

# Hot Wire

WIRE - Women's Information Newsletter Issue 8 April 2004

**H**ere at WIRE, we've got a good feeling about 2004. In the last eighteen months we've survived some fairly intense organisational change, with all its incumbent challenges. As a result we're in good shape, and looking forward to good times ahead.

**T**here's been a book running on our long awaited move for some time, and while nobody's holding their breath, word is that we'll be making the big shift to the Queen Vic Women's Centre this coming winter.

**S**andwiched as the Centre is between sky-scraping masters of commerce, we want to join with other tenants to boldly brand this building as hallowed women's ground – a space to reignite and refocus feminism in this state.

**A**t WIRE, we think its time to be bold about our status too. With twenty plus years of operation, in contact with thousands upon thousands of women each year, WIRE is uniquely placed to understand and comment upon women's issues and concerns.

**T**his year, we'll be pulling out all stops to get women's issues out there - stepping up media comment, fostering connections and taking up the causes women care about in research activity.

**F**or example, WIRE is to explore (subject to funding) the impact on women of men's behaviour change programs. With these programs forming one part of our government's response to domestic violence, we think it's important to ascertain if they work or not - for women and children, independent of any outcomes for the men in their lives.

**W**e're also involved in the State Office for Youth Young Women's Summit, and in preparation commenced a dialogue with a group of teenage girls about what it is that irks them, and what they'd like to see done about it. There's a full report on the back page.

**I**nternally, we've commenced a fascinating, if slightly challenging, discussion on competition between women – that most secret of women's business. It seems that when competition is covert it is at its most insidious. So while it's scary to speak its name, there's a lot to be gained from an honest appraisal of one's motivations.

**A**nd if you haven't noticed already, there's so much happening that Hot WIRE has had to get a whole lot bigger.

**W**e hope you enjoy it!



*SDouglas*

Samiro Douglas  
Manager, WIRE - Women's Information



*baby bonanza*

We're very pleased to report that the women of WIRE are doing their bit to fight dwindling birth rates.

Congratulations to our Development Co-ordinator, Louise Mitchell, and her partner Hercs on the birth of their son, Lucas.

Best wishes also to Kylie, one of our fabulous team leaders, and her partner Andrew on the birth of young Yosty.

Not to mention Sharon (another phone volunteer) and Jose on the arrival of little Miguel. Then there's Anna and her partner, holding up the girl child flag with the recent birth of their daughter Eva.

Rumours that we're soaking the barbeque shapes in fertility drugs are unfounded!

*...because we all need options*

## stories from the phone room

*Friday, 4:30pm*

**A** woman calls in a state of distress. She has no money for rent, she has been evicted with her two children and she needs somewhere to stay tonight.

By this time in the week, crisis, refuge and supported accommodation are all absolutely full. But she still needs somewhere to stay. We talk about making up with her mother, with whom she had a heated argument a month ago. We talk about friends who could offer the lounge room floor just for one night.

We talk about hanging around at Crown Casino through the night because at least there are lights and people around.

**These type of calls are all too common, particularly on Fridays, which is a bit of a standard "be out by" day and one when lots of women get their marching orders...from the floor of their sister's flat, their friend's spare room, the accommodation where the rent's way in arrears....**

**Our phone workers do their best, but the reality is that often there's no easy answers. Chronic shortages of affordable long and short term public housing stock means that on any given night thousands of Victorians are sleeping rough.**

*Tuesday, 11am*

**A** woman calls asking for a legal adviser because her insurance company has accused her of trying to burn down her own house. Then she bursts into tears and doesn't stop crying for about five minutes.

The phone worker sits through it, making comforting sounds, saying, "it's okay" and "I'm still here with you" while the caller sobs. Her husband has been abusing her since the house fire six months ago.

She has stitches and can't walk on her left leg. In the last week her husband has backed off because the doctor took photos of her cuts and bruises. Photos can be used as evidence in Court.

She wants the number for a Community Legal Centre, but the phone worker also offers the number for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. The woman says she's been married for 28 years and can't leave him, then she starts crying again and hangs up.

**O**ften, it takes a few attempts to leave a violent partner. It's hard for the phone workers, who naturally enough worry for the woman at the end of the line, who's in the hardest spot of all. But we do know that placing that first call is a huge step in itself, and that women often call back, because the phone worker has helped them start thinking differently.

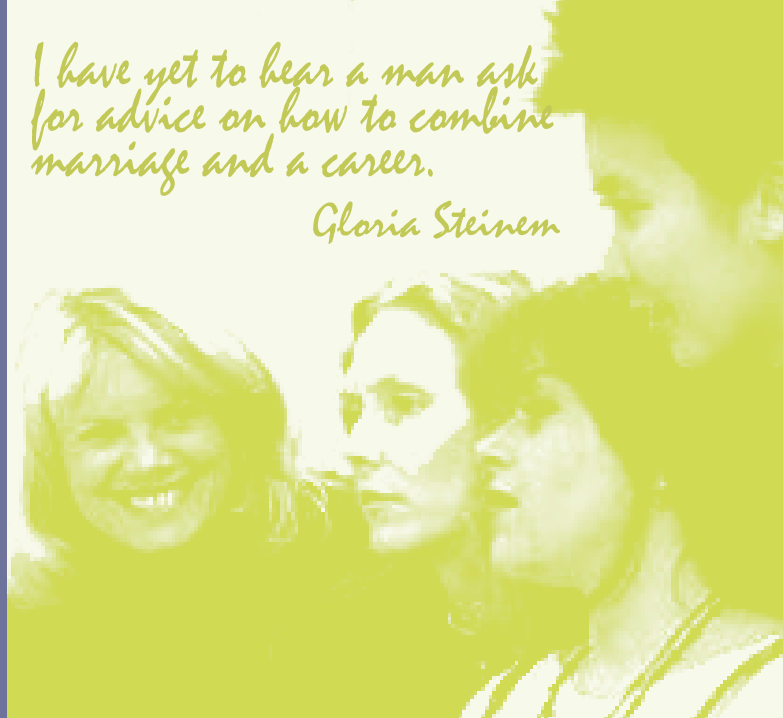
## pause to ponder

- More than 160,000 Australian women are prevented from working because they can't get childcare
- Women's total average earnings are just 66% of men's – less than was the case a decade ago
- Fully 25% of Australian women today will never have children
- Mothers of young children suffer government imposed financial penalties for choosing to be in the workforce
- At least 200 women are sexually assaulted every day in Australia
- Less than 10% of senior executives in Australian companies are women
- As of late 2002 only 8.2 of the directors of Australia's top 200 companies were women

(Source: *The End of Equality*)

*I have yet to hear a man ask for advice on how to combine marriage and a career.*

*Gloria Steinem*



## news and reviews

### Summers says

**The End of Equality - Work, Babies and Women's Choices in 21st Century Australia** by Anne Summers, Random House, 2003

Who can forget that seminal feminist work of the 1970s, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, the title and cover of which so pithily summed up the lot of women at that time? Who amongst the feminist movement did not salute its author for exposing the stereotyping of women running rampant in Australian culture?

**When Anne Summers, AO, author, social commentator, feminist and government adviser, wades into a debate, it's generally a good idea to listen. Summers doesn't disappoint with her latest tome - a formidable work that attempts to track changes in the status of women over the last decade.**

In *The End of Equality* Summers cogently argues that women's economic, political and social status have been systematically undermined by regressive policies instituted by economic rationalist governments in recent years.

Summers paints a dark picture of gains rapidly come undone, of a nation thus far unable to solve the problems women face balancing work, ambition and self-fulfilment with a rich and rewarding family/personal life.

However, *The End of Equality* is more than a pessimistic portrait of our collective present. It's also a call to action, a plea to us all to rethink, review, and refocus on a fight that is still far from won. For this, the sisterhood again owes Summers a debt of gratitude.

### our feminist framework

**In recent years, the idea that workplace stress may have negative health implications has gained increasing currency, particularly as corporations belatedly realise that workplace culture can affect their bottom line.**

Nowadays, we're hearing a lot more about the relationship between productivity and staff morale. A feminist framework, which remains a radical fringe culture, quite possibly has something to offer here. Indeed, a feminist framework, which links emotional well being and clarity of purpose with productivity, and emphasises the importance of communication, has the potential to significantly enhance staff morale.

We know this because at WIRE we actually work this way. We know that feminist principles applied to an organisational setting can deliver real rewards in productivity and purpose, not to mention the mental health of all involved.

**We believe that a feminist framework has much to offer the mainstream workforce – that it is in corporates' interests to shake up the male dominated corporate culture. Greater productivity means greater profits, after all.**

WIRE is at present documenting its management style, drawing out key concepts and processes and developing case studies by way of illustration. Then we'll set about spreading the word.

## young women shaping the future

**Y**oung Women Shaping the Future was an initiative of the State Office for Youth and Office for Women's Policy. It was a celebration of International Women's Day and an opportunity for the State government to hear the voices of young women.

As part of the day's activities, WIRE was asked to conduct a workshop with approximately thirty women aged 14 to 24. Although we were given some flexibility, we weren't keen to arbitrarily assign a topic. Instead, we assembled a focus group of teenage girls and asked them what they believe to be the big issues facing their peer group.

**A** lively discussion brought up a range of concerns, including eating disorders, drug and alcohol use and abuse, depression and anxiety, sexuality, peer pressure, and the rhetoric of "girl power".

There was also a strong plea for information about dealing constructively with the problems of their friends and families, as well as their own. Given the plethora of issues, and our particular expertise in helping women to help others, we decided to focus particularly on this point.

At the WIRE workshop, *She Ain't Heavy, She's My Sister*, participants learnt techniques to help them listen more carefully and give useful advice.

## What's on at WIC

### lunchtime forums

#### Got a business idea?

Wednesday 14 April

If you've got an idea for a small business, but aren't sure where to start, this seminar is for you. Presenter Geri Barr explains the key steps in turning your ideas into business realities.

#### Managing stress

Wednesday 21 April

Identify the symptoms of stress and learn techniques for managing it. Understand the relationship between stress, anxiety and depression. Presented by Alexina Baldini, psychologist.

#### Mid-life career planning

Wednesday 23 June

Is your career at the crossroads? Or is it simply time to take stock of where you're at and where you'd like to be in the next five to ten years? Learn to think more strategically about your career. Presented by Geoffrey Guilfoyle, Melbourne Career Information Centre.

### business building

#### Business Mentoring Program

Five evening sessions on Tuesdays beginning 20 April

This program explores how women can build profitable, sustainable businesses without sacrificing positive, sustainable lives.

Presented by Geri Barr, the program covers business structure, planning and prioritising, support systems, finances, operations and no-cost promotions.

Geri works within a feminist framework, taking due account of the particular experience of women in business.

*"The networks I've made have been invaluable, as has the way Geri has taught me to look at my achievements in a more positive light."*

*"We're all just jugglers, women in business, but now I don't feel like I'm constantly dropping the ball."*

Cathy from Buttonmania  
past participant

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