Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0126

Victorian Women’s Trust

(1985 -)

Born	19850101, Melbourne Australia
Occupation	Philanthropic organisation

Summary

The Victorian Women’s Trust (VWT) was established in 1985 with a gift from the state government to the women of Victoria, in acknowledgement of their contribution to Victoria’s history and achievements. Now independent of government, it operates as both a philanthropic organisation and lobby group that champions the rights and entitlements of women.

Details

As part of Victoria’s 150th anniversary celebrations in 1982, $1 million was allocated to Victorian women in recognition of their contribution to the State. Though the Victorian Premier, the Hon. John Cain, announced that the money would be used for a women’s centre in the city of Melbourne, it soon became apparent that funds would not stretch to cover the purchase and upkeep of a city building and plans were abandoned in favour of a women’s trust fund. A specially appointed Implementation Committee fought hard to ensure that the Trust would be administered by an all-female board. They received strong support from the Hon. Joan Kirner and other female Labor caucus members. The establishment of the Victorian Women’s Trust in 1985 represented a departure from the traditional philanthropic foundation in several important ways: the Trust was government-funded, it was run by and for women, and none of the women involved in its establishment were wealthy benefactors. The original trustees of the VWT were the Hon. Mrs. Justice Peg Lusink, Heather O’Connor, Joan Baird, Jenny Florence, Fran Kelly, Jenny McGuirk, Loula Roudopoulos and Jean Tom.

Early projects supported by the VWT focused particularly on assisting Victorian women to attain economic independence, but they also included inventive schemes such as the Women’s Garage at Ceres, equipping women with mechanical skills, or Oozzing Juices, a women’s drama group that performed in metropolitan housing estates and regional community venues. The emphasis on community involvement was strong from the outset. By August 1998, the VWT was launching its Purple Sage Project with the aim of gathering community groups for discussion around the politics of the day. At a time when companies were downsizing and the free market philosophy was dominating, the project offered a much-needed opportunity for communities to speak out about their concerns. 600 group leaders were appointed around Victoria, and findings were presented to the government. In recent years, the Trust launched another large-scale project of vital importance with Watermark, encouraging community discussion to raise awareness about Australia’s dangerous water shortage.

With the Stegley Foundation and the Reichstein Foundation, the VWT founded a Women’s Donor Network in Melbourne. By the mid-1990s, this network had become Women in Philanthropy (WIP), an advocacy and discussion group with the aim of directing philanthropic funds toward women and girls. In recent years, WIP has been revived once more as the Women Donors Network under the direction of Eve Mahlab. The VWT operates multiple projects, dispensing something in the order of $100,000 annually. It relies upon philanthropic support from Victorian women. Recent programs include a Women’s Circus Workshop for women with histories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse; the Purple Room Support Service, offering mentoring and employment advice for young people who have completed custodial sentences; and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, sponsoring a women’s human rights worker to undertake legal casework for asylum seeker women.

Published resources

Thesis
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

Book
Creative Philanthropy: Toward a New Philanthropy for the Twenty-First Century, Anheier, Helmut K. and Diana Leat, 2006

Catalogue
Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives, Victorian Women's Trust, 2001

Report
Our Water Mark: Australians Making a Difference in Water Reform, Victorian Women's Trust, 2007

The Purple Sage Project, Victorian Women's Trust, 2000

Site Exhibition
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria
Records, 1975-2001 [manuscript].

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