



YACTION

ISSUE 2 | NOVEMBER 2017



Welcome to YAction!

YAction shines a light on advocacy of YWCA Canberra, likeminded organisations and the issues that are important to our community.

So whYAction?

Advocacy is core to what YWCA Canberra does - women must be the crucial actors in any attempt to achieve gender equality.

This publication is about bringing the voices, initiatives and efforts of activists and organisations to the fore - we hope that by doing this we will increase awareness of critical issues and present opportunities for collaboration that our members, friends and supporters can get involved in.

Ultimately, we hope to strengthen a movement that works together to achieve gender equality in the ACT, as we believe that this will take a society wide effort.

YAction is about bringing current issues to the fore that are being debated in our Parliament and in the news, and that all too often happen in the absence of those voices that are most affected.

In this edition we:

- Put a spotlight on YWCA Canberra and Office for Women's recent partnership, to deliver the ACT's inaugural Gender Equality Forum.
- Speak with formidable housing advocate Penny Lehmuis to explore her personal journey and new documentary the [New Face of Homelessness](#).
- Look at how a community response to sex ed is equipping parents and guardians to tackle damaging gender norms.
- Launch our new policy priority on bridging the digital divide amongst young people.
- Explore the Children First Alliance's shared vision for early childhood education in the ACT.
- Highlight opportunities for you to get involved in our ongoing advocacy and campaigning.



BUILDING THE CASE FOR CHANGE - BY FRANCES CRIMMINS

YWCA Canberra recently partnered with the Office for Women to deliver an inaugural Gender Equality Forum. Stemming from the mutual objective of reinvigorating efforts to progress gender equality, the event drew together leaders from ACT Government Directorates, the for purpose sector, and the private sector to make the case for change.

The forum kicked off on a stirring note with the ACT Chief Minister reflecting on the ACT's legacy of being a cultural, social and economic leader in Australia. The Chief Minister expressed his desire for the ACT to be the leading Australian jurisdiction in gender equality, and to set a precedent for the rest of the country.

Minister for Women, Yvette Berry followed by acknowledging the tireless efforts of women's organisation's that had been campaigning for decades for women's rights. But to bring about systemic change, it was now time for the wider community to play their part.

The ACT fares well across a range of gender equality indicators compared to other states and territories, which is largely explained by the relatively small gender pay gap in Australian Public Service. However, keynote speaker Virginia Haussegger, Director of the 5050/2030 Foundation, provided a sobering reminder that this does not signal an inevitable march towards progress, and that hard won gains can easily

slip away. Reflecting on the fervour and energy surrounding the affirmative action movement in the 1970's, she spoke about how we find ourselves in a situation that is not so different to the one we were in 30 years ago. Australia has steadily declined in the [global gender equality rankings](#) over the past two decades, slipping from 15 out of 115 countries in 2006 down to 35th place in 2017. The situation is most alarming when you look at the participation of women in the political sphere, with Australia currently sitting at 61 in the world. The ACT is no exception to this widening inequality: the recent Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)

reporting found that the gender pay gap increased from 10.9 per cent to 12.4 per cent in 2016-2017.

Panellists brought their experiences of how they had observed and driven reforms and progress in institutions and other states and territories. Jerrill Rechter, CEO of [VicHealth](#) talked about how the recognition of domestic violence as a public health concern in Victoria, provided

the fundamental shift in how the issue was perceived and helping to position it as a community-wide issue.

There was broad consensus among panellists that until we make changes to the design of our organisations and institutions, our gender bias

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Paid parental leave policies and flexible working arrangements are the required steps in bringing about a more equitable sharing of unpaid care work, elevating women to leadership roles and addressing the pay gap
”

will continue to work against progress. As Virginia succinctly summarized: *“If we don’t change the design... we will keep focussing on fixing women and that’s not going to work.”*

This [Harvard Video](#) explains how Institutional design has the capacity to de-bias our decision making processes by removing the opportunity for bias to slip in. For example, blind recruitment processes can recalibrate our minds away from the person who looks the part, to the person best suited to the job.

[The University of Canberra’s](#) Adjunct Professor and Academic Fellow, Carmel McGregor reflected on her own experiences of institutional design in the Department of Defence, and spoke of the importance of analysing the entire recruitment pipeline on how to attract, retain and promote women to leadership positions. This might start at the very beginning of the pipeline, where the language of job advertisements can reinforce gender segregation and discourage applicants. Jerrill explained how VicHealth is currently undertaking research into job advertisements to understand how language correlated with response rates.

A common challenge cited throughout the forum was the associated stigma of accessing policies. As one participant explained, a women would rather lie and say they were going for a run, rather than admit that she was picking up their child from school, because of the fear stigma they faced in the workplace and the potential impact on their careers. In addition, oftentimes women feel guilty for taking time off because of the additional burden it will place on their co-workers.

This is where leadership comes in. Paid parental leave policies and flexible working arrangements are the required steps in bringing about a more equitable sharing of unpaid care work, elevating women to leadership roles and addressing the pay

gap - but crucial to this will be strong leadership to drive their implementation, encourage uptake, and address the cultural barriers that will inevitably surface through the process.

[The Australia Institute’s](#) Chief Economist, Richard Denniss’ made a powerful call to action when he asked the audience to stop accepting our leader’s tendency to “agree in principle”. He refers here to the incontestable data and the strong economic case for change and yet the lack of political action on the issue:

“Economically we know it can be done and are at the point where we need to move past the political power fluffing and worrying about the popular vote to get the job done.”

The forum closed with community, business leaders and Director-Generals strategising how to effect real change in their institutions. Drawing on the experiences of diverse sectors and industries, the groups sound boarded challenges in implementation, examples of success and what practical actions could be taken forward after today; A promising example of the community-wide effort required to achieve gender equality.

Today we built a strong case for change. As the experts explained, we have the tools, resources and experiences from other institutions and jurisdictions to get the job done. What we need now is strong leadership and the unwavering commitment to lead this change.

You can stay engaged with our ongoing push for gender equality and other advocacy by subscribing to [YAction](#).





BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE MATTERS

YWCA Canberra is calling on the ACT Government to ensure vulnerable young people receive the support and opportunities they desperately need to participate in the workforce of the future.

The ACT is one of the most poorly performing jurisdictions when it comes to equity in educational outcomes for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Our experience stems from working with young people in Richardson, which has the highest number of people in the ACT (24 per cent) who fall into the most disadvantaged 20 per cent of all 15-64 year old Australians.

We know that the persistent and widening gaps between students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those from more affluent families, is most clearly evident in unequal access to and usage of technology.

The families of vulnerable young people often struggle to provide access to technology, the internet and to

keep up with contemporary educational demands. Access is not only vital to contemporary schooling and education, but is a precursor to their future participation in the modern economy.

In fact, young people who don't have access to technology while in school, often go on to suffer further disadvantage when attempting to enter the workforce.

The Australian Workforce and Development Agency acknowledges that the shift to higher work skills necessitated by technology and international competition and economic opportunities, runs the risk of leaving the low skilled and unskilled behind. Young people, older workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disability are especially exposed to this risk.

We also know that youth educational disengagement, underemployment, and unemployment come at a cost to the ACT community, both socially and economically. In recent years, the youth unemployment rate in the ACT has been steadily growing, with 11.4 per cent of 15-24 year olds unemployed at August 2015. This is more than double the overall unemployment rate for ACT (4.8 per cent).

Through our [Clubhouse](#), we are closing the digital divide by providing young people in Tuggeranong with access to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) resources, skills, and industry placements.

This year's [Clubhouse Impact Report](#) shows that 65 per cent of our young members strongly agree that they are likely to use these skills learned in their future career or job.

The ACT recognized as a leader in digital

innovation, inclusion, and equality. However, there are a number of ICT black spots in the ACT, and it is of no coincidence that these pockets of poor access and usage directly corresponds to those areas of socio-economic deprivation.

That's why we are calling on the ACT Government to ensure that it's digital future is one that articulates a vision for all young people, and secures a role for them in the new digitalised economy.

Want more information

To read more about this issue check out our policy priority '[Young people and steam: bridging the digital divide](#)' and download the [2017 YWCA Canberra Clubhouse Impact Report](#).

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OUR SUPPORT FOR THE ULURU STATEMENT

YWCA Canberra has joined over 4,700 Australian organisations and individuals by signing a joint statement, calling the Federal government to embrace the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

The *Uluru Statement* is the outcome of an historic Constitutional Summit held earlier in the year, which drew together hundreds of influential First Nations leaders, and was the culmination of six months of national consultations. The statement reflects the aspirations of First Nations peoples for a “fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia”, and for the voice of First Nations peoples to be enshrined in the Constitution.

A majority endorsed a referendum to establish a permanent Indigenous Advisory Body, which would for the first time give First Nations peoples a constitutionally enshrined voice to Parliament. The delegation also called for a Makarrata Commission to supervise justice, agreement-making and truth-telling about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s history.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently rejected the Referendum Council’s recommendations for an indigenous advisory body, despite the process being commissioned by the Government. In a joint statement Turnbull, Attorney General George Brandis and Indigenous Affairs Minister, Nigel Scullion, said having an Indigenous voice in parliament is neither “desirable nor capable of winning acceptance at referendum”.

Contrary to this, a recent survey by Omnipoll, at least 61 per cent of Australians would vote “yes” for an Indigenous voice to Parliament, demonstrating that the majority of the Australian public support, and are ready for this change.

A broad church of Australian civil society organisations are now calling on the Federal Government to respect the wishes of Australia’s First Nations peoples in the *Uluru Statement* and make constitutional reforms that enable First Nations peoples to take their rightful place in Australia, an immediate national priority.

YWCA Canberra is proud to have signed the joint statement and stand in solidarity with the First Nation’s Peoples. **We urge the Australian Parliament to listen to the recommendations in the *Uluru Statement*, and support progressing the rights of Australia’s First Nations peoples to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. We encourage our members, friends, partners and allies to sign [the Joint Statement](#).**

OWL INTERVIEW WITH PENNY LEEMHUIS

Penny Leemhuis, [founder of O.W.L.’s](#) and formidable housing advocate, recently launched a documentary exploring older women and homelessness in the ACT. The launch of documentary was a huge success and has been credited with reigniting energy across civil society and government, to address this critical issue. We caught up with her to find out more about the concept behind the event, and what drives her as an advocate.

Your workshop was quite different to the usual policy forum: it featured music, making of ginger bread houses and a documentary. Tell me about how you came up with the concept and what you were trying to achieve?

When we first started filming the documentary, I thought there’s no point in making this unless people watch it so it needs to be launched. And then I thought, so I launch the documentary, the politicians will come. They’ll all have their scone and cup of coffee, and go away, and forget about it.

So I started to plan an event that drew on bodies of knowledge including community development, psychology and sociology; as well as my own experience. I landed on the gingerbread house idea because it directly related to the theme of the documentary; housing.

It was also chosen because of the smell - our greatest memories are laid out through our sense of smell and it can help to open up the neurological pathways to decision making, planning, and creativity. It breaks down barriers between people incredibly well as well.

I didn’t want it to be a talk fest. It was really important that this event was owned by the people. I had engaged with Adrienne Francis from ABC to be the MC, and we agreed that it was really important that people were not directed on the day and that they took ownership of building their gingerbread house.

Each table was given the foundations of a ginger bread house, along with a number of resources and were asked to start building. All of the resources had been carefully considered - the frogs are actually a sign of a healthy environment and

the multi-coloured M&M's; the white, pink, and chocolate, were to reflect diversity.

People got really, really creative with design features: some prioritised accessibility, while others built ergonomically viable houses that featured installation for heating and cooling. One table used a plastic lid from an icing container as a solar panel.

The documentary we watched was an in-depth account of your personal experience of homelessness in the ACT. Was this a difficult story to tell publicly?

The short answer is yes, but it's not about me. It's about 690,000 women who are facing homelessness and those women that are coming up in the future. It's about the next generation. I always have a view that the need of the many outweighs the need of the individual.

At what stage did you decide to become an advocate for older women?

I don't think I decided, I think it chose me.

In 2014, I took part in the ACT shelter, older women's housing vulnerability report. Up until that point, I honestly thought I was the only woman in that situation. It was at that point that I realised the depth and the scope, and the underlying issues that had created it.

I researched, I Googled, I asked questions and there was nothing for that particular cohort. There was no place where these women could go. As a middle class woman, that was something I had never experienced. I had worked with disadvantaged groups, but what it meant was that I didn't even see it coming.

It evolved naturally. Every time I did something in regards to advocacy, it would lead to something else, which would lead something else. It just grew into a life of its own. I thought, "I can step back from this or I can go with it." I chose to go with it.

Have you been able to bring other advocates on board?

One of my biggest challenges has been getting women to tell their story. I can understand that, they face a lot of fear, shame, and embarrassment. The first time I gave a speech I was ashamed about my position as well. Until I realised I will not be ashamed about my gender or my generation.

If I ask them why they don't want to speak publicly I often hear "I don't want my family to know. I have a part-time job, I'm afraid I'll lose it. I don't want anybody to know the situation I'm in." It all keeps coming back to the fear of losing grasp on whatever they've got right now.

But it is important that we bring other OWLs on board so we have a powerful voice in the community, and more importantly, a strong political voice.

What's been the general reaction to the forum and the documentary?

Absolutely amazing and supportive. I have actually been overwhelmed. Everyone was highly complementary about the event and were asking when the next one will be!

It has generated a lot of interest: I was interviewed by The Project shortly after and other opportunities have arisen to work directly on solutions to address homelessness, including a building company I am engaging with around a regeneration project. One of the most significant things to come out of the forum was the renewed energy across the sector and Government to tackle the issue of older women's homelessness.

One of the overarching messages from the documentary is that homelessness can happen to anyone. What do you believe women can do to protect themselves from housing vulnerability?

I do believe women can help protect themselves. Looking forward and considering what might impact on your capacity to maintain a home, needs to be a priority. Some of those measures are things like having financial agreements with their husbands. That sounds very cold, but while we continue to have a legal system that discriminates against women through the divorce process, then it's a necessary precaution. Education is also an important preventative measure. Skills in financial literacy and as well as making superannuation work for them is also key.

But I think homelessness can happen to anybody. Can women protect themselves? Only to a degree. As a society we need to put those structures in place. As Dr Andrea Sharam, Senior Lecturer has said, "Our society has changed, our systems haven't. They haven't even kept pace."

We need to have policy change from government to address the systemic causes of women's homelessness in terms pay inequality, gender inequality and the time out of the workforce that women take to rear children.

We know that there is mounting evidence pointing to the size of the issue faced by older women and yet recognition of the problem has been slow. What are some of the barriers that are blocking progress and what do you think needs to happen to bring about change?

I think one of the other barriers, of course, is there's no peak body that advocates nationally and so, there's no consistency or strength in our efforts. It's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle and if it all doesn't fit to people, they stick together, people won't pay attention.

One of the other barriers is that this is a multi-faceted issue. We need to break it down to a number of workable solutions so that decision makers will start to tackle it piece by piece.

I also think one of the issues is that in Western society, we do not treat older people with dignity and respect. We tend to ignore them and I think that's happening with O.W.L.'s.

The launch of the documentary couldn't have been timelier with the development of the new ACT housing strategy. What would you like to see from the new strategy and how can it work for older women?

I'd like to see an increase in social housing and I also think we need to incentivize developers so that an allocation of new stock is made to be affordable housing. We also need to revisit the tenancy laws so that they are responsive to older women's needs.

The government could also allocate land that's being unused in the ACT for mobile units. This could be a temporary measure to help people until other solutions are put in place.

Refurbishment of office blocks is also an immediate solution. This model has been tested in Holland where they did that and it was highly successful.

You can learn more about this issue by visiting the [O.W.L.'s website](#) and viewing the documentary, [O.W.L.s - The New Face of Homelessness](#).





A SHARED VISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE ACT

Earlier this year, ten established ACT early childhood providers joined forces to establish the [Children First Alliance](#), collectively representing 46 early learning centres and more than 3500 children.

Through the Alliance, YWCA Canberra is proud to join Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT, Belconnen Community Services, Communities@Work, Community Services #1, Goodstart Early Learning ACT, MOCCA, Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service and YMCA Canberra, to ensure all children have access to high quality and affordable early childhood education.

To find out more about the Alliance, their shared vision for early childhood education and care in the ACT, and how it all came about, we spoke to Alliance Co-Chairs Amanda Tobler, CEO of [Community Services #1](#), and Darren Black, CEO of [YMCA Canberra](#).

Darren, tell us a bit about yourself, and why it was important to you and to YMCA Canberra to become part of the Children First Alliance?

I come from a Community Service background, having worked in the Community sector for 12 years with a focus on children and youth. I also have three children of my own.

Fundamentally, YMCA Canberra aligns strongly with the belief in quality early childhood care and education (ECEC). It is a big part of our business, and because the agenda of the Alliance is to promote greater investment and appreciation of the importance of the first 5-6 years in a child's life, it was an important initiative for YMCA Canberra to support.

We know from evidence that children learn the most in the first 5-6 years of their lives, and we also know from the evidence in Australia and the ACT that we are underinvested in terms of resources and time in those early years.

What about for you, Amanda?

I am a born and bred Canberran, and I have been in the community sector for over 22 years. I am passionate about providing high quality services for our community that enable and enhance wellbeing and lives.

Community Services #1 is excited to be part of an Alliance that has a shared vision for children in the ACT that is built upon research, evidence and understanding of the Canberra community.

Community Services #1 has been providing early education and care services in the ACT for over 36 years, and we believe that all children have the right to access high quality education and care.

Darren, tell us about a bit more about the Alliance - how did it come together?

The Alliance came together because of a unifying belief in the importance of early childhood education and the knowledge and insight that it was not being done as well as it could and needed to be.

There is an aligned personal belief across the participating organisations and their CEO's and this belief is underpinned by strong evidence. It is this evidence that informs us that the investment made in the preschool years is going to have a life time impact on a child's capacity from a social, academic and future employment perspective.

When we apply a benchmarking approach, we are well behind international best practice in terms of time and resources allocated to early learning and preschool education.

Amanda, why do you believe that it is crucial that all Australian children, and particularly those who are vulnerable, have access to quality and affordable early childhood education and care?

If we as a society want to be able to give every child, regardless of background and social advantage, the best start in life so that they can achieve their potential access to early education and care is the answer.

There is now a well-established body of research that demonstrates the importance of early childhood education and care on a child's social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan and we know that access to quality early childhood education can immunise children against future disadvantage and harm.



High quality early childhood programs can return up to \$7 to society per \$1 invested. Too much money is spent in later years addressing issues that could have been prevented in the early years.

Amanda, what are some of the key outcomes that you and the Children First Alliance hope to see in years to come?

The most immediate action we would like to see from the ACT Government is the development of an Early Years Strategy, which will set clear targets for access to early childhood education and care for children in the ACT, particularly for children who are experiencing disadvantage, children with disabilities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Within the Strategy, we want to see a multi-faceted approach to the early years that acknowledges the interconnections between health, education, social

and economic outcomes.

[Research](#) tells us that Australia has some considerable catching up to do in regards to international standards in the provision of accessible, quality and affordable early childhood education. Here in the ACT, this deficit is already apparent, with [one in five children](#) being developmentally vulnerable when entering school. We need to see a renewed commitment from our local and federal governments, and collectively focus on doing everything in our power to support children to reach their full potential from an early age.

This Early Years Strategy is just the first component of the Alliance's five-point plan that we will work towards in coming years. You can read more about the other four key actions via the Children First Alliance [website](#).

The Children First Alliance recently prepared a [Submission](#) to the 2018-19 ACT Budget Consultation process, outlining the immediate areas for action in order to strengthen ECEC in the ACT.

These areas include:

- Developing an ECEC Innovation Fund and Co-Lab to support program that improve access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Creating an ACT Early Childhood Educators Professional Development Fund to support the ongoing need for professional development in the ECEC sector.
- Commission modelling into the cost of extending funded preschool access to three year olds, as part of the Future of Education review process.

You can read the Submission in full, and find out more about the Alliance via the Children First Alliance [website](#).

SEX ED @ THE POLO

Australia has one of the [highest levels](#) of reported sexual assault in the world, with young women aged between [10 and 24](#) the most likely victims. In this year alone, [42 women have been killed](#) due to gendered violence. Further, in 2016 [half of all university students](#) were sexually harassed, as discovered through the release of the recent Human Rights Commission survey.

In our current [post-Weinstein and #MeToo](#) world, more women than ever are now speaking out against their perpetrators. As larger numbers of women speak out, [Gloria Steinem](#) says women are finally being believed by media and society, and perpetrators are being held to account. However, the pervasive and toxic culture that allows misogyny and this mistreatment of women to occur, continues.

In Canberra for example, there has been a [33 per cent](#) increase in recorded rates for family and domestic violence, with women three times more likely to suffer violence. Canberra Rape Crisis Centre Chief Executive, Chrystina Stanford, has also noted a [dramatic rise](#) in sexual harassment and assault of young women in the past few years.

In Canberra high schools and colleges, a deep current of disrespecting and abusing women also exists, most notably highlighted by the [2016 pornography ring](#), where young men secretly exchanged graphic images of female students without their knowledge or consent.

Ending this noxious culture is possible though, particularly through sexuality education that has [been proven](#) to reduce gendered violence and increase respectful relationships. [Sexuality education](#) is more than biology; and includes consent, safe sex practices, self-respect, respectful relationships, personal rights, effective communication, and decision-making skills.

Unfortunately, not only is the provision of sexuality education [poorly executed and ad hoc](#) within the Australian education curriculum, but teaching respectful relationships within Canberra schools has been [completely scrapped](#). Such a move is alarming, particularly when other states are currently [scaling up](#) their curriculum investments, which indicates a [recognition](#) of the importance of respectful relationships in reducing gendered violence.

To address the need for cultural change within society, a group of friends devised Sex Ed @ the Polo. It is an initiative that embraces the powerful role that parents and carers can play in educating their children on key sexuality topics, and it creates a platform for guardians to overcome serious parenting challenges together.

Created by Deb Cleland, Claire Barbato, Jeff Thompson, and Libby Gordon, Sex Ed @ the Polo discusses ways to broach these topics with their children, including respectful relationships, sexuality and gender, consent, and how to be an ethical bystander.

In this interview, we talk to Libby Gordon, who provides us with an in-depth understanding of Sex Ed @ the Polo, and describes why the Canberra community needs this program now more than ever.

What is Sex Ed @ the Polo?

Sex Ed @ the Polo was a parent initiated event on 26 October this year for parents and carers of teenagers. It was a night of conversation starters on:

- Healthy teens
- Respectful relationships
- Ethical bystanders
- Active schools
- Strong community.

The event was run at the Polish Club in Turner as a 'global cafe' style night with seven tables for people to join - each table with a different conversation topic. There were expert facilitators at each table, who all volunteered their time to lead the discussion with parents and carers. There was also slam poetry, live music and stand-up comedians to keep the evening upbeat and friendly!

The table topics were about ethical bystanders, consent, masculinity and emotions, girls and pleasure, porn is not sex ed, LGBTIQ and teenage mental health.

What was the motivation behind creating this initiative?

We started asking some questions about our culture and what messages teenagers get about sex and where? We wondered how as a community we could help. Talking with each other seemed the best place to start as it was working for us.

Our standpoint was that the conversations we have as parents and carers with our teens can be a catalyst for culture change in schools and the community.



How did parents respond to your first session?

We've only held one event so far and we had approximately 70 people come along which was amazing! From the feedback we have had, the event provided a safe and supportive forum to discuss topics that are sometimes hard to talk about with each other and with our teenagers. Having a conversation with other adults helped people feel less alone in this. Several people have said that they have since had some really positive and open conversations with their teenagers about these important issues.

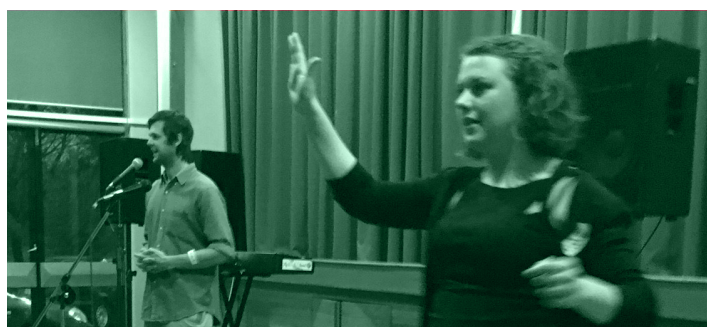
Why do you believe there is a need for Sex Ed @ the Polo within the Canberra community?

The idea for this event grew out of a conversation between friends with teenagers. We found ourselves talking about the casual sexual harassment, the ongoing risks of sexual assault (especially at parties) and why universities are still grappling with these problems as they were 30 years ago when we were on campus.

Sex Ed @ the Polo has a large focus on sexuality and consent. Why is this important?

Understanding sexuality and consent is important to foster a culture of respectful relationships in our schools and community. Understanding how our behaviour impacts others is our best chance to reduce hurtful interactions around sex and sexuality. We were really keen to give parents some ways of starting these conversations with the teens in their lives.

For example, one important aspect of the discussion for us was how to help teens think about being ethical bystanders in situations where there is casual sexism or things are getting out of hand at a party. It was really helpful to talk about giving teens a script they can use in these situations, a bit like teaching them when and why to ring 000 when they are younger. There were also some great discussions about the different ways of intervening or taking action. One of the catalysts for this event was a teen telling her mum about the sexual harassment she had seen at school.



What is the role of schools in providing sexuality education?

Our experience with our teenagers has been that schools do an excellent job educating them about the mechanics of sex including how to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy. The more nuanced conversations about sex, gender, consent, relationships and respect seemed to be inconsistent in delivery and quality. For some adolescent boys, the last two years at school or college in Canberra may be the last time they come into contact with an institution that can provide this information and guidance. That seems to us a great opportunity that is not being fully realised.

We also think there is a lot of pressure on educators to be everything to students and that there is a very important role for parents and carers to play around these topics. The home can be the most safe and supportive place to have these intimate conversations.

In the short and long term, what do you hope Sex Ed @ the Polo will achieve?

The objectives of Sex Ed @ The Polo were to get parents and carers active in culture change by:

1. Connecting and finding time to think and talk about contemporary issues and challenges to do with sex, gender, consent, relationships and respect;
2. Providing information, tools and support to talk with teens and networks; and
3. Approaching high schools and colleges about being more active in promoting positive cultures rather than reacting to incidents as they are reported.

In the short term, the event provided time to talk about these issues and to provide support to parents and carers to talk to teens. In the longer term, we plan to continue community activism with parents, the community and schools.

The event coordinators are planning how to continue with similar events and with other forms of community activism related to this issue. Watch this space and stay in touch via the Facebook page, [Sex Ed for Parents and Carers CBR](#).



EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Women's Centre for Health Matters is conducting a survey about ACT women's sexual and reproductive health. The survey will close on Friday 24th November 2017 at 5pm: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V8MW8ZF>

The ACT Government is investigating whether the housing needs of the Canberra community are currently being met and how they can be better met in the future. We encourage you to participate in this public consultation by filling out [this survey](#) on the [YourSay website](#).

Are you a talented writer and eager to share your views on gender equality with the world? Then you should consider applying to be part of our [new blogger series](#).

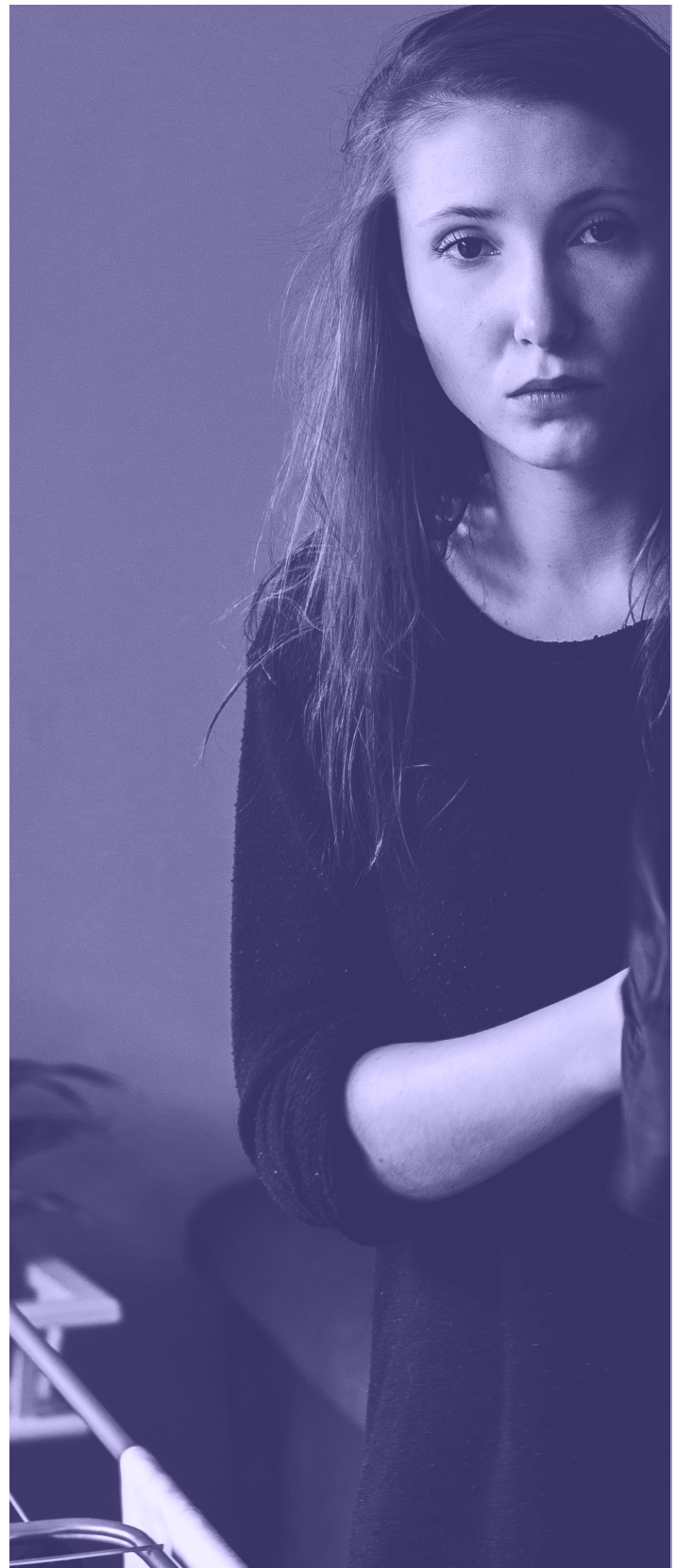
The Domestic Violence Prevention Council and DVCS invites members of the public to a lunch and panel discussion on "[How to promote the 16 Days of Activism Global Campaign in Canberra](#)" Friday 24 November 2017.

[White Ribbon Day](#) - National day to stop men's violence against women, Sunday 26th of November.

[Women with Disabilities ACT conversation](#) event, 30 November 2017

December 7 - [YWCA Canberra end of year member drinks](#)

Australian launch of the global [Women, Peace and Security Index](#), 13 December 2017



CONTACT

MISHKA MARTIN
Senior Policy Officer
Communication, Advocacy and Fundraising Team
Email: mishka.martin@ywca-canberra.org.au



Facebook.com/YWCACanberra



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