

Young Women Roundtable – Notes

10:45 for 11am-2pm 16 July 2016

Level 3, 52-58 William St, Woolloomooloo NSW

Key take outs from last Roundtable

- *“I haven’t stopped thinking about Super – which is weird. My boss gave me this Super form and it was an inch thick – and I was like why are you doing this to me Michelle? I thought we were friends!”*
- A class on Super would have taken away a lot of that anxiety about it when you’re first introduced to it.
- There should be different pathways to let you learn about financial literacy. There are real gaps that could do with being filled. We all talk about high school education but there needs to be other options.
- Women’s homeless shelters/refuges could be a place to provide financial literacy support for women at risk.
- There are two sides to the issues women face, the behaviour of – particularly men – to women. Some of it is deliberate thinking – this woman is less capable, I have a right to harass them - but there is also less deliberate discrimination. Guys at my school haven’t even thought about whether they’d stay home with a child – it doesn’t even occur to them.
- Important part of fixing these attitudes is getting men involved. Even though it is about women’s rights, it’s important for everyone. Giving rights to women improves men’s lives as well.
- It was good to talk about racial and disability discrimination last time. We should always consider how family can be involved in gender inequality and the cultural expectations of women and girls.
- If you don’t specifically identify as heterosexual there can be doubled up inequalities. You have the wage-gap, other gendered expectations and stigmatisation about your sexuality. So the discrimination is compounded. Different rights, different expectations, different opportunities.
- If women aren’t financially literate – it makes it so hard for women to escape domestic violence. Women who have dropped out of school, because of pregnancy, for example then don’t feel equipped to leave violent homes.

“I’m giving away ten years of my life to be a doctor and I was talking to someone about to finish. He expects his life partner to stay at home with their kids when they have them. I nearly had a heart attack – I’ve studied for ten years I’m not doing that. It was like I had presented a crazy idea to him!”

- *“I’m about to finish the HSC and I’m talking to my friends about how we would manage a work-life balance. When we mentioned it to the guys, they haven’t even thought about it. Girls are conditioned to think about it, it’s an expectation.”*
- Older people/parents have different viewpoints about gender. They say things like “think about the future” when making career choices. And they mean, will you be able to have a family and do that job. Maybe it was like that for them but things are changing now.
- *“Just because you are a woman doesn’t make you a mother necessarily. It’s not how it works.”*
- *“Last year when we had businesses come in to talk to us about what the future would look like for us. I asked why women only have 5-6 career changes but guys have more? No one could answer that question.”*
- *“It’s heartbreaking to see these different expectations instilled into girls. It would have started in primary school, and it just continues.”*
- *“Feminism is taught in high school. But it has a historical focus – as if it was a thing of the past, the battle has been won. The message is feminism isn’t a thing for now.”*
- *“It’s all over, everything’s equal now. Please stop complaining.”*
- *“A Bank came in to talk about financial literacy in our school but the talk was not given to the top maths class. I know how to calculate a parabola – but nothing about choosing a credit card.”*

Careers sessions at school have a strange focus as well. We never learnt about super or financial literacy. All the focus centred on what we wanted to do or study. This is a perfect opportunity to learn about finances but it was ignored.

- *“I wasn’t aware about the pay gap until recently. Perhaps our teachers aren’t aware of it?”*
- *“I work with people that are isolated, who are coming into youth shelters. Who will teach them life skills and financial literacy? Is that me? Because I don’t have those skills...”*
- Employers aren’t going to teach people about it Super. They aren’t best placed really. They will have an agenda and encourage people to go with their chosen super fund.
- Young people don’t really understand how important superannuation is. It’s something to focus on.
- *“At school we’re told not to worry about super and just to focus on our HSC. But we’re given personality tests to see if we’ll be an actress or a vet. But no focus on how to manage a bank account etc...”*
- Careers counselling has the message that you shouldn’t worry about the money, just do what you love. But that means discussion of money gets thrown out altogether.
- I think gender inequality doesn’t get talked about because a lot of people don’t believe it still exists. It’s like a concept or a theory.
- *“I said to my teacher who said the gender pay gap doesn’t exist: don’t you think it’s weird that you haven’t realised that you work in a female dominated workforce but all the top positions are taken by men? These are the people who are education our young men and women. Educating the people who are educators is so important.”*

- Women who works with homeless youth: *“I used to run sessions in school about healthy relationships and life skills but teachers weren’t supportive of what I was trying to say. And I only got an hour. And they don’t get it. But that’s where we have to start.”*
- Boys and girls get different wellbeing talks. Girls taught how to get away from potential sexual assault. Boys miss this. Boys weren’t being taught about what consent is. They were being talked to about how to talk about their feelings.
- There is a cultural problem in Australia. Everyone assumes women are the weaker gender. That we can’t look after ourselves. They worry about us being on the street by ourselves.

“There is a view that out on the street is a man’s space. We can’t feel safe out on the street.”

- But then there’s the flip side, where if you call that out – you get labelled “angry”. *“Well yes I am angry and I should be allowed to be angry.”*
- When you go to juvenile detention centres the majority are Aboriginal. Girls can be in there over a year – ranges from 12-18. Those girls when they get out are not going back to school, they won’t have the opportunity. Bu they want to improve their lives when they get out. But there are so many barriers around employment because of their criminal record – let alone the opportunity to be educated about super and other things.
- *“My dad said has said to me - get a good job so you can take care of me when you’re old. There is so much focus on looking after the family as woman, rather than pursuing what interests you.”*
- There are expectation to marry someone not below your social status and if you follow what you want to do, you’re betraying the family, you’re despicable almost.
- *“I know a women who is really smart, and she’s started working in an amazing job but her family says you’re getting a bit old now – time to start thinking about getting married. I think what? She’s just worked so hard, she’s just on the brink of achieving great things and her family is telling her to ‘calm your farm’.”*
- There are so many different and confusing cultural expectations – there are some messages that say you should be a virgin when you get married – but then I’ve had people offer to take my virginity because that might make me a more attractive wife.
- For queer women the message can be - Oh yay! You can work! Because people think you won’t have kids. Well I know lots of people who want to work. Lots of people who want families. People have these expectations about what your life is like based on stereotypes.

“I’m from Moree - there’s nothing out where I was living but cotton. So my parents moved us away to Lismore so we could go to uni and have opportunities. But it was moving us away from our family, from our support networks it was really hard. If I had to make that choice again? I don’t know what I would choose. Family connections are really important.”

- There is huge disparities in job opportunities between larger centres and smaller towns. In smaller places the jobs always seem to be given to men and women are expected to go find work elsewhere.
- *"I walk around in Sydney and there is part time work everywhere. And I think why didn't I grow up here? There were no opportunities where I was."*
- *"I watched all my male counterparts get jobs and apprenticeships and I took a year to find a job."*
- Albury abortion clinics, have huge protests out the front...so people don't want to go there anymore. Women don't want to travel to Melbourne to get an abortion. But there is no choice.
- When my mum came from India to Australia, the only job my mum could get was in day care, my dad was a banker. When she reached a certain age she was fired and she couldn't get more work.
- When I moved away to uni, I had done café and bar work...the only job I could get in Bathurst was babysitting and tutoring. Lismore was diverse, massive queer culture – incredible activist culture. Bathurst had none of it.



Discussion key areas – group work

Financial literacy/ Superannuation

What are the key issues?

- There is about to be life skill courses rolled out across the state. There should be a gender component of these courses.
- If you do general maths you get life skills – if you do extension maths you don't. Women are opting for the general maths to get the life skills.
- Gender is already in syllabus in subjects like economics – but too reliant on teacher discretion and knowledge in terms of what gets taught.
- Financial literacy too reliant on parents' knowledge/capacity to teach at home.
- Superannuation – first exposure at work. There is no education before then.
- *"I found out my employer wasn't paying me super and none of my friends were either."* People think they can get away with it because young people don't know their rights.
- People don't want to speak up about these issues because they don't want to lose their job.
- Education needed around workers' rights. People only taught about unions in a historic context – not about what they do in practice
- NSW government already have resources on these issues but they aren't very accessible or engaging.



What would make a difference?

- Educating everyone. Advocating/raising awareness of gendered financial issues.
- Families are often the first teachers. We need to be working with families as this is the first port of call.
- School level education needed – most young people are in touch with school at some point.
- Life skills are needed in the curriculum.
- Workplace is an opportunity to get more financial literacy – this should be capitalised on.
- Community services/justice system – here is where we should be addressing gaps, reaching people missing out on financial literacy education.
- Crisis services are needed in helping people when they are really stuck
- Employing social media – talk about these issues on these platforms. Everyone is connected there so it's a place to reach a lot of people about these issues.
- Youth groups. Youth drop in centres. Facebook associated with these groups. These could be used as educative spaces.
- Messages should be coming from their peers, "not just some random guy".
- Culturally specific education is important – ensuring appropriate language is used. Tap into different ways of communicating.

- Union informed programs in high schools about what unions are for – workplace agreements, rights etc
- Support programs for parents to become financially literate.
- Practical exercises to demonstrate the importance of super and the gender pay gap – e.g. café charging extra to men on equal pay day.
- Their needs to be a focus on literacy in some cases where women have fallen through the gaps, not just financial literacy.
- Early intervention is needed to people don't get to crisis point.

Proposed structure for education:

UMBRELLA objective: Comprehensive package of financial literacy that ensure education for everyone

- First touch point = school
- Second touch point = workplace
- Third touch point = community services and justice system (capture women who left school or who weren't connected to school)
- Fourth touch point = crisis services

Women at work

What are the key issues?

- Junior rates and exploitation of young workers.
- Attitudes in male dominated industries. There are ingrained expectations about who can be doing which jobs.
- Problems with managing work/life balance. Women don't know about how they can manage otherhood and careers. There is a stigma attached to pregnancy. Family responsibilities can impact on career progressions.
- Men aren't involved in making the change we need to see – involving them would give it more impact.
- There is a lack of women in top positions.
- Gendered attitudes about the subjects young people should take at school. This starts early.
- Cultural and family expectation impact on women's life choices.
- Exploitation of international workers and international students.

What would make a difference?

- Ensure policy and decision making, includes people who will understand the impact those decision will have. Men who don't understand women's experience making decision that affect women for example.
- There needs to be more awareness raising and education about the steps women can take to address inappropriate behaviour – what their rights are etc



- Changing gendered attitudes needs to start early. Educate young people in schools that standing up to problematic behaviour is important. If they don't they are contributing to the problem.
- Schools should be educating young people from primary school about healthy relationships and life skills, needed to start early. Employing role models in this education is important.
- Workshops in schools, workplaces and broader community eg. Churches, mosques etc to promote better attitudes around gender.
- Quotas need to be considered carefully – as they can make the people they are promoting feel like their achievements are less legitimate. Scholarships that encourage women into areas where they are currently under represented have a positive impact.
- Better access to childcare – make it more affordable and accessible.
- Adequate paid parental leave – with expectation that men or women can take it.
- Flexible working arrangements to manage children
- Increased support for single mothers who can't work as well as look after children.
- In Cape York there is a program where young mothers who haven't finished school can go to school and bring their children with them.
- Better education around workplace rights – in schools etc
- Ensure young people know where they can go to find out about what their rights – there's plenty of online information.
- Parents don't always have all the answers – there needs to be alternative paths for education around people's rights at work.



Housing

What are the key issues?

- Going home, staying home reforms mean there is a lack of specific services for women.
- Ensure there is young women specific housing
- Tertiary systems don't look to the individual
- Intersectionality should be considered – sometimes ignored.
- Feminists should advocate for all women – not just their type of women.
- Should never be the “perfect woman” who needs help. More understanding of the range of experiences and needs of women experiencing homelessness
- Not enough Aboriginal women refuges, housing, support services, or for CALD women. Legal support services are also lacking. Sex workers often overlooked.
- Identity not just one thing. Catering services to the individual.
- Not enough education around housing.

- Women aren't safe. Especially not young women.

What would make a difference?

- More sensitive responses to individual needs.
- Services that can investigate women's circumstances.
- Need more culturally appropriate women working with women who are Aboriginal/CALD women who can relate to them. Avoid the white saviour.
- Safe spaces are needed to seek support.
- A diversity of women's support services that allow flexibility and ensure women feel comfortable.
- Equip schools with services for children who don't have food - checking in with families where needed.
- A program to assist seniors who own a house but are living in poverty. They could offer a safe space to women needing housing who can offer them services/support they can't afford to get elsewhere.
- One stop shop support line - women diversity support network.

Extra issues:

- In patients recovering from Anorexia are paying a lot to stay in treatment - 2 months is pretty standard. There are often repeat admissions. Women leaving treatment are asking themselves - where do I go when I get out from a housing perspective? What job do I get?
- In some cases this is forcing women to rely on being an in-patient for housing.