

The Northern Territory Working Women's Centre

Providing information, advice and support to Territory Women since 1994

From the Coordinators' Desks

The NT Working Women's Centre was delighted and honoured to host the 3rd Our Work Our Lives conference in Darwin only a few weeks ago. The conference, which focused on industrial relations issues for women, brought together a truly inspirational group of presenters and delegates from all over Australia and Timor Leste. In her written welcome message the Governor General of Australia, Quentin Bryce, described Our Work Our Lives as a 'significant and influential gathering for discussion and debate on the key issues in women's employment'.

We learned that women are experiencing discrimination at work and sometimes termination of employment, because they are subjected to violence in their homes. We also learned that the gap in wages between women and men is *increasing*, not decreasing (women earn 1 million dollars less than men over their working life). Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick told delegates that Australian women's participation on corporate boards is behind all other OECD countries with the exception of Japan. She also said that Australia has had the largest decline over the last 2 years together with Hungary, Peru, the Philippines and Poland. Have a look at the following article for more details of the conference and go to www.ntwwc.com.au where you can find all of the papers.

Thanks must go to the sponsors of the conference the NT Government, Clayton Utz, Hesta and the Industrial Relations Society of Australia. Thanks also to all of the NTWWC staff and committee of management members for their support and assistance.

Oh, and a warm welcome to our newest staff member Anastasia Coroneo who is in the position of Senior Industrial Liaison Officer!

Rachael Uebergang & Anna Davis (Co-Coordinator)

Our Work Our Lives...some highlights

The NT Working Women's Centre with the support of the University of Western Australia was very proud to host the 3rd Our Work Our Lives conference, which brought together academics, industrial relations practitioners, union officials, lawyers, public servants and other interested people to consider issues surrounding women and industrial relations.

We were honoured that such informed and influential women as the Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick, Professor Marian Baird, Senator Jacinta Collins, Dr Sara Charlesworth and Dr Paula McDonald presented their ideas and research at the conference. We were also very lucky that other local women such as Dr Christine Short, Janette Galton and Naomi Porrovecchio presented papers, along with NTWWC staff member Minh Nguyen.

It is fair to say that there was one conference outcome that was pretty clear: a consensus that women, despite enjoying equal rights, including equal pay, on paper, are not faring particularly well in reality. While acknowledging how far we have come, it is also important to be honest about ongoing inequality, as a silent acceptance will do nothing to ensure basic rights for women workers. (Cont. page 3)



Inside this issue

Our Work Our Lives... 1 & 3

Client Case Study..... 2

Workplace rights and responsibilities sessions at CDU 2

Special points of interest

Equal Pay Day was held on 3 September this year — worsening from 1 September in 2009.

NTWWC AGM 19/10/2009

Don't forget the NTWWC AGM is fast approaching!

This year the AGM will be held at 5pm on the 19 October, on the NT Working Women's Centre premises, 98 Woods Street, Darwin.

All members and interested parties are welcome to attend.

Come along and join on the day and support the Centre's important work.



3rd National Conference
Women & Industrial Relations
August 12-13, DARWIN

NTWWC Client Case Study

Stephanie is 20 years old and works as a casual retail assistant. She has been employed at the same store for 5 years and although she is a casual she works full-time hours.

Stephanie approached the NTWWC for advice as she is pregnant and her employer is treating her badly. Despite giving six weeks notice that she would need time off to attend an antenatal appointment, her employer phoned her numerous times, asking if she could come in and when she could get there. At other times he has made sarcastic comments about her not wanting to lift heavy boxes anymore and asked her when she intends to finish up. Stephanie is only 18 weeks pregnant and being young and fit, she envisages working up until a few weeks before the birth however her employer's attitude is making her worried about her situation.

The NTWWC was able to provide Stephanie with extensive information about her rights at work as a pregnant woman, and about discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy. She was also advised about the further protections she would have from 1 July 2009 under the General Protections section of the Fair Work Act. Stephanie was surprised to find out that as a long term casual with regular and systematic hours, she classifies as an 'eligible casual' and is entitled to take 52 weeks unpaid maternity leave and return to her position afterwards. The NTWWC assisted Stephanie to write a letter to her employer, advising him that she was entitled to perform safe duties and to take unpaid maternity leave, as she hoped that making him aware of his obligations and her awareness of them may have a positive affect on his treatment of her.

* Case Studies are based on actual clients however names and details are changed to protect privacy



NT Working Women's Centre

**We help with
Problems at work**



**“Professional, appropriate service offering
some empowerment in a difficult time.”**

NTWWC Client Feedback

Talking about Workplace Rights & Responsibilities with English Proficiency students

NTWWC staff regularly deliver education sessions about Workplace Rights and Responsibilities to participants of the Certificate IV English Proficiency at Charles Darwin University, most recently in early September 2010.

Two sessions are presented over a fortnight, to students who are preparing for a work placement. The first week we canvas workplace rights and the Australian Industrial Relations framework. Through role-plays 'ideal situations' are presented to participants, providing an opportunity to demonstrate how communication is expected to occur between a worker and a 'boss' in Australia, particularly how to ask questions and what questions to ask. We provide resources by way of suggested questions to ask at a first interview, aimed at establishing basic work conditions and rights, as well as information on preparing for negotiations with employers.

These sessions provide both staff and participants with the opportunity for valuable two-way learning about modes of communication in different cultures, especially when discussion turns to the expectations of Australians for direct and relatively informal approaches to management in the workplace. For example, the Australian habit of addressing your employer by their first name can cause extreme discomfort for people brought up to show far more formalized respect in such situations.

In the second session we discuss problems at work and where to seek help. Institutions such as Fair Work Australia, Fair Work Ombudsman, NT Work Safe and the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission are explained, emphasizing their independence from 'government' and how they enforce laws. Issues of confidentiality, impartiality, investigatory and enforcement powers are discussed to dispel any misconceptions about institutional power and corruption.

Students then work in groups to devise role-plays showing a workplace problem, yielding many entertaining and instructive moments. We focus on discrimination and everyone nods their heads when we start the discussion; everyone has a story to tell, either from their own experience, or via the grapevine. Sharing these experiences through role-plays where avenues for help are raised ensures participants are aware of options for seeking help and demystifies the processes.



Our Work Our Lives...Cont. from page 1

Equal Pay Day slipped from the 1st to the 3rd of September this year, and current research shows that Australian women will earn approximately 1 million dollars less than men over their working lives. Rebecca Cassells, a Senior Research Fellow at the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra, presented research examining the factors contributing to the pay gap across a range of occupations and industries. A number of key determinants were identified however 60% of the gap can be attributed only to gender so that *'simply being a woman is the major contributing factor to the wage gap in Australia'*. Why do we accept this when legislation has provided for equal pay for over 40 years?

Our very impressive Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick talked not only about pay inequity but about women's inequity in the workplace in general - of course they go hand in hand. Liz outlined significant legislative gains for women at work in the last few years: a paid parental leave scheme, the Fair Work Act's right for parents to request flexible work and protection for employees from adverse action by their employer due to family or carer's responsibilities and reform of the Sex Discrimination Act. But she also argued that there's further opportunity to address gender inequity at work and she was very pleased to tell delegates that the Australian Human Rights Commission has intervened in the Australian Services Union's test case in Fair Work Australia which, we sincerely hope, will address the appalling low pay of community sector workers - that very female dominated industry.

While arguing that all of these things are positive changes, Liz also introduced the term 'gender asbestos' and called for attitudinal and cultural change. Coined by Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, the term describes the discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes and toxins that are hidden and embedded in the walls, cultures and mindsets of many organisations. It's the idea that the problem of gender equality can be traced to the institutional arrangements of organisations. Clearly, for women to be able to earn an equal share of the cash we're going to have to more equally share unpaid domestic and caring responsibilities and jobs that are at the higher end of the workplace hierarchy. To summarise Liz Broderick's ideas on how this can be achieved:

1. We need to stop trying to 'fix' women. The focus needs to shift from providing more assertiveness training, mentoring, networking and self branding advice - to fixing the system so that it works for everyone
2. The importance of men's role in promoting gender equality in workplaces - 'if there is to be change, male CEOs and business leaders must champion it. We need senior men working in flexible work arrangements, we need senior men taking parental leave, we need men investing in job redesign and workplace innovation'
3. Finally, Liz argued that we ought to be aiming for a critical mass as it is a critical mass that will create the change rather than change creating the crucial mass.

Certainly if the pay gap is going to be addressed in any meaningful way, some real change is required. If Dr Paula McDonald's research is anything to go by then without it, the existing norms that relate to the role of women and men at work will continue. Dr McDonald provided a snap shot into the minds of 819 Queensland students aged between 13 and 19. The students were asked to write an essay entitled 'Looking back at my working life' and were told: 'Pretend you are your parents' age. Tell us about your working and family life: what you've done as a job (or jobs), what you've achieved, and how you have tried to attain a reasonable income, fair treatment at work, and a balance between work and family.'

The analysed results were amazing and perhaps for those of us concerned about pay equity, a little concerning. Whilst the majority of girls expressed the view that their own employment would be their course to financial success, a few suggested they would achieve wealth by marrying wealthy men! Almost all the students presented quite traditional life trajectories of marriage, career, house purchase and family. The general theme was that work life balance for boys meant a distant involvement in family life that was secondary to paid work, whereas girls envisioned work life balance through the prism of primary care giving. Boys suggested that they'd *'keep in contact with family while travelling overseas'* and *'join their families on holidays'*, while girls said things such as *'family comes first'* and *'my kids are my priority'*. Only three girls mentioned sharing the caring responsibilities and three suggested their partner might be the primary care-giver. No boys presented these options.

It's hard to imagine that unless some very proactive steps are taken the status quo around women bearing the burden of unpaid caring responsibilities, working in low paid jobs and being under represented in positions at the higher end of the workplace hierarchy will remain. And of course, the current pay gap that comes with all of this will continue.

Papers presented at Our Work Our Lives are available on our website:

http://www.ntwwc.com.au/index.php/our_work_our_lives_2010



UPCOMING EVENTS

- IRSNT Annual Convention, 15 October, 8.30-4.30 at Darwin Central Hotel
- NTWWC AGM, October 19 at 98 Woods Street, 5pm for a 5.30 start
- UNIFEM Darwin Chapter Launch, 28 October 2010, contact Jeanette Parsons on 0412 504 332



NT Working Women's Centre

Free Call: 1800 817 055

Ph: (08) 8981 0655

F: (08) 8981 0433

E: admin@ntwwc.com.au

W: www.ntwwc.com.au

98 Woods Street Darwin

GPO Box 403 Darwin 0801

What is the NT Working Women's Centre?

The NT Working Women's Centre (NTWWC) is a community based, non-profit organisation that provides free and confidential advice to women about work related matters. The NTWWC receives funding from the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments.

The NT Working Women's Centre provides information, advice, representation and referral to NT women about work related issues such as: pay, working conditions, unfair dismissal, superannuation, discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment.

Every day women from all walks of life contact the centre for assistance, either through the free call number or personally in our office. Each year the NTWWC answers thousands of queries from Territory women from short inquiries to more complex matters involving representation.

Representation may involve assisting and speaking on behalf of a woman in formal complaints processes such as an Unfair Dismissal application or a Discrimination complaint. NTWWC assistance provided to women can include help filling in the required forms, preparing statements and supporting them throughout the process from beginning to end. The centre also provides community education to women about their rights at work, and our staff members conduct visits to regional centres and some remote communities.

The NTWWC is a member based organisation, and so is dependent on support from the NT Community. For a nominal fee of \$10.00 a year any woman in the NT (or any organisation for \$30) can become a supporting member of the NTWWC.



Please note: This newsletter contains general information available at the time of printing. While every effort is made to ensure that the information provided is accurate, it does not constitute legal advice.

For further advice about your individual situation, please contact the NT Working Women's Centre.

Join the NT Working Women's Centre

Membership of the NTWWC will support the Centre to continue to provide services to women throughout the NT who are in a disadvantaged bargaining position, insecure and low paid work. The Centre gives particular attention to vulnerable groups of women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from Culturally & Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, women who have a disability, women with family responsibilities and those living in regional and remote areas.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the NTWWC please complete the form below and return it to us. We will contact you to arrange payment of your membership fee.

Name: _____

Postal Address: _____

Contact Phone No.: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____