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PLACENTA PROJECT



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**WOMEN
WARRIORS**

LEADING THE REVOLUTION, CREATING CHANGE



Featured artist: Helen Timbury

Helen's colourful and optimistic linocuts are primarily figurative, evolving from a background in illustration and graphics.

Helen has a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Communication and works from her Drouin Studio. She exhibits regularly in Gippsland, teaches linocut printmaking in her studio, coordinates Open Studios West Gippsland and is a member of the Baw Baw Arts Alliance.

More of Helen's work can be viewed at www.helentimburydesign.com.au

Helen can be contacted on 0408 527 943.

This newsletter features her *Dyslexia Series*:

"This series explores my understanding and interpretation of the condition known as dyslexia.

This body of work attempts to unveil this disability through a playful and sometimes subversive interweaving of text and subtext, imagery and form, colours and textures.

In many circles dyslexia is seen as a disability but many people with dyslexia view their disability as a blessing, which affords them a unique outlook to the world at large. It is hoped this work may shed some new light on dyslexia and give insights to issues surrounding it.

I initially created this series for a 2015 exhibition called *Dyslexic Warriors*. I loved the title and wanted to create an image to show reading as the enemy, or something to be conquered for people like my daughter. She loves books but reading and writing can be frustrating.

I started drawing and found I wanted to create a strong female figure that could be inspirational to girls who have problems with reading and low self-esteem. The figure is a mixture of me and my daughters. Wanting to keep the tone optimistic I added Wonder Woman pants and added uplifting colours." Helen

Cover artwork: *The Dyslexic Warrior* by our featured artist Helen Timbury shows a woman proudly standing, stick and shield in hand, on top of a mountain of books.

About us

Our Story

Inspired by changing times and the need for a women's health service for women by women in Gippsland, consultations took place across Gippsland in 1991 under the banner of the Gippsland Women's Health Project. This led to the funding and establishment of Gippsland Women's Health Service in 1992.

From small but mighty beginnings, Gippsland Women's Health continues to be the lead organisation for gender equity, women's health, prevention of violence against women, and family violence system leadership in Gippsland.

Our Purpose

We aim to improve women's health, wellbeing and freedom of choice by advancing gender equity and working to prevent violence against women.

Our Vision

An equal and respectful Gippsland for all women.

In line with our vision, we:

- Put women's experiences first
- Are inclusive and respectful
- Value the contributions of our partners
- Have the courage to innovate and build the evidence base
- Are bold in our efforts to achieve fairness and justice for all women in Gippsland.

Our Campaigns



Make the Link   

Highlighting the importance of addressing gender inequality to end men's violence against women. makethelink.org.au



Are You Covered 

A safesex project promoting consent and the 30 condom vending machines in Gippsland.

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Subscribe: www.gwhealth.asn.au
Become a member: see page 19

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 [GippslandWomensHealth](https://www.youtube.com/GippslandWomensHealth)

DONATIONS

We welcome and value donations to enable us to broaden the reach of our work. Secure donations can be made online at www.gwhealth.org.au or call our office (03) 5143 1600

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the support of the Victorian Government.

We acknowledge the Gippsland Aboriginal communities and their rich culture.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the custodians of the land and water on which we live, work and play.



An update from our CEO

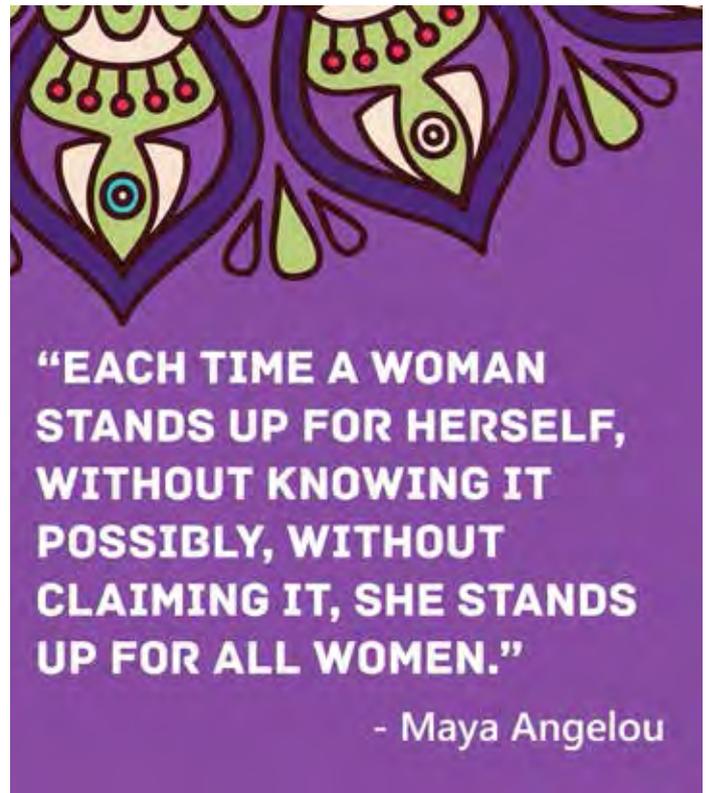
Women's Voices Creating Change

The pages of our Winter/Spring Newsletter are alive with the optimism and passion of each of the women who have kindly gifted their time, love and insights to create a warming and inspiring edition. As we come toward the end of another winter the colour, energy and expression of joy and hope on these pages might just have you thinking we are already cradled by spring's new beginnings. Kirli Saunders comments that, "Words are an ancient form of communicating and in their essence, they are about unity and inclusion." This newsletter is about both. It is also about breaking down the stigma of feminism and women's health; creating safe spaces for Gippsland women to celebrate, embrace and inspire; and bringing attention to the beauty of being a woman.

This newsletter profiles the leadership of young women and the desperate urgency they feel for action—action that will give them a future on this planet. If there was ever a time, a place in herstory for women to find their inner warrior voice, it's now!

These young women need the action of all women—the voices of all women—to be strong, loud and clear so that spring will be the moment of change and the celebration and rebirth of life she has always been. Friday September 20 2019—the Global School Strike for Climate. Let your "Words ring out again and again"!

Fiona Owen
Chief Executive Officer



(Source: Women's Health in the South East)



CEO Fiona Owen with Board members; Sue Barker, Gina Boyanton, Leah Radatti, Vanessa Leahy and Deb Manning at the 2017/18 AGM in Nov 2018.

Sport Warrior

Mark Her Words: a podcast about girls and women who love footy

I'm Isabelle and I live in Melbourne. When I was a little kid, I felt like the odd one out because I didn't follow footy. That all changed when AFL Women's (AFLW) came along. Suddenly, I became a passionate women's footy fan and an especially big fan of the Adelaide Crows women's team.

I love the AFLW! I love that during matches, the women are amazing, powerful and tough, then after the match, the players are really kind and chat with the fans. I love the fan culture at the matches – it feels like everyone belongs.

I didn't love that women's footy, and women's sport in general, didn't get mentioned much in the media.

My mum told me about the Outer Sanctum, a podcast about footy by women. I really liked the way they could be funny as well as talk about serious things like feminism. I especially liked hearing women talking about footy. That got me thinking about starting my own podcast, because **I think girls' voices should be heard too.**

I started my podcast about a year ago. It's called Mark Her Words (and you can find it on Soundcloud and Apple podcasts!). I talk about some of my different experiences with footy – the good stuff and the not so good stuff.

Not long after starting my podcast, I went to my first ever AFLM (AFL men's) match. I thought it would be fun and exciting - instead it was a bit of a shock. There were some men near us who loudly shouted rude and derogatory words during the match. I thought that it was unfair that the men thought they had the right to be loud and mean, instead of thinking about the rights of other people – especially kids like me.

I have been interested in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child for a long time, so I started thinking about what rights young sports fans should have. I decided to make my own convention. I called it a **Draft Convention on the Rights of the Young Sports Fan.**

After writing and sharing my convention, some amazing things have happened. I got to meet Bridie O'Donnell, the Director of the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, and Tanya Hosch, the AFL General Manager of Inclusion and Social Policy. They are smart and brave women who are working hard to make sport more inclusive for everyone. Meeting them was an awesome experience.

“

I think more young people, and especially girls, should speak up about the things that are important to them.

”

Isabelle
Year six student

 Markherwordspodcast

[instagram.com/markherwordspodcast/](https://www.instagram.com/markherwordspodcast/)

Editor's note: We are so impressed by the efforts of this vibrant and brave young woman. Please listen to her podcast on the "Draft Convention on the Rights of the Young Sports Fan." We particularly love article 18: "Sporting organisations should work towards gender equality, this includes equality in opportunities to play sport at all levels, equality in representation in the media and equality in decision making."

Well articulated Isabelle!



Isabelle standing in front of a mural at Princes Park.

Environmental Warriors

School strike for climate action: Why I strike

There is a quote on my sister's bedroom wall that reads, "She was a woman of the future, but she never lived to see it." I don't know the origins of this quote, I don't think she does either actually, but it has always left me to ponder its meaning, or question, is it simply romantic poetry? I have come to believe it tells a rather morbid story of a once strong woman, who was filled with zest for life, but who lost hope and began to live in the past. This quote prompts me to remember that life is fuller if we live in the present, looking forward into the future and learning from the past. I believe it is essential that we remember this when taking action on and discussing this climate crisis we live in, this humanitarian crisis. AND that we never lose HOPE.

Climate change is a global issue that will affect, is affecting, our lives. These changes are not only threatening the ecosystems of the natural world (which humans are a part of), but threaten society, global health, safety and economies.

I joined the School Strike for Climate because I was inspired by fellow youth who were taking initiative on the lack of climate action. I didn't like the idea of watching my peers fight for something that I strongly believe in, so I joined them. It was an extremely empowering experience that made climate goals feel achievable, leading me to end the day with more hope than I started with.

It was a demonstration that youth do not have to wait to be the leaders of tomorrow but can be the leaders of today.



Just pretend – Helen Timbury, linocut

Striking for Climate Action is important to me because I believe in a future where we can celebrate life in safety. Through keeping hope, I will continue to be an advocate for humanity and the natural world.

I would encourage everyone to educate themselves on issues around climate change. To understand that we can all make changes, small or large, in our lives that will help to mitigate the effects of it. Sometimes I become overwhelmed by the size of the issue, but I have found the best way to combat this stress is to do something positive and to make a helpful change in my own life.

The next **Global School Strike for Climate** will be held on Friday 20 September. The organisers have this time invited all members of the public to join due to the urgency that this global threat requires. So stay tuned and I hope to see you all there fighting with hope for a safe and vibrant future.

Love and blessings.

Lucy Capurso
Secondary school student



School strike for climate action (March 2019)

Change Making and Truth Speaking

With Kirli Saunders

Kirli Saunders is a proud Gunai woman, with ties to the Yuin, Gundungurra, Gadigal and Biripi people. She currently resides on Dharawal Country. Kirli is an international children's author, poet, emerging playwright and artist. We asked Kirli about her love of words.

When did you realise there is power in words?

I think the power of words has been something that's come about in more recent years, both as a writer and through learning First Nations languages through my project, *Poetry in First Languages*, at Red Room Poetry (RR). I understand that words provide us with ways of expressing our experience and identity, that they're tied to the land and taught to us by community. Words are an ancient form of communicating and in their essence, they are about unity and inclusion. I've always known the power of stories, having been surrounded by books and avid storytellers in my family. My love of words though came later. My heart is full when I sit by young ones learning language or writing their very first poem.

What inspired you to write *Kindred*?

Originally 'Highly Commended' in black&write! 2018, my collection, *Kindred*, was released by Magabala Books in 2019. This collection was written over six years and is based entirely on my experiences. *Kindred* is split into three parts: "Mother" explores my connection with Culture, "Earth Child" with Country and "Lover" with others in my Community. It was a daunting experience to make my personal story so accessible through the written word, but the writing of these poems has really served to heal a lot of traumas in my family. We've got a strong history of dispossession and relocation and many of the poems explore the disconnection to Culture, Country and Language that stems from these all too common happenings. The poems in the "Earth Child" and "Lover" section are for people that wrapped me up in new ways of seeing, that helped me find myself along the way.

“ Words are an ancient form of communicating and in their essence, they are about unity and inclusion. ”



Poetry in unusual places. Dharawal student Victoria and Kirli Saunders (Source Tad Souden for Red Room Poetry 2018)

Kirli Saunders continued...

Tell us about your work with children and keeping First Nations languages alive

Poetry in First Languages (PIFL), delivered by RR, celebrates, shares and preserves knowledge of First Nations languages and culture through poetry, music, dance and art. PIFL supports First Nations students in creating poetry in first languages by connecting them to First Nations poets, Elders and Language Custodians on country. The overall aim of the project is to strengthen connections of First Nations students to country, language and community to empower pride in their cultural identities resulting in enhanced wellbeing. PIFL has had some really special outcomes, including poems being published on trains, buses and in large scale public art installations. Seeing language in the local community and taught by Elders is really special.

What is your role at Red Room Poetry?

I'm their Manager of Poetic Learning and First Nations Cultural Liaison. RR aims to make poetry a meaningful part of everyday life by supporting poets to create and publish poems in unusual ways. As Manager of Poetic Learning, I oversee our education programs that run in early childhood, primary, secondary, juvenile justice, behavioural intervention and correctional services facilities. We connect poets with students to support them in self-expression through poetry. Poems from programs are published online and in murals and other public art, performed at events and recorded in podcasts. We've engaged more than 25,000 students in our writing projects including PIFL (learning about First Nations culture), New Shoots (connecting to the earth), Youth Unlocked (writing from juvenile justice spaces), Poetry Object (writing about curious objects) and The Disappearing (writing about place).

As First Nations Cultural Liaison at RR, I've introduced our Reconciliation Action Plan, helped curate our First Nations Cultural Advisory Board, created a First Nations Editing Policy and supported the employment of over 50 First Nations poets, artists, Elders and Custodians in 2019 alone. RR has a strong history of supporting First Nations poets and artists and I feel honoured to be able to contribute to the decolonisation of the arts with them.

Kirli Saunders

Children's author, poet, educator, First Nations Cultural Consultant
kirlisaunders.wordpress.com

Other books written by Kirli: Kirli's Children's Book Council of Australia nominated and internationally published picture book, *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, which explores boundary breaking and freedom seeking, follows a young girl as she unearths her very own freedom machine. Themes explored in the text include gender equality, freedom, courage, the power of books and journeys. Other books include *Our Dreaming*, *Happy Ever After* and *Afloat*. She is co-writing her first play, *Dead Horse Gap*.



Book cover of *Kindred* by Kirli Saunders

“

**My heart is full when I sit
by young ones learning
language or writing their
very first poem.**

”

Augury and Aether

An experience as an artist in residence

Augury and Aether is a self-portrait and written series undertaken to explore my personal relationship to illness and disability. Set amongst the mystical surrounds of various national and state parks in Baw Baw Shire, the series explores the development of disability pride and a reclamation of the self from a society that seeks to constrain and define disabled bodies. It reflects upon aspects of ableist attitudes in the medical system, society and structural inequalities that become the disabling aspects of our lives.

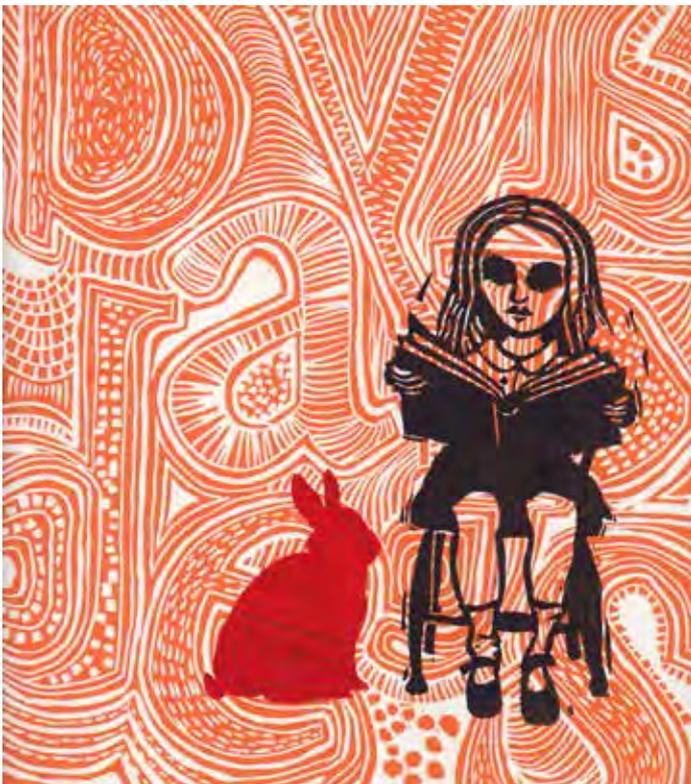
Womanhood is celebrated throughout and images are designed to challenge how disabled women's bodies are depicted and the environments we are allowed to exist within. With a society that frequently seeks to limit our existence to asexual, infantile beings with no personal agency, stances, styling and words are all created to exist unapologetically and with power. Styling is mystical and theatrical such that I am impossible to miss in the vibrancy of the natural environment. I both own and am part of, this space.

The project also focused on accessibility of creative practices, including reducing barriers such as cost and geography, and what constitutes writing. Images were taken using my phone and a tripod. Free photography apps were used to both take and edit the images, with the project hosted on a free platform, Instagram. The third stage of the project allowed for community members to write to the photo series. With many disabled and chronically ill people unable to leave their homes to participate in creative practices, this allowed people in Gippsland, Australia and even overseas to contribute, view and share the project.

Michelle Roger

Baw Baw Artist in Residence, Creative Gippsland's Come and Play (2019)

[instagram.com/augury_and_aether](https://www.instagram.com/augury_and_aether)



The Gift – Helen Timbury, linocut

“
**The sum of the whole
is greater than its parts.
Yet I have been broken
down into basest elements
and none see fit to put
me back together.**
”

Image next page: *Augury and Aether*, image 4 of 7, Crossover Regional Park, Crossover, Baw Baw Shire, Gippsland. Michelle, a pale white woman, sits astride her wheelchair facing camera on a gravel path. She wears a red vintage evening gown taken down to the waist exposing her upper body and her legs. Her hands are placed over her breasts and she wears a peacock feather headdress over her face. An ornate silver walking stick sits between her legs with the peacock feather and wire net sitting over her belly button. Behind her, tree ferns, mountain ash and other trees rise to the top of frame.

A poem in the Augury and Aether series

“Lift the arm, move the leg. Take off your top. Lie back down. This will be cold. Roll over. A little more. Now take a breath and hold it. Don’t move or we’ll start from scratch. This will be uncomfortable. Just a little longer.

Slice and sew.

Scan and probe.

Blue paper unfolds and white fabric lies awkwardly to reveal one detail at a time.

My body is a thing of clinical spaces, my existence prescribed by those who have never known me.

I am a heart, brain, arm or leg, bladder or bowel. Or smaller still, to lumps and valves, neurons and muscle. To negative spaces. A deficit model with pieces ever unconnected.

I am defined in jargon. In compliance, or aghast, noncompliance. In boxes and checklists. My body dissected to fit in places that don’t allow for cohesion or complexity. Whittled down until I can barely recognise the picture painted by the compilation of papers and ten-minute visits.

Words ring out again and again.

Broken and bad.

Complex and confounding.

Disconnected and discombobulated.

The sum of the whole is greater than its parts. Yet I have been broken down into basest elements and none see fit to put me back together.

Flesh and viscera, bone and skin left strewn in cold places until the next one decides to poke and explore. Spurred on by interest, or newness or ...

I wait in the dark until I could wait no more.

So I lay about me to collect my pieces. Carry them far from the sallow taint of iodine, cold colourless alcohol and pink filled pumps, to land in a world where grey-green eucalyptus and wandering waters bring life to sterile impersonal flesh.

Moirai guides my hand as needle meets thread and I begin to stitch. Patch and mend. Threads pick up connections never before explored. Threads pick up connections long forgotten. I create myself anew. The piece that was pieces sits tall upon the path.

Warmth suffuses body as pale flesh unfolds to reach out to the sun. I am uncovered, revealed. The whole long lost once more a thing of beauty. Once more mine.”

Michelle Roger



Augury and Aether (image 4 of 7) – Michelle Roger, photo

Advocating for Equality and Respect

Our priorities for government action

In the lead up to the federal election in May, Gippsland Women's Health conducted an advocacy campaign asking for candidates and the community to help us take action for an equal and respectful Gippsland for women.

The campaign included the development of videos, a brochure and social media messages that highlighted our priorities for government action. Prior to the election, all Gippsland candidates were approached by Gippsland Women's Health and were asked to commit to four key priority action areas for regional, rural and remote Gippsland women:

1. Advance Gender Equality: Women's health and wellbeing is shaped by gender inequality and Gippsland gender equality indicators are poor. We need a strong commitment to a National Gender Equality Strategy.

2. Commit to Women's Sexual and Reproductive Choice: Access to sexual and reproductive health services is a fundamental right for every woman in Australia, however this is not a reality for Gippsland women. We want a National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy and funding to support its implementation to ensure women can access services close to where they live.

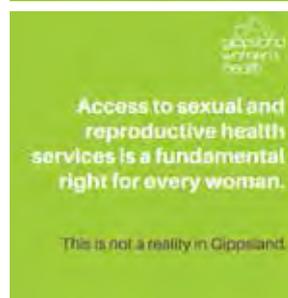
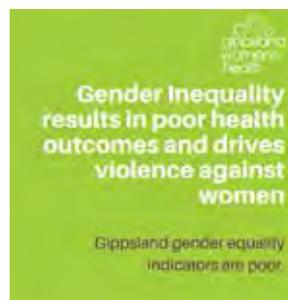
3. Prevent All Violence Against Women: Violence against women and their children is preventable, however Gippsland women and their children continue to experience high rates of violence. We need increased investment to expand regional, rural and remote prevention strategies.



Gippsland Women's Health advocacy brochure

4. Deliver on the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Gippsland has significantly higher rates of family violence compared to other parts of Victoria and Australia. We need a strong commitment to build on the work already done, to address funding challenges for rural and remote services so Gippsland women can receive fair and equitable support, including trauma recovery.

We will continue to advocate for these priorities at local, state and federal levels. For further information about these resources, go to our website.



Gippsland Women's Health advocacy campaign video

Gippsland Women's Health campaign social media posts

Federal election candidates

We asked the Gippsland female candidates why they stood and what it was like to run for the federal election



Gina Boyanton, GWH Board Chair (left) with Antoinette Holm

The seat of Gippsland has been held by the National Party for almost 100 years. For eighteen of the last twenty-four years we have had a federal Liberal/National government. For a candidate from the Australian Labor Party this was never going to be a soft target or an easy mark. It had to be about the process more than the prize. A robust democracy requires a strong opposition. Being seen, being heard, being serious and committed was so very important.

Running for public office – a federal seat – was not something I took lightly; it was not something I did for myself. My motivation was extrinsic, and it centred initially on the lived consequences of decades of encroaching neoliberalism and an apparent political inertia around global warming. I chose deliberately and with foreknowledge to step forward and into the political arena. To be eligible to stand for Federal parliament I needed to relinquish my New Zealand citizenship. It was unlikely I would win, but the high court determined that this needed to be completed before nomination for election. I don't get my citizenship back now the election is over.

Campaigning was intense, overwhelming, and at times great fun. What a privilege to be able to talk with the people of Gippsland as a candidate for public office. These conversations were about our lives, our communities and our values, and about politics.

It might be fashionable to say that “politics” is boring or irrelevant, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Remember that real change is made on the floor of the parliament. Historically, women's lives have been shaped by legislation. To be able to influence legislation as it is conceived, written or enacted is vital for all of us.

After all, we live with the consequences.

Antoinette Holm

Labor candidate for Gippsland



Mel Brown, GWH with Deb Foskey (right)

I stood as the Greens candidate in both the November state and May federal elections for Gippsland East and Gippsland respectively. I stood because I care about the future of our region and planet and being a candidate provides a platform to speak and write on issues affecting our region for that short window.

Greens policies reflect my own thinking – years ago I was involved in writing them – as they cover not only the environment but also democracy and social justice issues. To me, these are all connected, you cannot have one without the other.

It is sad to say that Gippsland scores lowest on most social and economic indicators, meaning that the need for excellent services is greater here than many other parts of our country.

Yet, as the election result shows, people don't always vote in their own best interests. I think a lack of education has a fair bit to do with this. For instance, despite the impacts of climate change so evident this summer, it was not a major factor in most people's votes.

Greens candidates still face prejudice and misinformation in this electorate. I could stand because I am a retired woman and job prospects would not be impeded by declaring myself as a Green. It is hard for younger people needing to be securely employed, but there are many people in the district who care about issues like indigenous housing and health, public transport, family violence, the environment and refugee policy. They need someone to vote for and I was proud to be that person and to stand up at forums and speak of Greens policies. I won't do it again; but I will happily mentor someone prepared to give people who care a voice.

Deb Foskey

Greens candidate for Gippsland

Advocate for yourself or find someone who can

Now is Awesome

Twenty-six years ago I was a separated mum with two sons, aged seven and nine. Showering, I found a large palpable lump in my left breast. After a long three-week wait I had a mammogram; the wait for the best time for a clearer picture. A radical mastectomy and full axilla clearance were performed. No mention of egg saving, had I finished my family? I don't know. I was only thirty-four. No suggestion of breast reconstruction, I wish I had been better informed. Six weeks post-surgery, my surgeon informed me that clear margins were obtained around two tumours. Celebrations. Much later that night I woke and entered the dark kitchen to find my parents in each other's arms. Crying. Not only had they faced the loss of their only daughter but two adored grandsons to a distant father.

A week later, reality. A prognosis of six to twelve months. All hope taken, nothing given in return, a stalemate. I clearly remember sitting, demanding something. A radical new treatment not yet at clinical trial stage was finally offered: high dose stem cell rescue. "It will probably kill you," were his exact words. After a rigorous round of tests I was accepted. Three rounds of the highest doses ever given, followed by harvested stem cells. My own hell on earth. Six months later I returned to my family. It took twelve months for me to fully reclaim my life.

With funding through 2004 Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) grants, a colleague and I established the Remote Working Party. Another grant was used to finance writing workshops for rural women living with breast cancer; their stories were published in *Heartsongs in the Key of C* in 2007. Both projects were established to give rural women a voice, a platform for advocacy.

I became a spokeswoman for BCNA, speaking on behalf of rural women and the inequality between rural/remote and metropolitan breast cancer pathways.

In 2008, a diagnosis of tumours in my liver and spine. Stage IV, metastatic, secondary or advanced cancer; different names but the same outcome. Active treatment began; it wouldn't cease until I did. There is no cure for stage IV. Life went on, bittersweet. An online metastatic group became a whole new family of women just like me, the sharing of similar, but different stories. We meet at least once a year. So many friends lost to this disease. Our family grew. Two new daughters-in-law and three beautiful grandchildren (one gifted from my daughter from another mother, two are my son's children). I stepped back from advocacy and concentrated on my life, my grandchildren.

Story continues on next page...



Marlene Parsons with two of her grandchildren

Now is Awesome continued...

In March 2019, I woke to excruciating pain in my right hip. Multiple bilateral fractures along the iliac crest. My pain was reduced from an eleven to zero as long as I remained stationary. A dose of radiation followed and chemo was halted. A relief physically but a scary proposition to deal with mentally.

A week spent lying flat while my oncologist sought help. The fragile state of my bones made orthopaedic intervention impossible. Brainstorming sessions with my oncology nurse, Linda Langskail, and McGrath Breast Care Nurse, Marg Centra. We agreed to use our individual networks to find something, anything, hope. After three weeks I was sent home with all the necessary equipment including a disliked but necessary wheelchair. My independence was gone, I relied on others for everything. I will be talking to our Mayor in the near future about the difficulties I experience moving around our town. Lochy (Loch Sport) is not an easy place to navigate with no footpaths or easy access to our local grocery store or cafe.

Marg Centra called. A possible solution came through her network of Breast Care Nurses. Monash Health's palliative care team offered the services of the specialist Interventional Neuro-Radiologist Team at Clayton.



Rose coloured spectacles – Helen Timbury, linocut

They had been successful in bone cementing damaged spines – osteoplasty. I contacted Professor Ronald Chandra and was admitted to McCulloch House Palliative Facility. A metastatic hip fracture had not been attempted before. There were fears of a break occurring during the procedure. The hammer and chisel used to make a pathway through my hip for the syringe could do major damage to fragile bones. I assured them I was willing to take the risk.

Monday evening the team watched as I stood unaided, completely weight-bearing, without the fear of bones crumbling. My pain level was high but it was different, muscular. Days later it was zero, the first time in almost eleven years. I remained for a further week undergoing intensive physiotherapy, progressing from walker to single crutch to walking stick.

I am now home, taking it slow but enjoying every day.

Marlene Parsons

#NowIsAwesome

“ **Advocate for yourself or
find someone who can.** ”

Marlene Parsons

The Placenta Project

Bec Vandyk tells us about her project

Why did I create the giant placenta?

At the start, it began as a simple idea to make something BIG that was a hands-on-hips, shouty statement: WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION IS HUGE!

But as the project developed, the reactions I found in conversations with organisations and the general public left me wondering, *This is a 'Strange Thing'; no one knows what to think, or where to look. The very word 'placenta' is an awkward one.*

How has this happened in a species so incredibly dependent on this organ?

Because we like to forget that we are completely reliant on our mammalian body systems. Occasionally—and as we age, regularly—we are reminded that our clever plans, our ongoing social interactions, and our mental equilibrium are all dependent on our fragile, human, physical bodies, which fail, bleed, and die. Blood lost, seen, smelled – these sensory signposts are reminders of how reliant we are on blood. And blood repels us, not just because of its potential to contain pathogens, but also because we like to think we are in charge of our bodies' ability to contain its blood neatly and prudently. And a placenta is a whole industrial factory for the channelling of blood. It is prescient, almost; drawing down litres and litres of a mother's blood, channelling nutrients, hormones, antibodies – and of course oxygen – all measured and sent to the exactly right places at the right times to facilitate all the complex matrices of a baby's development in utero. Once the placenta is birthed, minutes after the baby that engineered its creation, it is discarded.

A thing of blood, and covered in blood.



Bec Vandyk standing in front of the giant placenta

Like a placenta, a woman's monthly blood is made invisible by societal norms. This is a great irony: as a society we celebrate blood donors, and yet menstrual blood, impelled by the commands of the female body, is 'donated' to our species' survival, by each woman, every month. It is a social stigma, as my daughter is very quickly learning. While she and I celebrate and learn from each other's menstrual cycles, the society 'out there' is not so allowing. Blood, particularly menstrual blood, is a horrible thing. A bloodied placenta, likewise.

So I (along with lots of women who also believed in this work) created *Placenta* out of 900 discarded t-shirts. We created it because it has a direct answer to the question, "Why are women valuable?" This is an amazing organ, grown within a woman's body, new with every pregnancy, and yet not only is it thrown away, it is largely invisible even to the woman that birthed it, because our society remains stubbornly blind to the fundamental value of women. Why are women valuable? Because of the placenta.

Bec Vandyk

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Arts & Health Gippsland
artsandhealthgipps@gmail.com



The Placenta Project postcard

Fear not Fear

Force is not the answer,
Angst is not the way,
So resign yourself from clenched fists my love...
And surrender to the sway:
The radiance come morning,
The all-consuming darkness come night.
Still and yet, it is love that conquers
By and far, it is the highest height.
Untouched by the shadows,
And resilient to the sun,
It is what fosters the peaks to our plateaus, my dear;
It is the amalgamation of our separate selves back into one.
Indeed – fire fights fire,
And will fight it ever more.
So I tell you:
It is love, my love, that will transcend it all.
It is love that looks to the ceiling when you find yourself
sprawled upon your bedroom floor.
So, I beg of you:
Fear not fear, my dearest dear.
And love, my love, ever more.
Indeed, it is our only saviour,
Keeping our universe in accord.
So, strike down at nothing, my sweet.
Yet rise up faithfully fierce.
It is the embodiment of compassion that carries us
further than our feet,
And dismantles all our fears.
Believe you me:
I love you a thousand times over.
I know you know that by now...
So please – tune in already,
And let it draw your defences down.
For there is no need for walls in this realm, my sweet.
No need for fences in this town.
This is the landscape that's eternal for all time, you see.
And the clearest clarity you'll ever find.
Yes, it exists beyond your grasping, my sweet.
A space where you will know no defeat.
For not a thing can be conquered here,
You'll find even that age-old ego will disappear.
Yes, welcome back to the womb, my child.
Safe travels I'm sure you've had.
Welcome to the place where polarities
Absolve themselves,
With the flesh we're no longer clad.
This is where we've always been...
Floating in perfection,
Blazing trails in this seamless dream.
Boundlessly found in every direction.
So, rest easy now you know it:
You're unchanging with the times.
And trust there is a space of transit,
Just beyond the trappings of your mind.

Ella Therése Anderson

“This poem is dedicated to the activists, revolutionaries and sages of our time. My intention for this piece is to empower change makers in their darkest hours and reaffirm their purpose to them. Activism is more powerful when we are centred and moving in love – refusing to be disheartened, bitter or apathetic to the negativity of the world – especially when that negativity is directed at us as a result of our activism”.

Ella, a young Gippsland women with a passion for the spoken word



Star Gazing – Helen Timbury, linocut

“
**Whoever fights monsters
should see to it that in the
process [s]he does not
become a monster.**”

Friedrich Nietzsche

Every Girl. Everywhere. Period

Days for Girls in East Gippsland

Days for Girls is an international grass-roots movement that was started by Celeste Mergens in 2008 after working with a family foundation in Kenya and volunteering in a local orphanage. She found that through a lack of access to feminine hygiene products teenage girls missed up to 25% of their schooling, which seriously affected opportunities for further education and careers, and many women could not go to work.

Celeste learned that girls were sitting on cardboard for several days each month, often going without food unless someone would bring it to them. This set in motion Celeste's first intervention: disposable pads. But Celeste and her team quickly discovered a major problem that without any place to dispose of the pads this was neither a viable nor a sustainable solution. It was time for Plan B: a washable, long-lasting pad. And from this *Days for Girls* was formed.

Days for Girls has now reached more than 1,000,000 girls and women in over 125 countries. What has become clear in the years following *Days for Girls*' beginning was just how much of a difference hygiene solutions make in assisting women and girls to break the cycle of poverty and live lives of dignity.

Days for Girls Australia currently has 124 registered Teams and Chapters, with 33 in Victoria. Groups vary in size, from four to 50.

Associated with those Teams and Chapters can be up to 100 women sewing in small groups or in their own homes and supplying local Teams. *Days for Girls* really is a grass roots movement.

The East Gippsland Chapter was formed four years ago and now has more than 20 volunteers that meet each Monday afternoon at Uniting Church, Bairnsdale. Some outreach groups also meet in Orbost and Lakes Entrance.



Days for Girls logo

The local group creates the feminine hygiene kits for girls and women in developing countries, mainly in the Pacific region.

Over the last two years almost 4000 kits have been made and distributed to Vanuatu, Cambodia and the Solomon Islands.

The kits consist of a number of reusable liners that fit into shields that, in turn, clip onto women's underwear. Some small cakes of hand soap, a couple of pairs of panties, some ziplock plastic bags and instruction diagrams complete the kit which is then placed inside a colourful drawstring cotton carry bag.

The group's work has been supported to date through grants and would welcome further financial donations.

What began as a volunteer-run organisation with a small yet passionate group of women (and some men!) has rapidly grown into a robust network of more than 50,000 volunteers around the globe.

To find out more about *Days for Girls* East Gippsland, phone Merle McRae 03 5152 2322

Visit daysforgirls.org



Girls receiving their feminine hygiene kits (Source: Daysforgirls.org)

Sexual and Reproductive Health

The female condom

With the alarming increase in the rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis, now more than ever women need to take the lead in using an effective barrier method of protection during sex. The latex male condom has traditionally been the go-to, but you may be interested that there is another option available – the female condom.

A female condom is a thin, soft, loose-fitting pouch made of latex or polyurethane. It has rings at both ends, with one end closed. One ring sits outside the vagina and covers the vulva, while the other ring is inserted inside the vagina up towards the cervix. The condom works by providing a physical barrier to prevent the exchange of semen and other body fluids, thus preventing pregnancy, STIs and HIV. It is 79 to 95 percent effective.

Entering the market in the 1990s when HIV was highly publicised, the female condom was initially quite popular, however since then interest has declined. Whether this is due to lack of awareness of the product; that women find the condom challenging to use; or that it is difficult to purchase, needs further investigation. Family Planning (NSW) is currently doing research in this area.

Female condoms are available to purchase online or from your local pharmacist.

For more information about the female condom, visit the Better Health Channel or Family Planning Victoria.



Female condom (source: Family Planning NSW)

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a progressive, recurrent and often debilitating disease. It is an oestrogen dependent, inflammatory condition where cells similar to those that line the uterus are found in other parts of the body.

Approximately ten percent of women, about 200,000 women in Victoria and 176 million women worldwide, suffer with endometriosis at some point in their life, with the disease often starting in teenagers. Symptoms, including persistent pelvic pain, severe dysmenorrhea and debilitating pain that interferes with daily activity, are variable and often normalised, which contributes to a delay in diagnosis (often 7 to 10 years).

One of the Victorian State Government priority action areas of the “Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Key Priorities” is to improve access to early diagnosis, effective treatment and management of endometriosis, as well as medical and social supports to enhance the social participation of women with endometriosis. Gippsland’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance, which is convened by Gippsland Women’s Health, will support this work in Gippsland.

For further information on endometriosis please visit www.endometriosisaustralia.org or www.jeanhailes.org.au

If you are concerned whether you may have some of the symptoms mentioned in this article please contact your doctor.

Anna Roberts

Health Promotion Worker, Gippsland Women’s Health



I want to read but there are pom poms in my head – Helen Timbury, linocut

Gender Equality Art competition

This year we will once again partner with the Gippsland Respectful Relationships team, Department of Education and Training, on an art project promoting gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes. The competition will run during Term three and the finalists will have their art on Gippsland buses.



Design on a Bus competition poster

An invitation to our Annual General Meeting



International Women's Day

International Women's Day, March 8, is a day to recognise women's achievements, reflect on the extraordinary acts of courage and determination of women throughout history, and to continue our work to advance gender equality.

This year we celebrated with community screenings of the movie *Colette* in Sale, Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi.



Bairnsdale International Women's Day event

Partners in Prevention

Gippsland Women's Health has been a partner in Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria's (DVRCV) *Partners in Prevention* practitioner network of prevention of violence against women for many years. The network provides connection, collegiality, support and evidence-based tools and resources to Gippsland education professionals.

Jan Tracey, our Health Promotion Training Facilitator, recently featured in DVRCV's network video. If you would like to be part of a network of engaged practitioners, connect with experts, and learn about evidence-based practice, join Partners in Prevention network. Find out more at partnersinprevention.org.au or call our office to speak to Jan.



DVRCV video featuring Jan Tracey

Membership Application

Gippsland Women's Health inc.



Any woman who resides, works or studies in the Gippsland region and supports the Statement of Purpose of Gippsland Women's Health (GWH) Inc. is eligible to be a member.

All applications for membership are presented to the Gippsland Women's Health Board for approval at the first meeting following the application being received. Membership is confirmed only when the Board approves the application.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

New Membership

Membership Renewal

Has your address changed in the past 12 months?

Yes

No

If yes, what was your previous address? _____

Individual membership enables you to vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and general meetings, stand for election as a member of the Board, receive invitations to special functions and be included on our mailing list.

Do you wish to receive a print newsletter?

Yes No

Do you wish to receive the newsletter via email?

Yes No

Do you wish to receive periodic email updates?

Yes No

- Membership is for one year only and must be renewed annually.
- There is no annual membership fee.

I agree with the **Statement of Purpose** and wish to become a member/renew my membership of GWH Inc. for the financial year ending June 30,

20_____ (please complete relevant year).

I accept that the Gippsland Women's Health Constitution requires a register of members be retained and that a list of member names will be available for viewing by other GWH members at the registered address in accordance with the Constitution and privacy legislation.

In the advent of my admission as a member, I shall at all times comply with the rules of Gippsland Women's Health Inc.

Signature of Applicant

Date _____

Please complete form and return to:

Gippsland Women's Health
Reply Paid 664, Sale Victoria 3850

Office Location

56B Cunninghame Street, Sale Victoria 3850
Telephone: 03 5143 1600 or 1800 805 448
Fax: 03 5143 1224
Email: admin@gwhealth.asn.au

**Or complete online at
www.gwhealth.asn.au**

GIPPSLAND WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWSLETTER

IF NOT DELIVERED RETURN TO:

PO Box 664, SALE Victoria 3850

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**ENJOYED
OUR
NEWSLETTER?
WHY NOT
PASS IT ON
TO A FRIEND**

**WE'D LOVE TO
HEAR FROM YOU,
WE WELCOME
FEEDBACK OR
COMMUNITY
CONTRIBUTION**

SUPPORT LINES

1800 737 732	1800RESPECT National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service
1800 015 188	Safe Steps Family Response Centre
1800 806 292	Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault
1800 696 784	1800MyOptions (Contraception, pregnancy options and sexual health)
1300 363 322	Triage (Mental Health Emergency Service)
1800 858 858	Gambler's Help
1800 551 800	Kids Help Line
13 11 14	Lifeline

**We offer a health information service for all women's health queries.
Opening hours Mon - Thurs 9am to 4pm, Fri 9am to 3pm**

**Call 1800 805 448 or (03) 5143 1600 (please leave a message after hours).
Please note that we are not a crisis service.**



NEWSLETTER WINTER / SPRING 2019

56B Cunninghame Street, Sale Vic 3850 03 5143 1600 admin@gwhealth.asn.au www.gwhealth.asn.au

