

The Northern Territory Working Women's Centre

Providing information, advice and support to Territory Women since 1994

Welcome to Women @ Work!

We have now recovered from the wonderful Our Work Our Lives conference (all of the papers are on our website if you would like to see them), as well as some minor office renovations, and are back to the daily task of assisting women from all walks of life with their workplace issues. Our new Senior Industrial Liaison Officer Anastasia Coroneo has quickly learned the ropes and is a delightful part of our team. We are also thrilled to welcome back Nadja Reiter, Industrial Liaison Officer, who has been on parental leave after the birth of her second child. We do strive as hard as we can to create a workplace that is truly flexible and family friendly, and it is wonderful to be able to attract and retain such skilled staff with busy lives by offering work that is both part-time *and* meaningful.

Sadly this month we are saying goodbye to Minh Nguyen, who has been with us for over three years. Minh's position was both Industrial Liaison Officer as well as Specialist Community Educator with women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. Minh is that rare and special combination of skill, passion and warmth, and she will be missed greatly. We wish her all the best on her move down south.

Anna Davis and Rachael Uebergang
Co-coordinators

Culture influences Our Work Our Lives

As many friends of the NTWWC would be aware, a highlight of 2010 for the Centre was hosting the 3rd Our Work Our Lives conference in August. The conference brought together academics, industrial relations practitioners, union officials, lawyers, public servants and other interested people to consider issues surrounding women and industrial relations.

Amongst such distinguished guest speakers as Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick and Senator Jacinta Collins, were some from closer to home. A local session which particularly stood out was the plenary panel on Indigenous Women and Work.

The panel comprised six Aboriginal Territorians: Ngaree Ah Kit, Gemma Benn, Susan Murray, Joy Cardona, Moogie Patu and Priscilla Collins, chaired by MLA Marion Scrymgour. These impressive women of different ages and experience are all highly accomplished and well recognised advocates for Aboriginal women and issues in general; four of the group represented the NT at the 2010 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering, which established priorities and made recommendations to state, territory and federal governments.



Members of the plenary panel were asked to reflect on and speak about their working lives and the issues faced by them as Aboriginal women in the workforce. The audience was awed by their inspirational stories of juggling work and family, such as tales from Priscilla of taking her six children on the road to Cannes film festival to sell an idea!

For many in the room, it was their first glimpse into the complicated balancing act necessary for Aboriginal women, with family obligations far above and beyond the nuclear unit familiar to many Australians. Issues of systemic discrimination were touched on, but the panel's accounts of working life were overwhelmingly focused on the positives of working life and their achievements, emphasizing the importance of education, setting goals and working hard—and supporting each other.

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Special points of interest

Next year on the 8th of March is the 100th International Women's Day.

This centenary deserves special attention and many events will be held particularly in the week 4-12 March 2011.

The NT Working Women's Centre will hold a film night, screening *Made in Dagenham* on 8 March 2011 at the Darwin Cinema—mark the date in your diary now and come along and help us celebrate 100 years of International Women's Day!!

More information, including on grants available to assist with events is available on the website of the NT Government's Office of Women's Policy. Alternatively, contact Surya Silva at NT Anti-discrimination Commission if you wish to get involved.



NTWWC Client Case Study

Xiao Ling* is a 30 year old woman who had been working at a local store for 9 ½ years when she was accused of theft and instantly dismissed.

Xiao Ling reported that in fact it was common practice in the workplace for staff to take stock, leave a note in the till and pay for it on the next payday – however she was dismissed before being able to pay for the goods.

She further advised the NTWWC that over the years she had seen a number of staff bullied out of the organization as their entitlement to long service leave approached and that in the preceding six months, she had noticed that her manager was picking on her and she believed the real reason for her dismissal was to avoid liability for her long service leave.

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

The NTWWC informed Xiao Ling of the General Protections provisions of the Fair Work Act and explained the process available to her.

However, Xiao Ling explained to the Industrial Liaison Officer that she felt unable to proceed with such an action. She said that culturally she could not do it, as her former employer was wealthy and powerful and if she challenged them then lies about her would be spread amongst her community, damaging her reputation and family.

NTWWC Industrial Liaison Officers provide information about options and support women to make the choice that is right for them, regardless of whether it is the option the officer considers to be 'best'.



NT Working Women's Centre

**We help with
Problems at work**



“Thank you for a very positive interview. I feel better knowing about avenues I can take if necessary.”
NTWWC Client Feedback

Culture influences Our Work Our Lives (cont.)

The panel was followed by morning tea, where the buzz in the foyer was palpable. This buzz was reflected in the written feedback received from conference attendees, many of whom named the panel as their highlight of the conference.

In the next session, the NTWWC was especially proud to have staff member Minh Nguyen present her paper 'Moving Towards Cultural Competency'. This presentation included an overview of the culturally diverse nature of both NTWWC staff and NT residents generally and the opportunities and challenges this presents for service delivery.

Minh outlined the concept of cultural competency and its existence on a continuum, emphasizing that culturally competent service provision means ensuring accessible and effective service delivery to clients of all backgrounds. This requires an ongoing process of monitoring and adapting, in order to remain responsive to the needs of different cultural groups.

The session focused on the Centre's efforts over the past three years to increase the numbers of ATSI and CALD women utilizing the service, particularly through delivering Community Education. This focus has particularly been on cross-cultural collaborative sessions such as a bi-culturally facilitated session for a new refugee community in Darwin and many sessions with local Aboriginal training organizations.

The take home message was that there is no room for complacency. Organizations striving for cultural competency must continually review and evaluate their processes with a view to ongoing improvement in accessible service provision. The NTWWC recently conducted an internal workshop on cultural competency as part of our ongoing journey of consciously working to provide appropriate industrial relations information and advice for all women in the Territory.

Papers presented at Our Work Our Lives are on our website: http://www.ntwwc.com.au/index.php/our_work_our_lives_2010

Government funded Paid Parental Leave— what is it and am I eligible?

Australia finally has a universal government funded paid parental leave scheme!

This leave will be available to parents of babies born (or adopted) from 1 January 2011, with applications able to be lodged up to three months before the expected due date. The scheme will provide 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the minimum wage, which is currently \$569.90 a week, and will be taxable. Parents will have to choose between Paid Parental Leave and the Baby Bonus (currently \$5,294 and not taxable).

This leave will not displace the existing 12 month unpaid maternity leave with guaranteed return to work, nor will it displace any existing employer paid parental leave - all three can be accessed by those with eligibility.

There are four main eligibility criteria for the Paid Parental Leave Scheme:

Primary Carer – the applicant must be the primary carer, the person who meets the child's physical needs more than anyone else during the leave period;

Work Test – the applicant must have worked at least 330 hours in 10 out of the 13 months prior to the EDD, which equates to approximately a day a week. A minimum of one hour must be worked on each occasion work is performed. This can be work carried out as an employee, a contractor, or being self-employed and includes periods of paid leave. There can be a break within the 10 month period of up to 56 days with no work.

Income Test – The applicant must have earned \$150,000 or less than in the financial year prior to the claim date. (This figure will be indexed after 30 June 2012).

Residency Test –the applicant must be living in Australia, and be an Australian citizen, a New Zealand citizen, a permanent resident or a holder of a specified temporary visa. However, the work does not have to have been performed only in Australia.

The leave can be shared between parents, for example if the mother cares for the baby for the first three months then returns to work, if her partner then takes over a full-time caring role, s/he can access the remaining weeks of leave (providing they are eligible as above).

From 1 January until 30 June 2011, the payments may be administered by either the employer or the Family Assistance Office (FAO). From 1 July 2011 employers will be required to administer the payments through their payroll system. Applications are made through the FAO and more information is available on their website: <http://www.familyassist.gov.au/payments/family-assistance-payments/paid-parental-leave-scheme/>



Photos from a public consultation held by NTWWC in late 2008, which formed the basis of submissions to the Productivity Commission when preparing its PPL Report commissioned by the Federal government.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **International Women's Day 8 March 2011** – A celebration of 100 years of IWD— various events will be held and a calendar of events will be available on the Office of Women's Policy website at http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Office_of_Womens_Policy/index.aspx



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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 case management.

Throughout the NT we provide advice and representation about unfair dismissal and discrimination. For example, assistance can be provided to help women to prepare their forms and statements and support them throughout the process. 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: _____