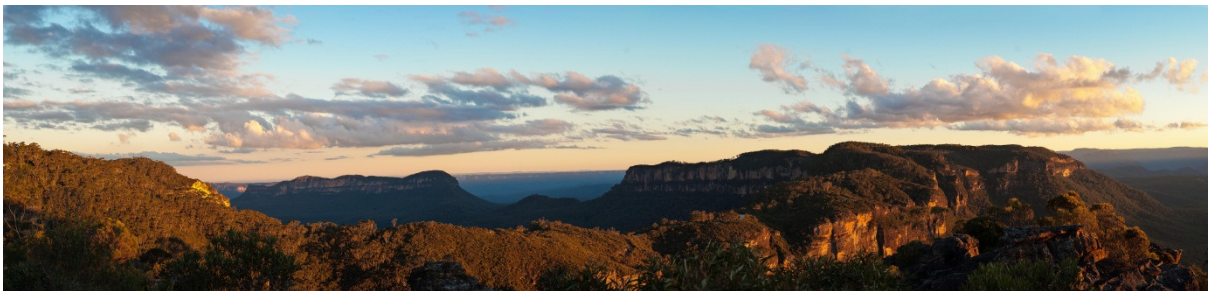


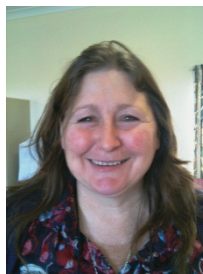


ANNUAL REPORT

2011-12



Chairperson's Report



The year has flown, and it is once again time to prepare our Annual Report. In my fourth year as Chairperson, it is a pleasure to provide a report on the activities of Mountains Community Resource Network.

The role of MCRN is to act as a local peak, representing and advocating on behalf of local community organisations. The Blue Mountains is well known for having a variety of well-connected local community organisations whose capacities for leadership ensure a vibrant and responsive community with each village or area having its own unique flavour. This makes the role of a local peak like MCRN interesting and rewarding as we work together to address social justice issues in our community.

This year commenced with the employment of Judy Spencer as MCRN Coordinator. Judy brought a wealth of experience gained from a background in managing health, housing and other programs in the government and non-government sectors. Judy was employed on a temporary basis, concluding her contract in March this year. We are most grateful to Judy for her gentle and effective leadership during this period.

In March we were fortunate to appoint Kris Newton a MCRN Manager. Kris has a broad range of experience gained from a number of areas and brings with her a capacity for critical and strategic thinking. We look forward with excitement to Kris consolidating the progress of MCRN's strategic plan, connecting with local and regional services and groups and familiarising herself with the burning issues challenging the sector in the Blue Mountains.

We also farewelled Suzanne Langford, who was employed on a temporary basis into the Support role. This newly created position is critical for a small organisation like ours to make best use of technologies, available time and resources. In October we were pleased to announce the employment of Casilde Blancodini into the role. Casilde has a background in the arts. Casilde's role will involve developing a communications strategy for MCRN and the sector and to finalise the web-site content and tools.

It was a particularly sad occasion when Kay Spriggs announced her resignation in June 2012. After nearly twelve years with MCRN Kay has left MCRN to work at Springwood Neighbourhood Centre. As MCRN's Finance Worker Kay has left the organisation with efficient and accurate systems - she will be missed.

In February MCRN hosted a governance forum aimed at assisting member groups to identify the governance issues they found challenging and ways to address them. The forum provided an opportunity for management committees and staff to work together to build a shared understanding of the challenges in today's environment.

Over the previous year one issue that has challenged the sector has been the transition to the Social and Community Services, Homecare and Disability Services (SCHCADS) award, effective July 1 2012. All services had to review and reclassify all positions. This was a task challenging

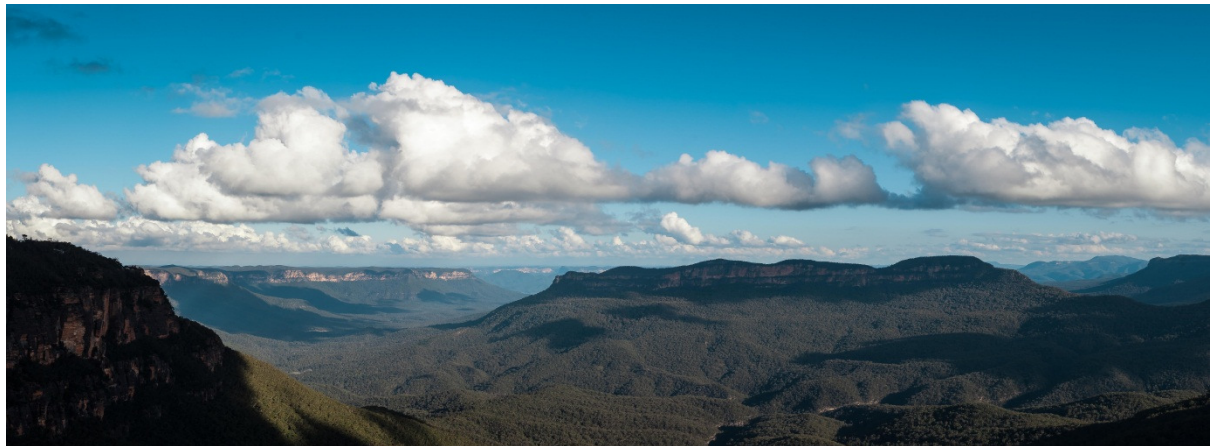
most Management Committees as they balanced the consideration of worker roles, service needs, equity and budgetary issues. We eagerly await the announcement of the Equal Pay rates on December 1.

Over the past year we have continued to strengthen our links with other local and regional peaks. By doing so we aim to stay abreast of the issues, working towards an informed and proactive sector, promoting best practice where ever possible. We have been working on our membership strategy to ensure we are a representative organisation with a clear mandate for leadership in the sector. We will continue to work on this throughout 2012-2013.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the other Management Committee members. MCRN is a small NGO with a very big brief. The challenges for staff are enormous and the need for strategic thinking and vision are critical to our success and sustainability. We could not do the work without a committed and talented bunch of individuals on the Committee. In particular I would like to thank Kath Harrison, Toni Quigley, Deb Allen, and Kevin Hardwick. I would also like to acknowledge Sue Morrison who resigned early in the year to focus on her studies.

It is with pleasure that I submit this year's Chairperson's report.

Suzie van Opdorp



Manager's Report:

MCRN Team:

I would like to pay particular tribute to the MCRN team in 2011/12, especially for their stalwart support during a year of significant change, and their assistance while I got myself 'up to speed'.

Meredith Osbourne officially resigned from her position as Coordinator in December 2011.

In the interim, Judy Spencer had been undertaking the Coordinator's role in a part-time capacity, and maintained this until I commenced in the new full-time Manager's position in mid-March 2012. I wish to pay a heart-felt tribute to Judy – she provided a fantastic ongoing briefing before I commenced in the role full-time. This is the most useful and comprehensive hand-over I have ever had for a new role; and I appreciated the opportunity this provided me to orient myself, get introduced to many of the key players in the sector, and generally get my 'feet on ground'.

Suzanne Langford resigned from the Service Support Person position at the end of 2011, and Casilde Blancondini was subsequently appointed to this role. Many thanks to Casilde (relatively new herself) for her support over my orientation period, and her keen interest in developing more effective communications to our members and the sector.

After nearly 12 years with MCRN, Kay Spriggs left the Finance Officer position to take up a new role. We appreciate her dedicated, cheerful and efficient service over this time, and can think of no higher accolade than that given by our Auditor: "The financial records have been maintained very professionally and accurately and Kay is to be commended for her good work. I was impressed by [her] accurate and timely preparation of financial statements."

As Suzie has indicated in her Chair's Report, all staff positions were required to be re-classified in the transition from the old SACS Award to the new SCHADS Award – this was undertaken, and a decision taken by the Management Committee, before the deadline of 30 June 2012.

Communications:

MCRN's role as the central information hub for the Blue Mountains community sector has been strengthened this year. A new Twitter feed commenced; which also appears on our website, and a new-look newsletter. Significant work was undertaken in the background early-middle 2012 on refreshing the MCRN "brand". Casilde was also busy re-vamping the website and the weekly *eBulletin* - with the latter launched toward the end of the financial year, garnering positive comments on the value and format of our communications.

Training:

During the year we hosted:

Governance Forum on theme of Ethical Decision-Making and Good Governance held in February 2012;

Suicide Prevention workshop (sponsored by RAMHI) in May 2012;

Practical Assistance Forum, held in early October 2011, which was very well received. There were workshops looking at cases, and a panel presentation with representatives from emergency relief

organisations(including the St Vincent DePaul, Anglicare, and the Blue Mountains financial counsellor and the NILS project). Follow up from that day will include some ongoing work to look at the issue around lack of services being opened on Fridays; and the possibility of an online Community Resource/database being developed (through MCRN).

INTERAGENCIES:

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). Thanks to some solid planning, each group has a clear direction and blueprint for collaborative action.

Homelessness and Housing Action Group (BMHAG): A new, interagency-type, collaboration was also trialled this year – the Homelessness & Housing Action group. The first meeting of the Blue Mountains Homelessness and Housing Action Group was held in October 2011. There was a considerable discussion about the ongoing purpose of the group (there were suggestions put forward that perhaps the group could focus on specific issues (eg one of the major current issues is around Temporary Accommodation and the reforms in NSW Housing policies and programs). It was agreed that it was important that Wentworth Housing be at the table if it was to continue. Unfortunately, this proved not to be viable, and the group considered disbanding.

Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI): this year developed Terms of Reference. The RAMHI Organising Group (ROG) generally met before each actual meeting to prepare the agenda and ensure we have the right guest speakers etc. – with grateful thanks to Lyn Pagan and Anne Fitzgerald for their enthusiastic commitment to the ROG and RAMHI. A questionnaire was developed for the November 2011 meeting to get feedback about RAMHI and help set future directions. It was agreed that MCRN would permanently Chair this meeting, with the Service Support person (Casilde) taking the Minutes. RAMHI received \$800 from CDSE funding in 2011-2012, and it was agreed that it would be used to subsidise a training session run by Wesley Mission on Suicide Prevention (in May 2012). This workshop was very successful, with participants giving positive feedback, and proposing a more intensive two-day follow-up (if RAMHI can find a way to finance this). RAMHI members were also very much interested in a DVD on the 'Open Dialogue' therapy system from Finland, and – courtesy of member Col Jennings – several presentations were made on different days in different locations, to ensure it was available to as many members as wished to view it. This 'non-medical model' approach was the springboard for the development of a clearer advocacy charter for the group.

Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI): BMCI is the generalist Interagency for the Blue Mountains community sector. This year, several options have been trialled for the format of BMCI meetings: one trialled early in 2012 was break-outs into small subgroups looking at specific issues (eg Youth, Housing, Mental Health) before a more general discussion. Later in the year, BMCI trialled guest speakers at each meeting. BMCI adopted a Terms of Reference, and agreed that membership of BMCI was the prerogative of MCRN Members. The Interagency also set in train the development of a Briefing Portfolio of Fact Sheets about issues in the local community, the community sector itself, etc. for the new Council. Local Member Roza Sage attended the November 2011 meeting; and gave an undertaking to attend later in 2012.

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. In addition, we have joined with the broader Metro-West peak bodies (WSCF, CRN), representatives from Blacktown City Council and from Department of Family & Community Services (Community Builders) in evaluating outcomes to date, and planning towards the next three-year period.

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, and the Blue Mountains Trade Union Council. You can read about their extraordinary work elsewhere in this report. We also supported the *One in Five* Creative Arts Association, showcasing the talent of people in our community living with and recovering from mental illness.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the MCRN Management Committee during a period of significant change. Without their passionate commitment, their strategic thinking and their encouragement, MCRN - and the community sector itself - would be so much the poorer. At a personal level, I sincerely thank the members of the Executive for their personal and professional support in a period of transition. Thank you.

Kris Newton



Blue Mountains Reconciliation Quilt displayed in the MCRN Meeting Room

BLUE MOUNTAINS EAST TIMOR SISTERS PROJECT

Report on Achievements 2011- 2012



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.

BMETS recognises that it has a unique role to play in responding to the needs of women in East Timor. Because we are a small community-based organisation we can respond in an immediate and direct way. BMETS works on projects that meet women's immediate needs whilst at the same time enhance women's capacity for the future. 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 (MCRN) 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, Kris Newton and MCRN Management Committee for their ongoing support since the inception of the Sisters Project way back in 2004.

This report provides a summary of the work of the group during 2010 - 2011.

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 two part-time community development workers (Laura and Beba) and a financial management worker (Odete) who are part of the Asia Pacific Support Collective Timor Leste (APSC-TL). Under the umbrella of APSC-TL and with support from BMETS, Beba Sequeira and Laura Abrantes undertake community development work in Dili and the rural areas of Timor Leste such as Bugoro in Liquica, Bobonaro, Covalima and Hatobulico. Beba and Laura 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 works 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, Beba and Laura work 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. Mana Kassian now manages 5 kindergartens, a community garden, a veteran's centre which undertake weaving projects and a restaurant business.

It gave us great pleasure to see Laura invited to speak in New York at the United Nations about how women's situation in Timor Leste has advanced against CEDAW. The Sisters were proud to have provided support to Laura to undertake her Masters degree, and then to see her publish her thesis on the topic of the peak women's organization in TL – Rede Feto.

This year saw the publication and launch of the English version of *"Secrecy – Key To Independence"*. This book was one of the first projects funded by BMETS and the launch was the culmination of 8 years hard work on the part of Beba and Laura. The significance of this book in recording the stories of women veterans involved in the independence struggle was indeed cause for celebration in Timor and in Australia. It was fitting that Beba and Laura were guests of NSW Parliamentarian, Helen Westwood, who launched the book in Sydney in May. Beba and Laura also launched the book in the Hunter and were the guests of the Sydney Writers Festival.

Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Work As AVI Volunteers in Timor Leste

One of the highlights of the year was following our Sisters, Gail Clifford and Judy Finch, on 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 sent regular reports of her progress and the Sisters have been able to assist with the provision of funding to purchase children's readers in Tetun and dictionaries that make a difference when setting up a library and learning centre.

Gail's emails to the group reminded the Sisters of the day to day challenges of getting around in Timor. 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. We were also able to enjoy some of the celebration of volunteer life as we heard about the progress of projects and other development work.

Judy Finch arrived in Timor in March 2011 where she worked with APSC-TL and the community in Hatobuilico for twelve months. Judy worked with APSC-TL around capacity building and sustainability; in particular, she has worked with them to undertake strategic planning and development of APSC-TL's strategic plan; she researched funding options and developed proposals; she also worked with APSC-TL members and staff to review their operational structure.

Judy returned to Australia in March this year and Gail returned in May. They were both sad to leave Timor but also glad to be able to share the learning and the experience of volunteering in Timor Leste. AVI are currently looking for a volunteer to work in Hato Builico and both Judy and Gail encourage other intrepid souls to consider taking up this challenge, reminding the Sisters that you get back much more than you give.

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. Since completing her studies Elsa has worked for a fair trade coffee company, with the mainstream non-government organisation, FONGTIL, and is now undertaking further post graduate studies in partnership with a university in Japan. Upon graduation Elsa contacted BMETS:

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

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 5 four preschools in the area – Buguro, Kaitehoo and Borletti. Currently the preschools are attended by 225 children. BMETS has provided funds for the purchase of readers, materials, furnishings and a small retainer for the 6 volunteer teachers. The kindergarten building at Kaiteho is being rebuilt this year.

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

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. We are aware of walkers visiting the village and climbing Mt Ramelau after discovering the booklet elsewhere.

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 were allocated in part to the building and staffing of Adult Learning Centre in Hatobuilico. We are pleased to report that the building is a wonderful achievement, and staff are now employed. A motorbike was also purchased to enable staff to travel around the District and into Dili.

Trek For Timor

In September 2011 it was Kangaroo Valley's turn to host the Trek for Timor. A number of Mountain women and Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters entered a team, La Lao Halimar. They walked hard and got through the challenge.

A message from Anne McKenzie and Mary Waterford following the walk:

We may not have been the fastest (40/47 teams) but we think La Lao Halimar sang the loudest, had the most fun and, to top it off, had the NUMBER 1 support team at Saturday's Kangaroo Valley Trek for Timor! We started singing on Friday night and didn't stop until we went to bed Saturday night.... yes some of it was tuneless but all in good spirits and well led by our woman of song Josie!

In March this year planning began in earnest for the Blue Mountains trek which was planned for 15th September 2012. We look forward to reporting on this next year.

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.

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 \$40,000 in funding.

Library & Literacy projects

BMETS has supported a number of literacy, library and learning projects across Timor in the past twelve months. Working closely with Kirsty Sword Gusmao's Mother Tongue project:

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.

BMETS also supported the work of Beth and Dan Gilfillan through the **Emera Biblioteka project**. Beth and Dan are now building their third library. In the first twelve months they recorded 35,000 visits to the Gleno library.

Strengthening our Partnerships and Knowledge Base

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. We will work with Wayne and Gabriela to hold a national forum for East Timor Friendship and support groups at UWS in July this year. There hasn't been a forum like this for quite some time so we anticipate it will be well attended.

BMETS Membership

Although the Blue Mountains is a small community, BMETS has sustained a strong and active membership with new members this year including Wendy, Verity, Barbara, Kathy and Carole. We encourage women to join the group. It is both rewarding and a big learning experience for members.

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. In the past year Mary Waterford, Anne McKenzie and Gabrielle Kirby visited Timor Leste.

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 in Australia and in East Timor.

- **Garage sales** – We held quarterly garage sales in Leura. Over this period around \$16,000 was raised through garage sales. Thank you, Jane, for the use of your home.
- **Annual Book Sale** - This year's book sale raised over \$13,000. Congratulations Ruth, Wendy and Jenny.
- **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.
- **Street stalls** – BMETS participate in street stalls at events such as Leura Fair and Winter Magic. Coffee and tarts 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 Unions Council Inc: Annual Report 2011/12

Introduction: In the past year Politics in the Pub has continued to thrive in the Blue Mountains - we have staged a number of well attended events covering some of the big issues of our times - from protection of the environment to the privatisation of power generation; from the influence of the media mogul Rupert Murdoch to the challenges to the public education system; along with a stimulating talk by one of Australia's leading historians on the lessons of labour history. It's fair to say that none of these events would have been possible without the continuing support of MCRN for covering our insurance and the Blackburn Family for once again providing us with a suitable venue free of charge.

The main debates we staged during 2011/12:

The Lessons of Labor History: The distinguished author and historian **Humphrey McQueen** drew on half a century of research and writing to present an invigorating and at times challenging analysis of Labor history. **Kim Sattler**, secretary of Unions ACT, gave a progress report on plans for a National Museum of Labour, which is to be established in Canberra.

Gotcha: Murdoch Exposed! This debate was led by the authors of two recent books investigating Murdoch's media empire - its sometimes illegal reporting methods and its political influence. Speakers were **Alex Mitchell**, the former political editor of the Sun Herald, who started his journalistic career on Murdoch papers, had recently published **Come the Revolution: A Memoir** and **David McKnight**, Assistant Professor at UNSW had just published **Rupert Murdoch: An Investigation of Political Power**.

Their speeches were followed by a vigorous Q&A session heightened by the background of mounting public disgust in Australia and Britain where Rupert Murdoch had closed Britain's top selling newspaper, **The News of the World** in the wake of the burgeoning phone hacking scandal.

Power, Guns 'n Money - Privatising power to shoot in the parks: This event brought together two separate but closely linked issues. **Mark Lennon**, Secretary of Unions NSW talked about the consequences of the NSW Government's decision to further privatise electricity, warning that similar experiences interstate had led to steeply rising electricity bills. **Lachlan Garland**, President of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society talked about the impact of the Government's deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party, allowing shooting in range of national parks in exchange for getting their vote to privatise power. The bringing together of different issues on the same platform attracted a more diverse audience.

Education The Equaliser: The Rod Brooks Memorial focussed on the great challenges faced by the TAFE and schools system after the state government's announcements of big spending cuts.

Phillip Chadwick, President of the NSW Teachers Federation, **Michael de Wall**, NSW Teachers Federation organiser as speakers were joined by **Keely Tregillgas** a student teacher from Springwood.

The education forum is staged annually in memory of **Rod Brooks**, a well known Blue Mountains teacher and community activist, who taught many students the art of public speaking and was passionately committed to the importance of free speech. On behalf of the Brooks family, the BMUC presents the \$2,000 Rod Brooks scholarship annually to two students of Katoomba High School - divided equally between a girl and a boy - to help them further their education. Money

raised at Politics in the Pub raffles is also used to buy books to donate to school libraries in the Blue Mountains.

The future: While the concept of Politics in the Pub is very much old style debating, we believe the attendances over the past year show there is still a demand for these kind of events. Simultaneously we recognise the importance of engaging with new media - in this regard the energy of our Secretary Debra Smith in using social networking to publicise these functions through Facebook and Twitter, and giving the debates a new life through videoing speakers and placing them on You Tube is of growing importance for our future. As is the work of Mark Gregory in running the Blue Mountains Union Council website and blog.

Kerry Cooke, President, Blue Mountains Union Council





Pink Mountains is the LGBTI community information website for the Blue Mountains. 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 website (www.pinkmountains.com.au) editor for the past 4 years. What started out as a purely information site has progressed (not without controversy) into a more LGBTI awareness & activist site, with ten people sometimes involved in an informal committee.

We also have a very popular Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/pinkmountains>. This is proving very dynamic and is now so popular that a separate website hardly seems needed.

MCRN auspices the group, holding any money received by us in their accounts, and when something needs to be paid a request is made for a cheque to be made out. (Pink Mountains can only have a cheque account if we are incorporated by law.) Thanks to Kay at MCRN for handling our accounts and book-keeping, and MCRN for auspicing us.

This year we have done the following:

- Pink Mountains helped organise & promote IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia) rainbow flag-raising ceremony, with a committee organised by Janet Mays. This is held internationally on the 17th May every year, it is held in remembrance of the day when homosexuality was removed internationally from the list of mental disorders. There was a crowd of about 120 for the flag-raising, which included several speakers, and free morning tea was provided by BMCC. This will be an annual event. Thanks to BMCC for their support.
- 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. We have the use of the whole poster display area.
- We had a half-page advertisement in the Gazette which cost over \$900. The organising committee approached neighbourhood centres and other community groups to advertise IDAHO. These groups each paid \$50 or more towards a half page advertisement in the Gazette. Thanks to all those organisations for the generous support.
- Some members of Pink Mountains have started a mens social group that meets on the second Sunday of the month for a BYO lunch at 10 Station St Katoomba, usually for a BBQ. This is something men can attend who work during the week but would like to

make friendships. The only other social group is The Three Sisters Social Group for LGBTI people which meets only on a Tuesday night for dinner. There are quite a few women's groups promoted on Pink Mountains website but not much for men, so some gender equality is a good thing. The age group for the men's group varies from 19 to 70 years old. We have had speakers from places like ACON and LGBTI History Group and we hope to have more. The number of men who come who seem quite isolated and lonely is surprising. We had a call from a man who plans to come who has never been to any gay social group in his life - he was 62 years old. Numbers vary from month to month; the July meeting had 10 guys attend a BBQ.

- We took part in the Winter Magic Parade again this year, with a walking group providing visibility for the LGBTI community and promoting marriage equality. We had really good responses from the huge crowd. We carried banners and rainbow flags.
- Pink Mountains organises and promotes working bees (through the website & Facebook) at the Medlow Bath HIV AIDS Memorial Park.
- Anti-homophobia and LGBTI awareness posters are now on display at Mid-Mountains Neighbourhood Center, Springwood Neighbourhood Centre maybe at Blackheath & Katoomba, MCRN/Lawson Library - all supplied by us. There were none before this past year. The visibility of our diverse community needs some promotion as well as making statements for equal marriage rights and anti-homophobia messages. It is also a welcome message to anyone LGBTI who visit community places that promote social justice issues.
- Over the June long weekend, Pink Mountains, with the expert experience of Jonathan Llewellyn assisted in promoting 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 Melone who organised this event.
- A film fund raiser was held at Scenic World organised by Jonathan as well.
- An advocacy group for LGBTI elders living in nursing homes or getting help at home is being discussed and hopefully a committee will be formed. A few people have expressed interest.

