there is always a presence on FB and Instagram etc, advertising the meetings and the guest speaker on the FB Events page. Again young women are the key to this, they seem to connect on these forums as easily as breathing! For them it would be minimal effort. Perhaps once more try targeting local socially aware groups e.g. the Greens, Amnesty, Save Westernport, Save Arthurs Seat, MP friends of Lospalos East Timor etc. even churches and schools on the Peninsula.

I personally feel that it cannot be overstated that SWAN is a WOMEN'S group for women targeting social justice issues that affect women. I believe that in this so-called age of 'equal opportunity' things remain very much the opposite. That SWAN provides a safe environment free from the dominant influence of a patriarchy that is still deeply ingrained in every aspect of our lives (all too often unseen and unrecognized) is a very unique and special thing that should be celebrated.

Melissa Kelly

I've been a member since July 2018 – the NAIDOC Week event when Celeste Liddle was the guest speaker. In fact, Celeste is the reason I discovered SWAN! I had been following her on Twitter and was very excited to see her. I joined Committee at that event and took over as Speaker Coordinator from Val Campbell in November 2019. I then put my hand up for Facilitator, after Erica Churchill's wonderful job as Facilitator. I have since retired from committee in September 2022, however I'll still be hanging around in some capacity!

Broadly, SWAN has made me feel far more connected to my local community and it has been wonderful finding a social justice group with like-minded women on the Peninsula. I have been amazed at the skills, organisation and dedication of the women with whom I've been on committee.

On a more personal note, I have always been petrified of public speaking. The patience and respectfulness of SWAN women creates a very welcoming space, and incredibly, I've learnt to be far more confident speaking up.

At Val Campbell's suggestion and with her encouragement and mentorship, I managed to clinch Shen Narayanasamy as SWAN's IWD guest speaker in March 2020. Shen's presentation

was phenomenal! Her harrowing story of trying to help refugees on Manus while being shot at chilled me. COVID-19 hit the world very hard that March and SWAN had to adjust to a new format after Shen's presentation: Zoom meetings. Coralie Alison's Zoom presentation had me gobsmacked at the portrayal of women and girls in advertising and mainstream media, and what advertisers are allowed to get away with. I'm convinced we are ALL completely desensitised to the appalling treatment of women and girls in media which feeds misogyny. I loved hearing Ronnie Gorrie's brilliant stream of consciousness presentation of her (at the time) new book, *Black and Blue*. Such an honest, down-to-Earth speech and book.

Heather Boundy

My recollections of SWAN go back to the very early days but I am quite hopeless with dates. Our early meetings were at the Mt Martha Community House and the visit by Joan Kirner was a pivotal moment in my participation. I had been a big fan since her early days working with state school parents' groups and representing them to government, as I too was always on one PTA or school board or another. Her passion for social justice and equality really rang a bell with me. I feel I may have attended one meeting before the visit by Joan.

I knew a number of the amazing women involved in the early days – Maureen McPhate and Val through church, Judith Graley and Denise Hassett through local politics and always admired them for their can-do attitude and passion about injustices around the globe. Through SWAN I met an ever-expanding number of similarly passionate local women. Sunday morning meetings were a safe place for women to congregate and talk about things that mattered to us as women of all ages and backgrounds. It was always fascinating to hear women stand up and speak about their lives, some tentatively at first, but grateful for the opportunity to share in a welcoming, non-threatening environment. I was one of the 'young ones' then in my late forties, but now would be one of the oldies, I'm sure (A word of thanks must be said to the husbands who faithfully turned up on Sunday mornings to move furniture and set up the rooms, then quietly went home – especially Alan McPhate, Gerry McKenna and Stephen Graley).

I was persuaded by my dear friend Janice Gray to join the committee and served as a committee member and eventually newsletter editor for a number of years. When I moved house six years ago, in a passion of downsizing I foolishly threw out all of my SWAN paraphernalia, including backcopies of newsletters and minutes of meetings. I know I passed on some things to Gwen White, who took over from me as editor, so I will check if she has retained any of this.

For twenty years or more I was a keen supporter of SWAN, attending most meetings and enjoying the friendship and collegiality of SWAN women. We had the best speakers! Highlights were Police Commissioner Christine Nixon, Mary Crooks (I later became a

volunteer at Victorian Women's Trust), Bronwyn Pike, Morag Fraser, Kate Durham, Sushi Das, Leslie Cannoldand so many more.

There have been a couple of occasions when someone has turned up without the ability to pay the small entry fee...never an issue! The share table brought us up to date with local events and groups and our range of interests seemed limitless. I always thought if you put together the collective volunteer hours and numerous involvements of SWAN women the community reach and effects would be astounding!

Val Campbell

On moving to Mornington, I was delighted to join SWAN, a like-minded, ready-made group of intelligent and activist women that fitted well with my own social justice ideals and lifetime of feminist activism in roles with the former Union of Australian Women, the Australian Labor Party, and lifetime member of the National Tertiary Education Union where I was Branch Secretary during my long-term employment at Monash University.

My first attendance at a SWAN meeting was its 2017 AGM and by the time the meeting was over, I had joined the committee! A key highlight of my involvement is SWAN's Supporting First Nations Group, of course - To liaise with and advocate for First Nations women and groups, particularly on the Mornington Peninsula as well as nationally - which I co-established with another member. And also, as SWAN's Speaker Coordinator for two years where I was successful in securing speakers for SWAN's bi-monthly meetings, such as Gillian Triggs, Nyadol Nyuon, Rosie Batty, Shen Narayanasamy, Celeste Liddle, Pamela Curr, and many others."

When asked how SWAN might remain relevant in the changing social-political context, Val suggested the following strategies: "a) Outreach to Multicultural women (as well as Indigenous women) who reside in Mornington Peninsula. We need SWAN members to take this up and potentially form a sub-committee or interest group to bring issues to the forefront; b) Continue to tackle and campaign about injustice and inequality, both state-wide and nationally; c) Liaise and monitor other social justice organisations on the Mornington Peninsula to engage in combined activism and / or campaigns."

Susan Blackburn

I can't really recollect when I was active in SWAN. I recollect going to my first meeting in Mt Martha Primary School when my children were quite young. The meetings soon moved over to Mt Martha Community House and I quite regularly attended. In particular I recollect the famous meeting regarding Refugee accommodation with Julian Burnside's wife, where

he also attended. It caused quite a ruckus from memory with another man writing a letter of complaint stating men should be allowed to attend regularly.

I think I stepped aside for a few years when I returned to study and things were very busy being a single parent with two growing children and no support. Really it was SWAN that was a catalyst for my foray into studying Community Services at Frankston TAFE. It was being inspired by the women I met and heard from and the variety of social justice issues that I became aware of that literally ‘lit a fire’ in me to be a conduit for positive change in our society. With this impetus I went onto work in the community sector and the public service but it really was SWAN that started the journey.

I returned to SWAN when my children were older. I had the privilege of joining the committee and sourcing speakers and then in fact being Chair for a few years. I was immensely proud to be able to be part of SWAN. My timelines might be a bit askew but I’m most proud of being able to negotiate with Mornington Peninsula Council for the free use of the Council Chambers for many years, long after I ceased attending, as part of that deal I also arranged for a local florist to provide free flowers for speakers.

Gail Price (MPSC) and I developed a ‘A Just Peninsula’ with profiles of organisations and groups that undertook support or advocacy for social justice issues. We also did a couple of public forums re Refugees under the SWAN banner. As part of this focus we had regular collections at meetings of clothes and other items, perhaps even food. This was then delivered to the Asylum Seeker Centres in Melbourne and Dandenong. A forum re Human Trafficking was undertaken with Rosemary Draper.

I think that one of the most impactful aspects of SWAN are the grants for local young women taking action on social justice issues. I hope they are still in place.

I haven’t been for a long time. I left when I joined the Victorian public service about twelve years ago. I’ve since retired. My observations when I did attend were that there needs to be a ‘younger womens’ alternative. I put a lot of thought into this years ago. I thought small meetings in coffee shops, perhaps Saturday afternoons. They could lead into the usual Sunday meetings at some point, for some people.”

Jane Hildebrant

“I was a SWAN member between 1996 and 2003 approximately. Although a feminist from a very young age, my participation in SWAN was a wonderful opportunity to join with other like-minded women in listening to the experiences of the women speakers and discussing the issues raised. I looked forward to the comradery of the lively monthly Sunday meetings. As Treasurer, I enjoyed being involved in planning our events.

Particular highlights that I recall are:

- Our Sunday meeting after September 11 as particularly sombre. I realised that the world had changed forever.
- My involvement with the social research project was my first experience of Participatory Action Research. SWAN's engagement with Peninsula women was a rewarding experience for our committee and, I hope, for the participants. Although we presented our findings to politicians, I don't believe anything came of it.
- Val McKenna's perseverance with her campaign to secure Heather Osland's freedom was inspiring."

Commenting on how SWAN can continue to be relevant in the changing socio-political context, Jane says: "Growing up in the sixties, I was very aware of women's inequality. I had expected that things would change. It is staggering that in C21, women are still not treated equally or respectfully. I am alarmed by today's misogyny, which is vicious and dangerous and far worse than in earlier decades and borders on the pornographic. In fact, in Julia Gillard's case it was pornographic and extremely vulgar. Young women should be made more aware of how their participation in social media forums makes them extremely vulnerable to hatred and abuse. I think this is a topic that SWAN needs to explore.

When I was a SWAN member, the group was not really politically active. We heard the views of the many women speakers but apart from the Heather Osland campaign and perhaps the social research project, SWAN did not really evolve further. The Victorian government runs many parliamentary inquiries on various subjects to which SWAN could make submissions.

SWAN should become more involved in supporting women of various backgrounds to get elected. We still do not have fifty percent of women in our parliaments. The number of women in local government is still depressingly low. On speaking of the attitudes and behaviours that give rise to violence and sexism - Natasha Stott Despoja said:

"For example, one-fifth of Australians still believe men make better leaders because they're more rational and less emotional" - **Australian Financial Review, Lunch with the AFR, 5-6 November 2022, p41.**

Other big issues: climate change action and the importance of individual behavioural change, political corruption, the declining health of our environment and the insidious erosion of our democratic rights, including the right to protest, eg. NSW has passed laws to fine and imprison people who protest.

I am involved in several community groups and overwhelmingly the impetus for action is driven by women of all ages and backgrounds. We understand the power of networking and working together to protect our communities and our environment. In particular, the

impacts of mining is a huge issue in country Victoria—something the media ignores. It would be good to see urban groups, like SWAN take an interest in what is happening in rural areas.”

Gail Price

Gail first attended in 2004. She stopped attending when she moved from the Peninsula in 2007. Following is her written contribution to this book.

Significance of SWAN in my life

- “Sharing the company of a diverse age group of women from many different life experiences who are also concerned about social justice and the environment. SWAN counters the view that ‘no one cares’.
- SWAN was always so welcome and comfortable, making it possible to listen to and talk about difficult issues. There was always social time – and delicious contributions of food and coppers, to debrief about what we had just heard.
- SWAN serves as a great example of what a group of people can do together, for social support, learning and nurturing a range of activities and initiatives.”

Particular highlights, events or causes that engaged me

- “Susan Blackburn, Rosemarie Draper and Linda Wimetel always recognized the importance of SWAN and shared that with me. They encouraged me to participate, which enabled me to connect with the participants, members and Committee. As a Community Development Worker for the Shire, this became an important network for me to tune into community interests, skills and talents.
- SWAN’s support for the Islamic Women’s Fashion Parade was crucial to the success of the event, both in people attending and running the event. I could only embark on this initiative with a solid partnership and SWAN delivered beautifully.
- There was also a strong link between the Friends of Lospalos and SWAN, which enabled cross over between the two groups.”

How SWAN could be further developed

I haven't been involved for years so I'm out of date with how SWAN is currently. Sharing the SWAN story is a great development and will inspire other people to just get started with their idea and see where it leads. It's an important way for people to connect on issues and actions, as well as social connection and reassurance that concerns are shared. As Margaret Mead said: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

Other thoughts

- SWAN didn't shy away from challenging issues, such as family and domestic violence, the pre and post arrival experiences of asylum seekers and refugees or the broader experience of migrating to Australia and female genital mutilation.
- SWAN was, and I imagine still is, very consultative, always encouraging people present to suggest topics and be involved in running the breakfast events or join the Committee. Also the open floor for news updates and any invitations to participate in the community in other ways.
- I was pleased to advocate for SWAN to use the Council admin building in Mornington as a Sunday morning meeting place, when there was a need to move from the community centre. The support of my Manager, Jenny Macaffer and Director Joe Gauci paved the way for permission to have sole access to the building. It's also shows the high regard for SWAN and trust in the leaders of the group that this access was provided.
- SWAN also supported the two forums on the myths and realities of the experience of asylum seekers and refugees in resettlement in Australia, along with the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group, which grew from the Anglican and Uniting Churches on the Peninsula. There was also a forum in which people shared their cultural backgrounds, as an introduction to discussing racism.
- Thank you to at least four inspiring, courageous women passionate about social justice who were / are part of SWAN: Susan Blackburn who partnered on innovative projects from her position with Good Shepherd, which enabled permission for Council to get involved in significant projects; Rosemarie Draper as a professional / resident / parent with children at Rosebud Primary School, bringing an international perspective on social justice with passion and creative, achievable actions, always ready to collaborate; Linda Wimetel, as we worked together on a daily basis always aiming to stay true to community development processes, with Linda providing practical support to the development of Friends of Lospalos voluntarily; and Judith Graley, who instigated the creation of the first designated community development role at Council and persevered assertively with Council management, ensuring that the position was offered - it was a great experience

being that first worker. Susan brought Good Shepherd to the table again as a partner in writing 'Just Peninsula' about support by Peninsula residents for asylum seekers and refugees. I remember sitting in a park with Rosemarie too, working through how the booklet would come to fruition.

All these experiences and more have become part of my DNA to take to work alongside other communities in other parts of Australia. SWAN to me is about women with an uncomplicated plan, followed through so well, to create more opportunities through connecting people socially and intellectually. There were and, no doubt there is still a range of political allegiances that intersect around human rights, social and environment justice, with SWAN welcoming everyone.

Thank you to the generations of SWAN women who created this gem.

A N N E X B

SWAN GUEST SPEAKERS

1996-2022

Following is a list of the remarkable women
who addressed SWAN audiences between 1996 - 2022.
Further information about these guest speakers and their presentations
can be found on the SWAN website.
www.swanwomen.org.au

1996-99 The Hon. Joan Kirner AM, AC, Centenary Medal 2001
Christine Campbell
Mary Crooks AO
Dr. Susan Feldman
Felicity Hampel AM, SC
Sally Mitchell
Brownyn Pike AM
Janet Powell AM, Victorian Honour Roll 2001
Lynne Kosky MLA, Elizabeth Lukin, Carole Mathew
Jennefer Hally, Marilyn Waring, Meryll Smith,
Senator Lyn Allison, Janette Cox, Helen Honer, Diane
Thompson & Evelyn Krape (all spoke at a women's seminar)

March 2000: Vivienne Nicholson
May 2000: Jill Hennessy
July 2000: Prof. Linda Hancock
September 2000: Sian Prior
November 2000: Irene Bolger
March 2001: Lisa Jane Solomon
May 2001: Sara Coward
July 2001: Susan Davies AO
September 2001: Dr. Lynette Dumble
November 2001: Christine Nixon AO, APM
March 2002: Amanda George, Victorian Honour Roll 2001
Tahmeena Faral addressed a public meeting
May 2002: Morag Fraser, Miles Franklin Award (2005-2007)
July 2002, Mary Bluett
September 2002: Dr. June Factor, Victorian Honour Roll 2001
November 2002: Glenyys Romanes AM
March 2003: Kate Durham
May 2003: Inaam Barakat
May 2003: Surma Hamid addressed a public meeting
July 2003: Sharon Burrow AC
September 2003: Christina Browning
November 2003: Duré Dara OAM
January 2004 Students from Chisholm Institute addressed a public forum
March 2004: Kate Baillieu & Andrew Wilkie MP addressed a public meeting
May 2004: Lillian Holt
July 2004: Pamela Curr AM, Victorian Honour Roll 2009
September 2004: Marguerite Ryan AM
November 2004: Anne O'Rourke
March 2005: Dr. Caroline Taylor AM
May 2005: Prof. Marcia Neave AO

July 2005:	Trish Bolton
September 2005:	Elleni Bereded-Samuel AM
November 2005:	Dr. Lauren Wimetal
March 2006:	Tracee Hutchison
May 2006:	Kali Paxinos
July 2006:	Dr. Anne Manne
August 2006	Toltu Tufa, Zulfiye Tufa & Nadine Sabbagh spoke at public forum
September 2006:	Sushi Das
November 2006:	Prof. Marilyn Lake AO
March 2007:	Sue Cowden
May 2007:	Mary Dalmau
July 2007:	Tara Anderson
September 2007:	Leslie Cannold, Australian Humanist of the Year (2011)
November 2007:	Merle Mitchell AM
March 2008:	Jenny Wharfe
May 2008:	Pamela Warr
July 2008:	Belinda Jakiel
September 2008:	Dianne Bowles
November 2008:	Judith Couacaud Graley, Bev Colomb & Prof. Marian Quartly
March 2009:	Dr. Carol Morse
May 2009:	May Kentish
July 2009:	Bea Edwards
September 2009:	Joan Kirner AM, AC, Centenary Medal 2001
November 2009:	Sabra Lazarus
March 2010:	Debby Maziarz
May 2010:	Morag Loh
July 2010:	Marguerite Ryan AM
September 2010:	Assoc. Prof. Marlene Drysdale
November 2010:	Sian Darling
March 2011:	Marlene Fox
May 2011:	Fazila Hajeb
July 2011:	Glenys Watts
September 2011:	Rosemarie Draper
November 2011:	Prof. Cordelia Fine
March 2012:	Sarah Capper
May 2012:	Jenn Fowler
July 2012:	Lynn Brodie
September 2012:	Karen Toohey
November 2012:	Dr. Nuzhat Lotia
March 2013:	Prof. Jayashri Kulkari AM
May 2013:	Mel Gillon and Nicky Mih
July 2013:	Reverend Aunty Janet Turpie-Johnson

September 2013:	Dr. Caroline Norma
November 2013:	Judith Couacaud GraleyMP
March 2014:	Kylee Bates
May 2014:	Natalie Collard
July 2014:	Dr. Lois Peeler AM
September 2014:	Kirsty Rosie
March 2015:	Dr. Philomena Horsley, Victorian Honour Roll (2001)
May 2015:	Hannah Jay
July 2015:	Meena Singh
September 2015:	Gabriella Bornstein
November 2015:	Giselle Bailey, Rachel Bovenizer, Judy Cooper & Ruth Stuetgen all spoke at a 'Peninsula Forum'
March 2016:	Carmen Hawker
May 2016:	Jeanette Lane
July 2016:	Lisa Waup & Tracey-Lea Smith
September 2016:	Aline Burgess
November 2016:	Ambreen Mirza
March 2017:	Luz Restrepo
May 2017:	Kathleen McInnes
July 2017:	Karan Kent
September 2017:	Teresa Gillespie
March 2018:	Rosie Batty AO
May 2018:	Santilla Chingaipe
July 2018:	Celeste Liddle, Victorian Honour Roll (2017)
September 2018:	Gillian Triggs
November 2018:	Dr. Dalal Smiley
March 2019:	Nyadol Nyuon OAM
May 2019:	Micaela Cronin
July 2019:	Irene Fisher
September 2019:	Leonie Morgan AM
November 2019:	Pamela Curr AM
March 2020:	Shen Narayanasamy
November 2020:	Teela Reid
March 2021:	Pia Cerveri
May 2021:	Ronnie Gorrie
July 2021:	Helen Bnads, Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll (2019)
September 2021:	Coralie Alison
November 2021:	Fiona York
March 2022:	Joanna Hayter AO
May 2022:	Judy Carroll & Katie Shafar
July 2022:	Stephanie Ross & Alice Ugle
September 2022:	Dr. Diana Johns
November 2022:	Dr. Sarah Russell

A N N E X C

SWAN COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND PERIODS OF SERVICE

1997-2022

This information is derived from retained records
and may not be completely accurate.

Gillian Adam 2015-2020
 Jeanine Barnden 2008-2009
 Wendy Barnes 2013-2014
 Lesley Beasley 2021-2022
 Eve Bergin 2018-2018
 Susan Blackburn 2006-2009
 Chris Blakey 1997-2000 & 2007-2008
 Pam Blazsanyik 2013-2015
 Heather Boundy 2005-2010
 Alana Burley 2008-2009
 Val Campbell 2017-2020
 Lynn Carpenter 2011-2020
 Claire Chandler 2013-2014
 Erica Churchill 2016-2022
 Wendy Clipsham 2006-2006
 Thalia Collard 2014-2017 & 2021-2022
 Judith Couacaud Graley 1997-2006
 Vivienne Daniels 2019-2022
 Margaret Darcy 2020-2021
 Jo Diplock 2002-2006
 Sharon Donnelly 2000-2000
 Rosemarie Draper 2004-2008
 Amy Duncan 2004-2006
 Gertie Endres-Holub 1997-1997
 Annabel Fegan 2005-2006
 Cori Felvus 1997-1997
 Daphne Fergusson 2011-2013
 Jan Flavin 2007-2008
 Gwen Fletcher 2011-2012
 Carole Ford 1997-1997 & 2000-2004
 Joan Garnet 2000-2000
 Barbara Godfrey 2009-2010
 Marilyn Godley 2007-2010
 Phyllis Goodwin 2006-2008
 Janice Gray 2004-2009
 Margaret Hall 2007-2008
 Jennefer Hally 1997-2000 & 2004-2007
 Denise Hassett 1997-1997
 Anita Heughan 2018-2019
 Jane Hildebrant 2000-2002
 Marilyn Hoban 2021-2022
 Lauren Hunt 2019-2021
 June Jay 2013-2015

Catherine John 2008-2009
 Anne Johnston 2008-2009
 Melissa Kelly 2018-2022
 May Kentish 1997-1998
 Alleyne Lacy 2001-2006
 Cherie Lewis 2018-2019
 Barbara Lindner 2000-2001
 Moz Lucas 2022-2022
 Rosemary Maughan 2013-2015
 Diane McDonald 2020-2022
 Val McKenna 1997-2006
 Maureen McPhate 1997-2006
 Wendy Megchelen 1997-1997
 Carol Morse 2009-2010
 Elaine Newbould 2015-2017
 Anne O'Neill 1998-1999
 Sue Parritt 2017-2021
 Lydia Pereira 2005-2006
 Heather Phillips 2008-2009
 Nola Plackett 2002-2004
 Gail Price 2007-2008
 Rosemary Race 2011-2014
 June Rance 2011-2013
 Jeanette Ransom 2007-2008
 Debbie Roberts 1998-2006
 Janice Rowland 2011-2012
 Fiona Sawyer 2000-2000
 Lara Smith 2018-2018
 Breda Smythe 1997-2000
 Lindsay Steele 1997-1998
 Jan Taylor 2018-2019
 Diane Thompson 1997-1999
 Liz Turner 2018-2019
 Kathleen van der Weerden 2000-2000
 & 2007-2008
 Sherryl Wearne 2016-2017
 Sue Weber 2014-2015 & 2018-2020
 Alison Wells 1998-2000
 Gwen White 2009-2011 & 2013-2014
 Lynette Wilks 2006-2008 & 2015-2017
 Loris Wilton 2018-2018
 Pauline Young 2009-2011 & 2013-2014
 Elsha Young 2018-2019

Huge thanks to Diane McDonald
for so much effort, over more than two years,
to research and document the history of SWAN.
Her understanding of what was needed, clear and interesting writing
style and passionate commitment to a great outcome, has resulted
in a book that SWAN members and others will enjoy.
This historical record will inspire us to continue the incredible work
that so many women have undertaken during SWAN's lifetime.

- Erica Churchill SWAN Facilitator 2019-2022

NOTES

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