

Replicating the Majura Women's Group model

A compendium of resources for establishing self-run groups for women at home with young children using the Majura Women's Group model

Author: Sue Hoffmann

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A project of the Brindabella Women's Group
in collaboration with the Majura Women's Group.

Produced with assistance from the ACT Government under the Community Support and Infrastructure Grants Program.

This compendium of resources is dedicated to the many women who might benefit from being part of a group like the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups – and to their children, families and communities.

I could cite many examples of collaborative work we have undertaken, but will highlight one partnership set up under the Community Inclusion Fund, because it encapsulates many of the themes I've discussed.

On advice from the Community Inclusion Board, the [ACT] Government is providing \$110,000 over three years to the Majura Women's Group in Downer, in partnership with ACT Mental Health, to take its 'Mums at Home in the Community' program further afield, into Tuggeranong.

For a number of years, this self-run community group has encouraged women with young children to come together for a couple of hours each week to talk about their experiences and learn new skills.

Each year the women set themselves challenging projects. Last year they completed a fantastic mosaic for the Queen Elizabeth II Family Centre. This year, with the help of an artist in residence, they're designing and making two felt wall hangings for the mothers' rooms in the Mental Health Unit at Calvary Public Hospital.

By combining on-site childcare, which gives the women some time to themselves, and project-based activities, the women have developed a model for dealing with some of the characteristic problems and risks that can confront mothers at home - including social isolation, low self-esteem, and post-natal depression.

While too early to report whether the model has successfully been transplanted to the south side, the project shows the real public value, the real public good, that can flow from genuine partnerships between government and the community, born out of the community's own instinctive awareness of where the gaps exist, and what might fill those gaps.

Extract, 31 August 2005 lecture by ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, to the Australia and New Zealand School of Government on "Shaping Opportunities, Creating Public Value: Government and Community Collaboration in the ACT"

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1981 a grass roots community group for women at home with children commenced in Downer, ACT. That group, which has been known as the Majura Women's Group since 1986, has continued to flourish and now meets weekly during school terms, providing a broad range of stimulating and creative opportunities for its members, together with adjunct childcare for those members who wish to access it. Central to its modus operandi is the principle of being self-run. While making for a substantial workload for the group's committee, the group's autonomy ensures the relevance of the group's program of activities, empowers its members and kindles their passionate involvement.

The instincts and experiences of the group's early members led to the development of a highly successful model of operation, which has continued with little significant change for almost twenty years.

In recognition of the group's success and its benefits for community building and the health and wellbeing of the women and their children at a stage of life which can be quite challenging, the group saw fit in 2004 to seek to assist a similar group to get started on the southside of Canberra. And so, with intensive input and support from the Majura Women's Group, the Brindabella Women's Group came into being and now operates independently as a self-run group.

This document takes the next step in providing for further replication of the Majura Women's Group by rendering the model more readily accessible to other parties who may wish to replicate it either locally or further afield. It aims to provide a set of resources to enable the establishment of a group modelled on the Majura Women's Group without the need for intensive input from either the Majura or Brindabella Women's Group.

This compendium of resources includes:

- An articulation of the Majura Women's Group model;
- An overview of the development of the Majura Women's Group;
- A summary of key general research relevant to the benefits of the model;
- A summary of recent external evaluations of the groups;
- An account of the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group, drawing out the key dimensions and principles for replicating the Majura Women's Group model;
- 'Nuts and bolts' information for replicating the model; and
- Further resources as appended material and further references.

The document may also be a useful reference for ongoing groups modelled on the Majura Women's Group.

This resource is the culmination of a project initiated by the Brindabella Women's Group and undertaken in collaboration with the Majura Women's Group and Belconnen Community Service. The author was a member of the Majura Women's Group from 2001 to 2007 and initiated and co-ordinated the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group from 2004 to 2007.

The compilation of these resources was made possible by funding from the ACT Government under the Community Support and Infrastructure Grants program.

This compendium of resources can be found online at www.brindabellawomensgroup.org

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I am indebted to Ruth Pratt, Kym Schmid and Gaetane Burkolter (from Brindabella Women's Group) and to Regan Field and Zoe Bowman (both from Majura Women's Group) for helpful feedback on drafts.

I would also like to acknowledge the countless women and children who have unknowingly contributed to this project. It has been my experiences together with the members of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups over the last eight years – and in particular the experience of establishing the Brindabella Women's Group – that has provided the basis for generating and compiling this set of resources.

I also extend my thanks to people from other agencies who have indirectly contributed to the project through the key role they played in the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group, namely Eulea Kiraly (then with Tuggeranong Community Arts), Steve Druitt (then with ACT Health) and Sue Clay (ACT Health). Thanks are also due to student researchers who conducted evaluations of the groups: Nicole Box with Barbara Chevalier, and Shari Read with Debra Rickwood (all through the University of Canberra).

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Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

There are certain places in life that meet up beautifully with one's soul, and the Majura Women's Group is that for me. Perhaps it's the instant simpatico that comes with sitting alongside other women with small children, or the fact that it is all right to either bring your children into the meeting room or take your children to the terrific childcare next door, or the small, essential civility of the morning tea break. But I think for me, the heart of it is that this group fiercely and lovingly protects the creativity and intellectual spirits of women – not in our roles as mothers, but in our own right as women. Its uniqueness is a puzzle of sorts: while being mothers of little ones is what brings us together, what we share is beyond that. We share our multi-layered selves, not separate from being mothers, but in the wholeness of being mothers and being women.

The Majura Women's Group has a rich history ... which is evident in its weekly gatherings. The mornings have a rhythm worn comfortably like a well-loved shirt. The projects have been varied and captivate our imaginations. We produce tangible, beautiful results. This group is a rarity because it carves out a place for women to be themselves – with and apart from their children.

This group resonates with my heart and leaving it is one of the top reasons I'm sad about moving from Canberra back to the States. I'll look forward to keeping in touch with its evolution from afar.

Ellen Unruh, Majura Women's Group newsletter, 2004¹

I quite often sit back and think what it really means to be a mother. It is a hard role to define and I am sure each of us here today, with our varied backgrounds and experiences would have greatly differing ideas on this. Some days can be incredibly exhilarating but on other days it can be a very lonely place to be.

In today's society we quite often measure ourselves on what we do, our occupation, the perceived way in which we contribute to society. This leaves mothers in a state of confusion. What we do is undefined, as our job description changes from day to day, and when it all gets a bit much resigning is not an option. When we were at work we knew if we were fulfilling our role and doing a good job. It was something that in the structure of the work place we could easily measure. Our mothering ability cannot be measured - we do what we can, when we can, and hope it's the right thing.

The Majura Women's Group offers women a supportive place to go and be involved, to be fulfilled and be part of something, which is the one thing we so often miss. We participate in meaningful creative projects, and feel a real sense of achievement when we look at the results. We still talk of our sleepless nights, our toddler's unexplainable behaviours, and the seemingly impossible task of maintaining some kind of order at home. But that is not the focus. It is we who are the focus. The women doing the most important job that we will ever do.

Extract of speech by Mia Menzies, 2004 Backyard Project Co-ordinator,
launch of the mosaic, *Nurture*, donated to QE II Family Centre
Majura Women's Group newsletter, 2005².

1 As reproduced in the Majura Women's Group 25th anniversary publication, *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 Years*, 2006, pp. 31-32.

2 Also reproduced in *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 Years*, 2006 (preliminary pages).

1. INTRODUCTION

This set of resources has been compiled to enable interested parties (individuals, community groups and agencies) to establish new groups modelled on the highly successful Majura Women's Group (MWG), which is a self-run community group based in Downer, ACT, for women at home with young children.

In 2004 the MWG embarked on a project to foster the establishment of a second group, modelled on itself in the southern suburbs of Canberra, and so the Brindabella Women's Group (BWG) came into being. The latter is now also a self-run community group for women at home with young children.

Given the successful establishment of the BWG and the value of both groups, the Brindabella Women's Group, supported by the MWG, took on a project to render the Majura Women's Group model more readily accessible to other interested individuals, groups and organisations. The aim of the project was to generate a set of resources to enable interested parties to replicate the model elsewhere, without the need for intensive input and involvement from one of the existing groups, as was the case with the establishment of the BWG. This compendium of resources is the result of that project. It can be used to establish additional groups in the ACT and/or further afield.

The compendium comprises:

- Information about the Majura Women's Group, its evolution and the model implicit in its current mode of operation;
- Information about the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group;
- Relevant research findings used to make a case for funding the establishment of the BWG;
- The key findings of external evaluations of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups;
- Specific "how to's" - the 'nuts and bolts' of the groups; and
- Copies of potentially useful documentation.

Interested readers may also wish to peruse the many publications produced by the Majura Women's Group, a listing of which is at Appendix 1.

This set of resources can be used to foster the establishment of a group similar to the current day Majura and Brindabella Groups. Equally, it can be used to start a group bearing closer resemblance to the early Majura Women's Group – or something in between.

There are doubtless aspects of the development of Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups that are idiosyncratic and not particularly important for the purposes of replicating the MWG model. This document attempts to identify the key aspects of bringing such groups into being. While it might be a community agency which takes the initiative to develop a group modelled on the Majura Women's Group, it should be noted that faithful replication of the model requires that the new group is autonomous from as early as feasible. In fact, compiling these resources has highlighted that attending to this is probably the fundamental key to success. While these resources include a considerable amount of information at the level of specific "how to's", it would be unwise to accord these details undue priority relative to that of fostering autonomy. The relevant principles of the model are drawn out in the document and may be more useful than the details included for replicating the model.

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

While the history of the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group is not the focus of this document, something of the story of fostering the autonomy of the Brindabella Women's Group is included in Appendix 6. This account is included to bring to life the application of the principles and to show the resulting gradual building of group engagement, ownership and the associated take up of the responsibility and running of the group. This chronicle also demonstrates something of the 'organic' nature of the development of a healthy group, with unplanned events sometimes feeding usefully into the group's development.

Members of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups wish users of these resources well in any endeavours to replicate the Majura Women's Group model elsewhere. Both groups would welcome news of any initiatives to replicate the Majura Women's Group model elsewhere³.

³ The groups can be contacted as follows:
Majura Women's Group, PO Box 7123, Watson, ACT 2602. See also www.majurawomensgroup.net
Brindabella Women's Group, PO Box 2648, Tuggeranong ACT 2901. See also www.brindabellawomensgroup.org

2. THE MAJURA WOMEN'S GROUP

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 - 2.2.5 Should the model be modified for further replication?

2.1. Introducing the Majura Women's Group

The Majura Women's Group commenced in the ACT in 1981 as a self-initiated group for women at home with young children. It is an open self-run group which has continued to operate since that time and currently provides a program of weekly half-day sessions during school terms, together with adjunct childcare.

The following text provides an overview of the impetus for the establishment of the group, what it does and what it achieves⁴.

For a generation of Canberra mothers the Majura Women's Group has provided sanity, friendship and new skills. It has offered support to women who are at home with young children by giving them an opportunity to meet, discuss issues and talk about the problems and joys of parenting. The group also provides a creative outlet and a reminder that even though bringing up children is a full time job there is room for personal growth and self-expression.

The Majura Women's Group was started in 1981 by a group of mothers seeking to overcome the isolation and lack of adult stimulation that can accompany the work of a parent. It now meets weekly at the Downer Community Centre. Members run the group and undertake all administrative and organisational work voluntarily. The Majura Women's Group continues to maintain its focus on supporting women with young children. It offers discussion sessions on parenting, health and a broad range of topical issues. It also offers physical activity sessions, as well as an annual creative project called the 'backyard project'. ...

Some [of these projects result in] individual artworks, others[result in] group works. In recent years the Group has concentrated their creative skills on public artworks, which can be seen in many locations around Canberra.

Further information about the Majura Women's Group is contained in several of its publications⁵ and in its regular newsletters. The group's website⁶ is also a source of information about the group.

4 Extract of the 'wall text' which introduced the group's 25th anniversary retrospective exhibition at the Canberra Museum and Gallery in 2006. This text was reproduced in the group's anniversary publication, *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 Years*, 2006, p.1.

5 See particularly: *Homebound: Community art in the Majura Women's Group*, 1996; and *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 years*, 2006.

Many of the group's group art works can be seen in various public places in the ACT. A listing of the public art works created up to 2006 is included as an appendix to the group's 25th anniversary publication⁷. Much of the group's archival record, including newsletters and publications, has been donated to the ACT Heritage Library.

2.2. The Majura Women's Group model

The core features of the Majura Women's Group model of operation were identified in the process of establishing the Brindabella Women's Group⁸ as follows:

- 1. **Woman-focused.** The Group is primarily concerned about the needs of the women - nurturing the 'nurturers', while also ensuring that the needs of the children are also well met. (In contrast, playgroups primarily address the needs of the children.)*
- 2. **Arts foundation.** Many of the sessions devoted to arts activities - nurturing creativity seems to be very constructive. It helps to create a very positive, warm, joyful and creative culture in the group. Likewise, parenting (done well) is very creative – e.g. how can I respond creatively to this impasse/tantrum with my toddler?*
- 3. **Community arts projects.** The inclusion of community arts projects in its programs has many benefits. Women value the opportunity to collaborate artistically and work together to create something that is given back to the community. The projects foster team work as well as stretching members to learn new skills over a period of time. Members take great pride in seeing their work displayed in public. What is achieved is well beyond what members could hope to achieve individually given their responsibilities for young children.*
- 4. **Variety.** There is something for everyone. The provision of a variety of sessions, including sessions on aspects of parenting education and physical activity (e.g. dance), helps women to broaden their horizons and develop interests that they can pursue outside the Group.*
- 5. **Self-run.** The group is self-run (by its members and through its elected committee). This ensures that the direction of the Group and session activities are highly relevant to members. It is empowering of the women. It gives them the opportunity to be committee members and to re-connect with / re-affirm old skills and/or learn new skills. Some women thrive on invitations to go along to associated meetings/consultations with other organisations. Involvement in the 'public domain' at a time of such intense domestic focus seems to be very valuable for some women.*
- 6. **Child-friendly and adjunct child-care.** Childcare is provided in the room next door. Without childcare, the sessions would be an exercise in utter frustration. However, babies are readily accommodated in the room with the women. Women are supported in easing their children into childcare and the decisions of the women in when and how they do this are respected.*

6 www.majurawomensgroup.net

7 Majura Women's Group, op. cit., Appendix 4, p. 41.

8 Application for Community Inclusion funding, 2004, Attachment 1.

7. **Affordable.** *Nominal fees are levied as follows: annual membership is \$15; session fees are \$2 per attendance and \$3 for childcare per family attendance. Members also contribute 50 cents to cover morning tea costs.*⁹

8. **Open and flexible.** *It is an open group. Women come along to the sessions when they can according to what's happening with their baby's sleep and children's sickness, etc. Women are welcome to arrive part way through the session (according to the baby's sleep needs / delays associated with a last minute dirty nappy / vomiting episode, etc.). Women are always welcome to join in with a community arts project part way along. Care is taken to ensure that arts projects and how they are managed can accommodate this.*

The group's raison d'être together with the above features have made for a group culture, which is welcoming, mutually supportive, accommodating, creative and validating of women at home with young children.

Has the model changed since 2004 and is it in the process of further evolution? In essence the model hasn't changed, although there have been some significant recent changes in the way some of the functions are managed, as follows:

- **Outsourcing of childcare**

During the establishment phase of the Brindabella Women's Group, the opportunity arose to 'outsource' the management of childcare. The group negotiated a contract with the local regional community service ("Communities@Work") for the latter to provide an adjunct childcare service for the group. This relieved the group of the considerable burden of being the direct employer of childcare staff and of the need to have and retain all the associated requisite expertise. The group has subsequently changed their childcare service provider several times, but continues to outsource the provision of childcare. Meanwhile, the Majura Women's Group has followed suit and outsourced childcare service provision to its local regional community service, "Northside Community Service".

- **Outsourcing of bookkeeping**

In 2007 the Majura Women's Group elected to outsource the bookkeeping workload that had previously been undertaken by the group's Treasurer. The Brindabella Women's Group has not (to date, at least) made this change: the Treasurer does the bookkeeping.

2.2.1. The value of 'universal' access to the groups

The MWG model provides for open access to the groups: they are not restricted to women at home with young children *with particular needs* (eg women at particular risk of postnatal mental health issues or who are experiencing major parenting difficulties). Being a 'universal' group provides for a general community mix of members, which promotes a strengths-based culture and enables the group to be self-managing. It allows women to join without any need or expectation to declare any vulnerability they may have. Equally, they can progressively choose when, where and to whom they

⁹ Majura Women's Group member contributions as at 2004. With the benefit of government funding, these fees have been substantially reduced. Current fee structures are: Majura Women's Group - \$5 annual membership, no session attendance fee and \$3 childcare fee per family; Brindabella Women's Group - \$1 annual membership, \$5 voluntary combined session and childcare fee.

disclose any challenges they may be experiencing associated with their role as mothers. This serves to normalise rather than pathologise the general trials and tribulations of parenting and mothering.

2.2.2. Women only groups

At various stages, both groups have considered the merits of broadening the groups to parents of young children, ie opening the groups to men at home with young children as well as women. While the potential value of the groups to such men has been acknowledged, both groups have elected to limit their membership to women, mindful that the dynamics and culture of the group would be at risk of unwanted change. Members value the safety and culture of openness within the groups to discuss personal issues, many of which are unique to women's experience, such as those associated with pregnancy, giving birth, breast-feeding, being a mother, and the interplay of women's experience of parenting and the rest of their lives. Accordingly, both groups continue to be women only groups.

To some extent, both groups have also catered to the needs of women who are parenting their grandchildren. This mix has worked well and enriched the groups through the life experiences of women who have adult children in addition to parenting responsibility for young children.

2.2.3. A summary of key general research relevant to the groups

Published research relevant to the contribution made by the MWG to the health and wellbeing of mothers and their young children is summarised in the following extract from the 2004 application for funding to establish the Brindabella Women's Group¹⁰:

Many women at home with young children are profoundly isolated, and this at a time when they face the relentless and often taxing challenges of their parenting role and adjusting to it. The perinatal period is a time of particular vulnerability to maternal mood disorders and these carry significant risks not only for the women concerned but also for their babies and children. The importance of infant attachment, early positive parenting and the early years for child development is well established (Milgrom et al, 1999), and these supports for child development are jeopardised by maternal mental health problems. Studies have consistently shown that 14% of Australian women experience postnatal depression and about 35% experience some form of postnatal distress well into the first year of their baby's life (O'Hara et al., 1990). Despite the high incidence of mental health problems in mothers there are few interventions that target this high-risk group in an attempt to reduce the known risk factors. This project targets mothers at home who are the primary carers of infants and young children, a group which is known to have increased vulnerability to mental health problems. The project aims to increase some of the protective factors for both mothers and children using a creative and economical approach of enhancing community networks.

There is good evidence that positive social supports and networks enhance parenting beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Dept of Family and Community Services, 2004). This publication also cites evidence of an association between social support and infant attachment: mothers of irritable babies who had more social support had more securely attached infants. Strong

¹⁰ Majura Women's Group's application for Community Inclusion funding, 2004, pp.12-13. Citations for the references included in this quote are listed in Appendix 2 to this document: Further references.

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community networks and adequate self-esteem have been identified as protective factors for perinatal mood disorders (Kowalenko et al, 2000). Protective factors identified for the health of children include a sense of connectedness to community and parental health and wellbeing (Developing a National Public Health Action Plan for Children 2005–2008). These protective factors of increased social support and connectedness to community are key components of the Majura Woman's Group which may mitigate against the development and severity of mental health disorders such as postnatal distress and depression (Cutrona & Troutman, 1986).

There is also published evidence that participation in the arts can achieve social connectedness and mental health benefits. The recent Australia Council publication, Art and Wellbeing, is the result of a three-year study of the connections between art and health, community strengthening, active citizenship and social inclusion. It cites VicHealth's evaluation of 28 projects in their Community Art Participation program which identified numerous specific mental health benefits, including the development of positive relationships, connecting families, connecting diverse communities, enhancing skills, and working against discrimination and violence (Mills & Brown, 2004). There are also published accounts of the value of involvement of the arts for marginalised young people (Marsden and Thiele, 2000). These authors have also developed a theoretical model of practice for cultural community development as it applies to marginalised people (Thiele and Marsden, 2003).

2.2.4. External evaluations of the groups

Two external evaluations were undertaken in the course of the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group. These were conducted as part of the Community Inclusion Fund (CIF) project in the period 2005–07. Both projects were undertaken by students from the University of Canberra. The first was a qualitative community development evaluation of the very new BWG undertaken in 2005. The second was more quantitative evaluation of both groups undertaken from an applied psychology perspective over 2006–07.

Nicole Box's 2005 community development evaluation of the Brindabella Women's Group found that:

- There was a strong need for a community group for women at home with young children on the 'southside' of Canberra;
- BWG is highly valued by its members as well as other community organisations;
- The group attracts a diverse range of women;
- Community organisations are referring women to the group and receiving positive feedback from these women;
- BWG members benefit from their participation in the group, through strengthening their social networks, building their sense of community and developing their skills and knowledge;
- The broad range of activities offered is beneficial (cf the narrower focus of some parenting groups which limit what they provide to sessions on parenting education); and
- Members valued a community-based model and the opportunity to contribute to the management of the group.

Recommendations for the development of future parenting groups are included in the Executive Summary for the evaluation which is reproduced at Appendix 3.

Shari Read's more quantitative evaluation of Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups in 2006-07 focused primarily on the sense of connectedness and belongingness engendered by the groups and the positive effects on mental health and wellbeing of the women involved. This research found:

- A high level of Post Natal Depression (PND) amongst members of the groups (nearly 16% of members of the women's groups surveyed revealed a level of PND that would warrant clinical concern);
- That despite the high level of PND amongst members, the groups were rated highly on measures of belonging and trust, social capital and social support;
- High levels of individual and collective self esteem and resilience for group members, suggesting that the groups provide valuable resources to their members which have been shown by research to be instrumental to recovering from depression in the postnatal period; and
- A significant increase in resilience over time for group members, suggesting that participating in a community group is a protective factor for women with young children.

The Executive Summary for Shari's evaluation is reproduced at Appendix 4.

Together the findings of these two studies affirm the value of the groups being open groups (universally accessible). The relatively high level of PND identified was in some ways a surprise. It could be argued that the groups are succeeding in attracting women in particular 'need' of the mental health benefits of the groups. At the same time, the women gain the benefits of joining with the broader community of women in the perinatal period, and from the strengths-based approach of the groups (see 2.2.1 for more on this).

2.2.5. Should the model be modified for further replication?

In considering the question of what, if any, changes might be needed/useful when another agency seeks to replicate the model, it may be useful to think about the desirability of outsourcing childcare, possibly also bookkeeping functions, and the need for a suitable venue. An agency that initiates a new group modelled on the Majura Women's Group may be able to assist in all three regards with relative ease¹¹. If it does, the challenge may be to avoid compromising the establishment of the autonomy and independence of the group. Careful attention to negotiating arrangements for the provision of these services and facilities, including the formalisation of these arrangements (eg as a Memorandum of Understanding) as the group assumes responsibility for itself, may help in this regard.

¹¹ Agencies likely to consider replicating the Majura Women's Group model may well have suitable facilities for hire, provide childcare for other purposes and have in house bookkeeping functions and expertise.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAJURA WOMEN'S GROUP

The early development of the Majura Women's Group may be of particular interest to anyone wishing to start a similar group with no funding / on a very limited budget. The genesis of the group is described by its foundation convenor, Paula Simcocks, as follows:

The Majura Women's Group was an attempt to pool the resources of the women around the neighbourhood, to help strangers become workmates and alleviate the difficulties of raising children.

We wanted more than a playgroup; we wanted a group that catered to our adult interests whilst continuing to oversee the care of our children. Women in Canberra frequently lacked any of the traditional supports to women at home; they often lacked family and old friends. They had a strong need to create a new community to build up supportive networks...

For the first five years, women at home with small children met in their homes, mainly in Downer. We needed an easy solution as we were overstretched, overtired and limited in our experience in organising community groups. So we decided, we would visit each other's home, and the hostess would provide a simple morning tea, and if we were lucky they would get to arrange a speaker of their choice. Rotating homes and responsibilities for organising speakers meant that each woman could further their own interests and it did not matter how organised or disorganised she was.

It became increasingly difficult to watch the children whilst meeting to have stimulating discussion with outside speakers. The catalyst for change came when one participant had her chicken coop demolished by bored three year olds. It was time to move into bigger premises and with people paid to supervise the children. This necessitated a constitution and a submission for funding which was successful on its second application and has been so ever since.¹²

And so the group evolved from the inexpensive model of meeting in members' homes to meeting in public premises with paid workers to supervise the children. This mode of operation was dependent on funding and initially took the form of occasional courses and morning teas. However, in time the irregularity of this arrangement was problematic, leading to the next development, as described in the group's 25th anniversary publication¹³:

Back in 1990 it became necessary to re-evaluate the operating model then used by the group. Numbers were dropping and the model of occasional courses and morning teas in the Downer Community Centre was not enough to draw a regular group of women together.

The new committee came up with the idea of having a regular Wednesday morning meeting. This would provide a weekly routine for the mothers and regular employment to the childcare workers. It would also provide more opportunity to develop the energy and commitment needed for the group to go forward.

¹² *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 years*, 2006, pp. 2-3.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 4.

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A school term program and a regular newsletter were developed and the morning sessions alternated between being focused on discussion (political, health, child related, general interest) and creative mornings. The committee shared the responsibility for organising the sessions and working on funding issues. This model has proved successful and is still used by the group today.

Indeed, this format of weekly sessions during school terms has stood the test of time and continues to the present - some 18 years at the time of writing. The regularity and predictability of this model of operation provide a rhythm for the group's activities that works well for members, whether they are active in the group weekly, or participate on a more occasional basis.

The diversity of general sessions held by the Majura Women's Group is described in the anniversary publication¹⁴ as follows:

The Majura Women's Group has held a wide variety of discussion, guest speaker and physical activity sessions over the years. These sessions stimulate and nurture us mentally, physically and emotionally. Discussion sessions cover a wide range of topics and reflect the interests of group members at the time. Some are led by guest speakers and others are self-run. We talk about ourselves, our families, our homes and our community. Topics have included health issues, relationships, our children, gardening, legal matters and current affairs. Physical activity sessions have included belly dancing, tai chi, drumming, creative movement and massage.

The publication goes on to describe a sample of the sessions led by guest speakers held between 1996 and 2001, as reported by members in the group's newsletters. The quarterly newsletter includes the program for the following term, and reports on sessions from the previous term. In recent years, this information has been made available through the group's website.¹⁵

Creative sessions and projects have also been an important feature of the Majura Women's Group model. The group's anniversary publication describes the value of these and provides an overview of the evolution of what have become annual arts projects as follows¹⁶:

An important aspect of the Majura Women's Group has been the opportunity for women to engage in creative activities. When at home with young children it is difficult to move away from the necessary but often mundane tasks of caring for a house and family. Creative sessions provide an opportunity for women to have some time for themselves, to express thoughts and feelings in a safe environment and explore different ideas and artistic media. Creative sessions also provide a real sense of achievement for women who rarely have a chance to finish any task. The completion of a card, drawing or lino print is a tangible product of the period of their lives dedicated to raising young children. Another important, but not so obvious benefit is the way in which friendships develop as women sit side by side painting pictures or placing mosaic tiles. It is at these times, when relaxed and with busy hand, that conversations about the real issues of mothering and life generally often evolve – where advice, support and friendship can be safely offered and accepted.

14 *ibid.*, p.9.

15 www.majurawomensgroup.net

16 Majura Women's Group, op cit., pp. 13-15.

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*Creative sessions have ranged from one-off self-run sessions where a member will pass on their own knowledge and skills to the group, to a large-scale art project spanning up to a year. Writing has been an ongoing theme of creative sessions for the group and a number of publications have resulted from sessions run by local authors – see Appendix 2 for a listing of the group's publications.*¹⁷

Since 1989 the group has received funding to employ an artist to run annual community art projects. Funding was originally sourced from the Australia Council. Since 1992 it has been received from the ACT Government's arts body, artsACT. Early projects were supported by Megalo Arts Access who managed the grants of behalf the group, but later Majura Women's Group applied for and managed its own grants.

The first major creative project, held in 1989, was termed a 'backyard' project to imply a sense of familiarity with an individual's immediate environment. This term has continued to be used for all of the group's annual artist-led projects. Both the length of the projects and the employment of an artist have been critical to the success of the backyard projects. They have provided for a real transfer of artistic skill to the members. For some members it has been an introduction to artistic methods never previously experienced, for others the opportunity to pick up skills put aside while working in the paid workforce or rearing children. Many women have taken the skills and confidence gained during the backyard projects and continued to develop their artistic skills through other recreational or professional art courses. For the artists employed over the years, working with the Majura Women's Group has enhanced their community development skills, introduced them to new ways of working and provided insights into different artistic approaches.

The backyard projects have been diverse in their artistic media and their outcomes. The eighteen backyard projects undertaken to date have included drawing, painting and printing, clay work and mosaic, quilting, embroidery and felting, writing and recording. In all cases they have involved a close collaboration with the artists employed on the projects and the group's members. Members are involved in all aspects of the design and making of the final works. Some projects have focused on individual works, while others have involved the making of public artworks that are on display in many venues around Canberra. The public artworks together with the exhibitions, publications and radio programs that have come from the projects have made the Majura Women's Group highly visible in the wider community.

The anniversary publication lists the group's 'backyard projects' up until 2006 in one of its appendices¹⁸ and a selection of the projects are featured in the body of the publication.

¹⁷ Reproduced as Appendix 1 in this document.

¹⁸ Majura Women's Group, op. cit., Appendix 1, pp. 36-38.

4. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BRINDABELLA WOMEN'S GROUP

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4.1. Introduction to the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group

The establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group was an initiative of the Majura Women's Group in response to community calls for the establishment of a similar group on the south side of Canberra. The new group was established to operate in a similar way to the then contemporary MWG. Its development did not follow the progression of the gradual evolution of the MWG. Accordingly, the BWG relied from the outset on the provision of services such as adjunct childcare, paid professional artist facilitators and the hire of community facilities in which to meet, not to mention the considerable cost of insurances. The corresponding overheads made for costs in excess of what participants could reasonably be expected to contribute, and so the establishment of BWG was reliant on a level of funding from the outset.

The Brindabella Women's Group's website¹⁹ provides current details of the group, including its program of activities, current community arts project and reviews of recent sessions.

As the Brindabella Women's Group "Establishment Co-ordinator", and with the benefit of having been a long-term member of the MWG, the dimensions of what I attended to in this role can be identified as follows:

1. Knowing, articulating and selling the vision
2. Engaging the enthusiasm of [potential] members
3. Engaging other community agencies – including collaborators
4. Pursuing funding
5. Publicity
6. Evaluation

¹⁹ www.brindabellawomensgroup.org

7. Getting started
8. Progressive development of autonomy and independence
9. The role of the Establishment Co-ordinator

Some of the above pertain to the establishment of a group of any sort. In the following section an elaboration of each of the above is provided. In addition to providing something of the story of the start of the Brindabella Women's Group, the key principles have been drawn out. These can then be applied in new contexts when seeking to replicate the Majura Women's Group model.

4.2. Key dimensions of replicating the model

4.2.1. Knowing, articulating and selling the vision

A strong appreciation of the model and a steadfast commitment to replicating it was vital for the establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group. Similarly, the replication of the model elsewhere would require a solid understanding of the model and a firm commitment to it.

Articulation and promotion of the vision to establish a similar group in the south of Canberra was not difficult. In fact, this possibility was first mooted from outside of the Majura Women's Group. I recall conversations with Emma Baldock from the QE II Family Centre, in which Emma asserted that Canberra needs a 'Majura Women's Group' on the south side of Canberra. When I started to seriously explore this possibility, I soon learnt that other community agencies were quick to be very enthusiastic about the idea – such is the reputation of the Majura Women's Group and the esteem in which it is held.

Within the ACT, it may be relatively easy to promote the model for further replication – given that the Majura Women's Group is so well known and highly regarded. Further afield, it may be necessary to draw more on relevant evaluations and pertinent literature to sell the idea, noting the benefits and cost-effectiveness of the model.

Key principles:

- Know the model well and be committed to it.
- Articulate the vision consistently to all relevant stakeholders. In particular, as new participants/members become involved, ensure that they are appraised of the long-term plan for the group from as early as possible in their involvement.

4.2.2. Engaging the enthusiasm of [potential] members

The success of the establishment of a new self-run group relies in large measure on building the commitment of its members to the group. It follows that the experience of the participants is key to their engagement in the group and their potential commitment to it. While this continues to be true throughout the life-span of a self-run group, it was considered to be particularly vital at the commencement of the new group.

At the time that a new south side group was mooted, some members of the Majura Women's Group lived on the south side. Some of these women expressed interest in the establishment of the new

group and potential interest in being part of it. Indeed several of these MWG members became involved in the new group. One in particular, Jules Tarrant, played a key role in helping to establish the new group, bringing her enthusiasm for the Majura Women's Group model and powerfully modelling the MWG culture within the fledgling group. Jules was a foundation member of the BWG and remained active within the group for its first three and a half years. She also contributed strongly as an early committee member of the group. The enthusiasm of members such as Jules was in itself a very positive 'infectious' influence on the development of the group.

At the time that the establishment of the new group was being planned, it was considered that a key to building interest in a new group was to ensure that the first program of activities would be well received and thoroughly enjoyable. Serendipitously, an opportunity arose for a term's worth of sessions on ceramics to be provided, and this program constituted the first sessions of the group.

Toward the end of this first term, the participants of the first program were consulted about the planning for the sessions for the following term. The determination of the program by the group's members (within funding etc constraints) ensures the relevance and appeal of the program to current members – and may well reflect the interests of their peers (potential members) too.

Key principles:

- Ensure that the initial program of activities will be popular for the target group.
- Consult with members about key decisions for the group.
- Facilitate a process whereby members progressively determine the forthcoming program of activities.

4.2.3. Engaging other community agencies – including collaborators

Early in the process of exploring the possibility of establishing a south side group, contact was initiated with several south side community agencies. One of these contacts prompted Eulea Kiraly from Tuggeranong Arts Centre to suggest that a 'morning tea' be held with invitees from a range of potentially interested local agencies. This was a fruitful way to explore together possibilities for developing the idea and what role, if any, other agencies might wish to play.

A number of other agencies played key roles in support of the establishment of the BWG – some at the outset and others somewhat later in the development of the group, as the needs of the group changed. However the relationships with these agencies have continued to be important for the group. For example, Tuggeranong Arts Centre hosted an exhibition of linoprint artworks produced by the group at short notice in 2006 when other plans for the artworks fell through.

Contact with local community agencies through the local 'interagency' meetings has also been an important way of connecting with these agencies. Four group members attended one such meeting (together with their children) and spoke of their experiences of the group and its importance to them. This seemed to make a significant impact on those present at the meeting and has no doubt been important in publicising the group.

Key principles:

- Seek to engage other relevant community agencies before getting started: explore the potential for collaboration, referral, etc.

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- Progressively keep other agencies informed of developments and provide publicity information including information about the current program of activities.
- Utilise opportunities such as interagency meetings to promote the group.
- Invite members to become 'ambassadors' for the group, eg through direct contact with other agencies (eg at interagency meetings).
- Utilise networking opportunities.

4.2.4. Pursuing funding

Obtaining funding was a critical step in seeking to establish a new south side group modelled on the contemporary mode of operation of the Majura Women's Group. Thankfully, most of the applications made for funding were successful. ACT funding seemed to be more accessible than federal funding. The early grants were:

- Healthpact (ACT Health Promotion) funding of \$5K in 2004/05. This, together with very generous support through a collaboration with Tuggeranong Community Arts, enabled the first 20 sessions of the group to be staged in the second half of 2004.
- artsACT funding of \$9K for a community arts project in 2005
- [ACT] Community Inclusion three-year funding of \$110K for 2005-2007. This funding provided for all of the group's needs from 2005 to 2007, with the exception of the community arts project in 2005 (for which funding had already been secured). The project involved a partnership between the MWG (and later the BWG) and ACT Health (Mental Health policy). It was subsequently extended to provide funding for 2008 also.

In June 2008, recurrent funding for both the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups through the Mental Health Policy Unit of ACT Health was announced. For the BWG this funding covers the general running costs of the group, including provision for a [not too expensive] annual community arts project.

The reputation and track record of the Majura Women's Group (and later the BWG), the established literature on the efficacy of what the groups do (re mental health prevention, promotion and early intervention, mutual support, capacity building and community development, community arts, etc), the support of the government partner for the CIF project and the progress of external evaluations for the groups were no doubt significant in achieving funding.

Key principles:

- Determine the level of funding that will be required (this will be a function of whether aiming to 'fast track' to the current mode of operation of the Majura Women's Group or whether planning to start with a less costly approach).
- Identify opportunities to minimise costs through relevant partnerships and collaborations - being careful to ensure that the group's autonomy and ultimate independence is not compromised.
- Identify potential funding sources as needed and utilise research findings (see above), including evaluation findings to pursue funding.
- In contexts where the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups are not known, it may be necessary to start small with minimal overheads.
- Engage members of the target group in the pursuit of funding from as early as possible. There may be wisdom in limiting the commencement mode of operation – and associated

level of funding required – to a level which is compatible with the engagement of target group members in the pursuit of funding.

4.2.5. Publicity

Publicity is a key requirement for both the establishment and the continuation of the groups. The groups necessarily experience a high level of turnover of membership as women return to paid work, study, or move on with the changing involvements of their children (eg to preschool, school and other community groups). Publicity therefore needs to be attended to on an on-going basis, although in keeping with the ebb and flow of community groups, some periods seem to need more active and keen attention to publicity than others.

All of the publicity at the commencement of the BWG was publicity of minimal cost. It included:

- Publicity through collaborating community agencies;
- Email publicity through other local community agencies;
- A flyer for the first term's program;
- Publicity via the members of the MWG. The MWG newsletter doubled as the newsletter for BWG for the first two years. This helped to raise the profile of the BWG;
- Local media were invited to a session and a display of the artwork created by group members during the first term. This resulted in an article with a photograph in one of Canberra's free local newspapers, the "Chronicle";
- A display of artworks made by members was included in an Adult Learners Week Exhibition at Tuggeranong Arts Centre in 2004;
- Invitations to local community agencies to provide guest speakers led to greater awareness of the group (through direct experience of it) and therefore enhanced referrals;
- Flyers containing the following term's program were emailed to community agencies;
- Publicity via community arts projects which resulted in artworks that were donated to local community organisations whose clients are/include women with young children;
- Informal word of mouth promotion.

Key principles:

- Publicity is essential for getting started - AND it needs to be attended to on an ongoing basis.
- There is scope for considerable publicity at no / very little cost.
- Referral agencies are important for publicity.
- Local media may well also be interested in a story about a new group (or its development subsequently), thereby providing broad publicity at no cost.
- Encourage members to make the group known to their peers and make publicity information readily available to assist with this.
- Always consider the potential for promotion of the group when evaluating options for community arts projects.

4.2.6. Evaluation

A significant initiative associated with the establishment of the BWG was the instigation of two external evaluation projects. These were conducted as part of the CIF project in the period 2005-07. Both projects were undertaken by students from the University of Canberra. The first was a qualitative community development evaluation of the very new BWG undertaken in 2005. The

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second was more quantitative evaluation of both groups undertaken from an applied psychology perspective over 2006-07.

There were several motivations for these evaluations:

- While MWG enjoyed a very positive reputation in the local community and there was much anecdotal evidence of the benefits of the group, there had been no substantial external evaluation of the group;
- The trend toward evidence-based funding rendered external evaluation strategically important;
- Evaluation of the CIF project.

The Executive summaries of the reports of both of these evaluations can be found at Appendices 3 and 4.

The processes used in the community development evaluation had several spin-offs:

1. One of the BWG sessions in mid 2005 was facilitated to gain input from members about what the group meant to them. The members found the very process of sharing their perspectives and experiences on this to be bonding, clarifying and valuable for the group. The use of an arts medium for the session (collage) was in keeping with the group and what it does, and resulted in a group artwork of which members felt quite proud.
2. This session also identified a value of the group that had not previously been identified in the course of the evaluation, namely that the group served to validate its members as 'stay-at-home' mothers (in a social context within which this is becoming increasingly less common place and decreasingly valued).
3. The latter also fed into a decision on the part of MWG (in collaboration with BWG and other local community agencies) to undertake a project in 2007 called, *Beyond "I'm just a Mum": A narrative project to research rich stories of mothering*. This project culminated in a publication titled, *Beyond "I'm just a mum": rich stories of motherhood*. An electronic copy of this publication is available online²⁰.

The evaluations also raised the awareness of group members – both BWG and MWG – in relation to funding issues and the need for strategic approaches to the sustainability of the groups.

Key principles:

- It is always sound to evaluate new endeavours (and to attend to evaluation progressively in the course of the development of a new group).
- Consider evaluation from a strategic perspective.
- In keeping with good evaluation practice, develop an evaluation plan before getting started
- Note that evaluation can be fun and creative.
- Consider the inclusion of evaluation methods that are congruent with the purpose and culture of the group (eg the collage exercise).

²⁰ <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/women/publications> (scroll down to "Community Publications").

4.2.7. Getting started

In the lead up to getting started, the approach was one of:

- Providing the initial participants with enjoyable and supportive personal and social experiences;
- Communicating the vision of the formation of an autonomous group;
- Allowing for the development of relationships between group members; and
- Allowing for members to progressively increase their engagement with, and thereby commitment to, the group.

While it was the role of the Establishment Co-ordinator to plan and organise all aspects of the first sessions, it was also important to engage the participants to contribute in small ways to the running of the group from the outset. This initially took the form of small tasks such as cleaning up after morning tea – washing cups, etc. Early arrivers also volunteered to assist the session facilitator with setting up. Helping with packing up also become a norm in the group. These small contributions were considered to be important in paving the way for members to take much greater responsibility for the running of the group down the track.

There were numerous organisational tasks to attend to in getting the first sessions started – securing a suitable venue and negotiating all the associated details with the venue provider, liaising with Tuggeranong Arts Centre which had generously offered for one of its funded classes to double as the start of the new group, making arrangements for the provision of childcare (this was initially done by hiring childcare staff), arranging insurance cover for the new group (public liability and workers compensation), budgeting and negotiating administrative arrangements (including financial management) with the committee of the parent group, the MWG, and publicity.

Key principles:

- Take charge of all initial planning, co-ordination and administration.
- From the outset factor in opportunities for participants/members to make small and undemanding contributions to the smooth running of the group.

4.2.8. Progressive development of autonomy and independence

As it happened, the new group had the luxury of a relatively gradual process to achieve independence. This was as a result of the 3-year (Community Inclusion) funding which the group successfully secured for 2005 - 2007. However, the nature of groups of women at home with young children is such that they experience a high level of turnover of membership. Accordingly, a more gradual process is more realistic for such a group than would be the case for a group with less rapid turnover of membership.

The key steps taken in fostering the independence of the group can be summarised as follows:

2004 (commencing July – term 3)

From the outset:

- Communicated the vision of becoming an independent self-run group (eg on the first flyer) and reinforced it regularly;

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Toward the end of term 3 (the first term of the group):

- Invited group members to contribute to the planning of sessions for the following term;
- Facilitated a discussion of the first participants to choose a name for the group.

During term 4 (the group's second term):

- Called for volunteers to be contact points for enquiries about the group;
- Invited members to contribute articles for the [parent] newsletter²¹;
- Foreshadowed that the first committee of the group would be elected in the following year;
- Ensured that members were consulted about key decisions affecting the group (eg the group needed to find a new venue after its first 6 months and make associated arrangements for childcare – members were invited to visit the proposed new facilities to provide feedback on its suitability)
- Appraised members of the group's funding situation and possibilities.

2005

From the start of term 1:

- Introduced a membership model;
- Engaged members in the group's first community arts project;
- Engaged members in the process of managing the major grant for the establishment of the group from the commencement of the funding period;
- Invited involvement in the management of evaluation initiatives.

During term 2:

- Engaged the group in evaluation.

During terms 3 and 4:

- Invited consideration of options for including sessions with guest speakers on relevant governance matters in the program of sessions (eg about the process of becoming incorporated) – members chose to include two such sessions;
- Election of first sub-committee (formally a sub-committee of the Majura Women's Group committee).

2006

- Three members of the sub-committee drafted a constitution in consultation with members;
- The group considered whether or not to become an incorporated association;
- Election of the group's first full committee;
- BWG commenced publication of its own newsletter;
- The treasurer made preparations for independent financial management – opened a bank account, set-up financial management software and chart of accounts, etc.

2007

- BWG took out its own insurances;
- BWG became an incorporated association and obtained an ABN;
- The funding agreement for the major grant was transferred to Brindabella Women's Group;
- Remaining BWG funds were transferred to BWG and BWG achieved financial independence;

²¹ Initially the Majura Women's Group newsletter also covered news of the fledgling Brindabella Women's Group.

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- BWG commenced operating fully independently of Majura Women's Group early in the 2007-08 financial year;
- AGM held, including the second election of a full committee.

Note that initially the women were involved simply as participants. Membership was introduced after the first 6 months of operation.

Importantly, the formal steps to independence were accompanied by numerous significant developments in the life, growth, norms and identity of the group, such as:

- The challenges, achievements and public recognition of the group's community arts projects;
- The group decision in 2006 to publish a 2007 calendar featuring examples of art work created by members;
- The group's trials and tribulations in relation to the recurring challenges of securing a suitable venue and providers of childcare; and
- Spontaneous developments in the culture of the group, such as members bringing unwanted children's clothes and toys to sessions to give to other members.

An overview of the early establishment of the Brindabella Women's Group is provided by the BWG report to the MWG AGM on 31 August 2005, which is reproduced at Appendix 5.

A more detailed chronology of the organic nature of the development of the group, including some serendipitous events, is chronicled in reports to the MWG Committee from November 2004 to September 2005. Relevant extracts of these reports are reproduced at Appendix 6.

Key principles:

- Aim for a somewhat gradual transition to independence if possible (noting the high level of turnover given the nature of the target group).
- Pace the group's and individual participants'/members' 'readiness' to take on tasks and responsibilities.
- Early in the life of the group, foreshadow a membership model for the group, but initially allow attendees to be participants.
- Progressively engage participants and members in decision-making.
- Ensure that as many as possible of the 'identity' aspects of the group's development (eg choice of a name, development of a logo, etc) are within the control of participants/members.
- Insofar as the group decides to outsource any group administration / co-ordination roles, ensure that the autonomy and self-direction of the group is not compromised as a result.

4.2.9. The role of the Establishment Co-ordinator

The Establishment Co-ordinator's role was to:

- Establish and provide initial co-ordination of the group;
- Foster the development of MWG 'culture' in the new group;
- Bring knowledge and skills from MWG to the process of establishing BWG;
- Negotiate with other agencies as relevant for the key operating principles of MWG to be embedded in the establishment of BWG;
- Facilitate the gradual transition to the group becoming self-run and independent;

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- Mentor group members as they progressively took on all aspects of the running of the group, including in the setting up of financial management systems and practices;
- Provide a conduit between the MWG and the BWG for such time as BWG was being managed by the MWG;
- Foster the development of networks between BWG and relevant community agencies;
- Initiate and provide field supervision of external evaluations – one of BWG and one of both BWG and MWG;
- Gradually phase out attendance at group sessions (and committee meetings) to create ‘space’ for members and committee members to assume responsibility for the group; and
- Become a ‘consultant’ to BWG and its committee toward the end of the establishment period.

Key principles:

- Holding firm to the vision of autonomy and independence for the group.
- Providing information, contacts and support to enable members to progressively assume control.
- Openness to the group developing an individual identity and ways of doing things within the broad vision and purpose of the group.
- Trusting that members will make sound decisions reflective of the interests of the target group.
- Fostering a culture of learning and support.
- Careful judgement concerning when to intervene in relation to decision making (limiting interventions as much as possible).
- Providing an initial conduit to other entities (groups, agencies, etc) and gradually transferring responsibility for this to the group.
- Accepting that members will vary in their capacity to contribute to the running of the group.
- Understanding of the voluntary nature of the contribution of members.
- Appreciation of the dynamics of groups, small community groups and volunteer management committees.
- Supporting the group to deal constructively with challenges and conflicts.

4.2.10. How similar, how different?

While the BWG has been modelled on the MWG, having been established to be self-run and independent creates the possibility that it could evolve to become something quite different from the MWG. To date it resembles the MWG quite closely in its operation and culture, although the different histories and circumstances of the two groups do make for some differences, such as:

- It’s still early days for BWG, which at this stage perhaps needs to work considerably harder to keep up attendance and membership numbers. (A difference was noted between the memberships of the two groups in that while typical attendance figures for the groups were comparable, BWG consisted largely of a smaller number of regular attendees, whereas MWG’s membership included many occasional attendees and a smaller percentage of ‘regular attendees’. This has rendered BWG more vulnerable to the loss of members. This seems to be simply a function of the different longevities of the groups and the difference may well wane as BWG clocks up more years and therefore accumulates a greater number of members with a marginal attachment to the group.)

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- BWG is not yet as well known and evident in the community (eg through the public display of its artwork) as is MWG, and it therefore needs to work harder in relation to publicising the group.
- The number of members who keep their children with them during sessions relative to those who utilise the services of childcare has differed between the two groups, at least in the period 2005 to 2007. A number of factors may have contributed to this:
 - The 'women's room' at the venue for the MWG is considerably more spacious than that for any of the venues for the BWG to date. The larger size and also the "L" shape of the women's room for the MWG accommodates babies and toddlers more readily than the spaces which BWG has and does occupy;
 - There are possibly different demographics at play between the groups. Anecdotally, at the MWG there seem to be more members with just one child who accompany their mothers to the group than is the case for BWG. Perhaps the women with two or more young children are more intent on some time out from their children during sessions; and
 - In 2005, there was strong demand for childcare places from BWG members and demand sometimes exceeded supply. For MWG, however, childcare has generally been available to those members who have sought it. The undersupply of childcare for BWG may have led to an increased valuing of childcare, relative to the value placed on access to childcare by MWG members. To some extent this may have become a 'norm' within the group.

Only time will tell whether the two groups continue to operate in a very similar fashion in parallel or whether they diverge. It should also be remembered in this context that the Majura Women's Group has seen many changes during the course of its almost 30-year history. The BWG has never operated in the way that the early MWG operated. It has been 'fast tracked' to resemble the contemporary MWG and perhaps those very beginnings of BWG will make for a different trajectory for the group into the future.

What does all this mean for the establishment of other groups modelled on the Majura Women's Group? The intention here is not to slavishly follow a set of prescriptions with an expectation that success will be guaranteed, but to seek to replicate the successful outcomes of the Majura Women's Group in other contexts - applying the core features of the Majura Women's Group model in ways which are well suited to the particular context in which they are applied.

5. SPECIFIC “HOW-TO’S”

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 - 5.6.3 Other avenues
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- 5.7 Governance
 - 5.7.1 Incorporation
 - 5.7.2 Group co-ordination roles and responsibilities
 - 5.7.3 Committee roles and how they relate to co-ordinator positions
 - 5.7.4 Committee meetings
 - 5.7.5 Turnover of committee membership
- 5.8 Concluding comments

5.1. Preamble to the “how-to’s”

This section provides detailed information on the 'nuts and bolts' aspects of setting up groups modelled on the Majura Women's Group. It is based on an expectation that the group will grow to a

size whereby the number of women attending any given session will usually fall in the range 10 to 20 (and rarely exceed 25), with up to 15 children generally in child care – and any additional children and babies being kept with the women in the women's room. (Note that attendance within the range specified above can correspond to a total membership well in excess of 25, eg of 50 or more.)

As noted above, the intention here is to provide information to assist in replicating the successful outcomes of the Majura Women's Group model in other contexts. The "how-to's" which follow are but 'one road to Rome'. They may be a useful path to follow, but in seeking to replicate the model, decisions of detail should always play 'second fiddle' to broader considerations such as the principles identified in the key dimensions of the previous section, together with any other considerations specific to the particular context in which a group is being set up.

The "how to's" are covered in this section under the following headings:

- Group meeting times
- Program of activities
- Children and childcare
- Venue
- Governance

5.2. Group meeting times

The scheduling of group sessions which has stood the test of time for the Majura Women's Group is as follows:

1. Frequency: weekly.

A weekly rhythm works well for the groups, with many but not all members adopting a routine of weekly participation. Members know when to expect sessions to be on, even if they haven't seen the current program of sessions. This predictability makes it easy for members to plan ahead and those who have 'lost touch' with the group can still turn up 'on spec.', confident of finding a session.

2. Time of day: mornings.

Mornings generally work best: many children have afternoon sleeps and some women have children at school/preschool who need to be collected at 3pm.

3. Day of week: mid-week.

The choice of a mid-week day offers an 'oasis' in the middle of the working week, which can work well for women whose partners are largely unavailable to share the care of the baby/children from Monday to Friday. The Majura Women's Group meets on Wednesdays and the Brindabella Women's Group meets on Tuesdays.

4. Duration: 2-hour sessions with a half hour either side.

The half-hour either side is for setting up/packing up and settling children into the childcare room/collecting them from the child care room. The 2-hour session may include a short break about half way through – particularly for sessions with guest speakers or involving

group discussions. The group has adopted a practice of having 'announcements'²² at this time (during or immediately before/after the break). This timing is optimal for the purpose of including most of the women who arrive late or leave early.

5. Timing: 9.30 to 12.30, for sessions from 10.00 to 12.00.

This timing enables women needing to take older children to school / preschool to do so before coming to women's group and to get home for lunch before afternoon sleeps, etc. That all said, the timing will not be ideal for all women at all stages of the lives of their children. Babies are sometimes ready for, or in the middle of, a sleep just when it's time to go to the group. Similarly toddlers may need an earlier lunch than this scheduling offers. Here the flexibility of the group is important, for example:

- Having a culture which readily accommodates women arriving/leaving part way through a session; and
- Encouraging women with babies to bring a pram or similar to accommodate the baby's sleep needs during the session.

6. Breaks: during school holidays.

The Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups (generally) schedule sessions during school terms only. Some women go away during school holidays and/or have school age children and move into a different rhythm for that period. Limiting the scheduled activities also provides a break from the administrative workload for the group. Of course the needs of women with young children continue during the holidays. The Brindabella Women's Group has also taken the initiative of nominating a public meeting place (a local park) for the regular group time during the school holidays. This enables the women to continue to meet for social contact and mutual support without the need for organising sessions, childcare and all the associated overheads.

5.3. Program of activities

This section addresses the following aspects of the program of activities:

- Overview and types of sessions
- General arts sessions
- Arts projects
- Parenting topics
- Women's health and wellbeing sessions
- Guest speakers and group discussions
- Physical activities
- General group sessions

5.3.1. Overview and types of sessions

The core features of the Majura Women's Group model identified in section 2.2 above include:

- An arts foundation, with many of the sessions devoted to arts activities; and

²² Announcements include announcements about the group (eg forthcoming group sessions, committee meetings), and other general announcements by group members (eg about forthcoming community activities they know of which may be of interest to other members).

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

- Variety - providing for a variety of types of sessions (including guest speakers, parenting discussions and education sessions and physical activity sessions as well as arts sessions) and rich variety within each of these types of activities.

The arts foundation of the group helps to create a positive and creative culture within the group in addition to providing opportunities for creative expression and developing new skills and interests. The variety offered means that there can be 'something for everyone'. Members typically appreciate the opportunity to engage in activities / with information and ideas that they might not otherwise be exposed to. Some have gone on to pursue particular interests and even careers as a direct development of their participation in Majura Women's Group sessions.

Many of the sessions are stand alone sessions, while arts projects undertaken by the group involve a series of sessions over time. In recent years the Majura Women's Group's annual "Backyard Projects" have generally been allocated some 16 sessions, as have Brindabella Women's Group's community arts projects. For some projects additional sessions and/or time outside of the regular sessions has been needed to complete the project. It should be noted here that with the benefit of hindsight, a more phased approach to the introduction of community arts projects for the Brindabella Women's Group may have been better. While group members highly value the projects and what they achieve, ambitious projects can be very taxing and overextend a new group with a young and limited membership and which is also contending with significant teething problems (ongoing venue issues and difficulties sourcing childcare service providers).²³

The Majura Women's Group has found it useful to interleave different types of sessions within a program. This helps to keep those members involved and connected who are selective in the types of sessions they attend. Arts projects are generally run over a calendar year - eg approximately four sessions per term.

Members determine the program of sessions for the forthcoming term – within the constraints of the particular funding available. Consultation and member input has been a long-standing principle for the determination of the program. At times the group's elected committee has taken on the task of deciding the sessions for the program. In recent years, members have had more direct input – part of a session is used to brainstorm ideas and then vote to determine the sessions for the following period.

The remainder of this section describes the sorts of sessions have been found to work well, some that haven't and what to take into account when considering the options. No doubt there are numerous others which have not been listed and which could also work well.

5.3.2. Options for general arts sessions

There are many general arts and crafts sessions that can work well, either as one-off sessions or in a series of two or more sessions. Some examples are listed below. Note that stand-alone sessions may

²³ One way of proceeding would be to focus initially on simply providing a variety of series of arts sessions. Some of the resulting artwork could be offered to relevant community/public agencies and/or the group may wish to display it in some way (eg at a special group meeting to which friends and family were invited). Some way down the track, the group may wish to embark on a small community arts project, and from there build to larger and more ambitious projects as the group gains in experience, its ability to envisage the commitment involved in a larger project and its skill base to manage such a project.

be limited to modest outcomes, whereas more can generally be achieved in a series of sessions. Many of the following could also be developed as the focus of a major arts project.

Writing and story-telling

- Creative writing – this can also yield short pieces for inclusion in the group's newsletter
- Story-telling – this can be a lead into voluntary story-telling at local public libraries

Music, etc

- Drumming
- Performing a short play/radio play
- Singing
- Song-writing

Paper-based

- Book making / binding – eg making a journal
- Drawing
- Linoblock printing – two sessions may be useful to ensure that all participants have a chance to complete their images and to print
- Origami
- Painting
- Paper marbling
- Papier Maché
- Stencilling

Textiles

- Fabric dyeing
- Fabric painting – eg linen tea towels
- Felting
- Sewing – eg a simple bag
- Silk painting
- Creative mending/darning

Traditional crafts

- Cake decorating (eg for children's birthday cakes)
- Crochet
- Flower arranging
- Knitting
- Macramé

Other 3-D media

- Jewellery making / beading
- Mosaics – two or more sessions may be necessary to allow for completion of even a small mosaic
- Natural fibre weaving
- Simple hat making (allocate more sessions for more serious millinery)
- Wire art

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

- Woodwork: eg making a desk-top easel
- Working with clay

Re-using domestic/other materials

- Button necklaces and broaches
- Collage – eg with found objects
- Sewing – eg a child's dress using a pillow case
- Sock puppets

Seasonal activities

- Egg painting – eg in the lead up to Easter
- Card-making – this can have a specific focus, eg re Christmas
- Fabric Christmas decorations
- Beaded Christmas decorations
- Gingerbread house decorating (pre-Christmas)

Other arts/crafts sessions

- BYO art and craft (eg an unfinished project / something you're working on at home)
- Conservation of children's artwork, etc
- Designing a logo for the group
- Home-made toys – eg mobiles, finger puppets
- Photography

Things to consider

The following questions may be useful to address when considering the suitability of an activity:

- Will it be of interest to a number of members?
- Can the activity be done safely - noting that babies and children will be present (it may be possible for some steps in a process to be undertaken outside if necessary)?
- Can reasonable progress be made during a 2-hour session?
- Is the activity interruptible, noting that attending to babies and toddlers can make for many interruptions?
- Does the activity involve special requirements - eg access to water?
- Is the activity practical/manageable in terms of the space required?
- Is the activity practical in terms of the time required for setting and packing up?
- Can any mess generated be managed?
- What expertise is needed and can it be accessed? Who would lead the session/s?
- What materials are needed? Do they need to be bought / might they be donated?
- What equipment is needed? Does it need to be bought / can it be borrowed / hired?
- Will the group need any additional storage capacity to run the activity?
- What are the costs (materials? equipment? session leader? anything else?) and is the activity affordable?

5.3.3. Options for arts projects

Over the years the Majura and (more recently) Brindabella Women's Groups have undertaken a wide variety of community arts projects. The projects have included²⁴:

- Printing (one or more types of printing)
- Drawing (eg one project culminated in the creation of a social and community map of the local area)
- Ceramics (eg in one project ceramic tiles were created for a wall mural)
- Sculpture (eg with clay or used materials)
- Mosaics
- Millinery
- Textiles (eg the creation of a quilted wall hanging)
- Embroidery
- Felting
- Writing (culminating in the publication of an anthology / book of short stories)
- Theatre
- Radio
- Creating a calendar (featuring artwork by members)

Many of the projects included multiple art forms, eg drawing and printing; printing, writing and Papier Maché; printing, painting and bookmaking). Each project has been led by one or more professional artists. Recent projects have mostly culminated in the creation of works which have been donated to the community, eg as public artworks.

If there is a considerable lag between when a decision is made to embark on a particular project and when it is undertaken, there is a risk that few of the enthusiasts for the project may still be involved in the group when it is commenced. The risk of this can be minimised by minimising the time between deciding on a project and commencing it – insofar as this is possible²⁵.

Performing arts projects may be problematic given the need for flexibility – women need considerable freedom in relation to whether they attend any given session. If the project requires individuals to commit to a schedule of rehearsals as well as a performance, flexibility is compromised.

The skills and aptitudes required of the artist/s leading the project include:

- Artistic expertise in, and passion for, the relevant medium/media
- Skills in facilitating the process of a group project - ability to guide while maximising group control of the project
- Teaching skills
- Knowledge of relevant safety practices
- Commitment to the project for its duration
- Understanding and acceptance of an 'open group' project process

24 Details in the case of Majura Women's Group projects up to 2006 are contained in Appendix 1 of *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 years*, 2006, pp. 36-38.

25 If the project requires project-specific funding, a delay of some duration will be inevitable.

- Understanding and acceptance of women's variable attendance at sessions
- Understanding and acceptance of babies and children being present.

Things to consider

When considering the suitability of potential projects, the questions above under "General arts sessions" are all relevant. In addition the following questions should be considered:

- Is the group at a stage of development where it is realistic/wise to embark on a significant project – or would it be better to schedule sessions which might build the capacity of the group to undertake a project down the track?²⁶
- Does the group currently have the resources to undertake a major project? What are the pros and cons of undertaking a major project at this time? What else is happening for the group? What scale of project would be a good fit for the group at this point and with its current membership?
- Does the group wish to donate the resulting artwork/s to a particular beneficiary and for a particular purpose? If so, what interest does the proposed beneficiary have in receiving/housing/installing the work/s? Have any referral agencies expressed interest in housing an artwork created by the group? Which aspects of the project will be the responsibility of the women's group and which of the recipient organisation? Are there special OH&S issues that need to be considered before finalising the design? Do any installation and post-installation costs need to be discussed with the recipient?
- Is the arts medium well suited to the intended installation context of the work/s?
- Does the arts medium hold sufficient interest to the members to sustain their involvement and commitment to the project through to completion? Will the project help to attract new members (both during the course of the project and after installation)?
- Can the project be completed within the allocated number of 2-hour sessions?
- Does the project lend itself to members joining the project partway through?
- Can storage needs be accommodated for the duration of the project?
- Will it be necessary for part of the project to be undertaken outdoors? If so, is there a suitable space, when in the life of the project will that be, and is the weather likely to be congenial?
- Can one or more suitable artists be found to lead the project?
- Who from the women's group will co-ordinate the project (this may include being a conduit between the artist and the group, and between the recipient organisation and the group)?

5.3.4. Options for parenting topics

The members of the group have in common that they are mothers of young children. They are therefore likely to share interests in discussing and learning more about all manner of matters relating to their parenting role. Some of the sessions dedicated to parenting topics have been held as general discussions, and for some a guest speaker has been invited. Inviting a guest speaker from a [potential] referral agency also serves to raise that agency's awareness of the group and what it offers.

²⁶ See also comments in section 5.3.2.

Topics for which guest speakers have been invited include the following:

Peri-natal

- Birthing
- Babies - settling, feeding, etc
- Fads and fashions in baby care
- Massaging our babies and children
- Mental health in the peri-natal period
- Play with our babies and children

Early child development

- Fostering healthy brain development of kids
- Speech development
- Child development
- Toilet training
- Children's behaviour
- Attachment and 'Circles of Security'

Health and wellbeing

- Exercise/physical activity for children
- First aid for children
- Nutrition and children
- Resilient children; resilient mothers

Approaches to parenting

- Discussion on favourite activities with the kids
- Parents as teachers
- Relationship skills - eg Parent Effectiveness Training
- Raising boys, raising girls - parenting and gender development
- Approaches to parenting
- Parenting without punishment
- Anger management for parents and children

Parenting and the bigger picture

- 'Drug-proofing' our children
- Children's literature
- Community services for parents
- Kitchens, kids and gardens
- Parenting and partnering
- Science play
- Storytelling
- Budgeting and money management

Additional possibilities include:

- children and art/creative arts
- children and music
- children's emotional development
- children and bereavement
- transitions to preschool/school
- kids and pocket money
- sex education
- the development of ethics and morality in children

Things to consider

- What topics appeal to current members?
- What topics might appeal to potential members?
- Are there topics which would complement other sessions of the program (eg the MWG held a session on ageing and dementia when creating an artwork for the dementia wing of an aged care facility).
- Are there current affairs topics which suggest parenting topics (eg raising children to become responsible citizens with respect to sustainability issues)?

5.3.5. Options for women's health and wellbeing sessions

There are many possibilities here too. Local service providers are often generous in providing guest speakers for these sessions. Topics can include, but aren't limited to:

Mental health

- Emotional resilience in the peri-natal period / Your needs as a mother
- Surviving and thriving as a mother of young children
- Our relationship with our body through the journey of mothering
- Body image and bathers
- Creative expression and wellbeing

Nutrition

- Nutrition
- Practical sessions – eg how to make sushi and Vietnamese rolls
- Food choices – what the label tells us
- Cooking with whole foods

Physical health and wellbeing

- Ideas for combining parenting and physical exercise
- Pelvic floor health
- Preventing osteoporosis
- Recognising drug mis-use
- Screening for women's health issues
- Sexual health and wellbeing

General health and wellbeing

- Naturopathy
- Aromatherapy
- Anticipating menopause

Things to consider

- What topics appeal to current members?
- What topics might appeal to potential members?
- What topics might excite current and potential members?
- Some topics are well-suited to a format of a presentation followed by questions and answers; for others discussion and therefore skilled facilitation is important.
- Think beyond the checklist and the usual categories, perhaps starting with specific issues for women. Eg some years ago the MWG held a very stimulating session on “Body image and bathers”.

5.3.6. Options for general guest speakers sessions and group discussions

The interests and imaginations of members are the only constraints here, although access to suitable guest speakers is obviously relevant. Timing has been important for the relevance of some topics. Topics have included:

Stage of life topics

- Paid work from home
- Getting involved in community groups – with a panel of inspiring women who have young children
- (In the context of ageing parents:) – dementia; palliative care; making a will, power of attorney, funeral arrangements

General interest

- A getting-to-know you session – sharing stories
- Aboriginal culture
- Ethical investing
- Gardening, permaculture
- Indonesian weaving
- Introduction to e-bay
- Using power tools
- Women in democracy – eg personal perspectives from a local female politician

Topical subjects, eg:

- A session was held in 1997 on the information super highway
- A presentation from a member of the Australian Republican Movement in 1998
- A guest speaker in 2006 on life in Canberra as a Muslim post “September 11”
- Sustainability eg: climate change; water sustainability; sustainability and self-sufficiency; food choices and our carbon footprint

- Surviving and thriving during a period of economic downturn and uncertainty

Things to consider

- What interests members?
- What do members want to learn about?
- Can a suitable guest speaker be found (or can a member run the session)?
- Are there any costs involved?
- Are there any safety issues?
- For topics which may touch on contentious issues, how can the topic be framed and the session led so that diverse views can be heard and respected?

5.3.7. Options for physical activities

These sessions are generally limited to activities that can be undertaken indoors with babies and children present. Examples of sessions previously held are:

General physical activity sessions

- Yoga
- Tai chi
- Pilates
- Symbolic movement
- Self-defence for women
- Fitness circuit (with minimal equipment)
- Massage

Dancing

There are endless options here; popular sessions have included:

- Aboriginal and Maori dancing
- African dancing
- Belly dancing
- Bollywood dancing
- Capoeira
- Creative movement – together with the children
- Dancing from the era of Jane Austen
- Flamenco dancing
- Folk dancing
- Gypsy dancing
- Latin dancing
- Thai dancing
- Tribal dance

Things to consider

- Will the proposed activity be suitable for women who are pregnant or who have recently given birth?
- Is the space available for the proposed activity adequate?

- Is the flooring of the venue suitable for the proposed activity? Will participants need to bring anything – eg a yoga mat/towel?
- Discuss possibilities with the session leader for children to participate (eg with a toddler on a hip).

5.3.8. General group sessions

The Majura Women's Group has also used some of its regular sessions for the following purposes:

- An introductory session at the beginning of the year to welcome and orient newcomers, reconnect on-going group members, provide an overview of the activities and projects scheduled, and talk about how the group works, etc.
- An annual session for the group's Annual General Meeting
- An end of year / Christmas session
- An evaluation / taking stock session – this can be done in fun ways, eg using collage to express, both individually and as a group, what the group means to members, accompanied by discussion.

5.4. Children and childcare

5.4.1. Caring for children during sessions

The chapter called "Our Children" in the Majura Women's Group's anniversary publication puts the provision of childcare into context:

Our children are what bring us as mothers to the Majura Women's Group, and to some extent they share in our time together. At times, they have contributed to our artwork. Just as members access stimulating and rewarding activities together and develop friendships and community along the way, so have the children – whether through their time in the sessions with us, through their time together in the adjunct childcare provided, or through the out-of-session contact between members which is fostered by participating in the group.

The provision of childcare with paid childcare workers is one of the key underpinnings of the group. It has always been acknowledged by the group members and ultimately by grant providers that without the provision of suitable, quality childcare it is not possible for women to actively participate in the group's activities. A substantial proportion of grant funds are spent on childcare expenses (over half in 2005-06).

As well as providing mothers with important respite, the childcare has also been important for the children. For many it is their first experience of formal childcare and provides an introduction to the routines of the structured care which they later encounter at preschool and school. It is also a source of new activities and toys and interaction with other children and adults. For many children their Wednesday mornings at 'the group' were as eagerly anticipated as they were for their mothers.

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

*While always provided, the use of childcare by individual mothers has always been optional and the presence and acceptance of children in the sessions has also always been part of the operation of the Majura Women's Group.*²⁷

The extent to which group members avail themselves of childcare varies from week to week and the overall patterns of usage have also varied over the years. For some women it may be a question of the age and stage of development of the child. At times it may be a question of the woman's need for some time out and / or opportunity to get the most out of the scheduled session. Or it may be a question of the child's needs or wants, which may be either for the company of peers or to be with their mother.

With the childcare room so close at hand, there is scope for flexibility within a session - eg if a child fails to settle, the child may join their mother in the women's room mid-session.

Some pointers for having children in the women's room are as follows:

- Brief session leaders that children will be present
- Have a tub or two of suitable toys available for use in the women's room
- Consider setting aside part of the room for toddlers with their mothers and where prams might best be parked
- Attend to safety issues – eg re power cords, urns, power points, cups of hot beverages, any equipment being used for the session
- Decide how to manage morning tea food so as to meet the hospitality aspirations of the group while at the same time supporting members in managing their children's intake of various foods. Revisit decisions on this as needed.

The childcare provided is to enable women to participate in the women's group; it is not provided for any other purposes. The Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups levy a modest fee for use of the childcare service. For the Majura Women's Group this is currently \$3 per session per family (for one or more children).

5.4.2. The adjunct childcare system used by the groups

5.4.2.1. The number of places offered

In recent years the Majura Women's Group has employed / engaged the services of three childcare workers for the morning sessions. This has corresponded to providing for up to 15 childcare places²⁸. At times, two childcare workers have been engaged, providing for childcare for up to 10 children.

The Brindabella Women's Group has mostly had provision for 15 children in childcare (three childcare workers), although increased demand led to trialling the engagement of four carers so that twenty children could be cared for in the room.

²⁷ Majura Women's Group, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁸ The children can be of any age up to school age. However babies and some toddlers generally stay with their mothers in the women's room, so those in care tend to be the older children.

5.4.2.2. Making the system work without bookings

The Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups do not take bookings, either for session attendance or for childcare places. Flexibility is one of the core features of the Majura Women's Group model as described in section 2.2 above and one of the manifestations of this feature is that the group has developed ways of managing childcare without needing to take bookings. This also avoids the considerable administrative overhead associated with a booking system. Operating a childcare service without bookings may be somewhat unusual and external service providers have in some instances taken a while to get used to the idea.

So how does it work? For many of the sessions the call on childcare happily turns out to be close to, but not in excess of, the places available. The convention of members taking turns to help out in the childcare room should the need arise (i.e. when the call on places exceeds those available) has provided some 'elasticity' to the capacity of the childcare service. The number of places can be extended by a further five, making for 20 places all up. It is generally quite unusual for there to be demand for more than 20 places.²⁹ More recently, the Majura Women's Group has opted for sharing access to childcare amongst members when demand exceeds supply – asking members to take their children out of care for a time to give others a turn; this means that all of the care is provided by the carers engaged by the childcare service provider. While a 'first come, first served' principle generally applies at Brindabella Women's Group sessions, members usually recognise when one of their peers really needs the care but missed out, and offers are extended to swap children in care and in the mothers' room.

Making the childcare system work may take some working out by the group / its committee, which may need to consider:

- Whether the number of places provided is optimal (or whether the budget might stretch to the provision of an additional carer); and
- Whether the system of voluntary helping out in the childcare room is working, and if not how the system can be improved.

Liaison with the childcare service provider is likely to be important in this context, as is consideration of any limits that should be set to the total number of places made available (given the space available, etc). The self-run nature of the group can help members to work through any issues which arise associated with childcare in an empowered way. Keeping in mind the role that the provision of childcare plays in supporting the aims of the group may help in resolving any issues or conflicts.

Experience suggests that other constraints to the growth of a group help to contain the demand for childcare. When the number of women attending a given session gets too great, it can become harder to co-ordinate, and the dynamics and culture of the group may make it harder for new comers to feel a part of the group. New comers may be less likely to become regular participants if their first experience is of a bigger and less personal group. In addition, when attendances are consistently strong, the groups generally pull back on publicity.

²⁹ Although this has happened for the Brindabella Women's Group on some occasions.

5.4.2.3. Arrangements with childcare service providers

A good working relationship between the group and the service provider makes for a sound foundation for the smooth running of the service, and of course open and clear channels of communication are important in this regard. In negotiating their current arrangements, the groups have formalised the agreements with service providers in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A sample MOU is at Appendix 7.

5.5. Venue

Finding a suitable venue can be challenging. Happily, the Majura Women's Group has enjoyed the use of the very well suited Downer Community Centre for many years, whereas finding a suitable venue has been a major challenge for the Brindabella Women's Group. The requirements of a venue are detailed below under the headings of:

- Location;
- Venue provider / other uses of the venue; and
- The requirements of the spaces:
 - The 'women's room'
 - The 'childcare room'
 - An outdoor play space.

5.5.1. Location

The following questions regarding location may be useful when considering specific venue options:

- Is the location suitable in relation to where members / members of the target group live (eg is it reasonably central)?
- Does the location offer pleasant and suitable surrounds?
- Is the venue accessible via public transport?
- Is there adequate provision for parking close by? How safe is the parking area for young children?

5.5.2. Venue provider / other uses of the venue

The venue could be a local community centre, a facility managed by a community agency, or something of the kind. The following questions regarding potential venues may be useful when considering specific options:

- Is the potential venue sympathetic to the aims of the group (and therefore a good prospect for a positive ongoing relationship with the group)?
- Are other uses of the venue compatible with the group? (Eg at one stage the Brindabella Women's Group hired the premises of a Youth Centre and needed to attend to issues of broken glass, cigarette butts and the possibility of sharps in the outdoor play space). Other uses of the venue may necessitate the establishment of routine procedures (eg attention to cleaning schedules and thorough checks for hazards immediately prior to sessions – especially where young children will be present).
- Can the venue hire costs be accommodated by the group?
- Will the venue be available for the foreseeable future? What sort of agreement / contract would the venue provider want and would this work for the group?

5.5.3. The requirements of the spaces

The [contemporary] Majura Women's Group model has specific venue requirements in the form of two adjacent (or very close by) sizeable indoor rooms plus child-safe outdoor play space. These are detailed below. Local government standards for childcare facilities may be a useful reference when considering potential venues.³⁰

5.5.3.1. The 'women's room'

A generously proportioned room is required with the following features:

- Adequate floor area to accommodate a variety of activities: meetings with guest speakers, tables set out for arts activities, physical activities - yoga, dancing, etc. plus space for babies and toddlers and tables for general group materials (newsletters, publicity material, sign-on papers, etc), morning tea supplies, and so on. Ideally there will also be space for parking prams and strollers inside the room³¹.
- Suitable flooring for a variety of activities - protective sheeting can be put in place as needed (eg tarps for arts sessions with messy materials)
- Pram / stroller accessibility
- Adequate natural lighting and heating / cooling facilities as needed
- Access to water (this could be via a nearby room / facility)
- Access to kitchen facilities (for making hot drinks for morning tea) - eg via a nearby room
- Access to toilets
- Access to generous storage for general group property (documents, publicity materials, publications including newsletters, administration equipment, morning tea supplies), arts equipment and materials, partially complete art works, including sizeable group artworks, and so on.

5.5.3.2. The childcare room

A second generously proportioned room in close proximity to the 'women's room' is required as follows:

- Adequate floor area for the maximum number of children and childcare workers, opening to an outdoor child-safe play area. The ACT Childcare Service Standards specify a minimum of 3.25 m² of unencumbered space per child.³²
- Suitable flooring for toddlers and young children - eg vinyl. For babies an appropriate rug / carpet may be needed.
- Pram / stroller accessibility
- Access to generous storage for childcare supplies (toys, consumables, sign-on books, equipment such as a CD player)

It can be helpful if children cannot see through to the women's room. If there is a door joining the two rooms, it may be necessary to keep it closed during sessions and for access to be via an alternative route.

30 For the ACT, refer to ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, *ACT Childcare Service Standards*, 2009, which can be found at www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/services/childrens_services

31 Failing that, there will need to be somewhere suitable nearby to park a number of prams and strollers.

32 ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, op. cit., p.51.

5.5.3.3. Outdoor child-safe play area

A pleasant, safe and secure space is needed as follows:

- An adequate space for the maximum number of children and childcare workers
- Suitably situated in relation to the climate, ideally with access to shade as needed
- Child-safe fencing
- Suitable surfaces for young children and ideally including facilities such as a sand pit
- Free of sharps, broken glass, cigarette butts, etc
- Access to adequate storage (for outdoor equipment and toys).

Women may find it useful to be able to view the children in either the childcare room or the outdoor play area without being seen. Some facilities offer this.

5.6. Publicity

Section 4.2.5 describes the avenues of publicity used at the commencement of the BWG. Experience has shown that publicity needs to be attended to on an ongoing basis and that at some times it will need more attention than at others. For an existing group, the adage of “a stitch in time saves nine” is definitely worth heeding. A common trap is to become complacent about publicity – everything can be swimming along nicely for an extended period of time and then all of a sudden it becomes evident that attendances have dropped, they haven’t rallied and there aren’t many members left to put effort into re-building numbers, or even to keep things going.

This section seeks to identify:

- the dimensions of publicity applying to a women’s group on an on-going basis
- a range of publicity avenues and opportunities
- a set of principles to bear in mind when seeking to publicise the group

5.6.1. Generating publicity material

This is the good starting point for publicity. Some publicity material needs to be hard copy, some can be electronic. Different documents serve different purposes, for example:

An overview of the group – a brochure or similar

A simple brochure will provide an overview of the group, it should be limited to (relatively) timeless information. It should provide the ‘who, what, why, where, when and how’ of the group, with enough information that a prospective member could simply turn up at the next group session. It should include information on costs, how to access further information about the group and any relevant funding acknowledgements. Images will help to attract attention and interest and artwork produced by group members can work a treat – especially if they relate to women with young children. Photocopied black and white A4 sheets folded into three can be quite adequate and very cost effective. A strong image (eg a linocut) on the front will be distinctive and help to attract attention.

What’s coming up: the current program of activities

A simple document detailing the current term’s program of activities will help to generate interest in attendance at specific sessions. This should include enough information to enable someone to turn

up at a session without needing to access other information sources (so include information on when, where, costs, what to bring, etc). Timely access to this document is imperative.

More in-depth information: the group's newsletter

Although the group may conceive of its newsletter as being primarily for internal purposes, it is also a marketing tool. It provides a window into the group in a way that a brochure or term program cannot do. Articles about what is happening in the group, what's coming up and session write-ups provide insight into the life, culture and workings of the group. The newsletter can include considerable creative work of members – eg lincout images, photos of other artwork, written pieces – poems, prose, songs, etc.

Electronic publicity

In this day and age there is no question that a web presence can assist publicity, but developing and maintaining the group's website should not be done at the expense of attention to hard copy documents and other strategies. Ensure that members (who have access to email) have ready access to electronic versions of documents which can be used for publicity purposes – eg the current term's program, the newsletter, so that they can follow up other contacts with an email plus an attachment / link.

5.6.2. Reaching the target group through other agencies

Relevant agencies

As for any publicity venture, a significant challenge is that of how to reach the target group. Many of the following organisations have played an important role in publicising the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups over the years. Readers from other jurisdictions will need to consider their local equivalent organisations and agencies.

- Local Maternal and Child Health (MACH) nurses / clinics³³
- The allied health arm of the ACT Maternal and Child Health Program
- QE II Family Centre³⁴
- Midwifery and maternity services (including home birthing and birth centre services)
- Local hospital social work and mental health units
- PANDSI³⁵ and other relevant mental health services
- Parentline and Parentlink³⁶
- Playgroups ACT
- Women's Centre for Health Matters
- Women's Information and Referral Service
- Local Child and Family Centres (eg Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre)
- Local community services eg Northside Community Service, Communities@Work
- Non-government service providers such as Marymead, Barnados, YWCA, Inanna, Centrecare, Anglicare, the Smith Family, Noah's Ark Resource Centre, Meg's Toy Box Toy Library

33 In the ACT these come under the Child, Youth and Women's Health Program, ACT Health; a general contact number for this program at the time of writing is 6205 1197.

34 In other locations consider what other health services there are for women with young children – eg Tresillian services.

35 Post and Ante Natal Depression Support and Information.

36 Telephone support and web-based information resources for parents.

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

- Government service providers / programs such as Schools as Communities, Housing ACT, Therapy ACT, ACT Library Service, Defence Community Organisation, Centrelink
- Community arts organisations as relevant (eg Tuggeranong Community Arts)
- Relationships Australia, Family Relationships Centre Canberra and other relevant counselling and family mediation services
- NAPCAN
- Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Funding bodies
- The publications, *Canberra's Child*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Chronicle* (also *Scallywags*³⁷)

How other agencies can assist

The above organisations have assisted with publicity in the following ways:

- By making publicity materials (brochures, programs and newsletters) generally accessible to their clients (eg placing them in their waiting rooms / in stands of brochures / mailing them to clients) – examples: MACH clinics; Parentline, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, the children's area of local public libraries
- By including information about the group/s in their own newsletters / publications / collated information about what is on for parents (eg the program for the forthcoming term) – examples: Parentline, Women's Information and Referral Centre's 6-monthly calendar, the CONTACT booklet produced by Citizens' Advice Bureau, Defence Community Organisation, regular information on group sessions in *Canberra's Child* and local newspapers
- By referring clients to the group on an individual basis – examples: MACH nurses, QE II Family Centre, WIRC, Parentline
- By housing artwork created by the group (with a plaque or similar to identify the source of the artwork) – examples: QE II Family Centre, Dickson Public Library, the Maternity Wing of the Canberra Hospital, the courtyard of the Birth Centre at the Canberra Hospital, the mental health ward at Calvary Hospital
- By hosting publications and / or other material generated by the groups – example: the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services hosts an electronic copy of the publication, *Beyond "I'm just a mum": rich stories of motherhood*³⁸ and Parentlink has a link to this electronic copy on its website.
- By including provision for a representative of the group to speak to a group of clients – example: addressing a New Parenting group at their final group session
- By inviting participation in public forums – example: the groups were invited to provide a speaker for the launch of the ACT Action Plan for Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention 2006-08.

The group's role

The above publicity outcomes have been achieved by:

- Supplying publicity materials – it's unwise to rely solely on electronic distribution of these publicity materials. Example: if a copy of the newsletter is to end up in the waiting room of each MACH nurse clinic, mail them at least that many copies

³⁷ *Scallywags* is no longer in publication.

³⁸ <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/women/publications> (scroll down to "Community Publications").

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

- Providing timely responses to agencies requesting information – examples: information for the WIRC 6-month calendar or for the CONTACT booklet
- Inviting agencies to provide guest speakers – this gives the speaker an experience of the group in action and a strong basis from which to make referrals
- Developing relationships with relevant agencies, including through networking and by inviting agencies to launches of community artworks
- Attending interagency meetings
- Collaborating on relevant projects – example: the *Beyond “I’m just a mum”* project was a collaboration between the Majura Women’s Group, the Brindabella Women’s Group, Relationships Australia, YWCA and Inanna
- Making direct approaches – examples: to Dickson Public Library re a possible artwork for installation, to the Maternal, Child and Women’s Health Program to address New Parenting groups, to Parentlink to host an electronic publication, to *Canberra’s Child*, *The Canberra Times* and *the Chronicle* to publicise sessions (respectively in their calendar, “Fridge Door” and the Chronicle’s Community Contacts / What’s On)
- Contributing to other networks – example: co-organising a Community Development Network (CD Net) forum on the arts and community development and providing a speaker for the forum
- Adopting a ‘publicity mindset’ in undertaking the activities of the group generally – examples: when deciding on the next community arts project - what organisation might the resulting artwork might be donated to and will women at home with children see it? What exciting things is the group doing and might the media be interested in reporting on them? What opportunities are there for group members to do what they love doing and achieve publicity at the same time - eg take a Story Time session at the local public library? Timing for getting out the next term’s program – will it be timely for referral agencies as well as for members? Grant acquittals – a chance to crow about the group. Written reports to an AGM – another opportunity to proudly proclaim what the group has achieved.

5.6.3. Other avenues

In addition to publicity through organisations and agencies such as those listed above, members can be keen and effective advocates for the group. Armed with brochures and flyers (including the coming / current term program) they can approach local libraries, GP surgeries, “Tilleys” and the like, post them on billboards, and use them for ‘word of mouth’ publicity.

Local community festivals can also provide publicity opportunities, eg the Brindabella Women’s Group was invited by Tuggeranong Community Arts to help staff the Story Tent at the annual Moon Festival in Tuggeranong in 2005.

The local media may be interested in running a story on the group from time to time. This may happen with or without the initiative being taken by the group. Examples: a story about a new group (prompted by the group issuing a media release), a story about the launch of a new community artwork (following a media release), a story about a group project which has just received funding (following a media release issued by the funding organisation).

Various annual events and celebrations can provide opportunities for publicity, some through other organisations, eg the display of group members’ ceramic work at Tuggeranong Arts Centre during

Adult Learners' Week. International Women's Day and Mothers' Day may also provide opportunities for publicity.

5.6.4. Follow though – what do newcomers experience?

Of course it's no good just attending to getting the word out and having prospective new members turn up. Their experiences when they come along will determine whether they come back and what they report to other women at home with young children whom they know – more potential members. As group members get to know each other well, it can be easy for a group to become unwittingly cliquy and excluding of newcomers. It may be helpful to consider the following:

- Are newcomers personally welcomed and introduced to others?
- Are they assisted in finding out what's what and where in the group? – childcare, sign on and other procedures, knowing where the toilets are and how to get a cuppa, etc, etc
- Do they have an enjoyable first experience?
- Do other members warmly engage with them (or leave them with no one to talk to)?
- Do the session topics and descriptions help to encourage potential newcomers to attend?
- How can new members best be included part way through a project?
- When they leave their first session, do they have all the information they need to attend the next sessions?
- When they return for a second time, will be they recognised and remembered?

5.6.5. Key principles

Section 4.2.5 identified the following key principles re publicity:

- Allow the group to 'sell itself' – through artwork, etc
- Everyone can contribute to publicising the group
- Tell it from the horse's mouth
- Envision the network of agencies, etc
- Make it easy for agencies to find out information
- Timeliness – eg newsletters
- Media contact – don't deluge them, make it easy for them to report

The following additional principles can be drawn out from section 5.6 above to add to this list:

- A stitch in time saves nine – don't become complacent about publicity
- Adopt a 'publicity mindset'
- Seize opportunities to achieve multiple outcomes (including publicity) with one initiative – and while having fun!
- Don't rely on electronic publicity to the exclusion of mailing out hard copies of key documents
- Attend to follow-through (what newcomers experience when they come along) as well as getting them there in the first place
- Publicity is not just the job of a 'publicity co-ordinator', it is a product of the contributions of all members
- If group resources are thin, it may be necessary to focus on what will reach the target group most efficiently – remember that staff in agencies who refer women to the group can contribute hugely to publicity but they need to receive publicity materials regularly and in a timely manner

5.7. Governance

5.7.1. Incorporation

Both the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups are incorporated associations. Accordingly their governance arrangements conform to the associated requirements. Incorporation status is necessary for some forms of funding. In keeping with being incorporated, each group has developed its own constitution, holds Annual General Meetings for members to elect a new committee to manage the group for the next year, and has its financial records independently audited each year. Information regarding incorporation in the ACT can be found on the ACT government website at www.ors.act.gov.au/BIL/WebPages/Assocns/associations.html³⁹

The remainder of this section describes the division of labour that has evolved within the Majura Women's Group, and also been found to work well for the Brindabella Women's Group. Note here the distinction between co-ordination roles and committee positions. The demarcation of co-ordination roles is a function of what the group needs at a given time (and the availability of volunteers to undertake those roles). The groups' constitutions, however, sensibly keep non-Executive committee positions as generic roles. The committee is then at liberty to tailor the co-ordination roles to current needs and to resource specific co-ordinator positions from within its ranks or from the broader membership. Section 5.7.2 describes the array of co-ordination roles undertaken in the groups in recent times, while section 5.7.3 describes the committee roles and how they may relate to the co-ordination roles.

5.7.2. Group co-ordination roles and responsibilities

For the groups as they currently operate and regardless of the status of the group (eg whether incorporated or not), the following areas of responsibility generally need to be covered. Each co-ordination role described below could be taken up by a committee member, or the committee may co-opt a non-committee member to undertake the role:

- Program co-ordination – facilitating a process whereby the group decides on the program of activities for the next period (generally one school term); approaching potential guest speakers and session leaders; finalising the details ready for publicity purposes (including through the group's newsletter and website as applicable); and liaison with guest speakers and session leaders in the lead-up to the relevant sessions.
- Community Arts Project co-ordination (if the group undertakes major projects) – co-ordination of all aspects of a community arts project: liaison with the artist/s, liaison with the intended recipient of the artwork/s (if relevant), communication with the membership, etc, through to the launch of the artwork, if applicable.
- Childcare co-ordination – contact on behalf of the group with the childcare service provider to ensure that childcare proceeds as smoothly as possible, and responding to any issues which arise.

³⁹ Corresponding documentation for other jurisdictions can be readily sourced online.

Compendium of resources for replicating the Majura Women's Group model

- Newsletter co-ordination – co-ordination of the production and dissemination of a regular group newsletter, with a frequency corresponding to the release of the program for the next period (eg once per term).
- Publicity co-ordination (including a group website if applicable) – attention to publicity and promotion of the group as warranted, possibly including up-dating the group's website if the group has one.
- Funding co-ordination – the need for this depends on the funding circumstances of the group. If funding is received, the workload associated with it may be either considerable or negligible. If not unduly onerous, a member of the Executive may take this role on.

5.7.3. Committee roles and how they relate to co-ordinator positions

The general governance responsibilities of the committee of an incorporated association are detailed elsewhere, eg see www.ors.act.gov.au/BIL/WebPages/Assocns/associations.html Resources such as this are useful for information on the responsibilities of all committee members and for the specific responsibilities of members of the Executive (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer).

In addition to members of the Executive, the committees of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups include a number of "ordinary" members.

Over the years the following co-ordination roles have been variously taken up by 'ordinary' committee members / members of the Executive or general group members⁴⁰:

- Program Co-ordinator
- Community Arts Project Co-ordinator
- Childcare Co-ordinator
- Newsletter Editor / Co-ordinator
- Publicity Co-ordinator (this may be combined with one of the other roles)
- Funding Co-ordinator (this may be combined with one of the other roles, eg one of the Executive roles)

A given committee member may take on several co-ordinator roles.

5.7.4. Committee meetings

Given the rhythm of the groups – meeting during school terms – the experience of the Majura Women's Group has been to also schedule committee meetings during school terms, usually two (or three) times in each of four terms (eg in, say, week 2 or 3 and week 8 or 9 of the term)⁴¹. The Brindabella Women's Group has also found that this pattern of scheduling meetings to serve them well.

⁴⁰ Some group members have also wanted to make a contribution to the running of the group without becoming committee members and have taken on a specific co-ordination role. Depending on the role, this may necessitate the establishment of mechanisms for liaison between non-committee member co-ordinators and the committee.

⁴¹ There are four school terms per year in the ACT.

While the Majura Women's Group has trialled various times of day for committee meetings, they have repeatedly returned to the option of evening meetings, free of the frequent interruptions of young children.⁴²

5.7.5. Turnover of committee membership

Note that the nature of the membership (women at home with young children) tends to make for a high level of turnover of the membership and therefore of committee membership and co-ordination roles, as members return to paid work or their children grow older and they cease to be involved. Furthermore, members may be 'out of action' in relation to committee roles due to pregnancy, a new baby, illness or other life events.

The continuation of the group relies on the ongoing availability of some members to take on committee and co-ordination roles. Over the years I have witnessed a great deal of 'give and take', as members move between participating simply as members and, as their circumstances permit, pitching in with the tasks of helping to manage the group. Such is their appreciation of the benefits of the group, and the good will generated by their involvement, that they want to 'give back' to the community so that others may benefit, as they have done.

5.8. Concluding comments

The preamble to this section noted that decisions of detail should always play 'second fiddle' to broader considerations such as the principles identified in the key dimensions of section 4, together with any other considerations specific to the particular context in which a group is being set up.

By way of conclusion, it is perhaps worth reiterating that fostering autonomy may be usefully regarded as a core principle – a guiding star when seeking to replicate the Majura Women's Group model. The Majura Women's Group came into being as a result of women's instinctive awareness of their needs and how to meet them. That wisdom and collaboration has led to the ongoing evolution of the Majura Women's Group over the last 28 years. New groups can draw on the lessons learnt over that time, but their members will only remain engaged and enthused if they feel in control and empowered to chart their own course.

⁴² Young babies, however, are more readily accommodated and have often accompanied their mothers at committee meetings.

Appendix 1: Majura Women's Group publications

- 1989 *Wet patch on carpet* – a compilation of members' writing chronicling 24 hours in the life of a woman with young children
- 1991 *Our hidden lives* – collection of written pieces and artwork by members
- 1992 *Home grown anthology* – collection of short stories by members
- 1994 *Majura Women's Group writing project 1993* – collection of short stories and poetry by members
- 1996 *Homebound: Community art in the Majura Women's Group* – documenting the community art produced by the Majura Women's Group from 1989 to 1995
- 1998 *Spoken images* – background and printed text of material broadcast by 2XX Community Radio in December 1997, with linocut illustrations
- 2005 *Women's works* – collection of members' poetry, story, song and illustrations
- 2006 *Majura Women's Group: Celebrating 25 years* – a selection of recollections, reflections, images and quotes to mark the 25th anniversary of the Majura Women's Group and to complement the 2006 Majura Women's Group retrospective exhibition at the Canberra Museum and Gallery
- 2007 *Beyond "I'm just a mum" – rich stories of motherhood* – the culmination of a project conducted in collaboration with the Brindabella Women's Group, Relationships Australia, the YWCA and Inanna Inc. This publication is available online at <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/women/publications> (under "Community Publications").
- 2008 *I promise your family will eat this* – a compilation of healthy recipes and information about local physical exercise opportunities which cater to the needs of women with young children

Appendix 2: Further references

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Appendix 3: Evaluation of the Brindabella Women's Group - 2005

Executive Summary: Evaluation of the First Year of the Brindabella Women's Group by Nicole Box, 2005

This report provides an overview of the evaluation study of the Brindabella Women's Group. The Brindabella Women's Group is a community group for women with young children, based on the successful model of the Majura Women's Group. The Brindabella Women's Group commenced in 2004 and is located on the south side of Canberra. The Majura Women's Group, in partnership with ACT Health Mental Health Policy Unit, is in receipt of 2005-07 seeding funding from the ACT Government's Community Inclusion Fund to continue establishing the Brindabella Women's Group in Canberra.

The aim of the Brindabella Women's Group is to enhance community and peer support for women at home with young children. The Brindabella Women's Group provides a weekly meeting space, with nearby childcare, where women can participate in activities such as community arts projects, group discussions with guest speakers, parenting education seminars and physical activity sessions. The Brindabella Women's Group is currently facilitated by an ex-president of the Majura Women's Group, with the goal of becoming self-managing by 2007.

Established research outlines there is a need for community programs targeting women with young children. Women are more likely to experience mental health problems following childbirth than any other time in their lives, and social isolation is common for mothers who choose to stay at home (National Health and Medical Research Council 2000). Research has found that the wellbeing, skills and confidence of mothers have huge potential to affect the life trajectory of children (Logdson and Davis 1998; O'Hara et al. 1990). In addressing these needs, there is an increasing push for mental health programs that focus on prevention and early intervention (draft ACT Action Plan for Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention 2005-2008).

One strategy for improving the emotional wellbeing of mothers is parenting groups (Hanna et al 2002; De La Rey and Parekh 1996). Traditionally, nurses or health professionals have facilitated parenting groups. More recently, there has been growing support for **community-based** parenting groups where parents are empowered to play an active role in the development and management of the group (Tomison and Wise 1999; Prilleltensky and Nelson 1994). Fostering a sense of community is thought to have significant health benefits (Smith et al. 2001). Research on community-based parenting groups is limited, but it is believed they are more sustainable (Orr 2004), they improve parenting skills and self-esteem (Zeedyk et al 2002) and they enhance parents' social networks (Prilleltensky and Nelson 1994). The Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups fit neatly into the definition of community-based parenting groups.

Project Rationale

An evaluation study of the Brindabella Women's Group was conducted as part of funding requirements of the ACT Community Inclusion Fund. While the Majura Women's Group has been operating successfully as a community group for women with young children on the northside of

Canberra for over 24 years, it was unknown how the model would work on the southside of Canberra. This evaluation study analysed: the extent the Group is establishing itself in South Canberra and progressing towards self-management; how women benefit from the Group; and how the Group meets the goals of the *Building Our Community – The Canberra Social Plan*. Three key areas of *The Canberra Social Plan* were analysed:

1. Strengthening the wellbeing of mothers and young children;
2. Strengthening community; and
3. Strengthening lifelong learning and the arts.

In addition, the evaluation study compared the outcomes of the Brindabella Women's Group with the goals of the *ACT Children's Plan* and the draft *ACT Action Plan for Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention (PPEI) 2005-2008*, as well as with established research in the area of parenting groups and programs.

Research Strategies

Central to the evaluation of the Brindabella Women's Group was the use of a 'participatory evaluation' methodology. Participatory evaluation is an innovative approach to conducting evaluation studies, which encourages the people being researched to be actively involved in designing and conducting the evaluation process. The project officer spent five months with the Brindabella Women's Group, implementing a number of strategies including observation, group discussion, group activities, and questionnaires, as well as a survey of ten community organisations associated with the group. In addition, a Brindabella Women's Group member conducted an inquiry into why some women no longer attend the group.

An important part of the participatory process was the development of a positive relationship between the project officer and the group members. A mutual dialogue was established, where the project officer continually shared the findings of the study with group members, to verify the accuracy of the data, and to encourage the women to have input into the data analysis. The benefit of the participatory process is that it enabled the members to discuss the benefits and issues for the group in an open manner, fostering group connection and understanding. The women also stated that the participatory process provided a positive example of how evaluation studies could be conducted in the group. One of the outcomes of the participatory process was the development of evaluation manual for the Brindabella and Majura Women's Groups to use in the future.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the evaluation study indicated that there is a **strong need for a community group for women at home with young children on the southside of Canberra**. Feedback showed that the Brindabella Women's Group is highly valued by its members as well as other community organisations. Thirty-nine women have attended the Brindabella Women's Group over the period of February to September 2005, with an average of eleven women attending each session. Women attending the group came from twenty different suburbs in South Canberra, attracting a diverse range of women – including women with a history of mental illness, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous women, new mothers, experienced mothers, and older and younger women. It was noted that other community organisations are referring women to the Group, and receiving positive feedback from these women.

The evaluation found strong evidence that women with young children benefit from participating in the Brindabella Women's Group. Firstly, it **strengthens women's social networks** by providing opportunities to meet other mothers, collaborate on joint projects, and develop ongoing friendships. Secondly, it **builds women's sense of community** by enhancing peer support, increasing their knowledge of community services and events, and encouraging their participation in the wider community. And thirdly, it **develops women's skills and knowledge** by offering low cost adult learning and art activities in a child-friendly environment. The evaluation findings support other research on the benefits of parenting groups and community art and adult learning activities.

While traditionally parenting groups have focussed exclusively on activities related to parenting education, the evaluation findings demonstrate the benefits of parenting groups that engage in a **range of recreational activities** and providing members with **choice** in the activity program. Also of note, is the need for parenting groups to be **low cost, flexible and 'child friendly'**. A major finding of the evaluation is that women want to attend a parenting group that looks after the interests of **themselves and their children**. One of the successful elements of the Brindabella Women's Group model of operation is that it provides women with the choice of having their children with them in the group, or using the nearby childcare.

The evaluation also provided considerable evidence on the benefits **community based parenting groups**. Feedback from the women indicated that they were highly supportive of being included in the management of the Group, stating that it fosters a sense of belonging and achievement, and ensures that the group is relevant to members' needs. It was identified that a key part of the Majura Women's Group model of operation is that it has a **strengths-based approach** and recognises and utilises the assets of its members, including the women's ability to support one another and work together as a team. The Brindabella Women's Group and its sister group, the Majura Women's Group, are examples of true **community development** – where the needs of a community are met by bringing people together to use their collective strengths to help themselves and each other.

In terms of improvement, it was identified that the venue and membership numbers are an issue for the future of the Brindabella Women's Group, and publicity could be enhanced. However, the Brindabella Women's Group is well on track in **meeting its goal of being self-managing** by 2007. There is a consistent membership base, and the first membership committee was elected in September this year. Central to the self-managing process and the overall success of the Brindabella Women's Group has been the **high quality facilitation** provided by the Establishment Co-ordinator of the Brindabella Women's Group. This study has shown that the Majura Women's Group model of operation has the possibility of being replicated in new locations.

Of particular note, the evaluation highlighted the challenges faced by **stay-at-home mothers** and the social factors (such as the value of paid work in society and the lack of neighbourhood cohesion) that influence women's experience of motherhood. Although spending time as a stay-at-home mother is personally rewarding, being outside the paid workforce can impact negatively on women's social networks, their inclusion in the community and feelings of self worth. These findings demonstrate the value of community programs (like the Brindabella Women's Groups) that encourage friendships between stay-at-home mothers, promote their participation in the wider community, and provide women with the opportunity to engage in rewarding activities that meet their "adult needs". Feedback from members provided strong evidence that involvement in the Brindabella Women's Group improves women's **emotional wellbeing** and how the members feel about themselves and their parenting skills.

A major finding of the evaluation was the “invisibility” of stay-at-home mothers in society, arguably reflecting society’s lack of interest and valuing of this role. If improvements in maternal mental health prevention and promotion are to be made, there needs to be **more research** into the emotional wellbeing of stay-at-home mothers and more community support for initiatives that target these women. Research bodies, community groups and mothers themselves can all play a role in raising society’s awareness of the experience of motherhood.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that the growing support for community-based parenting groups is well founded, with strong evidence that women are benefiting emotionally and socially from their involvement with the Brindabella Women’s Group. A number of recommendations can be made from the evaluation for the **development of future parenting groups**:

- Adopt the goal of self-management of the group;
- Allow members to have input in directing the group’s program;
- Provide high quality facilitation, over a three year period, to assist in the self-management process;
- Develop a supportive group culture, where members care for one another;
- Be an ongoing group, with an open membership policy;
- Be accessible – in terms of location, time and cost;
- Provide a variety of activities, related and unrelated to parenting;
- Provide a child friendly environment, including childcare;
- Encourage women to explore and share their experiences of motherhood;
- Develop affiliations with other groups and services in the community; and
- Publicise widely.

The evaluation findings highlighted the important role community groups play in mental health promotion and prevention. The Brindabella Women’s Group is actively working towards the *ACT Children’s Plan* goal of strengthening children and their families, by enhancing women’s confidence and skills in their parenting role. The Brindabella Women’s Group is also meeting the goals of the *ACT Action Plan for Mental Health Promotion Prevention and Early Intervention (PPEI) 2005 - 2008* by improving maternal wellbeing and resilience. In endorsing the Brindabella Women’s Group project, the ACT Government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting families and children through community building.

For further information:

The contact details for the Brindabella Women’s Group is available on-line at <http://www.communitiesonline.org.au/brindabellawomen'sgroup/>⁴³

The contact details for the Majura Women’s Group is available at <http://www.communitiesonline.org.au/majurawomen'sgroup/>⁴⁴

43 The BWG website address has since changed.

44 The MWG website address has since changed to www.majurawomensgroup.net

Appendix 4: Quantitative evaluation of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups - 2007

Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups by Dr Shari Read and Professor Debra Rickwood, 2007

This report provides the findings of the evaluation of the Majura (MWG) and Brindabella (BWG) Women's Groups.

The evaluation focuses primarily on the sense of connectedness and belongingness that the MWG and BWG engender in their individual participants, and the positive effects on mental health and wellbeing of the women involved. The research is essentially quantitative, designed to measure changes in aspects of group participation and the associated psychological benefits to the individuals. There is also a qualitative aspect of the research designed to identify the elements and processes of the MWG and BWG that women find beneficial.

The overall aim of the evaluation research was to determine whether there was a change for the women in the MWG and BWG in terms of social connectedness, mental health, and parenting over the course of the program and compare with a matched group of women in the community participating in an alternate program (Playgroup) and a group of women in the community not participating in such a program. Data were collected in two stages: Stage 1 data was initial data collection and Stage 2 was follow-up data collection from the same participants about six months later.

Overall, data reveal participants in the MWG and BWG are very happy with the benefits of group membership. There seems to be a strong theme of women joining one of the groups on the basis of a recommendation from either a friend or their community health nurse or because they are looking for social support (which they report finding).

The good work of the Women's Groups becomes clear when results on each of the measures at Stage 1 of the research are interpreted in context of the high level of postnatal depression (PND) among the members of these groups. Despite nearly 16% of Women's Group mums revealing a level of PND that would warrant clinical concern, the groups were still rated highly on the measures of belonging and trust, social capital and social support. Further, members had similarly high levels of individual and collective self-esteem and resilience as Playgroup mums, suggesting that not only are the Women's Groups accessible to women with PND, but also, they are providing valuable resources to these women which have been shown by research to be instrumental in recovering from depression in the postnatal period.

Stage 2 data reveal a significant increase in levels of resilience among the research participants, particularly among members of the MWG. This finding suggests that participating in a community group, such as the MWG, is a protective factor for women with young children. It is likely that the Women's Groups contribute to the mental health of women by increasing resilience and therefore reducing the risk of a stay-at-home mother developing a disorder when exposed to adverse circumstances.

Appendix 5: Brindabella Women's Group Report to the 2005 Majura Women's Group AGM

The Brindabella Women's Group (BWG) came into being with a "Ceramics for Mums" course in term 3 of 2004. During that term, the group spontaneously gave itself its name. The first 6 months operation of the group was made possible by a Healthpact grant of \$5,000. This funding, together with partnering with Tuggeranong Community Arts to provide a number of the BWG arts sessions from July to December 2004, and rental support from Tuggeranong Link, enabled the group to get off the ground.

During its first 6 months to end 2004, the group met at Richardson Community House, with adjunct childcare provided in the room next door. Healthpact funding provided for the employment of 2 childcare workers in term 4.

The "Ceramics for Mums" course was a closed course and the 10 childcare places sufficed during term 3. However, in term 4 when the group became an open group and offered a more varied program, similar to that of the Majura Women's Group, attendances grew. Members frequently helped out in the childcare room as the demand for childcare outgrew the supply of 10 places available.

During the second half of 2004, I wrote several grant applications on behalf of BWG. One of these was for 3 year funding through the Community Inclusion Fund (CIF). This application necessitated a government partner and we teamed up with Mental Health ACT on account of the mental health benefits of the group. We were very pleased to learn in December that this grant application had been successful. Together with funding from artsACT for 18 arts sessions in 2005, and 2005 CSG Brokerage funds of \$368 for children's equipment, this grant should provide for the needs of the group through to the end of 2007. It provides for a year-by-year phasing out of my role as the group progressively becomes autonomous. Both CIF and the artsACT grant have provision for 3 childcare workers and therefore 15 childcare places.

The CIF application also gave prominence to evaluation – of both the BWG and of the Majura Women's Group (MWG) model of operation. While there is a mass of anecdotal evidence of the benefits of the model, this has not been brought together in a substantial evaluation. It is hoped that these evaluations will provide the basis for achieving funding on a more secure and integrated basis for both groups in the future. This 3-year evaluation process is off to an excellent start with the work of Nicole Box, a final year community development student at the University of Canberra. She has been gently but powerfully gleaning information and evidence to go into her report. Her report will be a major part of our end of year report to the Chief Minister's Department, which administers the CIF grants. A session in term 2 to assist our evaluation, and which involved the creation of a group collage, proved to be unexpectedly significant for the group. The resulting artwork has since been brought out by members to assist them in talking to others about BWG.

A number of factors led to the move of the BWG to a new venue from the beginning of 2005. Richardson Community Centre was no longer available to the group on Tuesday mornings and the room available for the women to meet in was relatively small. Since the beginning of term 1 this

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year the group has been meeting in the Schools As Communities Rooms at the Richardson Primary School. This provides a long(ish) thin meeting room joining a smaller roughly square room and ready access to toilets. Initially the small room was used for the provision of 5 adjunct childcare places. The remaining 10 places were provided at the Richardson Early Childhood Centre (RECC), through subsidisation from Communities @ Work - Richardson Family Links Program. Since the beginning of term 2, all 15 childcare places are provided at the Centre through subsidisation from Communities @ Work – Richardson Family Links Program (RFL). Our budget allocations for childcare wages and rent are diverted to RFL, which then contributes the shortfall to RECC to provide the places. We are most grateful for this support and for the general personal support of Nicole Pollock, Manager of RFL.

Although the current venue for the group provides more space than Richardson Community Centre did, it has become clear that it is a major constraint to the growth of the group (and that growth is essential for the group to achieve a large enough membership base to become autonomous). When the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre builds its premises in Tuggeranong Town Centre, a suitable venue will be available. Until then, we continue our quest for a more suitable venue.

Since the beginning of term 3 last year the program of sessions has been a varied one, much like that of MWG. Arts sessions are interspersed with sessions with guest speakers on parenting topics and various aspects of women's health. Members have also been contributing sessions – a session on Christmas craft late last year and a yoga session is planned. In March BWG members led storytelling sessions at the 'Luna Festival' organised by Tuggeranong Arts Centre. BWG members were also pleased to join MWG members at the launch of the MWG mosaic 'Nurture' at QE II in March. ArtsACT funding this year provides for a total of 18 'Art, Play and Possibilities' sessions with Amanda Bruhn. Initial sessions explored the media of linocut printing, mosaic and Papier Maché. The remaining sessions are being used to create linocut installations for donation to local baby health centres and to RFL. This is BWG's first community arts project and a significant milestone for the group.

BWG has attracted good media and publicity in the last year. I put out a media release at the end of term 3 2004 and The Chronicle and The Word both picked up the story. This release prompted the interest of the Canberra Times in the groups. This resulted in a Canberra Times feature article about the MWG QE II mosaic in late December and which made mention of the BWG.

The CIF project "From Majura to Brindabella: Mums at home in community" was featured in the Summer 2005 edition of the ACT health promotion journal, *Healthlink*. An article about the project was also included in the recent edition of *Healthy Territory*. Tonight ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, will give an Australia and New Zealand School of Government public lecture titled, 'Shaping opportunities, creating public value: Government and community collaboration in the ACT'. It is possible that he may refer to the partnership between MWG and Mental Health ACT as a successful government-community partnership in this address.

The BWG is working gradually but very solidly towards becoming self-managing and self-sustaining, like the Majura Women's Group. Many members have taken on volunteer roles over and above assisting with setting up and packing up on Tuesday mornings. These have been recorded in newsletters. I am very thankful to them, but more importantly this is an essential step towards autonomy for BWG. A number of sessions have focused on self-management topics, such as a guest speaker from the ACT Council of Social Services speaking about incorporation and governance

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matters generally. CIF funding for BWG provides ample flexibility to allow for more such sessions to be included in the program as needed.

Today the group brings a proposal for the role of its first committee, this proposal has also been considered by the MWG committee. BWG's first committee will be formally a sub-committee of the MWG in the first instance. By the beginning of 2007 it is planned that the Deed of Grant for the CIF grant will be signed over from MWG to the BWG. BWG will consider becoming incorporated in the lead up to that transition. In keeping with this transition, I fully expect that the (yet to be elected) chair of BWG's first committee will be here next year reporting to the 2006 MWG AGM.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported the establishment of the BWG. The moving accounts of the group given by four members at a recent meeting of Tuggeranong community agencies bore witness to the wider community to the significance of the group for its members. I feel very confident about the future of the group.

Sue Hoffmann
Establishment Co-ordinator
Brindabella Women's Group
31 August 2005

Appendix 6: Extracts of reporting to MWG, tracking the progression of BWG to autonomy

1. Extract, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 3 November 2004:

Development of the 'culture' of the BWG

I think this is developing well, with a high level of 'ownership' of the group taking root. The women were keen to be involved in determining the name of the group and in generating ideas for the term 4 program. The women are pitching in with offers of help in various ways – helping out in the childcare, recruiting special volunteers for help with childcare, publicity and so on.

2. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 6 December 2004:

Term 4 sessions

*Term 4 sessions have continued to go very well, with strong attendances (13, 12, 12, 15, and 10 women in weeks 3 to 8 respectively), great topics and enthusiastic participation. [The artist] for 6 of the sessions, advised me on the morning of 30/11 that she would be unable to attend that day, so we used the session to talk about the Group, funding prospects for 2005 and a potential venue for 2005. The latter was particularly timely **and the session led to a volunteer for secretarial work.** Accordingly we now have a contact list of 27 women ...*

*Attendances have been so strong that the demand for childcare has exceeded the capacity of the 2 childcare workers budgeted for (we have had 14 children in childcare on 2 occasions). The 'turn-taking' method of managing the fairly consistent 'over-demand' hasn't been hugely popular, so **discussion on 30/11 led to an alternative plan:** some of the children being cared for in the women's room as needed. ...*

Development of the 'culture' of the BWG

*This is certainly developing very well, as evidenced by **spontaneous contributions of home made morning tea food, bringing along kids' books and videos to offer others in the group, suggestions of kids' clothing exchanges, and lots of mutual support in relation to personal issues.***

Publicity

*I attended a meeting of the Family Support and Parenting Network on 11 November to promote the BWG (and also the MWG). Some of the many workers in attendance were very interested to learn of the Group, take brochures, and refer women to us. **[One of the members] has been active with***

publicity too: 1-way radio interview, talking at Library story-time and is planning to speak at New Parenting Groups.

... budget for BWG (July to Dec 2004)

... such that my attendance at all of the term 4 sessions is possible – quite important this early in the life of the Group and with the ‘open’ policy this term which sees new women coming along virtually every week.

Venue for 2005

*... **The Group discussed [a specific option] at some length** with [the proposer of that venue option] on 30/11 and responded very favourably to the possibility.*

[Funding] for 2005 and beyond

*At the 30/11 session, **the group discussed possible options, should neither of the above 2 grant applications be successful.** The Group favoured ‘cost-neutral’ gatherings for terms 1 and 2 (eg getting together with kids at a local park) for the weeks between the [sessions for which funding had been secured].*

3. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator’s report to Majura Women’s Group Committee Meeting, 9 February 2005:

[Funding]

*The Deed [of Grant for the 3-year grant for the establishment of BWG] **includes explicit reference to providing for the transfer of the contract to BWG** when agreed to by [the funding body], MWG and BWG.*

Publicity

- *Brochure – I have started work on the text for this. **[One of the BWG members] expressed interest in late 2004 in working on it, but hasn’t responded to my emails at this point.** We clearly don’t need it desperately to attract women to the Group! It is also desirable that we are confident of our venue arrangements before proceeding with a major publishing run. Furthermore, after term 1 we can expect to have some BWG linocuts that could be included in the brochure.*
- ***Story-telling by BWG members at the Moon Festival will help to raise the profile of the Group in the community.***
- *I am scheduled to attend a staff meeting of Tuggeranong MACH nurses and allied staff to raise the profile of the BWG on 23 Feb – **I will ask whether one or more BWG women might like to join me.***
- *Website – I understand **[one of the MWG committee members] has been in contact with [one of the BWG members] about up-dating the BWG website.***

[arts] sessions

... I imagine we will also seek to solicit the assistance of members to make up linocut boards for on-going BWG use.

Challenges

- *I am mindful that building BWG self-management experience, skills and culture is something that I need to be constantly working on. Already some members are helping with various tasks (eg membership secretarial role, publicity, website up-dating, banking, some newsletter contributions) and I need to gently foster the gradual increasing up-take of this. BWG contributions to write-ups of sessions for the newsletter were thin for the current newsletter, so perhaps BWG members don't have much "ownership" of the (MWG) newsletter at this point?*
- *I plan to work with both Groups in developing a draft plan for transferring formal responsibility for the management of BWG over the 3-year period and I look forward to your input.*

4. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 17 March 2005:

[On 19 March] BWG has its next community arts activity, this time on its own. The Group is taking responsibility for 2 twenty minute segments of story-telling at the Luna Festival staged by Tuggeranong Arts Centre. This is the culmination of 3 sessions this term on story-telling run by Jigsaw Theatre Company which went very well.

Publicity

- *Brochure – [One of the BWG members] has been progressing this. Some of the linocuts recently produced might be used for the brochure.*

[arts] sessions

... One of the BWG members suggested that her husband's [service club] involvement might be drawn on in support of BWG. She indicated that their preference is community service, so I suggested the making of linocut boards for the Group. [The member's husband made linocut boards] in good time for the sessions and BWG now has 15 boards! He kindly donated the materials as he had off-cuts available. This generosity of spirit is a fantastic boon to the Group.

...

Up-take of volunteer roles and development of group culture

- *This is proceeding very well. Some weeks ago I drew up a list of all the tasks/roles that could do with someone looking after them. Group members responded very positively and almost all have found a volunteer. Yesterday I sought a volunteer for assisting with*

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data entry [for bookkeeping] and more than 1 woman would have been prepared to do this.

- *The current identified volunteer roles and the volunteers are:*
 - [name] – banking and raising cheques*
 - [name] – various aspects of publicity (website up-dating, talking to new parenting groups, at public library story-time, radio interview/s)*
 - [name] – secretarial – at this stage membership secretary role*
 - [name] – *evaluation assistance: planning and co-ordination (re CIF project)*
 - [name] – brochure*
 - [name] – *liaison with Tuggeranong Arts Centre re Story-telling at Luna Festival*
 - [name] – *morning tea co-ordinator (purchasing milk, biscuits, etc)*
 - [name] – *co-ordinate BWG input to newsletter*
 - [name] – *contact people for enquires re the Group*
 - [name] (considering this) – *grants reports co-ordination*
 - [name] – *bookkeeping data entry*

** Seven of the above roles are new since the last Committee meeting (those asterisked). I think this bodes very well. It seems to be a natural and smooth pathway to formally establishing the first committee later this year. I am mindful that continuing to build BWG self-management experience, skills, confidence and culture is something that I need to be constantly working on. I think we're certainly on track with this.*

Challenges

- *Next term I plan to work with both Groups in developing a draft plan for transferring formal responsibility for the management of BWG over the 3-year period. If you are interested in being part of a small working group to be involved in this please let me know.*

5. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 2 May 2005:

Up-take of volunteer roles and development of the group

Write-ups for the most recent newsletter were more forthcoming than for the previous one. This is an encouraging development. I was also very encouraged when one of the members suggested that we use some time in term 2 to learn about incorporation. I have drafted a checklist of jobs for setting up and packing up, members are providing comments on things I've missed.

Re transferring formal responsibility for the management of BWG over the 3-year period – I suggest that the best way to proceed with this is for BWG members to start the ball rolling on this with a draft plan to put to the MWG. The session on incorporation and other governance matters should be a useful impetus for this.

6. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 9 June 2005:

Recent sessions and attendances

...the group is about to decide on a small community arts project for the remainder of these sessions this year.

The session on incorporation and governance also went very well and the group mapped out the following steps to take before the end of the year:

- *Look at MWG Constitution*
- *Attend MWG AGM*
- *Invite MWG Executive to visit and talk about their roles (integrated with other arts sessions)*
- *Explore a collective model (eg invite a guest speaker)*
- *Establish a (sub-)committee (how many members?)*

Venue and associated arrangements

[Re the need for a new venue:] Some of the members have been exploring options through the churches (no joy) and others have wondered about preschools.

7. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 9 June 2005:

First Community Arts Project

The Arts, Play and Possibilities sessions in the period since the last Committee meeting were for brainstorming and deciding on a community arts project to be undertaken during terms 3 and 4. A number of possibilities were canvassed and it took the best part of two sessions to arrive at a decision. ... Other considerations included the potential for publicity arising from the project and the desirability of a project with a very low risk of proving to be overly ambitious at this early stage of the life of the Group and at a time when it also needs to take on other challenges (eg starting a Committee).

Voluntary roles

I think this is continuing to develop nicely. It was very heartening when one of the members took the initiative to ask who normally co-ordinates the following term's program for MWG – and she subsequently offered to co-ordinate the BWG program for term 4 this year. The newsletter details the voluntary roles currently being undertaken by BWG members. I am hoping to find a volunteer to take on at least some of the co-ordination of the community arts project. Some novel ideas are emerging – like buying up Long Life milk and storing it in the cupboard to avoid milk 'crises'.

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I think it is probably imperative that I take Ceri's advice and make sure that I stay away from AT LEAST one session each term – to assist the process of members progressively assuming responsibility for the Group.

Toward the election of the first BWG Committee

The BWG program includes mention of a number of steps during term 3 leading up to the election of the Group's first committee. This will, in the first instance, formally have the status of a sub-committee of the MWG (while BWG is under the umbrella of the MWG).

The steps mapped out in the program are:

- *26 July: consider the role and possible structure of the BWG's first Committee*
- *2 August: consider the option of a collective model of operation with the stimulus of a guest speaker from a women's refuge; [the MWG President] is also scheduled to attend this session to talk briefly about her role and how MWG operates in comparison to a collective model.*
- *9 August: firm up on a proposal regrading BWG's first committee to go to the MWG AGM (and to the MWG Committee in advance of the AGM)*
- *31 August: Attend the MWG AGM and hopefully reach agreement with MWG re how the first Committee will operate*
- *6 September: BWG members elect the first committee and schedule 1st meeting.*

The role of the first committee as I see it and which I propose to put the BWG for consideration on 26 July is as follows:

A. Steps to autonomy:

- *Develop a constitution for the BWG (using the MWG constitution as a starting point)*
- *Explore and make a decision about incorporation of BWG*
- *Plan steps for progressively assuming greater responsibility for the management of the Group, ideally with view to assuming responsibility for the CIF grant for the duration of 2007 (the Deed of Grant makes provision for this transfer of responsibility) and planning for sustainability (including financial viability) beyond 2007.*

B. Co-ordination, management and reporting functions:

- *Explore alternative venue options for the Group and make recommendations to MWG re any changes (including any associated changes to childcare arrangements)*
- *Attend to the general week-to-week management of the Group – or ensure that these tasks are attended to from amongst the membership: session co-ordination and liaison with RFL/RECC, community arts project co-ordination, program co-ordination, childcare co-ordination as needed, publicity, newsletter contributions, membership information co-ordination and newsletter address list co-ordination, contribution to reporting requirements and acquittals of grants, contribution to evaluation, chairing of committee meetings and keeping minutes of meetings*
- *Liaise with MWG Committee to determine a workable system for reporting for such time as coming under the umbrella of the MWG (eg provide committee meeting minutes for*

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tabling at MWG Committee meetings, contribute articles for the newsletter, a representative to attend MWG Committee meetings?)

It is envisaged that the Committee will gradually assume a progressively stronger overall co-ordination and leadership role relative to that of the Community Development Worker (ie me), with my role changing to more of a mentoring role.

Publicity

- *Follow-up of lapsed attendees – some of the BWG members initiated and have acted on this (in a highly respectful and unobtrusive way), following the sending out of a letter with the term 3 program.*

8. Extracts, BWG Establishment Co-ordinator's report to Majura Women's Group Committee Meeting, 23 September 2005:

First Community Arts Project

*For some weeks in term 3 the project progressed in a low key way. When [one of the sessions] was called off due to an evacuation, a **discussion about members' concerns occurred. This led to a re-visiting of the project at the next session with [the artist] and further group development of the project plan.** The energy and enthusiasm for the project has lifted markedly and I think it's back on track. I talked to the group about seeing this as a pretty normal part of the process with a major project and appreciated their initiative in raising their concerns. ...*

I am hoping that at the group's first committee meeting someone might take on a co-ordination role for this project – eg together with me.

Voluntary roles and development of ownership of the group

*I think this continues to be on track. **There was no hesitation on the part of 8 women to nominate for committee positions and a further 3 members may attend the first committee meeting.***

In my last report to the MWG Committee I wrote,

"I think it is probably imperative that I take [the MWG President's] advice and make sure that I stay away from AT LEAST one session each term – to assist the process of members progressively assuming responsibility for the Group."

*I didn't plan to be absent this last term but was too unwell to attend the session during which the group was evacuated. **When the group returned to the room (after coffee in the foyer of the childcare centre), they planned the sessions for term 4, discussed members' issues concerning the community arts project and what to do about them, and contributed to [the] evaluation.** There is quite strong interest in the group in attending [the evaluator's] presentation of her evaluation next Tuesday and in reading a draft of her report. I think the group is absolutely on track with regard to taking ownership of the group.*

Election of the first BWG Committee

This election went smoothly and 8 members volunteered for committee positions as follows [names omitted]. Some others indicated that it was too early for them to take on a committee position.

- *Chairperson*
- *Secretary (inc. membership)*
- *Members: [6 members]*

... I understand that two group members who struggle with English as their second language are planning to come to the first committee meeting.

The committee formally has the status of a sub-committee of the MWG (for such time as the BWG is under the umbrella of the MWG). The role of the first committee adopted at the AGM following consultation with both the MWG Committee and the BWG members is as [described above].

Publicity

- *Four BWG members and I attended an interagency meeting of community organizations working in the Tuggeranong area to speak about BWG and members' circumstances and experiences of the group. Some of their inputs were quite moving and I think made a very strong and positive impression of those present...*
- *I am hoping that the first committee meeting will result in one or more volunteers to take on publicity for BWG.*

Appendix 7: Sample MOU for the provision of an adjunct childcare service

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING: agreement between [XXX] and Brindabella Women's Group for the provision of adjunct childcare for Brindabella Women's Group

[XXX] agrees to provide a childcare service to Brindabella Women's Group (BWG) between the hours of 9.30 am 12.30 pm, on Tuesdays during ACT school terms and commencing [date], including:

- All aspects of management of the service (eg. recruitment, police checks, rostering and supervision of staff)
- Workers compensation insurance cover for [XXX] staff employed to provide the childcare service
- The provision of a suitably qualified and experienced person to co-ordinate the team of childcare workers and to organise the program of activities
- The provision of other caring and competent staff, recognising the value of continuity of staff
- Program provision for Tuesday sessions 9.30 am to 12.30 pm
- Supervision of childcare students on student placements and other volunteers as applicable, rostered to assist in the childcare room.
- The provision of a care ratio of 1:5 based on 3 [XXX] staff members, plus students and other volunteers as applicable, thereby providing at least 15 childcare places.
- The provision of consumable resources for activities.

Brindabella Women's Group agrees to:

- Provide payment of childcare service provision fees directly to [XXX] on issue of an invoice at the commencement of each term
- Provide a weekly contact person to liaise and communicate with the childcare team leader
- Roster one or more volunteer parents to assist with childcare for the session if there are more than 15 children and if CIT students are not rostered on student placements for that session, to ensure that a 1:5 care ratio is maintained
- Provide first aid equipment as needed.

The agreed fee for the provision of the childcare service for the Brindabella Women's Group on Tuesday mornings is \$xxx per weekly session (making the total fee for a 10-week term \$xxxx).

The parties agree that:

- As needed, week-to-week issues may be raised for resolution between the [XXX] team leader and the BWG contact person. From time to time and as needed, broader issues may be raised with the [XXX] Manager.
- At the end of each semester the fees for the following semester may be renegotiated by the parties as necessary – eg taking into account any wage increases in the childcare industry.
- In the event of either party wishing to cease the above arrangements and withdraw from the agreement, at least two months notice is required by that party.

Signed by [SERVICE PROVIDER]
representative:

Name (printed):

Role/title:

Date:

Signed by Brindabella Women's Group Inc.
representative:

Name (printed):

Role/title:

Date: