



WRANA

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTION
NETWORK AUSTRALIA**

“(Our Rights, Our Voices)”

**The Tasmanian
Community Report on
Women's Human-Rights
in Australia**

2004



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Executive Summary

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, is an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They have also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

The Australian Government submitted combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports to the UN at the end of 2003 which will be reviewed by the UN CEDAW Committee in 2005. To facilitate this review, non-government organisations prepare Shadow Reports, alternative sources of information, which help assess Australia's implementation of CEDAW. The Women's Rights Action Network of Australia (WRANA), which facilitates Australian activism for the promotion and protection of women's human rights (<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~wrana/>), are facilitating the *Women's Report Card Project*, a community and CEDAW Shadow Report on the status of women in Australia.

WRANA has coordinated reports around Australia and granted \$900 including expenses to assist with the costs of contacting and consulting with women, usually in small groups, in a wide range of situations and regions of Tasmania. There has been a particular commitment to involve women from migrant, refugee and ethnic backgrounds.

The last overview report on the situation of women in Tasmania, *Women's Voices: Our Vision for the Future*, was produced in 2000 by the Tasmanian Women's Consultative Council to the then Premier, the Hon. Jim Bacon MHA. Copies are available at Women Tasmania. That report contains many issues raised again by women in the current consultations, including identifying gaps in services and facilities. As with the earlier report, the majority of women consulted are from marginalised groups, often without access to information and services.

Most consultations were of one to two hours' duration. Consulting with various groups proved to be an opportunity for community development, for women to learn about their rights and CEDAW, and through expressing their views on crucial issues, for participants to begin to think of ways forward for women in Tasmania.



Methodology

Women's organisations were contacted by phone, email and post using a flyer based on those sent out by other states. Consultations were held in the premises of women's organisations.

The following groups participated in the consultations:

- Women's Health Centre (WHC), Hobart. 3 participants
- Working Women's Centre (WWC), Hobart. 2 participants
- Women Who Were Refugees. 3 participants in Hobart, 26 in Launceston
- Older Migrant Women's Group. 11 participants in Launceston
- Social Heart Centre, Clarendon Vale, a low socio-economic suburb. 6 participants
- Unions Tasmania, with the Secretary and women organisers from various unions. 4 participants
- Skills Centre, Triabunna, a rural town. 8 participants
- Hobart Women's Shelter. 3 participants
- Women and Disability Group. 6 participants

All Launceston and Triabunna consultations were conducted jointly with Jocelyne Scutt, Tasmanian Anti-discrimination Commissioner.

The *Women's Report Card Project* National Working Group was established in April 2003. The National Working Group developed CEDAW training materials to use in an initial train-the-trainer two-day workshop, held in Melbourne in July 2003. Women from around the country attended, with the intention that people who came to the training would facilitate the training and consultation processes in their home state or territory. From WRANA's preparatory work, and through the course of this training, seven key areas were identified: violence against women, leadership and participation, law and justice, housing and utilities, health, education and economic security and employment. It was agreed that these areas would form the framework for other training and consultation sessions, and for the state, territory and national reports.

In this report, we used the questions suggested by WRANA and included another question: How can women make a difference - what role can women play in all these areas to bring about positive change?



Further information, organisational and individual case studies were received from:

- The Working Women's Centre
- Hobart Women's Health Centre which also houses the Women's Health Network
- SHE (Support, Help & Empowerment), a service for women in and from abusive relationships
- Women's Legal Service
- Women in Black, Hobart
- The Link Youth Health Service
- Tasmanians with Disabilities
- Women of the World Group, a migrant women's group from Tasmania's North West coast

Relevant material was also drawn from the consultations held as part of the lead up to Beijing +10, Australian women's review of progress since 1995.

Overview

Each key area identified by WRANA has been covered, focusing on:

- Our Rights – stating women's rights in this area as set out in CEDAW
- Our Voices – inviting the participants to describe how they saw their current life circumstances, and those of other women, in relation to that particular topic
- Our Successes – what women have achieved in this area
- Our Solutions – proposals for change and action in response to continuing problems

This report is set out covering each topic in sequence. The report is a distillation of the information from the women participating in the consultations, with additional material and case studies. Direct quotes have been included.



Violence Against Women

“There is a power imbalance in relationships with a lack of assertiveness and low self esteem which can lead to domestic violence.”

Our Rights

Women have the right to live free from violence. The CEDAW Committee outlines this right in a separate document, which recognises that violence against women is a form of discrimination, and that when women experience violence, a range of their rights are violated. Governments must ensure that laws, programs and policies are in place to enable women to live free from violence.

Our Voices

Overview

Violence against women exists in all areas of society, in many forms. Women at the consultation reported that low self-esteem, lack of financial independence, lack of support and the perception of a pervasive culture of violence, are all obstacles to women leaving abusive situations.

Culture of violence and sexual assault

Women reported that there are high levels of sexual assault in small regional communities. It was felt that the highly publicised accusations of the assault of women by football players, and a pervasive attitude that women ‘get what they deserve’ if they dress in a certain way, contribute to negative stereotypes of women.

Responses to violence

Women reported that overall there are poor responses by the authorities to violence against women in the community:

- Police can take up to half an hour to respond to a domestic violence call, and there is a perception that they are ineffective, often doing little more than taking the male perpetrator aside for a talk, and then leaving.
- Crisis support services exist mainly in the cities, and rural women experiencing violence often have no support. These services only operate between 9am – 5pm weekdays, which was seen as extremely ineffective, as violence against women happens at all times.
- Women at the consultations felt that the court system works in favour of the male perpetrators, with the court process being a traumatic one for the victim; as well as the burden of proof being on the women in family law matters.



Lack of education

There is a lack of sex education for girls in school, including education about safe sex, self-esteem and where to go for support in abusive situations. Participants reported that community perceptions that men should be strong and not show emotion are still common. Women at the consultations felt there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor, with the creation of a welfare class, and this contributes to a lack of goals and aspirations for young women.

Women who were refugees

Women at the consultation reported that domestic violence is a large problem in migrant communities. In refugee camps there was a process for reporting and dealing with violence against women, however women who were refugees are often unaware of their rights, or unaware of where to report violence in the wider community, and some women do not even know how to call the police. There is often a cultural stigma attached to reporting violence, with women afraid of being ostracised for speaking out against their community, and cultural attitudes that support male domination.

Familial violence

Women reported that there are no emergency care services in outer suburbs and rural towns for children suffering abuse in the family home. Child Protection Services are not always effective, and their 24-hour phone hotline is usually directed to voicemail. Child-to-adult abuse, including psychological abuse, is hidden in the community. Often it is directed towards the mother, and there is not much support for these women.

Women with disability

Women at the consultation reported that women with disability experience abuses in different ways. These can include denial of control over their bodies, withholding of medication, emotional, physical and sexual abuse and the lack of control of their finances. As women with disability are often dependant on their carers, this makes it difficult to exercise their rights if they are being exploited or abused; and women with disability face the additional problem of being less likely to be believed when reporting violence.

Case study: Mavis

Mavis* worked in a large federal government organisation. One of her co-workers had made sexual advances and would often approach her in the workplace when she was alone to harass her. Mavis notified her manager who arranged to have her transferred to work in a different area from the man. However, as the two areas shared a common tearoom there were still occasions where Mavis came into contact with him. Despite Mavis making further complaints, the man was never reprimanded and no further efforts were made to protect Mavis. Mavis began to suffer extreme anxiety about going to work. One evening after finishing her shift, Mavis was crossing the car park to get to her car when the man rushed at her out of the shadows brandishing a samurai sword. Fortunately Mavis escaped physical harm, but emotionally she was very traumatised by this event.



Our Successes

- The Tasmanian State Government recently implemented the *Safe at Home* strategy to address domestic violence, although some women felt it was problematic in that it aims to increase police numbers, instead of better educating law enforcement officials about how to deal with violence against women.
- The Facing Up To It (FUTI) program that challenges abusive behaviour, predominantly by men, is being run in some outlying communities and is having a successful impact.
- There is increasingly more discussion and awareness-raising within the community about violence against women.
- There is a federally-funded Supported Accommodation Program (SAAP) administered by state government, although the individual needs of homeless women and those suffering domestic violence are often not addressed.

Our Solutions

- Specific training addressing domestic violence is needed for the police, police prosecutors, magistrates and health care professionals, including doctors, nurses and ambulance staff.
- Police should be run like non-government agencies with service delivery requirements linked to their funding. There should be more effective legal responses and less bureaucracy.
- Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) need to be more easily obtainable for women experiencing violence.
- 24-hour crisis services need better and secure ongoing funding, and there needs to be wider education about the services they can provide.
- There needs to be wider education and information about the law and women's rights, particularly for women who were refugees. Community attitudes that support or ignore male domination or abuse of women must be addressed.
- Women need to listen, support and value each other, be accepting of difference and work together so that people can learn from their stories and experiences. The funding of more women's groups, particularly in rural and regional areas, is vital.
- Child Protection Services need more funding and ability to act to protect children. The foster care system needs to be able to help children from abusive backgrounds.
- It was felt that the history of physical violence by former federal opposition leader Mark Latham was not well addressed in the public arena. There needs to be an anti-violence response, with the government showing they do not support or condone any form of violence.
- There needs to be differentiation between the needs of homeless women and those suffering domestic violence, for shelter accommodation.
- There needs to be well-funded research on the high percentage of intergenerational domestic violence.



Leadership and Participation

"Politicians only come here when it is an election year."

"I wouldn't know how to get involved."

"How do you tell politicians what you want?"

Our Rights

Under Articles 7 and 8, CEDAW requires governments to ensure the right of all women to be involved in public and political life, including the right to vote, hold public office, participate in the formulation of government policy and non-governmental organisations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and to represent their governments and communities internationally.

Our Voices

Political participation

The culture of politics is alienating and adversarial for many women. Many women do not know how to get involved, and the only exposure they have to politicians is during an election campaign. One woman ran for election in the local council, but the main question she was asked was who was going to look after her children.

Women who were refugees said there were many new issues for them that they had never considered before, and they needed time to think about the topic.

Women at the consultation felt that women do not get the same support as men from the media. Many women believe that they cannot be politically active, and this is reinforced by a lack of education about political participation and active citizenship.

Indigenous women

Women at the consultation reported that Indigenous women have difficulty accessing culturally appropriate services, being heard, and being understood. There is a lack of representation of Indigenous women at all levels of government. Women at the consultation felt that in the debate about land rights, Indigenous women's cultural needs were being ignored.

Women who were refugees/migrant women

Women who were refugees and migrant women reported that they have been discriminated against by police and lawyers because they believe these women do not know or understand the law. Women who were refugees and migrant women have difficulty participating in political life, as there is a perception of unwillingness by others to accept and understand differences. There is little representation at all levels of government of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.



Unions

Women at the consultation reported that union leadership is predominantly male, even in predominantly female industries. Participants felt that within union leadership there is an acceptance of flawed males but it is understood that women have to get there on merit. Women were concerned that young women organisers were not being supported and it is difficult for them to get promoted. As there is no public funding for union election campaigns, women are often unable to run for elections.

Our Successes

- Women are becoming more active and experienced, through help and support groups locally, nationally and internationally.
- EMILY's List is an excellent initiative within the Labor Party which provides financial support, training and mentoring to support endorsed Australian Labor Party women candidates in state and federal elections.

Our Solutions

- There needs to be more equal representation in Parliament. There generally needs to be more women in politics, and specifically representation of women from CALD backgrounds, women with disability, single mothers and Indigenous women.
- There needs to be more education, information and empowerment sessions for women to learn about how government operates at the different levels, and how women can become politically active, including running for election.
- In one local council there is currently only one woman, and no councillor is under 50 years old. There needs to be more encouragement and support for young women to run for election, and upfront funds for women at a local level to campaign for election. One way of addressing this would be an EMILY's List for local government.
- There needs to be a funded study into the barriers which prevent women's involvement in politics, and programs to address this.
- Women need to be involved in public life and need to be vigilant, publicising the facts of the realities for women. Women need to support each other to become informed and active citizens.
- In Tasmania with the Hare-Clarke system of proportional representation, there is the potential to support individual political candidates that share and demonstrate values.
- There needs to be more inclusive political dialogue.
- There is a need to value others' experiences. There are so many other types of disadvantage that through the common experience of being women we can work together to overcome these.



Law and Justice

“There is a fear of drug dealers with people attacked for owing money...what can the police do?”

Our Rights

Women’s right to equality before the law, equal access to, representation in and treatment under the law are recognised by CEDAW. (Articles 2, 3, 8 and 15).

Our Voices

Women who were refugees

Women at the consultation reported women who were refugees face a lack of culturally appropriate legal services. Cultural values which support male domination, a lack of understanding about the law and their rights, fear and the cost of the legal process have deterred women who were refugees from asserting their rights.

Women with disability

Women with disability often find information about the law, the legal system and their rights inaccessible, which prevents them from using the law to assert their rights or protect themselves, for example in relation to tenancies or obtaining loans. Women at the consultation reported women with intellectual and/or psychiatric disability are often treated unequally.

Lack of representation

With the exception of community legal services, it was felt by women at the consultations that there is a lack of representation by women in the law, government departments and legal services, and particularly a lack of Indigenous women and women from CALD backgrounds.

Crime

There is a perception that much crime in low socio-economic areas is alcohol or drug related. Women at the consultation felt that the system is failing, with light sentencing contributing to a vicious cycle of crime, poverty and drugs. There is a perception that criminals are often released on technicalities, making communities unsafe, and solutions such as curfews are seen as useful only if young people can be made to abide by them.

Our Successes

- The Tasmanian Government passed the *Anti-discrimination Act* in 1998, which is very comprehensive. However, the Anti-discrimination Tribunal can only suggest to people what they ought to do, and is unable to enforce decisions. A recent success, however, was a landmark anti-discrimination ruling about sexual



harassment awarded to a transsexual woman after she was verbally abused by her neighbour. The judge upheld the ruling even after an appeal was made. This was not only a victory but also extended the scope of the accommodation section of anti-discrimination law to include neighbours as well as landlords.

- The Women’s Legal Service provides a state-wide service and believe they would be more successful with more funding.

Our Solutions

- The legalisation of marijuana may reduce the crime rate, by reducing the number of drug dealers. 24-hour police stations in outer suburbs would also help address the problem.
- Community development programs need ongoing funding, including women’s groups and local networks.
- Retaining Australian content in the media so that our culture is reflected is particularly vital for women in the struggle towards equality.
- There needs to be education campaigns for men and women on gender equity in all areas of public and personal life, including the law.

Housing

“One real estate agent no longer rents to people from Africa because they once had what were seen as bad tenants.”

Our Rights

CEDAW requires that governments secure women’s right to be free from discrimination in economic and social life in Article 13. In Article 14, the right of rural women in particular to “enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing” is recognised. The rights are also secured through the work of the Committee, which addresses issues of housing in its concluding comments.

Our Voices

Public housing

There is a lack of public housing, which has increased since the state government sold much of the public housing stock. Women at the consultations felt this reflected a lack of foresight and planning. There are currently 3,024 people on the waiting list for public housing. The categories of eligibility are problematic, and many women are forced to stay with family, friends, or in cars and caravans due to the lack of public housing.



It is not possible to buy public housing unless you have been renting that property for at least 15 years, and the costs associated with bank loans are often prohibitive. Public housing often has no insulation, and heating is expensive. Government policy is for tenants to heat the living area, and to obtain another heater a woman must have a letter from the doctor.

Renting

Women at the consultations reported that discrimination against single mothers, students and refugees were barriers to private renting. There is little security for women who do manage to get a rental property, with housing often being sold during the tenancy. It was felt that tenancy laws worked in favour of landlords. Often rental housing is old and without heating, and there is a need for an independent tenancy tribunal. Women also reported that the cost of rent has increased disproportionately to wage and social benefit increases.

Effects of development

If development takes place in rural towns, such as the building of a marina, the cost of housing and goods and services in that town increases. Access to wharves for tourists are often placed in front of local fishers, and docking fees increase. There is no correlating increase in wages, and women from these communities suffer a severe economic disadvantage.

Women with disability

Women at the consultation reported that there is little appropriate public housing for women with disability. Women on disability pensions have trouble accessing loans and face discrimination in private rental.

Our Successes

- Housing Tasmania does have good outreach services, but they appear keen to talk to developers. Frequent staff changes also make it difficult for the community to consult with them.
- Colony 47 and Anglicare are helpful non-government organisations.
- The Tenants' Union informs tenants of their rights, although it needs to be better publicised as their services do not appear to be well known.
- Red Shield housing is part of Salvation Army, which is a helpful service, but is hard to get hold of and their rents are high.

Our Solutions

- Housing policy needs to be more flexible, catering for the various types of families, including more co-housing and support of self-funding in different communities. Adaptable, affordable, universal housing is needed.
- Greater education is needed about tenants' rights, such as education about the appeals process. There needs to be more funding support for advocacy in housing matters.



- Insulation is needed for much of the current public housing stock.
- Consultations and communication between Housing Services and the community must be improved.
- There is a need for much more available housing.

Health

“They take teeth out to save them.”

Our Rights

Article 12 of CEDAW requires governments to eliminate “discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure ...[equal]...access to health services, including those related to family planning.” It also requires that governments ensure accessible appropriate health services in relation to pregnancy and postnatal care, including the provision of free services where necessary.

Our Voices

Overview

Women at the consultation felt that women’s health is being dropped from the Federal Government’s agenda, including Indigenous women’s health. Women reported that a lot of health research appears to concentrate on men’s health issues, which does not necessarily correlate to women.

Access to healthcare

Women at the consultations reported that access to affordable mainstream health services is problematic due to a reduction of resources within the public health sector in areas such as mental health, public dental service and doctors who bulk-bill:

- In outer suburbs and rural areas there is a shortage of doctors. It can sometimes take two weeks to get an appointment, and doctors are often not replaced when on leave.
- Women reported discrimination against single mothers, for example the assumption by some doctors that single mothers want their pregnancy terminated.
- Women are often not informed about their options, and reported being prescribed pills or operations as a first resort.
- The health care system is not seen as holistic, however, alternative therapies that women are more likely to access are usually expensive.
- There is a no effective and affordable dental system. Women at the consultations reported that removing teeth was often the only option, due to the prohibitive cost of repair and the lack of dental services. There is no public dental service in a number of rural towns, although there is still a dental service to some schools.
- Women at the consultation felt there was a disproportionate amount of health issues linked to poverty. There is a concern that many women relieve the stress of poverty by drinking and taking drugs, which compounds health problems.



- There are still child health centres in rural areas but no visiting midwives. There are no pregnancy or birthing services. Transport can be problematic, and communication can be difficult as there are places without mobile telephone coverage.

Young women

Women and girls at the consultations reported there are a number of health issues facing girls, such as self-esteem, obesity, and a lack of access to counselling services at school. It was felt there was a lack of confidentiality by health workers when dealing with younger women, which prevented many girls from seeking pregnancy tests and addressing their sexual health needs. There is a need for greater sexual health education addressing sexually transmitted infections, contraception, and education about how a woman's body works. There are high instances of teenage pregnancy, and women at the consultations felt the Federal Government's \$3000 'baby bonus' announced in the 2004 budget, is not an appropriate way of supporting women, particularly in low socio-economic communities.

Mental health

There is no ongoing funding through Medicare for counselling, and there is no funding assistance for psychologist appointments. Women at the consultations reported that many women get anti-depressants from their GPs, as other programs assisting with stress are prohibitively expensive. Isolation is a large contributing mental health factor, particularly for older women.

Lesbian health

There was a needs assessment commissioned by the Tasmanian State Government last year on the health needs of lesbians and gays, but it has not been published, has not got past the draft stage and is not being acted on by the government.

Women who were refugees

Some women who came to Tasmania as refugees face ongoing psychological issues. However, a lack of understanding and education about mental health issues and a lack of culturally appropriate services prevent these women from accessing help.

Older migrant women

Women reported that bullying in aged care, long waiting lists for operations and the perception that once you are over a certain age you are forgotten, are all barriers to older migrant women's health care needs. Some people revert to their first language, rather than English, as they get older, and it was felt there was a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services for older women.

Women with disability

Women at the consultations felt that the quality of care for women with disability is connected to economic security and education levels. Women who are less able to express their needs have less access to health care and information. Women with



disability had problems leaving abusive situations due to the lack of physical access at shelters. The sexual health needs of women with disability are not adequately addressed, as some women identified physically inappropriate equipment prevented them from having a pap smear. There is still a wide assumption that disabled people are asexual.

Our Successes

- Advocacy groups such as Tasmanians for Disabilities are vital, but they need ongoing secure funding. The wider community is becoming more aware of women with disability's needs, and The International Year of Disabilities helped with visibility campaigns, but it needs to be ongoing.
- The state government has just announced more funding for mental health.
- It is possible now to talk to people about differences and people are beginning to differentiate, for example, to recognise people from the Sudan rather than from Africa generally.
- There is less stigma attached to single mothers now than previously.
- Sex workers' welfare and rights are better protected under the *Sex Industry Regulation Bill 2004* (Tas).

Our Solutions

- A comprehensive public health system, including allied services, dental and mental health, is essential. Outreach services such as those from the Women's Health Centre could be expanded to include dental, family planning, mental health, alternative therapies and emergency community health.
- Medicare must be expanded to include all areas of mental health services.
- There should be incentives offered to increase the number of bulk-billing doctors, especially in regional and rural areas.
- Services such as the Women's Health Centre need secure ongoing funding.
- An integrated, whole-of-government approach is needed to address the links between health, education and housing, through secure and ongoing funding that goes beyond the term of a government.
- The federal government should remove their reservation to the Optional Protocol of CEDAW, and secure maternity leave into legislation.
- There should be ongoing funding for older women and migrant women's action groups.
- The difficulties in abortion legislation need to be addressed.
- Obesity and associated ill-health must be addressed through education and health promotion programs. This could possibly include a ban on junk food advertising during children's television.
- There government should fund an outreach program for young girls, addressing sexual health education for girls who are at risk or homeless. There needs to be more support for young parents.
- Centrelink policy must be addressed to make it easier for young women to leave abusive family homes and gain financial independence. Currently the process is slow and invasive, often heightening family conflict.



Education and Training

“But it is not their fault as there are not enough resources.”

Our Rights

Article 10 urges countries to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men in all aspects of education and training. Women should have access to the same curricula, professional staff and programs of continuing and adult education, especially those aimed at reducing any existing gender gaps within education, and opportunities to benefit from the same scholarships and grants as men. Governments are required to ensure that stereotypical concepts of the roles of men and women are eliminated.

Our Voices

Overview

State schools and schools in rural areas lack many resources. There is a perception that schools are often industry-driven. Teachers and childcare workers are under-valued, and often criticised by parents, rather than parents and teachers working together for the children's benefit. Education is not perceived as well-rounded, and more education on life skills is needed. The federal government is putting a lot of money into private schools, while many state schools are under-resourced.

School zoning

Women at the consultation reported that in one low socio-economic suburb, a large number of children are sent to schools outside the area, which leaves low enrolments and subsequently less resources in the local school. There are also a high percentage of special needs children in the local school, and teachers are criticised even though they do not have the resources to provide an adequate education. Legislation is needed so schools are zoned according to where students live, to ensure that enrolments and resources are equally distributed.

Women who were refugees

For women who were refugees, the difficulty in acquiring English language skills is a large barrier to further education and employment. Many women believe the 510 hours of English lessons offered is not enough to gain a good understanding of the language. It took one woman six years to feel competent in English. Training in the use of computers, now essential for many jobs, is also problematic as there is about 1 computer to 16 people at TAFE (technical and further education). Women who were refugees were concerned about ongoing learning, and how they could get practice with their English on the holidays. One woman wanted to gain better English skills but could not attend classes at the time as she had to care for her children, and has now found she has been here too long to qualify for free classes.



Many women do not know where to go for information about the possibilities for study and work. One woman reported that she knew the system well enough and has been applying for work, but when she attends an interview, finds she is discriminated against because she is from the Middle East. Many women do not have their overseas education qualifications recognised here, but have trouble obtaining new qualifications due to their lack of language skills. Colleges (grades 11 and 12) do not make provisions for women with language barriers in taking tests.

Women who were refugees are very keen for their children to receive a better education than they might have received themselves, and believe there ought to be more specialised assistance. They believe their children can be perceived as slow learners because of language barriers and accents, which results in more frustration, difficulty in learning and a loss of self esteem. It was felt that teachers generally need cultural awareness training. A number of women felt powerless to help their children with their homework as their English skills are not good enough.

Childcare

Women with children find it difficult to study, as childcare is either expensive or it is hard to find a place. Women at the consultation reported there is a trend at childcare centres to have children reading before they go to school, which is not only an added pressure on those looking after children, but also takes away from the parents' role and places pressure on the children. Women were concerned that children were not being allowed to just play and be children.

Cost and Access

Education is expensive, and access to education is particularly difficult for people in rural areas, women with disability and single mothers:

- For women with disability, the added burden of transport, medication, carer and support costs make education even less accessible.
- One woman said that she felt guilty as she knows that she has to pay off her education sometime. For women who are less likely to have continuous employment, due to family commitments, the chances of paying off the cost of their education are less than men. Women were also concerned that the government forces people to pay back their education costs once they reach a certain income level, regardless of individual circumstances.
- A single mother studying part-time at university, did not believe she had adequate support or enough flexibility, and was given a hard time by lecturers if she had not done the reading.
- It is difficult for people in rural areas to go to university or TAFE so skill centres, which offer TAFE courses with online support, are often the only other option for higher education. The centres predominantly cater for women, but are limited by staff and numbers of students in the courses they can offer. TAFE requires a minimum of ten students per course, but it is often difficult to find that many students



for a single course in rural areas.

- Transport is a problem, especially in rural areas for women travelling to skill centres.

Lack of career guidance

Women at the consultation felt that there is a lack of career guidance in schools. The annual Careers Expo is expensive to exhibit at, so there are limited options on offer. The Career Reference Centre does not have an outreach program to operate in rural areas.

Lack of disability support

Women at the consultation reported that since special schools were closed, students with special needs are not getting their development needs met in mainstream schools as there are few resources. One woman reported that her disabled son only gets support when he disrupts the class.

Our Successes

- Groups such as the Women's Information Network room (WIN), a small place in a rural online centre with in-kind support from Women Tasmania, are making a difference. There is a youth group starting in that area again as well. These Centres help young girls to stay in school, and show them that they have options.
- The Colleges have a program for young mothers to return to study. It is important to keep this going.
- Access to higher education is easier though it is becoming more expensive.
- After a complaint to the Anti-discrimination Commission, a College changed their procedures to allow a woman from a CALD background more time to do her tests, because of her language barrier.
- Skill Centres are making a difference in rural areas.
- Women's KARADI Aboriginal Corporation is a place for Aboriginal Women and families, which provides a resource centre, and works for the promotion and empowerment of Aboriginal people. It creates an environment that promotes growth and well-being through learning and growing together.
- The State Government has recently announced more teacher aides and assistant teachers to help with children who have special needs.

Our Solutions

- More accessible and relevant education programs, and broader career guidance, are needed for teenage girls.
- More resources and volunteers are needed in state schools.
- More resources are needed for skill centres in rural and regional areas. It is felt that people ought to be subsidised for study in rural areas as they do not have the same options, for example, the difficulty of combining work on farms with study.
- More hours of English lessons are needed for women who were refugees.
- Adequate childcare and income support for women participating in training courses is required.



- Inclusive education for women with disabilities is needed through equal access to mainstream schools and further education. Cultural and disability awareness training is required for teachers.

Economic security and employment

“School uniform is expensive, a jumper costs \$80 and a new jacket \$55.”

Our Rights

Women have the right to work, to receive training and employment opportunities, to receive equal pay to men for work of equal value, to have access to benefits, compensatory schemes and allowances, especially in relation to retirement and incapacity to work. Women have the right to not be discriminated against in the workplace on the basis of marriage, pregnancy and maternity, and to have their health and safety protected. Women have the right to paid maternity leave and to access support and social services which allow them to combine family obligations with work responsibilities. CEDAW requires governments to ensure these rights under Article 11.

Our Voices

Overview

Australia is a wealthy country with an economic growth far in excess of its trading partners, but there is still an economic divide between men and women, with women making up 60% of casual workers. Women who are in paid work generally receive less pay than men, even at managerial levels. Women at the consultation felt that there is a conservative government trend to encourage women to stay at home and raise families, rather than work. There are many barriers to job security for women, including unequal pay, increasing casualisation of the workforce, unavailability of permanent part-time work for women with family responsibilities, the application of unfair dismissal laws, incorrect pay rates, and work and family discrimination.

Pensions and benefits

Many women find it difficult to manage on pension or benefits. There is no room to pay for emergencies, such as replacing broken white goods. Women on pensions or benefits often have difficulty providing for their children’s schooling, including uniforms, books and excursions. Women at the consultation reported that free dress days at schools add more financial stress, as their children are subjected to peer pressure to have the latest fashions.

Women who were refugees

For women who were refugees, the lack of recognition of qualifications and education attained overseas, combined with a lack of English skills, makes it very difficult to find employment. Women at the consultation also perceived a lack of trust of refugees by



potential employers, and discrimination based on women's perceived or assumed childcare responsibilities.

Older women and migrant women

Women at the consultation reported that many older and migrant women are unaware of entitlements and services that can help them.

Casualisation

Women are concerned about the increase of casualisation of the workforce, as it means they have no right to secure employment. Casual work means that the employer has control over the amount of work employees do, and casual workers have no access to sick, annual or family leave, no security of employment, and are required to be available all the time, even when there is no work. Women at the consultation were concerned for women who are on pensions and do some casual work. These women are required to disclose their casual incomes in advance, and this can be difficult to calculate, and often leads to over-payments, which must be repaid to the government, placing added financial pressure on workers.

Unions and industrial relations

Unions are a source of information and collective action which can correct or improve conditions, and were seen by women at the consultation as effective. However, with a decrease in membership, unions do not have the same power and influence that they used to.

In a recent minimum wage case, The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) asked for \$26.50 a week increase in the minimum wage. The Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) was prepared to award \$19, while the government and employer groups were asking for \$10 only. Women felt that even while Australia has good economic performance, the government is denying workers a decent wage rate.

Women at the consultation were concerned that the Federal Government funds employer unions, meaning they are not neutral. Industrial Relations law makes it increasingly difficult for workers to bargain collectively. Without collective bargaining agreements that fix wages for employees under that agreement, the pay inequity between men and women continues to grow. The right of workers to collectively bargain needs to be legislated. Women generally have less bargaining power when faced with individual work contracts, and thus are further disadvantaged. It was felt that the experiences of the members of the IRC are out of touch with women's current economic reality. Women also raised concerns that the Tasmanian Government does not enforce industrial relations legislation pertaining to inspectors in the workplace, and that the law is often unclear making it difficult for women to pursue compensation for work-related claims.



Work and family balance

Work and family is a difficult issue for many women. In the State Public Sector women do not have the right to return from maternity leave to part-time work, only a right to request it, which the employer cannot unreasonably withhold. Many women would love to stay at home with their children, but cannot, through economic necessity. Without a culture of family-friendly workplaces, such as part-time work arrangements, flexitime or onsite or subsidised childcare, women are often placed in the difficult decision of having to choose between work and family life.

Under-valuing of women's work

Women at the consultation felt that women's work and skills are under-valued. Traditionally female-dominated industries such as hospitality, retail, care-giver and clerical industries are low-paid occupations, relying on award rates. The minimum wage is insufficient, and often women struggle to pay the bills, accruing large household debt. Women's unpaid domestic labour remains unrecognised.

Single Mothers

The current trend of casualisation is especially difficult for single mothers. Without guaranteed or permanent hours, women are unable to plan financially for their and their families' futures. Childcare is expensive and it is difficult to get a place, especially on a casual basis. Women at the consultation reported discrimination against single mothers in the workplace, both in finding employment, and missing out on training opportunities and promotions. Women reported there is a perception by employers that single mothers are less reliable than other workers.

The \$3,000 'Baby bonus' announced in the 2004 Federal Budget was seen by some women as sending the wrong message to young women. It was felt that paid maternity leave, or financial assistance delivered over a period of time after a child is born, would be more effective and financially responsible than one lump-sum payment.

Transport

Women at the consultation reported that a lack of public transport is a barrier to women participating in the workforce. In regional and rural areas, the school bus is often the only reliable bus service, and it only operates in school hours, which does not always fit with women's work hours. It can also be difficult to travel to childcare, as young children/babies cannot be taken on buses as there are no restraints.

Women with disability

Most women with disability are on limited fixed income. Many women with disability have qualifications and high levels of education, but are underemployed, often in tokenistic work, which does not provide a career path or promotions. Often they are unable to do the work they are qualified to do because workplaces lack the technology or equipment needed to assist with their disability. Women reported that women with disability often face discrimination when job-seeking, for example one woman was not given a job at a



hospital when it was found she was in a wheelchair.

It is difficult for some women with disability to access Centrelink and other job providers, as they lack the required software technology such as a touch screen for voice recognition. Even obtaining information for employment is difficult, as government departments often send documents as a PDF or another form that is difficult to read.

Retirement

Retirement in the public sector is based on the final salary and superannuation contributions. Women have less ability to make contributions due to gaps in employment, often because of family commitments, and many women find they cannot retire at the retirement age of 55. Women who had casual or temporary employment often have no employer superannuation contributions, and therefore cannot retire at all. Often older women are put onto unemployment benefits when they reach retirement age if they have no superannuation.

Our Successes

- There has been 12 weeks' paid maternity leave for state employees since 2000.
- The State Industrial Commission ratified the pay equity principle in 2000.
- Through Unions Tasmania, the Anna Stewart Memorial Project facilitates greater union involvement for women.
- Organisations such as the Anti-discrimination Commission, the Working Women's Centre, the Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission and unions continue to work towards improving pays and conditions for women in the workforce.
- Tasmanians for Disabilities obtained funding from the Department of Communications to create Radio for the Print Handicapped (7RPH) radio reading service. This became core funding which gave people jobs.

Case study: Debra

Debra* is in a managerial position in the public service who returned from 12 months' maternity leave in a male-dominated area of work. Her position had been filled by a more junior male colleague for most of that time. Her manager told her on her return that there had been a re-structure in her absence and her job would remain occupied by her colleague. The duties she was assigned were of a lower level than she had previously been operating at. Debra is currently in negotiations to get her old job back.

*Names changed to protect identity.



Our Solutions

- Lobbying is needed for security in employment and equal pay which has still not been achieved.
- Financial support and tax breaks are needed for families earning under \$40,000 per year, and individuals below the poverty line.
- There needs to be full access for women to paid maternity leave.
- It was suggested that local councils could get together with Metro bus services and subsidise a bus service to the outer suburbs and rural areas, and include services such as a late night bus so people could go to a film or young people could go into town.
- There needs to be more education for both employees and employers on their rights in the workplace.
- More incentives for study are needed, especially for women moving from pension to benefits.
- Women should work together to improve union membership, and try to change workplace environments. Women need to be encouraged to join unions and be involved in union activity.
- The skills and qualifications of women who were refugees need to be promoted and recognised.
- Discrimination on the basis of childcare must not be allowed to continue.
- There needs to be a greater balance and understanding between the needs of employee and employer groups.
- There needs to be reform of workers compensation at the state level.
- There needs to be more low or no cost representation and the maintenance of a no cost jurisdiction in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission (TIC).
- The government needs to create more jobs and consider greater gender equity. Women who were refugees have suggested a more flexible approach including income-generating activities, as well as encouraging women to gain more skills and training.

It was felt that women need to stop being afraid to speak out, take a deep breath and speak out long and loud.