



Australian Women's Coalition

**Barriers to Women's Employment
Women and Recession Project**



**Broken Hill
consultation notes**



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INTRODUCTION

The consultation on the Australia Institute (TAI) report *The Impact of the Recession on Women*¹ was facilitated in Broken Hill, New South Wales, on 29 September 2009, by Darriea Turley, Chair of the National Rural Women's Coalition², The Broken Hill Enterprise Development Centre³ (BHEDC), Women on Boards⁴, and the National Foundation for Australian Women⁵ (NFAW). The event was held in the rooms of the BHEDC between 6.00 and 8.00 pm.

Invitations were issued through the mailing list of the BHEDC, the local contacts of Ms Turley, and through advance media statements which were carried in both the *Barrier Daily Truth*, and on the local ABC radio station, welcoming all comers. (A list of those attending is at Attachment 1; a copy of the invitation is at Attachment 2; and the media release and newspaper coverage is at Attachment 3)

The purpose of the consultation was explained as being to learn from Broken Hill women about their experiences in relation to achieving workforce attachment, to identify their responses to the findings of the TAI report, and thus assist in the production of a report to Commonwealth and state governments which would highlight the experiences of women facing local barriers to workforce participation. An undertaking of feedback to the participants was given.

BACKGROUND

Broken Hill is a city with a population of some 19,000 in the far west of New South Wales (NSW), a mining centre on the edge of desert, close to the area known as the 'Corner Country'. Nearest centres of population are Menindee, Milparinka, Silverton, White Cliffs and Wilcannia. The tower mullocks and headframes of the mines dominate the city landscape.

Silver was discovered here in 1883 by Charles Rasp, a German émigré working as a boundary rider on Mount Gipps sheep station, near the NSW/South Australian (SA) border. Rasp and five others eventually floated a mining syndicate to exploit the find – the forerunner of the major Australian company Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd (BHP).

The main industry has been, and remains, mining high grade ore.

¹ David Richardson, 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>

² <http://www.nrwc.com.au/>

³ <http://www.bhedc.com.au/>

⁴ <http://www.womenonboards.org.au/>

⁵ <http://nfaw.org/>

The Line of Load in Broken Hill is reported as the richest deposit of silver, lead and zinc in the world, which has generated over \$100 billion in revenue to date.

Tourism and hospitality are also now significant industries.

Pastoralism remains a major industry in the region – mainly wool. There is some horticulture in the Menindee area, based on irrigation from the availability of water from the now depleted Menindee Lakes and the Darling River.

There is a current economic downturn in Broken Hill – 400 jobs were lost from the Perilya Mine in 2008, and a number of men left the city seeking work elsewhere, in some cases leaving behind women and families without adequate social support networks.

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) data indicate⁶ that the employment services area (ESA) covering Broken Hill has an unemployment rate of 7.0%. Of the current estimated working age population (14,390 at last census) people seeking work are just over 10% of the makeup. The average length of unemployment is 35 months and the average age of job seekers in this area is 34.

The city population is quite strongly multicultural, although there are few recent non-Anglo migrants or first generation migrant families. There is a strong and vibrant sense of community.

The cluster of impressive and handsome civic buildings in the city centre was constructed during the initial boom period shortly after the BHP began mining. The City Council has embarked on a program of restoration and maintenance of early buildings; consequently the city centre has a number of impressive buildings influenced by late Victorian civic architecture.

There is an historic mosque built in 1887, a relic from the Afghan and Indian cameleers who were the initial providers of goods transport although there are no longer any practicing Muslim populations in Broken Hill. The building is maintained by the Broken Hill Historical Association with assistance from the City Council. The Association (with assistance) also maintains a synagogue from the same period – although there are no longer practising Jewish families in the region. The synagogue was established by the early itinerant Jewish retailers of clothing and household goods working in the outback supplying miners and pastoralists.

It is reported that there is almost no movement into the city of recent refugee population groups – although some may come as seasonal workers to those centres focussed on horticulture.

⁶ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, Labour Market Portal, 'Far West', viewed 13 January 2010, <http://www.workplace.gov.au/lmip/EmploymentDataNew/WesternNSW/FarWest/>

There is a substantial Indigenous population in the region, although apparently relatively few Indigenous men or women find work in mainstream employment in Broken Hill. Indigenous men and women tend to find work in Indigenous-managed organisations such as health, employment or cultural services. However, it is reported that there are likely to be some individuals with an Indigenous background working in mainstream employment who do not, self-identify as Indigenous.

While Broken Hill is predominantly a white community, towns such as Wilcannia, Menindee and Brewarrina are predominantly Indigenous. State entities such as the NSW Parks and Wildlife maintain a number of regional national parks with significant Indigenous associations, staffed by Indigenous conservation workers.

The University of Sydney has based a special Rural Health teaching and research unit in Broken Hill, which adds significantly to the health infrastructure in the region, as well as providing a hoped-for means of training health workers who will eventually settle and work in regional and rural Australia.

The city is home to a Royal Flying Doctor base, and the School of the Air.

Broken Hill is the main transport access hub and service centre – health, schools, government agencies – for a range of small remote communities in the 'Corner Country'.

The culture of the city has been shaped by the mining industry, and the unique influence of the union movement through the Barrier Industrial Council (BIC)⁷.

The city has long looked to Adelaide and South Australia as a stronger influence than Sydney or other areas of New South Wales and is on Central Australian Time, rather than Eastern Standard Time.

For over fifty years, union policy in Broken Hill prohibited married women from taking on paid employment unless they were professionally trained. Clerical and retail positions were to be kept open for young unmarried women or widows⁸.

⁷ See, for example, http://workers.labor.net.au/69/c_historicalfeature_shorty.html

⁸ The following extract from the Australian Women's Register entry 'Broken Hill Union Ban on Married Women Working (c. 1930 - 1981' compiled by Georgia Moodie illustrates the problem:

'[...]Women working in unskilled or low-skilled professions such as shop assistants, receptionists and domestic staff would lose their jobs upon marriage.

This long-standing union policy was challenged in 1981 by Mrs Jeanine Whitehair, who was employed as the most senior of five dental assistants at the Town Dental Clinic in Broken Hill. After her marriage in November 1980, Jeanine was one of three people who lost their jobs at the clinic purportedly for economic reasons. With the support of the New South Wales Equal Opportunities Board, Jeanine was successful in her attempt to seek reinstatement. This was a landmark case which not only engendered a significant shift in the nature of women's employment in Broken Hill, but also signalled the beginnings of the erosion of the power of the Barrier Industrial Council'.

Viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4104b.htm>

For a recent celebration of the contribution to their community by the women of Broken Hill see 'Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill', a collection of essays and biographies of Broken Hill women⁹, available on the NFAW's Australian Women's Archives project website¹⁰

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION POINTS

- There are problems with adequacy of broadband access/quality, which affects women seeking to make use of Internet resources.
- There appear to be jobs available, for example there are vacancies in community services and there is always work in hospitality, but there are barriers to mature women taking up these jobs.
- Some women are available to work in a lesser capacity than standard variations of the full-time equivalent position. These women are sourced and found according to a local network of female business and community leaders in a generally ad hoc fashion. Formalising a network of 'who is who' and 'who needs what' in terms of employment opportunities may provide opportunities.
- There is a significant problem with the supply of child-care, notably for school-age children before and after school and during school vacations. It was noted that the Y was 'unable to take the financial risk' to develop outside school hours care (OSHC) programs. This risk comes about because of the length of time it takes to gain the numbers needed for the OSHC service to be cost neutral for a community charity which attracts very little local government operational support. Vacation care, however, has existed at the YMCA for many years. This program augments the other programs available at the YMCA and helps maintain this community charity in the city.
- Access to TAFE courses and the related capacity of many women to make effective applications for positions is a matter for concern. Many women need assistance with understanding what they have to offer; which makes them reluctant to put themselves forward. 'TAFE can't help if the women aren't motivated'.
- Many women maintaining a caring role also volunteer substantially whilst outside the paid workforce. When it is time to re-enter the workforce, some believe they have no skills and yet they have held various volunteer positions and gained many skills.
- Is there scope for volunteer work which can be verified by an organization to gain recognition of prior (RPL) status and certification?

⁹ National Federation of Australian Women and University of Melbourne, 2009, *Australian Women's Archives Project*, 'Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill', viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.womenaustralia.info>

This may give some women the 'pieces of paper' they need to apply for positions and the confidence to know their skills are transferable.

- Some local people seem to do 'endless' small-scale TAFE courses without being followed through into placement in on-going jobs.
- The importance of a blend of training with on-the-job work experience was noted.
- Many women who would otherwise be well-suited to positions, for example in the Municipality operated human services, lack confidence and capacity to develop formal applications.
- There is a need for affordable programs to help women develop these skills if the women are to overcome barriers to employment. It was reported that the average age of current care workers is 54 years, and there is a need to recruit and train younger women. Suggested approaches which could help could include information sessions helping women to develop self-confidence.
- The traditional male hegemony of the community is still felt strongly by women.
- The existing Commonwealth financed employment service is willing to assist with career counselling and placement, but is unable to offer these women a complete service – the conditions of Commonwealth funding are such that the service is to be provided to those individuals eligible for or in receipt of Commonwealth income support. Most of the married women seeking employment, career counselling and the like, are not eligible for benefits in their own right.
- There was agreement that these employment services should be funded to assist the 'hidden' unemployed.
- Young women seem 'to lose their voices' once they move beyond school. There is a need for services and activities which will continue to engage young women. The YWCA is very active, but more is required. More services for all women, and forums in which women can voice their opinions would encourage younger women to speak as they would be joining a chorus, not having to find the 'bravery' needed to speak alone.
- There is concern for the farm families, where the women must often run properties in the absence of menfolk, providing volunteer contributions to the family enterprise as well as to the community, yet also need access to career counselling and work options. There is a need for recognition and perhaps certification of volunteer community service which recognises the worth of such activity in cases where women are seeking paid employment.
- It was noted that there are many trained nurses among this farmwife population who are now out of the workforce but who could re-engage.

- There is a problem with the adequacy of Commonwealth Isolated Children's payments for farm children forced to board in town to attend high school – the school leaving age is about to be raised to 17 years, but eligibility for payment ceases at age 16.
- There was concern expressed about Indigenous people's future employment opportunities at a time when many state entities (health, education etc.) are scaling back their local workforce. The point was made that there are extensive opportunities for traineeships for Indigenous workers, but very few actual jobs at the end of the traineeships.

REFERENCES

- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, Labour Market Portal, 'Far West', viewed 13 January 2010, <http://www.workplace.gov.au/lmip/EmploymentDataNew/WesternNSW/FarWest/>
- National Federation of Australian Women and University of Melbourne, 2009, *Australian Women's Archives Project*, 'Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill', viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html>
- National Federation of Australian Women and University of Melbourne, 2009, *Australian Women's Archives Project, Australian Women's Register*, 'Broken Hill Union Ban on Married Women Working (c. 1930 - 1981', viewed 14 January 2010, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE4104b.htm>
- Richardson, David, 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>

ATTACHMENT 1

Attendees:

Dionne Devlin – Board member YMCA, YMCA Australia, Practice Manager
Go Dental

Lori Emmett – Board member YWCA

Helen Walton – D.E.T School counsellor, TAFE/YWCA/P&C

Ann Rogers – General Manager Legion Club

Judy Parr – Manager Community Services Broken Hill City Council

Marian Brown – Greater Western Health Service

Jan Sidford – Executive Officer Australian Rural Health Collaboration

Mandy Royle – Executive Officer, Dept of Rural Health, University of
Sydney

Darriea Turley – Manager Community Engagement Greater Western
Health Service

Maris Netherwood – Sureway Employment Service – Employment Adviser

Helen Ferguson – Centrelink – Rural and Climate Change Branch

ATTACHMENT 2

Invitation



Invitation to Broken Hill events

Women and Recession - Broken Hill consultation

Come and have your say about the situation in Broken Hill about **Women, underemployment and unemployment**

You are invited to a workshop on 29 September, from 6 pm to 8 pm, at the Broken Hill Enterprise Development Centre 41-79 Crystal St Broken Hill, to discuss the implications for Broken Hill of the findings of the report on women and unemployment, which was launched on 24 August by the President of the ACTU.

The report found that many women were unable to access work yet wanted to work, because of their inability to make suitable arrangements about their caring responsibilities. Many women in this situation need access to TAFE style courses, but find access difficult. Information paper will be available to attendees.

The National Rural Women's Coalition and the National Foundation for Australian Women, with support from Women on Boards, are sponsoring this workshop as part of a series in different cities. NRWC is especially keen to ensure that the voices of women in rural and regional settings are heard, in the eventual report to Federal and State Governments.

Women on Boards Broken Hill Workshop - Getting Started: Recognising and Reaching Your Career & Board Potential

This workshop is designed to assist you with practical strategies to position yourself for career and board roles. More details at: <http://www.womenonboards.org.au/professional-development/gettingstarted.htm>

Workshop is 2:30pm-5.30pm, Tuesday September 29 at Enterprise Centre, Broken Hill, Cost: \$66

For both events reply to ruth.medd@womenonboards.org.au



ATTACHMENT 3

Media release



'Broken Hill consultation - what can be done to improve Australian women's chronic underemployment?'

The impact of the recession on women report released on 24 August 2009 by The Australia Institute and launched by Sharan Burrow President ACTU, finds that women comprise the majority of the 'hidden unemployment' in the economy and their financial position will worsen as a result of the GFC-induced downturn.

The National Rural Women's Coalition and the National Foundation for Australian Women, with support from Women on Boards, are sponsoring a Broken Hill consultation as part of a series of consultations in different cities.

"We are particularly keen to ensure that the voices of women in rural and regional settings are heard in the eventual report to Federal and State Governments." Marie Coleman, Chair NFAW Social Policy Committee.

The report found that

- High levels of underemployment and chronic low pay for Australian women are set to worsen as a result of the global recession warns a major new report.
- This hidden unemployment has resulted in many women not using labour market schemes designed to help people re-enter the workforce and to protect workers from the worst of the economic crisis.
- Many women are unable to access work yet wanted to work, because of their inability to make suitable arrangements about their caring responsibilities.
- Many women in this situation need access to TAFE style courses, but find access difficult.

Information paper will be available to attendees.

Come and discuss the implications for Broken Hill of the findings of the report of women and unemployment. An information paper is available.

Consultation arrangements

29 September 2009

6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at Broken Hill Enterprise Development Centre, 41-79 Crystal St

Contact: Marie Coleman 0414 483 067



Women hit hardest by downturn

A new study has found that women will become worse off due to the economic downturn.

The implications of this will be discussed at a meeting in the city tonight.

The 'impact of the recession on women' report found that women comprise the majority of the "hidden unemployed".

The Australia Institute's report, released last month, also found that women's financial position would worsen as a result of the financial downturn.

The National Rural Women's Coalition and the National Foundation for Australian

Women, with support from Women on Boards, are sponsoring the consultation meetings.

Marie Coleman, from the NFAW's social policy committee, said it was important that country people were heard too.

"We are particularly keen to ensure that the voices of women in rural and regional settings are heard in the eventual report to Federal and State Governments."

The report found that: High levels of underemployment and chronic low pay for Australian women were set to worsen as a result of the global recession; this hidden unemployment has resulted in many women not using labour market schemes designed to help people re-enter the work force and to protect workers from the worst of the economic crisis; many women who wanted to work were unable to use it because of their inability to make suitable arrangements about their caring responsibilities; many women in this situation needed access to TAFE-style courses, but found access difficult.

An information paper will be available to people attending tonight's meeting.

It will be held at the Broken Hill Enterprise Development Centre in Crystal Street from 6pm to 8pm.

2 — Barrier Daily Truth, Tuesday, September 29, 2009