



Blue Mountains Reconciliation Quilt displayed in the MCRN Meeting Room

**MOUNTAINS COMMUNITY RESOURCE NETWORK
ANNUAL REPORT 2010 - 2011**

Blue Mountains Reconciliation Quilt

Gillian Hand was doing her Masters at UWS and asking the question “Why is it difficult for non-indigenous people to even begin to explore their resistance to the reconciliation process?” She began with exploring her own resistance asking herself what would encourage her to be more involved? As quilting is one of her passions and she knew it had been used as a way of community development, she came up with the idea of forming a group to explore the issue. She chose the theme Walking Together as a starting point and asked everyone to consider what that phrase meant to them and how they would convey their thoughts/feelings in a textile medium. Many people contributed to the quilt and it has been used as the focal point for many community gatherings including annual events such as the Elders Lunch, Journey of Healing and NAIDOC.

It continues to inspire people to look at their own responses to reconciliation.

Materials: All kind of fabrics-cotton, felt, calico, velvet, rayon, silk, polyester blends.

Names of contributors: Clancy and Rosanna King, Emily and Loren Pettit, Susanne Gardener, Maggie Kyle, Maggie McNulty, Gillian Hand, Moira Hickson, Libby Silva, Gail Hewison, Liz Rickman, Chris Marks, Maitraya, Heather Bloor, Jess Gleeson, Rita Lynch, Rita Farrell, Angie Gleeson, Michele Lea, Beverley Fry, Maria Losurdo, Vivian Baruch, Krishnamayuri, Gillian Richards, Mary Goslett, Alfrida Edwards, Lizzie Oates, Jo Enoch’s art group of young people with a disability.
The quilt was put together in 1997 and finished in 2002.



**MCRN acknowledges the Darug and Gundungurra people as
the traditional owners and custodians of this land and their**

Elders past and present.

**MCRN also acknowledges all Aboriginal people living
in the Blue Mountains.**

"Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance.

It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health:
a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination."

Mick Dodson, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Social Justice Commissioner, 1993-1998

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Brief History of Mountains Community Resource Network

The Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN) began in 1984 as the Blue Mountains Community Services Advisory Council. The Advisory Council was to provide advice to Blue Mountains City Council and to act as an 'umbrella organisation' for local community and welfare groups and services. The initial aims of MCRN involved drawing together organisations and individuals in the Blue Mountains to meet the following objectives:

- To act in a formal consultative role with BMCC and other levels of government;
- To develop a coordinated approach to the needs of people in the Blue Mountains and issues affecting them;
- To be an advocate for community organisations in the Blue Mountains;
- To develop an information base of socio-economic need in the Blue Mountains;
- To develop forums to determine needs and strategise to meet those needs;
- To assist organisations in skill development;
- To raise community awareness of relevant social issues.

MCRN became incorporated in 1986 and received WSAAS funding in 1985, followed by funding from the Department of Community Services in 1987. The Migrant Community Project was funded by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs from 1992 to 2005 and WSAAS funding supported the Disability Community Development Project from 1998 to 2002 and the Mental Health Community Cultural Development Project from 2003.

Some Achievements of Mountains Community Resource Network

- Convening Blue Mountains Community Interagency, regarded as one of the best networking processes in the state;
- Initiating the Blue Mountains social planning process which supported development of the Blue Mountains City Council Community Plan.
- Initiating research into the needs of people with disabilities and people of non-English speaking backgrounds in the Mountains from 1990-1991, gaining funding for the Migrant Project from 1992 to 2005 and resourcing the Blue Mountains Migrant Residents Association.
- Initiating research into the needs of people with disabilities and obtaining WSAAS funding for the 1998-2003 Disability Community Development Project.
- Supporting and resourcing four new neighbourhood centres and numerous other new services to the Mountains.
- Auspicing Blue Mountains Community Transport in its initial development.
- Initiating innovations such as The Everyman Project (2000), Access the Best BM (2000), Connecting and Celebrating Communities (2001), first national Women and Earth Conference (2002), and the Getting to the Heart of Community Development - Nepean Conference (2006).

- Developing the Blue Mountains Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI) project and the Mental Health Community Cultural Development project from 2003 to 2007. Auspice of the Blue Fringe Festival.
- Establishing groups such as Blue Mountains People for Peace, Blue Mountains Movement for Change, Blue Mountains Women's Action Group, the Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Project and the BMCC East Timor Friendship Committee.
- Developing regional structures such as the annual Teamwest Conferences, Voice for SONG (Small Organisations Non-Government) and playing a key role in the ongoing survival of Western Sydney Community Forum and TRI Community Exchange.

Aims & Objectives of MCRN

VISION

Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN) is a dynamic peak organisation whose actions are founded on social justice and community development principles. We value community and cultural diversity and we challenge inequality. On behalf of organisations, groups and individuals, and concerning the Blue Mountains as a whole, MCRN will work towards achieving a socially just community in the Blue Mountains and alleviating community disempowerment caused by poverty, discrimination and human rights injustices.

OBJECTIVES

MCRN will initiate and coordinate actions which address social justice issues using the following strategies:

1. Networking and Advocacy

- Represent Blue Mountains community organisations on local, regional, statewide and national bodies (both government and non-government) and advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups and communities;
- Lead individuals, groups and agencies in the Blue Mountains to advocate for social justice;
- Network and collaborate with non-government and government agencies on community welfare service development, community development and developing responses to social policy;
- Contribute to public and social policy development by raising issues and facilitating a community response to government initiatives.

2. Community Development

- Facilitate action and activities aimed at improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged individuals and groups;
- Initiate, support and resource the emergence of projects which address social justice and respond to community needs. In cases where there is no other appropriate sponsor MCRN may auspice such projects, depending on available resources.

3. Facilitation and Resourcing

- Facilitate a range of interagencies and forums that enable Blue Mountains community organisations to work effectively together;
- Facilitate community education on issues of social justice, disadvantage and prejudice;
- Facilitate training opportunities for community welfare workers and community welfare organisations;
- Provide information and referrals to community groups;

- Provide resources, support and promote community organisations for the wellbeing of individuals and the community.

4. **Research**

- Seek resources for and undertake research on community needs and issues in the Blue Mountains;
- Promote the use of research for effective social planning.

5. **Best Practice**

- Manage and administer the organisation in accordance with best practice principles as determined by MCRN policies.

Management Committee 2010-2011

Chairperson

Suzie van Opdorp

Vice Chairperson

Brad Ellis (until December 2010)

Toni Quigley (since December 2010)

Secretary

Lyn Bevington (until December 2010)

Deborah Allen (since December 2010)

Treasurer

Tracey Willow (until May 2011)

Kath Harrison (since June 2011)

Management Committee Members

Suzie van Opdorp

Lauren Harris

Brad Ellis

Tracey Willow

Kath Harrison

Toni Quigley

Janet Linee

Sue Morrison

Deborah Allen

David Clarke (Blue Mountains City Council representative)

Janet Mays (Blue Mountains City Council representative)

MCRN Staff 2010 - 2011

Mountains Community Development Project/Team Leader

Can Yasmut (until August 2010)

35 hours per week

Funding: Community Services – CSGP

MCRN Coordinator

Meredith Osborne (from November 2010)

32 hours per week

Funding: Community Services

Judy Spencer (from late June 2011)

28 hours per week

Funding: Community Services

Financial Administrator

Kay Spriggs

10 hours per week

Funding: Community Services

+ 4 hours per week

Funding: Department of Health and Ageing

Service Support Worker

Suzanne Langford (from March to June 2011)

10 hours per week

Funding Community Services

Chairperson's Report

It has been another stimulating and challenging year at Mountains Community Resource Network.

We started the year with a change in organisational leadership. Can Yasmut left the organisation to pursue other opportunities. We were fortunate to recruit Meredith Osborne into the Coordinator position. Meredith came to MCRN with a wealth of experience in the areas of human rights, sector development and training.

In her new role Meredith undertook consultation with the Blue Mountains community sector and determined that the training and development needs of the sector are critical to the long term sustainability of the local community sector, particularly for small non-government organisations. This has helped form MCRN's agenda for this year as a key driver of sector development with planning underway for a Governance Forum later in the year.

In April this year Meredith took leave without pay to take up a secondment with the NSW Legal Aid Commission. We were fortunate to recruit Judy Spencer into the Coordinator's position. Judy comes to MCRN with strong leadership and management expertise developed after working for many years in senior roles in a variety of Government departments and non-government organisations. In these roles she has worked extensively with community organisations both in the Blue Mountains and the wider Nepean area.

Major achievements this year include the publication of the mental health resource ***"Resourceful Living"***. This practical handbook was developed in close consultation with mental health consumers, carers and services and aims to provide information about local services and other resources. I wish to acknowledge the Mental Health Coordinating Council and NSW Health for funding this project. I also wish to thank Project Worker, Johana Iren, for her tireless efforts in bringing this resource to completion and the many contributors and partners to the process. There are too many to name but without your support we would not have been able to produce this wonderful resource.

As convenor of the Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI), Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issue (RAMHI), and Mountains Multicultural Interagency, MCRN has undertaken planning with each of the interagencies to ensure that they remain dynamic and relevant to our members. We have set targets for activities and are working collaboratively with our members to achieve these.

In this ever changing environment, we need to have a strong community sector which is united in its' approach to government and funding. For many years now MCRN has placed itself as the "peak-body for the Blue Mountains community sector" providing advocacy and representing the community sector through consultation and collaboration with our members. To date the issue of 'membership' has been informal. To ensure that we have a 'mandate' from the sector to act as the 'peak-body' we believe it is time to formalise our membership process. This is something that we will be working on over the coming twelve months.

I wish to thank our members and partners throughout the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney for working with us this year. I'd especially like to acknowledge the breadth of community organisations we have the pleasure to work with, our funding body, NSW Human Services (Community Services) and Blue Mountains City Council for their ongoing support over many years.

MCRN is a small community organisation which relies heavily on its staff to undertake a broad variety of complex tasks. Given the changes that have occurred within MCRN I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kay Spriggs for eleven years of dedicated service as our Finance Worker. I would also like to thank our Support Worker, Suzanne Langford, for ensuring that our office and technology runs smoothly. I would like to pay tribute to Meredith Osborne and Judy Spencer for providing their own unique brand of leadership.

Last but not least, I wish to recognise the other members of the MCRN Management Committee. At the Annual General Meeting last year, Tracey Willow, Lauren Harris, Kath Harrison, Toni Quigley, Janet Linee, Deborah Allen and Sue Morrison were elected. As a management team we've worked well together ensuring good governance and overall direction of MCRN.

Sadly Tracey Willow and Lauren Harris resigned from the Committee earlier this year after many dedicated years as Committee members. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their significant contribution to MCRN and the Blue Mountains community sector. I congratulate them for their efforts and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

With a new State Government we will no doubt see changes in funding policy governing the direction of community-based organisations. Over the past five to ten years we have worked closely with our funding body, Community Services, in relation to the reform of the CSGP program. We hope that this partnership of cooperation and mutual respect will continue into the future as we both work towards best practice and sustainability in the community sector and to best meet the needs of the community in the Blue Mountains.

It is with pleasure that I present this year's Annual Report. I look forward to a productive and rewarding 2011 – 2012.

Yours sincerely,

Suzie van Opdorp,
Chairperson,
MCRN.

MCRN Coordinator's report

As one of the smallest community organisations in the mountains, MCRN makes its presence felt. We support the community sector by creating opportunities for networking, communication, professional development and shared action. We provide services and undertake special projects that community organisations with limited resources would find difficult to do themselves.

This has been a year of challenge and opportunity for MCRN and the community sector generally. It is a testament to MCRN's resilience and sound foundations that it has moved through this period with minimal disruption.

After three years as Team Leader, Can Yasmut left MCRN in July 2010 and I took over his position in November. I would like to thank Can for assisting with handover and for making himself available to answer questions while I was on a steep learning curve. Can and the management committee developed a comprehensive strategic plan for MCRN setting priorities and direction for the next three years. The work that went into the plan made my job that much easier.

I would like to share some notable achievements in 2010/11 of which the MCRN team can be justifiably proud.

Communications

MCRN's role as the central information hub for the Blue Mountains community sector was firmly established this year. After a trial period, a permanent Service Support position was created to produce weekly information bulletins for the community sector and to further develop a strong web presence for MCRN. The feedback we have received about the value and format of our communications has been very gratifying.

Interagency groups

MCRN convenes, coordinates and provides secretariat support to three interagency groups in the Blue Mountains – the Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI), Mountains Multicultural Interagency (MMI) and Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI). Membership has grown this year and thanks to some solid planning, each group has a clear direction and blueprint for collaborative action.

Interagency initiatives this year included a robust "Meet the Candidates" session prior to the State election hosted by BMCI, two forums on homelessness, cultural competency training for HACC and community workers, a new operating framework and terms of reference for RAMHI and other professional development opportunities for workers.

In a period of limited human resources at MCRN, workers from member organisations have stepped up to ensure that these groups remain active and focused. I would particularly like to acknowledge Anne Fitzgerald (MOCS) and Lyn Pagan (Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre) for

helping to lead and invigorate RAMHI in 2011, as well as Suzie Van Opdorp, (MCRN Chairperson and Manager of the Blue Mountains Women's Health and Resource Centre) for convening BMCI whilst the Coordinator's position was vacant. Thanks also to all the workers who contribute to these groups with such commitment and energy. It is little wonder that we are one of the most active and connected communities in the State!

Networks & representation

This year MCRN continued to represent the community sector on the Stronger Families Alliance (SFA), Youth Mental Illness and Substance Abuse (YMISA), Coalition Against Violence and Abuse (CAVA) and the Neighbourhood Centre Manager's group.

MCRN is also represented on the management committees of Western Sydney Community Forum and TRI Community Exchange, ensuring that the voice of our community is heard beyond the mountains.

Supporting unfunded groups

MCRN plays a unique role in supporting and resourcing unfunded and/or unincorporated community groups and social justice campaigns and this year was no exception. MCRN auspices a range of local action groups including the Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Project, Pink Mountains, Blue Mountains Trade Union Council and the Multicultural Residents Association. You can read about their extraordinary work elsewhere in this report.

We also supported the One in Five Creative Arts Association, a highlight of which was being invited to be on the judging panel of the human rights photographic competition. The works selected for the exhibition were moving and powerful, showcasing the talent of people in our community living with and recovering from mental illness.

Campaigns

This year MCRN proudly supported the Equal Marriage Rights campaign and led a joint response from the Blue Mountains community sector. Many diverse services across the mountains publicly supported the campaign in a half page advertisement and open letter to the Prime Minister that we published in the Blue Mountains Gazette.

MCRN also played an active role informing the sector about the transition to our new award and the ASU's Equal Pay Campaign. This year Fair Work Australia handed down its decision in the pay equity case, finding that workers in the community sector do not receive equal pay for work of equal value. This is a great victory for the sector and for women workers generally as 87% of our workforce is female. We trust that government will come to the party and acknowledge the contribution of our sector to community wellbeing by fully funding any pay increase that may flow from this landmark decision.

Projects

Our main project this year was the production of “Resourceful Living”, a comprehensive directory of local services, support and other useful information for people living with or recovering from mental health issues, and their carers.

Project worker, Johana Iren, produced a high quality and much-needed publication for the Blue Mountains community during her short time at MCRN. She put her heart and soul into this project and it shows. Not only is the final product in great demand, the development process was respectful and collaborative involving potential users and service providers every step of the way. She also demonstrated some fine entrepreneurial skills to supplement project funding with additional sponsorship!

I would like to acknowledge the Mental Health Coordinating Council for funding this project, as well as the services and businesses who provided sponsorship support. A big thank you also to designer Delores Turro and to all the people who contributed beautiful artworks to the publication.

We also undertook a full refurbishment of our public meeting room with a grant from the Community Buildings Scheme, including installation of a proper kitchen. We are now able to offer an upgraded facility to the many community groups and networks that use MCRN as their meeting place.

MCRN Team

Finally, I would like to pay special tribute to the MCRN team in 2010/11, starting with our indispensable finance and administration workers.

Kathleen Bevins kept the office running smoothly between Can’s departure and my arrival and coordinated the refurbishment of the meeting room. I wish Kathleen and her family all the best on their new adventures in Queensland.

The return of long term staff member, Kay Spriggs, was welcomed by us all. A highly skilled and experienced financial administrator, Kay also provided me with critical organisational knowledge and history. I would have been lost without her! Thank you Kay.

I would like to thank Suzanne Langford for stepping into the temporary Service Support position and for her exceptional commitment, initiative and reliability. You will be missed. I’d also like to welcome Casilde Blancodini who will be leading MCRN's IT and communications strategy in the coming months.

Thanks again to Johana Iren who I have acknowledged above. It was great to have you in our team, albeit briefly.

Thanks also to our long term volunteer Johanna Blonk for desktop publishing anything we needed, including her contribution to our last annual report.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the MCRN management committee which expanded in 2010/11 to become more diverse and representative. Your commitment, passion and fearless debate of important issues is an asset to MCRN and the community sector. Thank you also on behalf of Judy and myself for the personal support you have given us both in what can be at times a lonely road!

I would like to particularly acknowledge our Chairperson, Suzie van Opdorp. Your belief in MCRN and what it can achieve is an inspiration. Your capacity for hard work, even through difficult times, is legendary. Thank you.

As many of you know, after five months at MCRN I was offered a short term position at Legal Aid NSW leading a statewide community legal education project. I am extremely grateful to the MCRN Management Committee for encouraging me to pursue this one off professional opportunity, despite the undoubted inconvenience. I would also like to thank Judy Spencer for stepping into my position and for holding the organisation with exceptional skill and care. MCRN is in very good hands.

MCRN is a unique and precious community resource and I am inspired by what it has achieved in a disrupted year. A new funding framework, as well as our comprehensive strategic plan, means we will be focusing on training and professional development for workers, resourcing the community sector and building our membership base.

I look forward to all that is possible in 2011/12. From little things big things grow!

Meredith Osborne

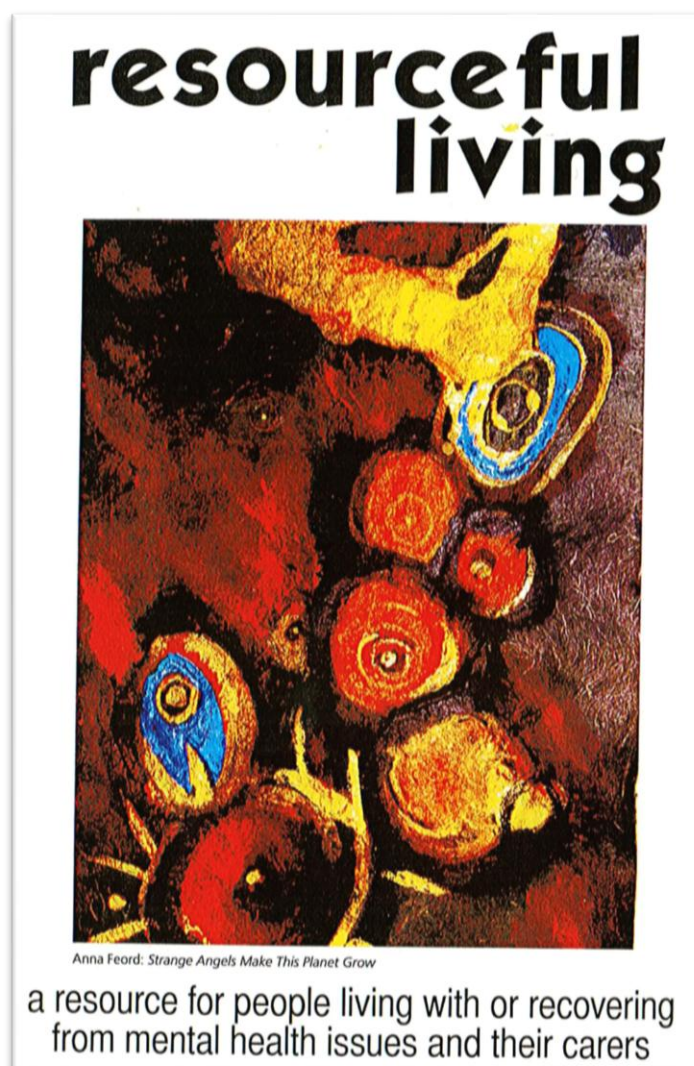
Coordinator November 2010 – April 2011

Resourceful Living Project Report

I had the great pleasure to coordinate the Resourceful Living project on behalf of MCRN. Resourceful Living is a resource for people living with or recovering from mental health issues and their carers. The content of the resource was determined through a series of community consultations, and consultations with members of One in Five Creative Arts Association and Vale Street Social and Recreation Centre. The result is a colourful, friendly and useful resource that covers information about accommodation, financial, legal, mental health to recreation, just to mention a few areas. The resource was launched in May 2011 with about 70 people in attendance.

The resource has been well received throughout the Mountains, if you would like a copy please contact MCRN on 47594599 or at support@mcrn.org.au.

Johana Iren
Project Worker



Pink Mountains Report



Pink Mountains is the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community information website for the Blue Mountains www.pinkmountains.com.au

It is now well established and is well known in the community. Thanks to Anne McKenzie who had the original vision, it is very doubtful that it would have happened without her energy. Kevin Hardwick has been the editor for the past three to four years.

What started out as a purely information site has progressed into a more LGBT awareness and activist group with ten people involved in an informal committee. We also have a very popular Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/groups/pinkmountains>

Thanks to MCRN for the continued support and insurance coverage for all the events we have had.

What we have done this year includes:

- Pink Mountains helped organise and promote IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia) rainbow flag raising ceremony ,with Celia Hutton from SOAR (Wimlah Refuge) BMCC, BMFS, Maurice Brady, Suzie van Opdorp and others on May 17th 2011.

The Flag raising was done by parents and children from Rainbow Families Group. There was a crowd of about 120 for the event which included free breakfast at BMFSS followed by several speakers. This event has the support of BMCC and will be an annual event.

- From the 17th of May an anti homophobia poster display was shown for four weeks in the BMCC foyer thanks to the support of Maurice Brady. Posters included ACON posters, Equal Marriage Rights posters and others.
- Pink Mountains organised, with Robbie Wilde, the Equal Marriage Rights Rally earlier this year and we are continuing to collect signatures for the Letter to Julia Campaign with stalls at Magpie markets until December. This was made possible with the excellent support of Meredith at MCRN.
- MCRN assisted greatly in approaching neighbourhood centres and other community groups and individuals to sign an open letter in favour of equal marriage rights. These groups each paid \$50 towards a quarter page advertisement in the Gazette. Thanks to MCRN & Meredith who worked so hard to get this happening.

- Pink Mountains combined with Bush Lemons for a stall at Mardi Gras Fair Day to promote Pink Mountains and other social groups in the Mountains, this was very successful.
- We had brochures and posters available from various LGBT social groups and also from businesses in the Mountains, either LGBT owned or friendly. We thought this was a most successful day for everyone, making connections and getting people to be involved in our local community.
- We took part for the first time in the Winter Magic Parade with a walking group providing visibility for the LGBT community. We had really good responses from the 50,000 + crowd. We carried huge rainbow banners and rainbow flags.
- Pink Mountains organises and advertises working bees (through the website and Facebook) at the Medlow Bath HIV AIDS Memorial Park. Twelve Cheery trees were donated by the Three Sisters Social Group during winter and were planted by a group from Pink Mountains.
- Anti homophobia and LGBT awareness posters are now on display at MMNC and KNC, there were none before this year.
- We also distribute The Sydney Star Observer LGBT newspaper to Wentworth Falls TAFE and other places.
- During the June long weekend Pink Mountains assisted in promoting all the events during what has become known as PinkFEST. We also asked Playback Theatre to be involved with one of their unique productions. Thanks to Genie Malone who asked them to do a Coming Out Stories evening which was very well attended at Wentworth Falls School of Arts.

Next year

- A gay men's social and information group is being formed with the first meeting to be held in November. It is hoped the men's group will open communication between men of all ages and backgrounds to discuss issues such as health and well being as well as any subject the group may choose. I have been made aware that mental health outcomes, substance abuse and high suicide rate for the LGBT community is poor in comparison to the rest of the community. It is hoped that by discussing these issues we might become more aware of this issue. It will also be a social group.
- A possible advocacy group for LGBT people living in nursing homes or getting help at home is something which could be pursued next year.
- We have an informal committee of about 10 people and we met recently to discuss if we could become a sub-committee of MCRN as I can't see incorporating as a possibility at present.

Thanks to Kay at MCRN for handling our cheque account as we are unable to open an account without being incorporated. Thanks to MCRN for support and encouragement throughout the year.

Kevin Hardwick

Editor

Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Project Report



The Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Project (BMETS) was established in 2004. It currently has in excess of twenty members and a far larger group of supporters in the Blue Mountains and wider community. All members contribute their time, skills and resources on a voluntary basis.

BMETS aims to improve the lives of women in East Timor by contributing to the ongoing leadership and empowerment of East Timorese women. BMETS does this by developing sustainable projects that directly benefit East Timorese women and foster partnerships and friendships between women in the Blue Mountains and women in East Timor. Typically the projects we support require very small amounts of funding. We aim to make the approval process for projects as direct and simple as possible. Our practical approach to our work has earned us support across the Blue Mountains and beyond.

We acknowledge the role of Mountains Community Resource Network in supporting and resourcing our group through the provision of a legal auspice, insurance and administrative systems. This allows us to do the work we are so passionate about – supporting and promoting the rights and conditions of women in East Timor.

We would particularly like to acknowledge Kay Spriggs for her ongoing support since the inception of the Sisters Project way back in 2004.

Building Partnerships with Women's Organisations in East Timor

Our partnerships with women's groups in East Timor continue to grow in strength and depth. In Dili we provide salaries to three part-time community development workers who are part of the Asia Pacific Support Collective Timor L'orosae (APSC-TL). Under the umbrella of APSC-TL and with support from BMETS, Beba Sequeira, Laura Abrantes and Odete Belo undertake community development work in Dili and the rural areas of Timor Leste such as Bugoro, Maliana and Hatobulico. They provide BMETS with ongoing advice about the issues facing Timorese women, their needs and potential opportunities for BMETS to further its vision in Timor Leste.

APSC-TL work on a wide range of projects; some are funded by BMETS whilst others occur independently of BMETS. They support and monitor scholarships, support and resource other women's groups and projects. As part of their rural work, APSC-TL works with Mana Kassian and the Women Veteran's Centre in Bugoro. BMETS provides a small stipend to Mana Kassian in recognition of her development role in the village. Mana Kassian continues to be a driving force behind many of the community initiatives in this village.

In the past year, APSC-TL celebrated the 10 year anniversary of it's formation in 2000. In spite of the adversity faced by the Timorese people since the referendum in 1999, the celebration acted as a reminder of the progress made by women in Timor Leste. We were fortunate that Judy Finch, Gabrielle Kirby, Anne McKenzie, Fiona Christian and Mary Waterford were able to participate in the celebrations. The success of BMETS is a testament to the strength of APSC-TL and the support it has in women's communities across Timor Leste.

It gave us great pleasure to celebrate Laura Abrantes' graduation with her Masters in Gender Studies. In particular, Laura has studied gender-based violence in a post-conflict Timor Leste which will contribute significantly to the work of APSC-TL and the recognition of violence against women in Timor Leste. The Sisters were proud to have provided support to Laura to complete her treatise in Brazil with a four month placement back home in Timor Leste. Laura has now returned to Timor Leste to continue her work with APSC-TL.

The APSC-TL 10-year celebration also launched Jude Conway's book 'Side by Side: Women of East Timor, Stories of Resistance and Survival' which documents the stories of many of the women of APSC-TL as well as other influential women leaders. Jude also launched her book in the Blue Mountains at a Blue Mountains International Women's Day celebration.

BMETS Sisters Work As AVI Volunteers in Timor Leste

One of the highlights of the year was preparing with our Sisters, Gail Clifford and Judy Finch, for their adventures as AVI (Australian Volunteers International) volunteers.

Gail Clifford left Australia in August 2010 to take up an eighteen month contract in Maliana where she is helping to consolidate the work of the Leichhardt Friendship Committee in establishing a library and community centre. The facility also acts as a Community Learning Centre.

Gail sends regular reports of her progress and the Sisters have been able to assist with the provision of \$5,000 to purchase children's readers in Tetun and dictionaries that make a difference when setting up a library and learning centre.

One of the challenges for everyone in East Timor is surviving the terrible roads and the impact of the wet season so beautifully described by Gail in an email last Christmas:

After setting up a meeting time the guests failed to arrive. It just shows how much we take for granted - while I was sitting there waiting I realised that most people would either be walking or on a bike & that without any other form of transport, there is just no way they could come. The roads were awash & you'd get soaked in 2 seconds flat. So I assumed we would finish work for the day. I have rescheduled the meeting - just hope it doesn't rain again!

Being a volunteer in Timor Leste is a powerful learning experience. Life can be difficult and coping with this is part of the journey as a volunteer. Gail says:

It's never ending and so easy to get involved in so many needy causes, but you just have to step back & try to prioritise needs.

Judy Finch arrived in Timor in March where she has a twelve month contract with APSC-TL. Judy is working with APSC-TL around capacity building and sustainability, in particular, she has undertaken strategic planning and developed APSC-TL's strategic plan; she has researched funding options and developed proposals; with their members and staff Judy has reviewed APSC-TL's operational

structure and is undertaking long term planning to ensure sustainability into the future. On top of all of this Judy has been undertaking a myriad of practical tasks as well as learning Tetun.

Largely I am doing capacity building with APSC-TL. In some ways, this involves supporting Beba and Laura in the work that they are doing (mostly working on improving documentation in English). It also involves going with the staff here to various meetings and appointments that they have set up and in these cases I feel that I am the beneficiary. As Beba and I are the only ones that can drive here I am often doing the driving to meetings or to purchase office equipment. I am really getting to know Dili!

In Dili Judy has been preparing funding submissions on behalf of APSC-TL and working with the APSC-TL staff to help them develop their submission writing skills. She has also liaised between women's groups in Timor Leste and BMETS advocating for particular projects and activities that further both the work of BMETS and APSC-TL.

Judy estimates her time has been split 70 per cent with APSC-TL and the remainder with the Hatobuilico community. She has worked in Hatobuilico with the Community Committee undertaking strategic planning with the community regarding the establishment of the Adult Learning Centre.

Judy has made around 7 trips to Hatobuilico. This is no mean feat when you take into account the roads between Dili and Hatobuilico. Whilst it is only a 100 km journey, the trip can take 5 or 6 hours depending on road and weather conditions.

As a community development worker Judy understands the importance of maintaining a sense of humour when teaching children from Hatobuilico:

I started off with the same principle of getting the kids to only knit here (at the Centre) which meant bringing out the big bag each time the kids came. Even though there were names attached to bags of knitting there was inevitably some distress when the bag got into the wrong hands. And after a while I felt it was a pity for kids not to be able to continue to knit at home in the long hours of the evening when they were so keen. So ... you can see where this is leading ... today I look in the bag and there is zilch there!

BMCC East Timor Friendship Group

In 2005 BMETS worked with the then Blue Mountains Mayor, Jim Angel, and the East Timorese Consul-General, Able Guterres, to establish a Blue Mountains Friendship Committee. Hatobuilico sub-district, located about 100kms from Dili, high in the mountains at the base of Mt Ramelau, was nominated as our Friendship Community. Since this time we have worked closely with the Council Friendship Committee to further mutual interests in the Hatobuilico sub-district.

Work in Hatobuilico has really consolidated over the past twelve months. Volunteers Anne McKenzie and Fiona Christian developed a walking guide to the sub-district. This booklet has the potential to really enhance tourism in the area and funding has been secured through Aus-Aid to develop tourism resources. As a result of Judy Finch's volunteer placement with APSC-TL, much work has been undertaken in strengthening the Community Committee structure, planning processes and general community engagement. The Trek for Timor funds have allowed the development of the Adult Learning Centre in Hatobuilico. Job descriptions are being developed with the view to employing two local staff. This is a wonderful result after what has been at times a challenging process. Hatobuilico will have a specific AVI placement in 2012 as a result of Judy's advocacy.

Trek For Timor Raises \$61,000

The Trek for Timor has been a major joint undertaking between BMETS and the Blue Mountains Friendship Committee. The Trek was modelled on the Trek for Timor held in Kangaroo Valley in 2009. The planning and logistics for the event took over 12 months to develop. The Trek was held in September 2010 with 250 people participating as walkers and about 150 volunteers responsible for making the Trek both safe and enjoyable for all involved. A range of partnerships were established with walking groups, St John's Ambulance Service, the local Ham Radio group, State Emergency Services, etc. The Trek raised \$61,000 which will be shared between projects in East Timor nominated by the two groups. Two major joint projects will be the creation of an Adult Learning Centre and a senior high school in Hatobuilico.

From the organisers of the Trek:

"An event like Trek for Timor needs lots of volunteers, both in the lead-up and on the day.

From just a small group of volunteers, our team grew and grew. Marshals trekked out to the far reaches of the course, armed with first aid kits and words of encouragement; the registration teams set up their tables before the sun had risen; checkpoint helpers became cheer leaders; St John volunteers tended to blisters and scrapes; and the volunteers from WICEN kept the radios rolling and communicated news across the course.

Without all these wonderful teams of volunteers, we would have been lost. We salute you all for your hard work, enthusiasm and sense of fun. We look forward to seeing you at the next Trek for Timor. Thank you." Trek for Timor Committee

58 scholarships established for young women in East Timor

Over this period our scholarships program has grown from 30 to 58 women and girls participating in secondary and tertiary education. One of the students Elsa Pinto completed her Agricultural degree earlier this year receiving the top mark in her course. She is now working for a fair trade coffee company and looking at doing her Masters in the next couple of years. Elsa writes:

Dear Sisters, thank you so much for your support. Without the scholarship I don't think I could have completed my studies. Not many girls get to complete their degree. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Elsa Pinto

Tais Cooperatives

Tais production is a method of traditional weaving undertaken by women using a back strap loom. Tais fulfils an important role in East Timorese culture with each district having its' own distinctive tais colours and designs. As part of each visit to Timor a consignment of tais is purchased for sale in Australia. Tais sales not only provide an income for women and their families but help to maintain culture in what is an increasingly globalised world.

Women Veteran's Centre

In 2006 BMETS provided \$1500 for the completion of the Women Veteran's Centre in Bugoro village, approximately 20 kms from Dili. Over the years we have supported the Veteran Women's group to initiate and complete a number of projects. Under the leadership of Mana Kassian, there are now four preschools in the area – Buguro, Kietcho and Borletti. Currently the preschools are attended by

92 children. BMETS has provided funds for the purchase of readers, materials, furnishings and a small retainer for 6 volunteer teachers.

BMETS, through APSC-TL, employs community leader and Veteran, Mana Kassian, as a Rural Outreach Worker in Bugoro. Mana Kassian is supported and resourced by APSC-TL and is a major resource to the village and the Veteran Women's Centre.

Supporting the work of Kirsty Sword-Gusmao

Since 2005 BMETS has been working with Kirsty Sword-Gusmao's Alola Foundation. Initially we did this through the sale of gift vouchers in support of the Alola Mother and Baby packs promoting maternal and infant health. More recently we have contributed directly to Kirsty's welfare fund which provides direct relief to families experiencing severe hardship. In total we have provided over \$30,000 in funding.

Library & Literacy projects

BMETS has supported a number of literacy, library and learning projects across Timor in the past twelve months. We have provided over \$5,000 to the Maliana Library and Learning Centre to purchase resources and equipment. We contributed \$5,000 to the Biblioteka Ermera (Library) in Gleno which was opened this year.

We are currently working with Kirsty Sword-Gusmao in her capacity as UN Goodwill Ambassador for Education supporting the development of her literacy program the "Mother Tongue" Project which aims to address literacy in local languages and dialects in a number of districts in Timor Leste.

Strengthening our Partnerships and Knowledge Base

We were pleased to host a visit from Kate Owen. Kate has worked in East Timor as a volunteer for a number of years and has a wealth of experience across a range of areas including health and education. Kate is from Ballarat and has been part of the Ballarat Friendship Group. Kate was able to shed light on the challenges and opportunities when working in Timor. This was particularly beneficial when both Jude and Gail were heading off on their volunteer placements.

In this period our sister group in the Hunter "HETS" held an information evening on Timor Oil and Gas with two speakers, Geoff McKee and Tomas Freitas. A small but keen audience attended raising \$400 which they directed to BMETS activities.

This year we were approached by Dr Gabriela Coronado and Dr Wayne Fallon from the University of Western Sydney's School of Management. Wayne and Gabriela are interested in grass roots approaches to international development. They have developed a partnership with BMETS and will be carrying out a research project in the coming year that will be of mutual benefit. From the BMETS perspective we hope that this partnership will assist us to refine our practice. We are a bunch of enthusiastic and committed women however we recognize that greater awareness of 'best practice' models in international development will enhance decision-making and the work we do.

BMETS Membership

In September 2011 we were very saddened by the passing of our long time member Megan Llewellyn. Megan is survived by her partner, Anne Llewellyn, who continues to be an active member. We wish to acknowledge both Megan's contribution to the group as well as Anne's profound loss. One of our Sisters Bev Plaizier wrote the following upon learning of Megan's passing:

It was heart warming to hear of Megan's amazing life experiences. Our daughter Heather interviewed Pixie O'Harris (Megan's mother) over a few visits for an Art College project. It's a little bit of a jig-saw that I'm sad I didn't know about.; quite an amazing woman from a family of great talent. It was moving to hear Mary and others reflect on Megan's wonderful life. I wish I knew more about these parts of Megan's life. A very poignant time.

We were pleased to welcome new members this year. Gillian, Julie and Susan, it's great to have you in the group! We look forward to working side by side with you at garage sales and book sales.

Visits to Timor

Visiting East Timor helps to build and enrich our understanding of the complexity and beauty of life across the Timor Sea. It is also a powerful way of maintaining the friendship connection between our women's communities in the Blue Mountains and in Timor. Over the past twelve months a number of trips to Timor have occurred. Anne McKenzie and Fiona Christian were fortunate to spend several months researching their Hatobuilico Walking Trails tourism booklet in 2010. Sisters Gabrielle, Lina, Sheila, Jasmine and Mary also visited; with Mary making a number of trips in this period.

Fundraising

Fundraising continues to be an important part of the work of BMETS and something that encourages and keeps women involved. Members derive great satisfaction through this aspect of group participation as it is a very practical and rewarding way that women can work with other women both here and in Australia and East Timor.

- **Garage sales** – We held quarterly garage sales at two locations – Blackheath and Wentworth Falls. Over this period around \$16,000 was raised through garage sales.
- **Annual Book Sale** - This year's book sale was held on 30th and 31st October and raised over \$11,000. This is an annual event that provides significant project funds.
- **Union Aid Abroad** – APHEDA (Australian People for Health Education and Development). BMETS has a partnership with APHEDA which enables cash donations to be tax deductible. A variety of individuals have contributed funds through APHEDA this year – we acknowledge and thank you for your generosity. Through this mechanism we have raised about \$40,000 this year.
- **Street stalls** – BMETS participate in street stalls as events such as Leura Fair and Winter Magic. Coffee and tea sales, raffles and awareness-raising are the main objective of these activities. This year some productive sisters prepared chutney for sale at Winter Magic. This was a big success with all jars selling!
- **Raffles** – Through the generous donation of prizes by local residents and businesses, BMETS holds raffles every two to three months. Raffles raise about \$3,000 each year.

Up-coming events are advertised on our blog: <http://www.bmeasttimorsisters.blogspot.com/>

Blue Mountains Union Council Inc.

In the last year we have held several “Politics in the Pub” events to achieve our aims of promoting unionism and social justice. We couldn’t have done it without our supporters. Thank you to MCRN for covering our insurance, Blackburns Family Hotel in Katoomba for providing us with a venue at no cost and our speakers who have been extremely generous with their time and expertise.

John Sutton, National Secretary, CFMEU spoke about the corrosive effect on our society of sham contract arrangements and casualisation of the workforce. Ged Kearney, President of the ACTU, expressed the same concerns on behalf of the ACTU. It seems that no matter which industry or topic our speakers address, the impact of increasing “flexible” work arrangements are concerns often expressed by our audiences and our speakers. Our hospitality survey is still on our website and we encourage local hospitality workers to take the survey.

Gary Zadkovich, Deputy President NSW Teachers' Federation addressed the Rod Brooks Memorial Forum about the disparity between funding of public and private schools & the National Curriculum. Copies of “We Are All Born Free”, a child’s version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were donated to Mount Victoria and Blackheath Public Schools. Mount Victoria also received a copy of “The Island” by Armin Greder. Two Katoomba High School students received a Rod Brooks scholarship of \$1000 each.

The “Meet the Candidates -State Election Special” drew a large audience. The popularity of these events demonstrates that the community is hungry for personal, “unspun” communication with their potential representatives & the opportunity to ask them about their policies. These events have contributed to the health of our democracy by making our representatives more approachable and increasing community engagement with politics and politicians. Regrettably the Coalition candidate declined our invitation to speak however we thank Trish Doyle (Labor), Janet Mays (Independent) and Kerrin O’Grady (Greens) for having the courage to answer the questions posed, without notice, by our audience. Positive feedback from the participants indicates our Candidates’ events may lead to more “town hall” style meetings in the future.

“Meet the Candidates” was also an opportunity to begin our active support for the “Better Services for a Better State” campaign of Unions NSW. Our support will continue for some time.

Ged Kearney, Stella Topaz of the NSW Nurses Association and Quality Aged Care Action Group (QACAG), Annette Peters, Registered Nurse & member of QACAG and Shirley Ross Shurley, Aged Care Trainer, member of QACAG and BMUC spoke about the Aged Care industry at the “Because We Care, Quality Aged Care for Older Australians” “Politics in the Pub”.

Their different perspectives demonstrated that while the primary role of Unions is to improve conditions for workers, Unions and their members are collectively engaged in improving conditions for the whole community even when there is no direct benefit to Union members. This pursuit of social justice distinguishes Unions from other lobby groups, such as industry groups, which are only focused on obtaining a benefit their own members. "Because We Care" is not only an apt title for the Nurses' Unions' aged care campaign, it is also a good description of much of the Trade Union movement.

"Because We Care" also highlighted another issue which should be an historical oddity, the undervaluing of so called "women's work". The Q&A session promoted discussion of the disparity of wages and conditions between the acute care and aged care sectors, with the conclusion that united collective action in the acute care sector has been successful in winning better wages and conditions for acute care nurses. The fragmented nature of the aged care industry makes it extremely difficult but no less important for unions to organise and raise standards for workers and carers.

We have had a website and blog, www.bmucinc.com & <http://bmuc.blogspot.com/for> some time. We can also now be found on FaceBook & followed @bmucinc on Twitter as well.

It all happens with our great team of Members and community support.

Debra Smith

Secretary

Blue Mountains Unions Council Inc

29/8/2011

Treasurer's Report

The Audited Financial Statement for the 2010/2011 shows that MCRN is in a solid financial position despite showing a \$17,877 deficit. The deficit is showing against the Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters (BMETS) due to expenditure across many newly initiated new projects, including a newly implemented significant scholarship program and significant infrastructure expenditure. The deficit in this financial year was also impacted by the Mental Health Resourceful Living project running slightly over budget. BMETS is redressing their deficit currently, and this years deficit will not impact MCRN's financial situation in an ongoing way.

Additional funds were received from the NSW Department of Human Services/ Community Services as a one off grant, enabling the purchase of much needed office equipment including a new photocopier and new computers for the service.

2010/11 was a busy year with projects being undertaken or auspiced by MCRN including Pink Mountains, So Gay So What Forum, the Building Project for the new kitchen in the meeting room, BMETS and the Resourceful Living Mental Health Directory.

Review indicates that all MCRN staff leave entitlements and all our legal obligations can be met financially.

After approximately 15 years of service as MCRN's auditor, Ann Hoffman retired. This year's audit was attended by William Tomiczek and Associates. The audit process went extremely smoothly. William was very impressed by the level of accuracy reflected in the documentation, the timely manner in which our accounts were audit ready, and the professional approach taken by the Organisation to our financial management.

I have joined the Organisation only recently in capacity as Treasurer and I am looking forward to working with the staff and Management Committee.

Tracey Willow

Treasurer

