

Australian Federation of University Women

A Voice for Graduate Women



Newsletter

ABN: 93 656 106

863

Registered
Incorporated Assoc.

Y15762-15

www.afuw.org.au

March 2008

Electronic Delivery for the Newsletter

At the March Council Meeting it was decided to send future Newsletters electronically to those willing, or indeed anxious, to receive it in that format. There are reasons of economy for this, and we would like you to take up the option if possible, but we realise that it won't suit all members and will continue to deliver hard copy to those who need it.

ACTION NEEDED: Please help to get the system working smoothly so that we know how to deliver the July Newsletter to you! Notify the Membership Registrar, Wendy McCallum, by 30 April, whether you want the newsletter by email or post. You can email her at wmccallum@iinet.net.au or write to her at 39 Gardon Rise, Gwelup, WA 6018.

From the President's Diary

Life has been busy since the October 2007 Newsletter, not least because of the flurry of activity after the December election of a new Government. This had to be dealt with while maintaining activities such as representing AFUW on the organising committee of Melbourne's Sleepsafe Breakfast, a Project 50 function for White Ribbon Day (our partners in Project 50 are BPW (Business and Professional Women), NCW (National Council of Women), Soroptimists and Zonta); attending the AGM of the Melbourne Community Foundation, which featured the work of the AFUW-Vic scholarship programme; rising early for the UNIFEM Breakfast on International Women's Day and being one of the speakers at the Victorian Women's Trust function celebrating 100 years of suffrage for women in Victoria.

From 14 to 18 February I was in Geneva for the IFUW Status of Women Committee Meeting. There was much discussion on adapting the Programme for Action to the Board's recent policy of a more intense focus on education issues, also on planning for the 2010 Conference in Mexico – there will be fewer Seminars and Workshops, but scheduled separately.

Meanwhile, Council business and, to a lesser extent, WomenSpeak matters kept up a regular buzz of emails, but more of these below.

Council Meeting 8 March

The Future of AFUW was much on the mind of those at Council. It was good to hear that our immediate financial anxieties in relation to the Tax Office had been resolved and that the efforts of the Treasurer, Deborah Haydon, had secured AFUW tax exempt status. The Treasurer had less comforting news when she pointed to our declining membership and reported her calculation of an 800 membership as the absolute minimum required for financial viability.

The decline in membership numbers was only one factor in the document written by Margaret James (AFUW-Vic President) proposing a radical re-structuring of AFUW through dissolution of the State Associations. Some members will have been involved in meetings of S/TAs to discuss this proposal. The outcome of those consultations was that no S/TA was prepared at this stage to support such a radical change, preferring to make greater efforts to increase membership and the efficiency of our operations. Nonetheless, the Executive felt obliged to say that, if membership numbers have not improved by the end of this year, it will be necessary to have proposals for constitutional change in readiness for the 2009 Triennial Conference. So this is indeed an SOS to all members: please try your recruiting skills and bring in at least one new member.

Council accepted that there were many valid points of criticism in the circulated document. Almost all responses favoured a change of name to something like Australian Graduate Women. A motion to change the name in a similar way was narrowly defeated in 2003, but it seems as if a name-change moment may have arrived. Members will receive more documentation on this before the Triennial Conference, the only occasion on which it can be resolved. One might comment, however, that if, as a result of the changes to IFUW membership rules passed at the IFUW Conference, the current Working Party on AFUW membership rules convened by Kathryn Seymour recommends a broadening of these to include some graduates of tertiary institutions other than universities, then a name change will be logically necessary.

The need to improve communications, especially through the website, was also generally agreed, and a Working Party on the website has been set up under the convenership of Juliette Woods, whose website for the AFUW Status of Women Committee should be visited by all members.

The New Political Scene: Submissions, Consultations, Working Groups

The newly elected Government has swung into action with a number of consultations. The first of these was Treasurer Wayne Swann's call for community input to budget planning. AFUW's submission in January made a number of recommendations, chief of which was an increase in education funding to match OECD levels, with special attention to the situation of universities. Other matters stressed were the need to ensure equitable access to education, to alleviate student poverty and to address continuing impediments to women advancing to senior levels.

These education issues also featured in our submission to the consultation called by Elizabeth Broderick, the newly appointed Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner, along with concerns for income equality, the economic situation of elderly women, the role of things like childcare and maternity leave in work-life balance and the need to put an end to domestic violence and sexual harassment. Thanks to Juliette Woods, who, with members of the Status of Women Committee, was largely responsible for preparing this submission.

Both submissions can be viewed on the website, where they will in due course be joined by submissions to the Productivity Commission's enquiry into paid maternity leave and the Higher Education Review initiated by Julia Gillard in her role as Minister for Education.

The drive for paid maternity leave has been led by Marie Coleman of the National Foundation for Australian Women, who spoke about her appearance before the Productivity Commission at the recent WomenSpeak meeting, March 17 to 18 in Canberra, which May Kentish and I attended as AFUW representatives. After considerable discussion, members agreed to support universal paid

maternity leave for women in the workforce, with a government-funded income-replacement scheme with a period at least equal to ILO recommended standards. It was agreed that each organization would prepare its own submission, in order to demonstrate breadth of support for a measure described by the *Sunday Age* as 'overdebated, overcooked and overdue.'

The WomenSpeak Meeting had an hour's interview at Parliament House with Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Women and for Housing, at which we were able to put forward a wide range of concerns. The Minister is in the process of meeting each of the 4 National Secretariats, and met a week later with Security 4 Women, where we are represented by Dalma Jacobs and Mikele Barrett-Woodbridge. Both Secretariats were impressed by the readiness of the Minister to listen to what they had to say and to engage with it.

AFUW had previously secured a meeting with the Minister's Policy Adviser, Monika Wheeler, at the time of the Council Meeting. Dalma Jacobs, Tricia Blombery and I were able to raise many of the matters in the 2 AFUW submissions mentioned above, but we felt that our credibility was most firmly established when we presented Monika with a copy of *Putting Our Money Where Our Mouth Is*, the document that describes our scholarship programs. She was clearly impressed, and we took the opportunity to press for community-based scholarships to be made tax-free, on parity with those awarded by the Commonwealth Government. The other thing that impressed was Dalma's grasp of statistics, demonstrated as we took up our recurrent theme of the need for all statistics to be gender-disaggregated.

A Cross-Secretariat, Cross-Sector Working Group on Education

After seeing the submission on education made to the Treasurer by WAVE (Women in Adult and Vocational Education), I felt that women's education organizations should be doing more to cooperate with and support each other, so advances were made to WAVE and AWE (Association of Women Educators), both of which belong to the S4W Secretariat. S4W generously provided time and space during their face-to-face meeting on 26 March and members of the three groups, joined by Julia Ryan from the National Foundation for Australian Women, held a long and cordial exchange of news and views. As a result, I believe we understand much better what each organization is and does, and that the Working Group we've set up will provide a sounder and more comprehensive basis from which to advocate for a better education system in all sectors.

WomenSpeak Consultation Theme for 2008

Another important feature of the WomenSpeak March meeting was the report on the first of the consultations to be held (as part of the Secretariat's contract with the Office for Women) on the 2008 topic of 'Standing in Solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women to achieve policies and programs that meet the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia'. This theme was chosen after input from Aboriginal woman present at the October 2007 WomenSpeak meeting in Sydney. The first community consultation took place in Adelaide on 3 March and is reported to have been a great success. I have received a detailed report from Erica Jolly, one of the AFUW-SA participants. It will be available in the April AFUW-SA Newsletter, which will be on the AFUW-SA website, but if any member would like a copy immediately let me know and I can send one by email. (Contact me at jstr0036@bigpond.net.au)

AFUW Scholarships Open for Application

There are four awards in 2008: the AFUW Fellowship (sponsored for the third time by AFUW-Q), the Georgina Sweet Fellowship, the Beryl Henderson Award, and, for a final time, the E. M. Hinder Award in the field of Southeast Asian Studies. Council accepted the recommendation of the Education Trust that this account should be closed, as the capital has never been sufficient for the award to be offered more than occasionally. Eleanor Hinder, as Secretary of the Sydney University Women's Graduate Association, was one of the founders of the national Federation. Her career was most impressive, and will be featured in the 2008 issue of *Graduate Women*.

Please do visit the Scholarships Page on the website for details, and do spread the word of the scholarships among friends and acquaintances.

We are currently considering how we can meet the stringent requirements of the ATO for Deductibility Gift Recipient status. Achieving this would mean that we could solicit tax deductible donations, something especially relevant to the AFUW Fellowship, where we would like to build up the capital so that the Fellowship could be offered every year, not alternately as in the past.

Sharing Things that AFUW Members Do

The Scholarship program certainly has pride of place in our actions to support educational opportunities for girls and women, but S/TAs and Branches often have other individual and interesting projects and one-off actions that exemplify 'making a difference.' We're planning to introduce a session at the 2009 Triennial Conference where the membership can take the floor to tell us about such things, meanwhile here are some examples of what I mean:

The AFUW-NSW Southern Highlands Branch were inspired by one of their guest speakers, the Education Officer at the Berrima Corrections Centre, to make a special award of \$500 to one of the prisoners who had gained extraordinarily high results in TAFE studies undertaken on line. Recognition of achievement can be important in the rehabilitation process and we hope that this award will be both a symbolic and a practical way of making a difference in one woman's life.

Members of Sunshine Coast Branch of AFUW-Q financially support a Program of Swimming Lessons for Muslim girls. These girls, enrolled at Milpera State High School in Chelmer Brisbane, are not able to use a pool where males might be present. Sunshine Coast Branch has supported the program for three years, 2006-2008. Before the funding of this program (\$550 in 2006 and \$500.00 the other years) these girls were total non-swimmers (and not water-safe) but with no possibility of participating in the regular swimming program. Sunshine Coast Branch and Milpera are partnered in this initiative by St Aidan's Girls College (Grammar) at Corinda, which provides the pool facilities. At the end of each term, which consists of ten weekly lessons, all girls are declared water-safe and some are able to swim 25 metres. To date there have been 10 to 12 girls participating each term and that number appears to be just right. Milpera State High School was also fortunate enough to employ a swimming instructress with experience in training Muslim girls.

The Peninsula Branch of AFUW-Vic, which now has just 12 members, nonetheless raised \$600 when they invited friends to a fund-raising afternoon tea in support of the Ugandan Association of University Women's program to enable girls to complete secondary education, which requires fees. The afternoon's guest speaker, Ms Anne Sarr, was very appropriate as she spent many years in Africa, as well as in the Pacific, as a Peace Corps health services provider.

Something AFUW Members Might Do

The winner of the 1997 AFUW Fellowship, Jacqueline Broad, recently sent AFUW a copy of her book *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, which would, she declared 'never have been possible without the generous financial assistance of the AFUW'. She has gladly agreed that, given the discontinuation of the idea of an AFUW Library, her book should go to the Jessie Street Library. The Jessie Street National Women's Library has as its focus the literary and cultural heritage of women. It aims to support the fields of women's history and women's studies and especially to ensure that documents relating to Australian women's lives and activities are preserved and made accessible to readers and researchers. An independent entity, its only employee is the part-time archivist; all other workers are volunteers. The Library needs and deserves support, which can be in the form of donations of money (tax deductible) or appropriate books. Before donating books, it would be wise to check the catalogue to see that they are not already in stock. You can access the catalogue, and the Library's contact details, on this URL: <http://203.147.135.214/about.html>