

# YOUNG WOMEN

## Who Are We?

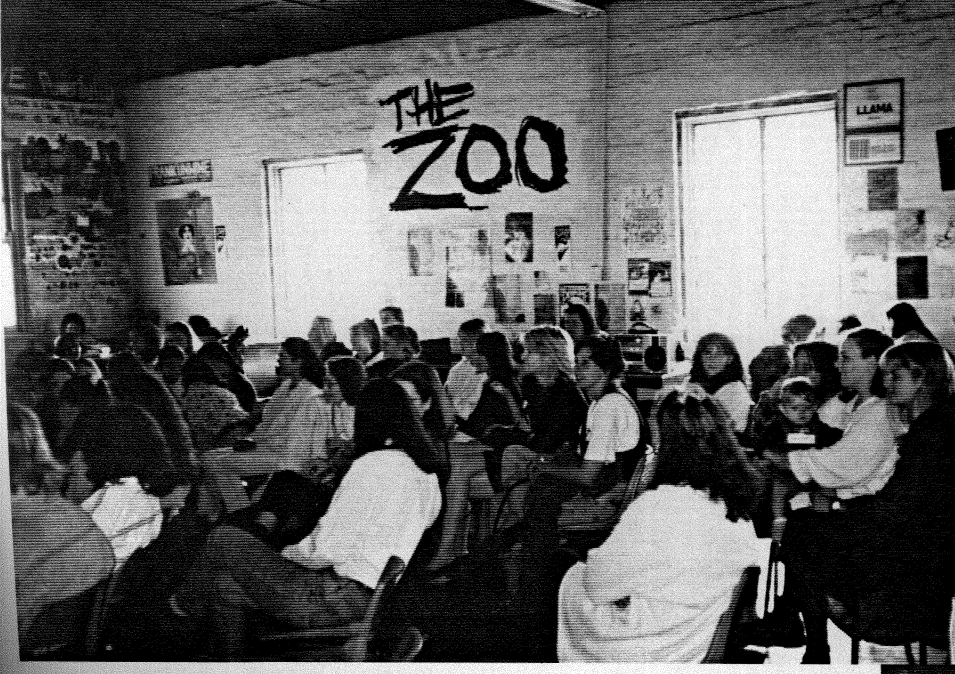
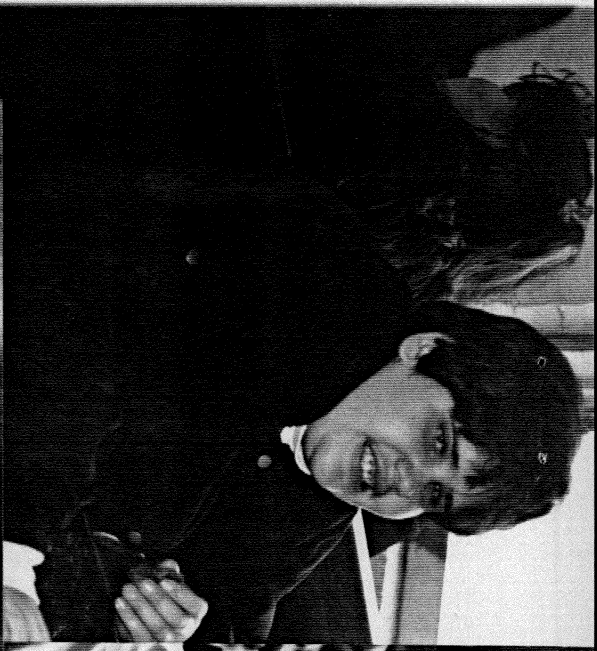


### Proceedings from Young Women's Speakout

28 June 1993

A Project of WAYWARD  
Women Alongside Young Women for Action, Research and Development

Auspiced by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc





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**WAYWARD thanks all those who attended and contributed to the success of the Speakout. Special thanks to:**

**Young Women:** Sarina, Heather, Tracey, Michelle, Bekky, Clarissa, Leanne, Marlene, Theresa, Sue, Melinda, Laura, Tanya, Jodie, Catherine, Leeanne, Sharon, Kym, Fabiana, Tam, Lisa, Wendy, Kelli, Naomi, Melody, Kathy, Simone, Rachelle, Kerryn, Nicole, Christine, Effie, Connie, Vinnie, Debbie, Ronda, Lisa, Wendy, Supalak, Sureerat, Joanne, Amanda, Lisa, Nikkii and Lauchlan, Kirsten and Rhiannon, Charmaine and Tina, Jow and Tommy, Paula, Zac, Tanya, and Leean.

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**Speakout Coordinators:** Angie Dunbavan and Michaela Curran.

**Group Work Facilitators:** Deb Rodrigues, Tess Murray, Bindi Wythes, Sunniva Bolton, Bettina Nissen, and Michelle Fix.

**Ms of Ceremonies:** Jan Owen.

**Guest Speaker:** Zoe Rathus.

**Speakout Facilitator:** Rebecca Lister.

**Catering and Venue:** The Zoo Cafe - Joc, C, and Susan.

**Proceedings Recorder:** Alex Gillespie.

**Childcare Workers:** Joanne Gaudry, Kathy Gregory, Bindi Wythes and Sunniva Bolton.

**All members of WAYWARD.**

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## WE ARE WOMEN!

We are women  
we have a right  
to express ourselves  
without a fight!

Don't discriminate  
'cause of our way  
beliefs of the mind  
or what we say.

Want to be equal  
just let us walk  
and free of the eyes  
that won't let us talk.

Just understand  
we want to be free  
as we are women  
who are proud to be!

Laura Ford  
28 June 1993



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# INTRODUCTION

In late 1992, WAYWARD (Women Alongside Young Women for Action, Research and Development) applied successfully to the National Agenda for Women Grants Program for a small grant to hold its second young women's speakout. Because WAYWARD is an unincorporated association, the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) agreed to auspice the project. Appendix 1 of this report gives more details about WAYWARD, and YANQ.

WAYWARD held its first young women's speakout during Youth Week in November 1992. The Youth Week theme was "Young People - Responsible Decision Makers". WAYWARD adapted this theme, so that the first speakout focused on "Young Women - Responsible Decision Makers". At that event, young women and workers expressed an interest in participating in future speakouts, as a way to draw attention to issues affecting young women, and to build a sense of unity and action.

In establishing the theme for the second speakout, the project Coordinators consulted with young women and workers who had participated in the first speakout and/or were planning to attend the second one. The Coordinators found that young women had an interest in discussing a variety of interrelated issues. To provide a focus for the speakout, and at the same time allow for discussion of a broad range of topics, WAYWARD members settled on the broad theme: "Young Women - Who Are We?". This allowed young women to discuss any issue or topic central to their own lives, or in which they had a particular interest.

## Objectives

The objectives of the speakout were:

- (1) To hold a speakout in a safe, comfortable environment, where young women who use community services can identify and "speak out" on issues of importance to them.
- (2) To maximise the involvement of young women in the speakout, including young women from groups which are often marginalised (e.g. Aboriginal and Islander and non-English speaking background communities, women with disabilities, etc).
- (3) To document and distribute the proceedings of the speakout.

## Anticipated Outcomes

The anticipated outcomes of the project were:

- (1) Young women participating will have the chance to improve their sense of self-esteem and self-worth through speaking out and being heard.
- (2) Other young women will benefit as government and non-government workers gain insight into young women's issues, through attending the speakout and/or reading the proceedings.
- (3) The speakout will encourage increased involvement in WAYWARD's activities by young women from marginalised groups.
- (4) The information shared at the speakout will help to ensure that WAYWARD's future activities are responsive to young women using services.

The grant obtained from the National Agenda for Women Grants Program included an allocation for wages to coordinate the organisation of the speakout. This position was job-shared by social workers, Angie Dunbavan and Michaela Curran, both of whom had been involved in the first speakout.



## LEADUP TO THE SPEAKOUT

The speakout Coordinators began work in early May, approximately seven weeks before the speakout was to be held. Budget constraints meant that they could not be employed for any longer.

As noted above, WAYWARD wished to consult with young women and workers in establishing a theme for the speakout. Members also felt that it was important to develop processes and practical details (eg date, venue) which would be most suitable for potential participants.

Therefore, the Coordinators began the project by contacting agencies throughout South East Queensland, to investigate how to make the speakout most appropriate for young women. A total of 37 agencies was contacted and workers were asked to find out from young women what issues they felt were important. This process identified many issues, including: safety; rights; women and disability; relationship issues; changes in the workforce; housing; pregnancy; sexual violence; self esteem; the importance of group work; drugs and alcohol; homelessness; child-care; and unemployment.

In consultation with other WAYWARD members, the Coordinators decided on the theme, "Young Women - Who Are We?". This theme accommodated the diversity of issues identified, and would give young women and workers an opportunity to meet and share information about themselves.

WAYWARD's first speakout was open to male workers, although none attended. Feedback from the first speakout suggested that participants welcomed the opportunity to speak in an all-women group, and would have felt inhibited by the presence of men. Therefore, the Coordinators of the current event asked young women and workers if they would like the speakout to be an officially women-only event. The consensus was that young women would feel safer and better among other women and, therefore, the speakout was declared a women-only event.

Similarly, workers were invited to the first speakout as "observers" although, once again, few attended in this role. (Most attended to support young women.) The Coordinators of the current speakout discussed this issue with WAYWARD members, and the group decided that the presence of uninvolved "observers" might inhibit the spontaneity of the young women participating, and make them feel that they were "under the microscope", rather than having fun. Therefore, the group decided that only those workers who were supporting young women, or assisting with speakout tasks, could attend the speakout.

However, there was a strong feeling that it was important to share the findings of the speakout with other workers. Therefore, the group decided that the proceedings should be widely distributed, and that perhaps WAYWARD should hold a follow-up workshop for workers, to discuss the proceedings.

The Coordinators' consultations confirmed that young women were eager to participate in fun and practical workshops. In developing these small groups, and engaging facilitators, the Coordinators networked with various individuals, training providers, and community groups. The Coordinators also arranged for a Ms of Ceremonies for the day (a WAYWARD member), and a facilitator to encourage discussion from the floor (a community arts worker).

The Coordinators were also responsible for making practical arrangements such as venue hire and catering.

Once the essential details of the day were organised, the Coordinators designed a flyer advertising the speakout and sent it to approximately 100 South East Queensland agencies which have contact with young women. The flyer advertised that travel subsidies were available to participants, and that free childcare and lunch would be provided.

The Coordinators then made follow-up telephone calls to the agencies which had received flyers, to explain the speakout in more detail, and encourage young women to attend. RSVPs were then sought in the week prior to the speakout. Over 90 RSVPs were received.

## DETAILS OF THE DAY

### Date and Venue

The speakout was held from 9.30am - 3.30pm on Monday 28th June. This date was chosen because it fell in the school holidays, and young women attending school could therefore attend. Many school students had found it difficult to attend the first speakout, which was held on a normal weekday.

The speakout venue was the Zoo Cafe, in Fortitude Valley, an inner-city suburb. It was chosen because:

it was centrally located and near to public transport;  
it was reasonably priced, and could cater for the event;  
it had a youthful, informal atmosphere, which included pool tables; and  
its proprietors supported the event and can provide a women-friendly atmosphere at all times.

### Program

The following program was planned for the day.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 9.30  | Informal introductions, registration, and coffee/tea/food and music   |
| 10.00 | Welcome and Introductions ( <i>Jan Owen, WAYWARD member</i> )   |
| 10.15 | The Legal Rights of Young Women ( <i>Zoe Rathus, Women's Legal Service</i> )  |
| 10.30 | Presentations ( <i>young women</i> )<br>"Young Women - Who are We?"<br>Discussion from the floor ( <i>facilitated by Rebecca Lister, community arts worker</i> )                        |
| 12.30 | Lunch and Free Pool   |
| 1.30  | Small Groups ( <i>young women, workers and group facilitators</i> )<br>"Young Women - Who are We?" through art; jewellery-making;<br>circus skills; storytelling; and 'No-Sew' applique |
| 2.30  | Presentations to the group ( <i>small groups</i> )<br>Final Remarks from Young Women  |
| 2.50  | Closing Remarks ( <i>Jan Owen, WAYWARD member</i> )   |
| 3.00  | Afternoon Tea   |
| 3.30  | Close   |

### Participants

Approximately 95 women attended the speakout, about 65 of whom were young women. The remainder were workers who attended to support young women, or to assist in the organisation of the day's events. The young women and workers came because of their contact with a variety of agencies. The agencies involved in the speakout are described in Appendix 2 of this report.

### Introductions

Jan Owen began by giving a brief description of WAYWARD, its reasons for holding the speakout and the program for the day. She then introduced Zoe Rathus from the Women's Legal Service.

## The Legal Rights of Young Women

Zoe Rathus, a solicitor from the Women's Legal Service, spoke about the services young women can access through the Service, and young women's rights with respect to domestic violence. Zoe provided accurate and concise information about the Domestic Violence Act, violence as a crime, and other kinds of violence. She invited questions at the end of her talk, and a number of young women asked detailed questions about legal rights and assistance when confronted by different kinds of violence. Discussion followed from Zoe's talk and it focused on the experiences of young women and more specific information with regard to domestic violence and rape.





## YOUNG WOMEN - WHO ARE WE?

In the next part of the speakout, individual young women spoke to the group about the topic: "Young Women - Who are We?". Each of their presentations is reproduced below. Discussion after each speaker was facilitated by Rebecca Lister.

### Tam

I thought about heaps of issues that are important to me, like being an incest survivor, the chronic lack of secure housing for young women, our right as women to have access to termination if that is our choice, our desperate need for avenues to voice our experience and our opinions, but first I'm going to talk about women themselves - ourselves.

As women we have things in common. We have our pain - the physical pain of growing, of menstruation, of childbirth. The emotional pain of love, of loss and of understanding. We have our struggles - the struggle for our freedom, our struggle to fit the beauty myth, the struggle to be accepted for who we are, the struggles with the past and, sometimes the hardest, our struggles with ourselves.

We have our strength and that is something, as women, that we should be most proud of. The strength to keep going when it all seems too hard, and the strength to put up with common, everyday hardships that would make most men give up. We have our courage - the courage to change, the courage to grow, the courage to feel, and the courage to keep going even when it all seems so shitty that it would be easier to stay in bed. We have our ability to love - to love each other, to love our kids, even when life's events should have beaten all the love out of us. Despite our sadness and our anger, most of the time we can still love.

And I suppose last of all we have hope. This is something that women throughout the ages, no matter what their circumstances, no matter how horrific their lives were, have always seemed to maintain. We hope for change, be that in ourselves, our partners, our country, people's attitudes or the world as a whole.

We as women need to stand by each other, as the only way we can continue to go forward is to support each other in all parts of our lives. I wanted to stand up here and make you feel, I wanted to touch on all the subjects that are important to me as a young woman, and what I just read ended up sounding like a cross between a political speech and a motivation seminar, so I thought I would also like to talk about something I'm close to, that I know a lot about - ME.

I'm a fairly average young woman. Like 96% of the female population I don't fit the beauty myth, I suffer all the insecurity that most of my friends have, from the 'I'm too short, too fat, too loud type' to the 'Oh my God' what am I going to do with my life?' type.

I'm an incest survivor. Statistically, one out of every four women is a survivor of some sort of sexual abuse. I'm an addict and an alcoholic. I've been clean and sober for about fifteen months. Roughly 10% of the population has some form of addiction or drinks alcoholically. I'm not here to recruit you to AA or to get you to face your past issues. I'm here because I'm a young woman and these are just a couple of the issues that are faced daily by young women, along with housing, money, parenting, sexuality, discrimination and thousands of others.

I suppose we're the lucky ones here, in a sense, because to be here means we're in contact with some sort of youth organisation and being here today means we can express our opinions and our needs in a supportive atmosphere.

*Tamalane was congratulated for her sense of humour, confidence and courage to speak. Discussion focused on the beauty myth and, in particular, discrimination against women from other cultures. The group agreed that women could not live up to the models of beauty provided by the media and society, and that there is no need to live up to these standards.*

## Marlene

I want to talk about child abuse and rape. So many people are going through this. I can relate to this and understand what they are going through.

One in three girls get raped and abused outside of the family or by someone they know. These people just want to destroy your life. Being raped or abused is not your fault and you don't ask for it. Being abused can be using money to sell your body by having sexual intercourse. Abuse may be when a man forces himself onto you to do things like take your clothes off and take pictures of you. There are a lot of people in this world that have been abused. They end up on drugs, then staying on the streets. By doing this they are hurting themselves and they need to be helped.

The only way they will get help is if they ask people for it. There is always someone there to listen.

Now I will tell you about my abuse, when it happened to me and how I feel about it now. I was sexually abused by my father and other men as well and it was very painful throughout my life. I was young at the time. Abuse is wrong and they shouldn't do this to you or anyone else. Just be happy the way you are and try to forget what happened. People are still out there being abused. All their lives are mixed up because of the abuse.

MEN THINK THEY HAVE POWER OVER WOMEN AND WOMEN SHOULD STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR RIGHTS.

Some women, as they grow up, start to dislike themselves but they don't change their personality because that is what we are given. Years go by and you start to grow up and become an adult, but you should never stay a child all your life. In this world you should not change yourself to meet the other person's level. The level should be yourself and nobody else.

Sometimes I would like to be a man because girls go through a lot with men. Some people don't like being women because your body changes as you grow up and you have to be who you are, you can't change your personality. Being a woman, you start to become an adult, you can't go back to your childhood, you have to grow up.

In the Wild Women's Group we start from 18 onwards, women only allowed to join. Not men, because we might talk about something personal in the group - we might get embarrassed about it. Whoever wants to join the group, they have to let us know where they are so we can contact you for more information.

## Sue

Women - Who Are We?

I'm covering women with a disability and the problems they face. It's not often we get an opportunity to speak out. So I wouldn't do it justice without covering all that I could. Some of the problems we face are: living in the community; access to public places; counselling; and public tolerance and awareness.

Living in the community: It is hard to live in the community because people with disabilities need help to do everyday things and to understand things. Because the support that is around is limited to certain types of disabilities and certain amounts (ie. small groups), it leaves a lot of disabled women not being able to live in the community, which is every woman's wish. So henceforth, a lot of women with disabilities are left alone at home with parents. Parents grow older. Woman grows older and concern for the future increases.

Access to public places: There are too many places with stairs. Heaps of stairs at that! With places with lots of stairs, it would be hard enough for people with arthritis, so how the hell do people with crutches and wheelchairs have a chance? Just think of all the business those places are missing! A very good example of this was when South Bank was made. At this stage of the game, it was law for new places to be wheelchair accessible. What they said was wheelchair accessible isn't. How can a place with stairs be wheelchair accessible? And the same goes for Movie World. The only way to fix this for the future would be to have a wheelchair person be available to make sure it is in fact wheelchair accessible, because they truly know what it takes to be accessible.

Counselling: It is bad enough that women get hurt in the first place eg. rape, incest etc. When they go for counselling, counsellors don't explain things well. If you compare a woman with a disability and a woman without, both being hurt, sure some of the things are the same but with a woman with a disability they have added problems. They have difficulty explaining themselves, understanding what it is all about, or even what has happened. For example, they might come and say "I've been hurt. I've got marks on my body and I keep going in the shower a lot. I don't know what's happening". The only way I see to fix this problem is to have someone that is there on staff who is trained to explain to disabled women as counselling progresses.

Public tolerance and awareness: The public attitude is both sad and funny. Funny because have you ever seen the public's reaction when a wheelchair comes down a hill? The gap widens to the extreme sides of the hill for one wheel chair coming down. And it's sad because of the looks, the smart remarks and not understanding or sometimes even trying to understand what a person with a disability goes through. Some school kids have to be told by the bus driver to get off the disabled seat. Trying to rush people in crutches and bumping into them and not apologising.

I hope this talk will help make the world a better place for women with a disability..

*Following Sue's and Marlene's contributions, the group discussed lack of access to public places, mental illness and violence. The group felt that health professionals lack understanding of women's experiences. Woman-specific health issues, like menstruation and menopause, are often not taken seriously.. The group also felt that men are not punished enough for the violent crimes that they commit and that women victims are often ignored. Most of the women attending the speakout felt that no matter how a woman looks or acts, she does not deserve to be abused. There was a mixture of attitudes about the abuse of sex workers.*

## Leean

This morning I wasn't really going to come up here and do a speech but I decided why not? It's something that needs to be talked about and not kept in the closet. See these 'Stop Violence Against Women' stickers? When you see someone wearing these on their books or whatever, just stop and take time to think about all types of women - Aboriginal women, lesbians, non-English speaking background women and disabled women, because most of the time we've been ignored.

I'm here to talk about the violation of a basic fundamental human right, and that's the right to express your own sexuality. All of this is happening as we speak. The violation of our rights is happening now. Whether or not I'll feel safe. Whether or not I should tell my family or tell my friends about how I am - you know that's an issue I have to deal with on a daily basis.

If you haven't heard yet, this week is annual pride festival and that's where gays and lesbians are coming together. It commemorates the Stonewall riots in New York, where gays and lesbians who were having their rights violated by the police decided that was enough. This week is to think about all our brothers and sisters who have died, are being bashed and being called 'poofster' and 'dyke' and everything like that. It's a time for us to remember that, to support each other. I guess it's like a family. Because all the time we're being violated, our rights are being violated whether it's from churches, governments all sorts of places.

You can't walk along the street with your lover because people just look at you and just make you feel like you're dirt or something. And I think pride festival's a good opportunity to say that we're here and we're queer and get over it. I think a lot of straight people have this misconception



that it's sort of like if I breath on you might turn dyke and that we're crazy or something. I don't know, but it's not like that at all. That sort of attitude is a typical homophobic attitude that a lot of straight people have. They want us to be closeted, they don't want to see us, they want us to be invisible. That's why I feel that we should ALL be out and be open about it because we've been around for a long time and we're not going away.

If you are out on the streets and you come across a gay or lesbian couple, I'd just like it if you didn't say "What a poof" or "I don't mind gays but I wish they weren't so blatant", because gays and lesbians are everywhere - there could be some even here sitting next to you and you wouldn't even know it.

The Pride Festival has given me the opportunity to be out and to celebrate my differences and to be proud of who I am. We're here and we're not going away.

*Leean was congratulated for her courage to speak out about homosexuality in such an open, humorous and positive way. Discussion centred on older people's attitudes towards homosexuality, stereotypical perceptions of what ALL lesbians are like and the provision of support services for lesbian women.*

## Christine

I belong to Contact Youth Theatre which is held in Metro Arts in the City. We're a theatre company, well not really a theatre company so to speak. We work on social issues like sexuality, or people from non-English speaking backgrounds, or Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Social issues like what we are talking about today. We're there to help - for young groups to come to do workshops. We do all our own demonstrations. It's a chance for us to work at our own pace, whether it's personal, professional or political. Anyone is welcome - single mums especially because I'm a single mum and I look after that area. No-one has to be a great performer - you just go at your own pace. The phone number is in the phone book. We're looking for new members.

*Some of the young women spoke about the performances they had seen which were run by Contact Youth Theatre. The YACCA projects at Goodna and Logan, which Contact Youth Theatre are presently involved in, were also discussed.*

## Sarina

My name is Sarina Van Wyk and I'm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and my grandfather comes from New South Wales and my Mum comes from Charleville. Well the last time I talked, I spoke about the stuff that had happened to me at home. *[Sarina spoke at the previous speakout.]* Well, recently I got my flat from the headleasing scheme through Margaret from the Inala Youth Service. That was a big relief to me because now I've got my own place and no-one can tell me you have to do this, or you have to do that, or you have to conduct yourself in a certain way. I can be myself and do the things I want to do.

I'd like to mention something about what someone said before, about how women are supposed to look. To me, I don't care. I'm me and that's who I am and if a man or anyone else doesn't like the way I dress or talk, that's their problem. People can take me the way I am or leave it. And my boyfriend who I have got now - he's a big support. He says he loves me the way I am which is really good. Because most men either say "Lose weight" or "You're too skinny" or "You're too fat" and things like that. Well men who are like that - they're not worth thinking about.

Recently I enrolled at Kangaroo Point TAFE college to do an Aboriginal Welfare Course and I want to be an Aboriginal Youth Worker in two years. In two years I want to help my people, especially street kids. I've been out of home but I haven't experienced living on the streets, which is a plus ... but it isn't, because I don't know what they go through. Still, I want to help them.

Most people say "You're all the same. You sit in the park and drink and things like that." Well we're not like that and for the people who do things like that there are reasons why they do that.

I didn't know much about my culture. Through one of the subjects in my course, "Culture Studies", I learnt a lot about my culture and I've still got a lot to learn. It is a really big plus for me and it's special to me because now I know how they feel and things like this, what's done and the reasons why. Thank you.

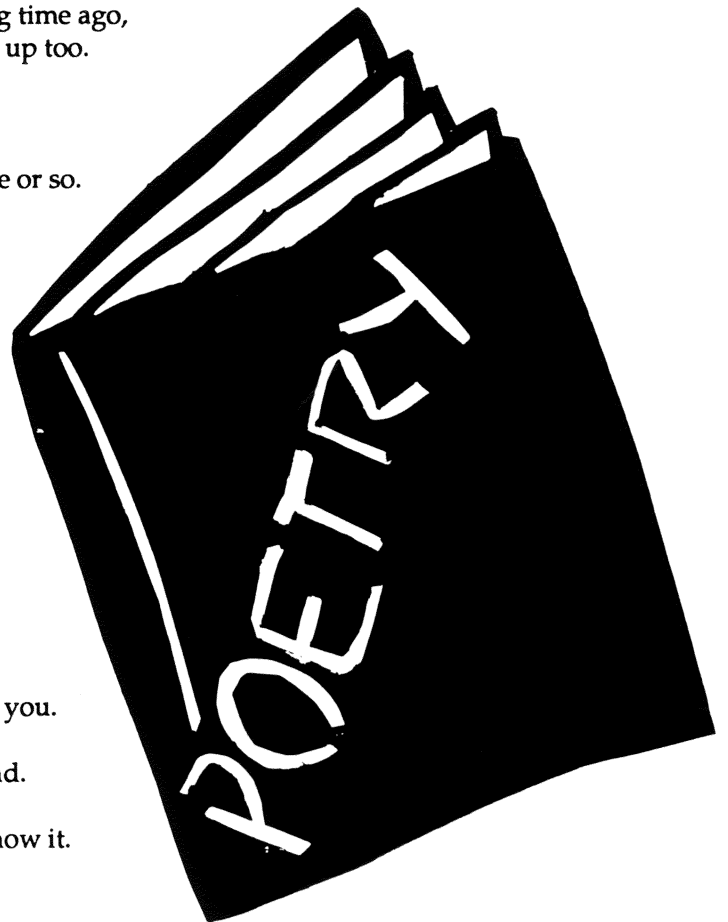
*Discussion followed about the media portrayal of street kids, and young women talked about their experiences of living on the streets and the lack of accommodation available. The Zig Zag housing resource book for young women "Somewhere to Call Home" and accommodation available at Bahlloo were mentioned. Many of the young women felt that government funds were often misused in areas other than housing.*

## Kirsten

I just have a poem written by a girlfriend of mine. She was supposed to come today, but she's burnt her hand and left us with her child. Its called:

### MAD OR SOMETHING

Have you ever felt like you're going really mad?  
Everything around seems to change,  
but you just stay the same.  
Nothin' makes sense,  
nothin' goes right anymore.  
You make enemies before you've even met them,  
your social life is fucked,  
your family life was shot down in flames a long time ago,  
and sometimes your private side of life screws up too.  
No-one understands what you're on about.  
Sure, they all think they know,  
but not one of them knows the full of it.  
You're lonely even if you're with twenty people or so.  
You have to be somewhere  
but not even you knows where.  
A real uneasy feeling falls upon you.  
No matter where you are,  
you gotta be somewhere else.  
How do you explain this feeling to anyone?  
But it's not so crazy,  
when you are the one taking life like this.  
That's why you don't tell anyone at all.  
But after days that take years to get through,  
the whole years just pass away.  
You've still got your problems,  
just worse ones, and more.  
Scared to love or trust anyone fully -  
What would they think of you?  
Everyone you love or trust ends up turning on you.  
They're gone,  
Just like a hair fallen from an elderly man's head.  
Your body gets worse and worse.  
You can't see it, but you're slipping and you know it.  
But who really gives a damn?  
Not one person.  
What have you got to live for?  
Who are you to any one person in this human asylum?



The days get shorter  
 and the cold, dark, lonely nights come  
 quicker and quicker.  
 The sun never shines for me anymore,  
 A constant shadow following you everywhere you go,  
 though never visible,  
 Everyone lies - don't believe anyone.  
 You shouldn't ever let people get to know you either.  
 Crying gets like wiping your nose,  
 it happens all of a sudden,  
 and for no reason, anywhere.  
 This could go on forever,  
 and still no one will ever know  
 exactly what was going on up there  
 inside your very private brain.  
 Because not even you know for sure .....  
 Don't worry .....  
 they call us people Mad or something.  
 (by Bessy)

And this is just a poem I've written about dead friends.

I hear laughter echo  
 Feel the ricochet  
 Childlike delights in the setting of the sun  
 I see the changing shadows  
 Cast off by trees  
 taking on the human form  
 I've come to play in tombstone park  
 My friends are here  
 The friends who eons ago ceased to exist  
 laugh  
 breath  
 and live.  
 They call to me under a canopy of stars  
 Running free in a ghost-like game of tiggy  
 I feel the light touch of fingers going by  
 Warm breath on my neck  
 They beckon me  
 Tease me  
 Plead with me to join the game  
 to come and play with me  
 But I sit in the dark  
 Eyes wide  
 Heart yearning to go home  
 and not wanting to leave my friends  
 Rusted hinges scream in the distance  
 Breaking the silence  
 Stopping the laughter  
 Killing the moment  
 All is quiet  
 Save the wind in the trees  
 My friends have gone back to the shadows  
 Back to sleep  
 Back to nothing  
 Back to tombstone park.



## Laura

G'day, I'm a bit nervous about this. I'm a quiet person. I don't usually speak in front of people. My name is Laura and I do volunteer work at Young Women's Place in Toowoomba. I moved to Toowoomba about three months ago, from Tara, Tara's about four hours west of here, because I wanted to get on with my life. I was in Toowoomba about a month, being bored, no friends and nothing to do. I was seeing a woman at the Youth Employment Service in Toowoomba, to help me find a job. She referred me to Young Women's Place, so I could meet new friends around my own age. People in the same situation as me, unemployed and insecure. I started hanging around with the people at Young Women's Place - I found I could relate to them and just be myself. I didn't have time to get emotional or bored because they always make me laugh - I do a lot of that nowadays. I was asked to start doing volunteer work - answering the phones and typing and things like that. I've also written two poems for Young Women's Place and I'll read one today. It's called:

### TO YOUNG WOMEN'S PLACE!

10 Anthony Street  
is the place to be  
the friendly smiles  
that are given for free.

Kathy C. and Kathy P.  
then Megan and Clare  
with other helpers too  
as everyone does care.

To whinge or laugh  
or drop us a line  
we'd love your company  
yep, just anytime!

So if you're wishing  
for a different space  
well, just come right in  
To ... Young Women's Place!!

I had a chat to one of the workers at Young Women's Place, Megan Redfern, and I showed her my poetry book which has about 120 poems now from about the last two years, and she suggested I do a book of poems to sell to the public. I've done the layout myself and the typing and I just completed the artwork and I can draw as well. I do T-shirts and things like that.

The people at Young Women's Place found that I was a great advantage to them, being so equipped with everything else but I love doing the work as well. My book is called "Time Makes Life" and it will be for sale at the end of July, which is a great achievement for me and I'd like to thank the people at Young Women's Place for that.

So now I still do volunteer work with a group of people that I've never regretted working with. I've really surprised myself over the last three months and if it wasn't for the people there I'd probably still be a quiet person and you wouldn't be seeing my face today.

Anyway, I hope I haven't bored you with all of my history but if there's any young women out there who can't find themselves or their self esteem then I recommend a place like Young Women's Place or somewhere similar. But don't get the wrong idea - it's not a refuge or really strict place. It's somewhere where you can express your feelings and know that you've still got some life in you. So, on a final note: don't be bored, set your pace, and feel alive at Young Women's Place!

*Young Women's Place and Zig Zag plan to stock Laura's book.*

# Kelly

I write quite a lot of poetry and I'd just like to read some poetry to celebrate the fact that I'm a woman. I'm not planning to hit too many major issues on the head.

## WOMAN

I am woman  
woman stood  
all alone  
once  
and next  
beside you  
then she ...

I am breath  
breath that feeds the fire  
dance, kindle  
my passion  
to burn beyond  
ritual to raise young

I am song  
listen to me sing  
lullaby  
catch you on a  
tee-tering rhythm  
rhythm  
I am that too  
and soul

I am bird  
with wings to fly  
currents  
to caress

I am all these things  
and some  
say  
I am just  
a woman

## IF I SEEM A BIT CRAZY

If I seem a bit  
crazy  
It's just that I was mad  
last month  
and  
it's a full moon  
and  
it probably has something to do with the six panadol  
I took this morning

If I seem a bit  
on edge  
it's just the lack of sleep  
and the continual stimulation because



I'm a woman  
and I can't be Prime Minister  
and that really upsets me

If I seem a bit  
off centre  
it's just  
that my left breast is slightly larger than my right  
and I forget sometimes  
to breathe from my diaphragm

If I seem a bit  
unsure of myself  
it's just a stage I'm going through  
but  
I know, you know, I'll  
be alright

If I seem a bit  
crazy  
it's just that I was mad last month

## Becky

I'm shy so don't laugh. First off I'd like to read a poem. Actually, first off I'd like to thank Angie and Margaret because if it wasn't for Angie and Margaret I'd still be at home with my two kids screaming in my ear. They've done a lot for me in the past and for the future. There's not really much else to say but they've just done a lot and I suppose everyone from here who's got someone else will agree. I'd just like to give a clap to Angie and Margaret.

This poem is called:

### MISSING YOU

Loving you always,  
I shall never forget.  
We shared the good times,  
we shared the bad.  
I wanted to help you,  
but you thought  
you could manage.  
You fell on your arse,  
and I thought I'd forget you.  
But I still love you.  
You, I shall never forget.  
I hope when it's over,  
you'll come back to just me.  
Forget all the past,  
and start over again.  
I really do miss you,  
you don't understand,  
the love I am holding,  
is yours for eternity.

With that poem I felt ... I think verbal abuse hurts a lot more than just a slap on the face or something because I know - I've been there, I've done that. I've been in women's refuges, I've been beat up, I've been raped and it hurts. I'm only 20 - what does my future hold?

## Simone

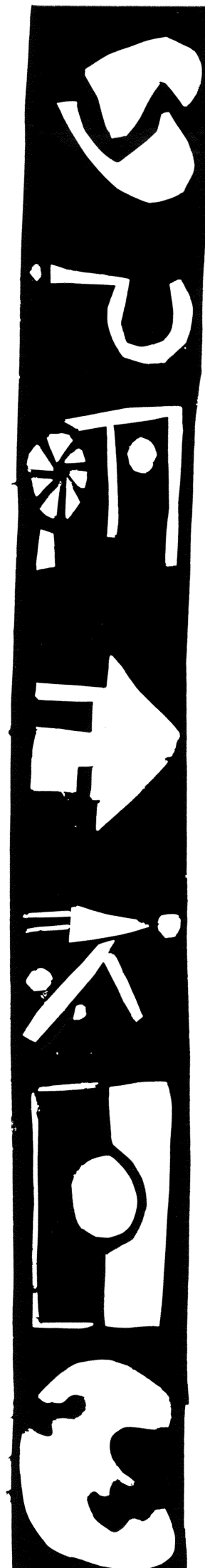
Me.  
I'm Happy, I'm lonely  
I'm surrounded by friends  
I'm laughing, I'm crying  
Changing moods never end,  
I'm with you, without you  
I'm longing for your touch  
I'm waiting, I'm needing,  
Do I ask for too much?  
I'm bubbly, I'm boring  
Some say conceited,  
I'm striving, withdrawing,  
I won't be defeated,  
I'm coming, I'm going,  
My path I can't see  
I'm succeeding, I'm failing  
I'm discovering me!!!

## Kym

For Mary.....

As I sit and think  
of how my love for you has grown  
Here in my heart  
Is more love than I have ever shown

As I watch time tick by  
I miss you so, so much  
And long for the warmth  
And feeling of your touch.  
You've given me more love  
Than I could have wished to see,  
love from above,  
Something I'm thankful for.



## Small Groups

The small group workshops were included in the speakout to provide fun, participatory activities for the young women, and to give participants the opportunity to develop new skills. Workshop activities were chosen in consultation with young women and workers. The Coordinators were especially keen to develop workshops which would encourage participation by young women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Facilitators for the small group workshops were chosen for their experience in, and support for, young women's issues, as well as their skill in the workshop area.

The objectives for the small group workshops were:

- (1) To encourage interaction, and provide a safe, comfortable environment.
- (2) To link young women into a wider, community-based network.
- (3) To encourage young women to learn or become involved in activities rather than being 'told'.
- (4) To focus on process but also remember the importance of product.
- (5) To link young women's experiences with the nature of the workshops.

### Jewellery Making

This small group was facilitated by Michelle Fix, a graduate in teaching who now works making environmentally sound arts and crafts. It provided young women with the opportunity to make bracelets and necklaces out of natural and inexpensive materials such as pods, clay and beads. Skills required to make the jewellery included patience and co-operation. This was a very popular workshop and young women took home the products of their work.

### Story-Telling

This small group was facilitated by Bettina Nissen who is a community-based storyteller. It was a quiet environment where young women had the opportunity to discuss their issues in and through the form of stories. Imagination, the ability to listen to others, and confidence to contribute ideas were skills used in this workshop.

### Circus Skills

This small group was facilitated by Deb Rodrigues who works with Circus Avalon. Its activities centred on the ideas of "balance", "strength", and "support from those around you". Members of this group worked up to doing acrobatic movements using challenging exercises and playing games.

### No-Sew Applique

This small group was facilitated by Tess Murray, who is an instructor from the South Brisbane College of TAFE. It provided an opportunity to learn how to create inexpensive, attractive designs for clothes, using scraps of materials and paints on T-Shirts. This work group required sharing and creativity.

### Art

This small group was facilitated by Bindi Wythes and Sunniva Bolton. It enabled young women to use paintings to investigate the negative and positive feelings they may have had about the day. The young women then joined together to paint a mural of the speakout. This work required imagination, sharing, co-operation and creativity.

At the conclusion of the small group workshops, all groups, except the storytelling group, made a presentation back to the larger group.

## SAMPLE BAGS

WAYWARD provided sample bags for participants as an expression of appreciation for the time and effort young women put in to attend the speakout. The sample bags contained a Streetwise comic; an Info book; stickers; a voucher for a free makeover at the Body Shop; speakout badges; and a sealed section, containing condoms, wet stuff, and safe sex information. Young women were generally very happy to receive the sample bags, and thought they were great fun.

## EVALUATION

Participants in the speakout were asked to write down their opinions and suggestions about the day on a piece of butcher's paper taped along the wall. This form of feedback could be anonymous, was less formal than the usual evaluation sheet, and allowed young women to comment on whatever aspect of the speakout was most important to them. Most of the comments on the piece of paper were written there by young women.

Further feedback on the speakout came in the form of letters and telephone calls from workers in some agencies, who wished to pass on their own perceptions and/or those of young women who had spoken to them after the speakout.

The following comments are primarily those of young women, drawn either from the piece of paper, or from information passed on by workers.

### Positives

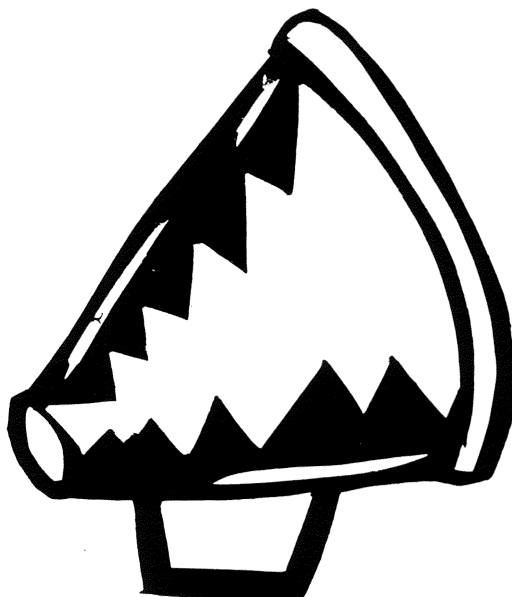
*Great stuff - was able to build my confidence and know there are people who understand.*  
*Variety was great. Venue created a relaxed atmosphere and most important for me was the workshop, where we had a chance to be close and face-to-face without the imposition of audience/speaker.*  
*It was great. Now I know there are people out there who really do care. I was shy up until today.*  
*Good, great!*  
*I think it is good freedom of speech for young women, and it was a nice day.*  
*Thanks from Gympie Widgee Youth Service.*  
*I thought it was great - heaps better than last year, a lot more young women and some real issues out in the open.*  
*Great fun. Good job. Well done.*  
*Great for young women to have opportunity to speak out and others listening to identify and be affirmed.*  
*Great warm atmosphere.*  
*It was an exciting day and I think it was great that most people spoke out about their feelings.*  
*It was a great day. I really enjoyed listening to other people's thoughts and feelings.*  
*It was good.*  
*It was well put together and there should be more.*  
*FANTASMAGORICAL! Should be more speakouts regularly.*  
*Keeping the confidence from today to last 12 months before another speakout will be difficult. Could they be 6-monthly?*  
*Young women feel energised and would like to come again.*  
*It was great to be here today. I enjoyed myself. Thanks a lot.*  
*It was wonderful. However, speakouts need to happen more than once a year.*  
*Empowering, moving, thought-provoking ... I'm so bloody glad to be a woman.*  
*Fantastic - well done everyone.*  
*INSPIRING. A job well done.*  
*Being able to express myself openly without fear of discrimination. Glad there was chocolate to cure my cravings. Didn't really want to be here at first but it got better as the day went on.*  
*Well done WAYWARD.*  
*Well done Angie and Michaela.*  
*Well done young women!*  
*Excellent venue.*  
*Seems like these young women have a lot to say. It's great to provide that opportunity. See you next time.*



Excellent - should be held more often, maybe on a particular theme. Young women have lots to say! Well facilitated. Great food! Thank you for your hospitality and welcome.  
 Great day, loved discussions, food, workshops were great, loved sample bags, great involvement and opinions from young people, great to know there are other women who understand and know how hard life can be.  
 Food was great, the workshops were great, more variety than last year. It was an enjoyable day and it was good that there were a lot more people this year than last year.  
 Friendly atmosphere, good location. Lots of people contributed to the day, workshops were great and a variety to choose from. Lunch was delicious.  
 Great to see movement in women's rights. Art group and what I saw of circus group excellent.  
 Unreal!!! First time - I'll be here again, great to actually see and hear people's opinions.  
 A good day trip, met some nice people. Hope we could go next year.  
 Enjoyed myself. Hope to go again next year.  
 Quite good. Talk time was unreal.

### Improvements/Thoughts for Next Time

Venue was a bit too noisy.  
 Not too bad but needs to be more of them!!! Less cars going past.  
 Please make it with no stairs next time. Also please have more breaks.  
 Setup of room could have encouraged more to speak out. I did not like my back to people.  
 Childcare facilities not adequate, childcare workers did well but more thought re venue needs to be considered.  
 More time needed for the workshops.  
 Traffic noise too loud.  
 Please remind all of us next time to bring poetry books along in advance!  
 Childcare area could be better planned.  
 Could happen more often along individual themes.  
 Would have been good to go early. Activities were stupid.  
 A bit noisy.  
 Maybe more time - a weekend camp? and groups to talk about yourself? Can speakout be held in other towns?  
 Noisy and hard to hear to concentrate on what people were saying. I found it distracting with people walking in and out all the time.  
 There was a lot of noise which made it hard to hear people who were talking.  
 Would have liked more information from Women's Legal Service on sexual harassment and more time to talk about actual violence.



## CONCLUSIONS

Considering the events of the speakout, and the evaluation comments, WAYWARD members and the Project Coordinators have reached the following broad conclusions.

### **Young Women - Who Are We?**

The project clearly achieved its first objective - the speakout was held, and young women spoke about matters which they felt were important.

The young women at the speakout showed very clearly that they have a diversity of opinions and experiences, but also have much in common. They also showed that they welcome the opportunity to speak out about issues affecting them, provided they are given the support to do so. Young women who spoke at the first speakout were far more confident and ready to speak at the second one. Those young women who did not speak seemed to enjoy hearing other young women speak about issues which mattered to them, and all young women had the opportunity to participate more in the small group workshops. Young women seemed to draw a sense of strength and unity from the speakout.

### **Attendance**

The second objective was to maximise the involvement of young women in the speakout. This was achieved. In the initial stages, young women were involved in deciding the date and program for the speakout. When the speakout was held, the number of participants was impressive. Factors contributing to this success included: word-of-mouth from the last speakout, the fact that it was held during school holidays, and excellent networking and promotion by the Project Coordinators. Making the speakout for women only and limiting workers to support roles were effective strategies.

However, young women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-English speaking backgrounds were still a small minority at the speakout. More work needs to be done to encourage greater participation by young women from these groups.

### **Venue**

The venue had many strengths and some weaknesses. Its central location, informality, and the wonderful food provided by the proprietors, scored highly in evaluations. However, inner-city traffic noise, lack of appropriate childcare facilities, and steep flights of stairs were problems. The search for the perfect venue continues!

### **Speakout Program**

In general, participants reacted positively to the speakout program.

### **Documentation and Distribution of Speakout Proceedings**

The third objective, to document and distribute the proceedings of the speakout, has also been achieved.

### **Outcomes**

#### **Outcome (1)**

**Young women participating will have the chance to improve their sense of self-esteem and self-worth through speaking out and being heard.**

Evaluations by young women indicate that this outcome was successfully achieved. However, as one young woman noted, more and more regular speakouts would reinforce these benefits.

#### **Outcome (2)**

**Other young women will benefit as government and non-government workers gain insight into young women's issues, through attending the speakout and/or reading the proceedings.**

The proceedings have yet to be distributed, so this outcome cannot yet be assessed.

**Outcome (3)**

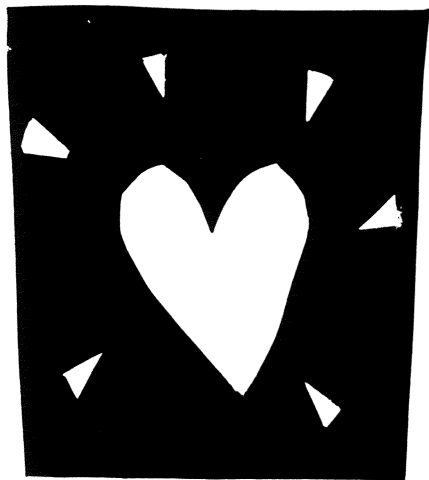
**The speakout will encourage increased involvement in WAYWARD's activities by young women from marginalised groups.**

More young women from groups which are difficult to access attended this speakout, than attended the previous speakout. WAYWARD will continue to develop strategies to increasingly involve young women from these groups.

**Outcome (4)**

**The information shared at the speakout will help to ensure that WAYWARD's future activities are responsive to young women using services.**

WAYWARD will continue to consult the information contained in this report when planning future activities, or preparing written material.



## APPENDIX 1

### DESCRIPTIONS OF WAYWARD AND YANQ

#### What is WAYWARD?

WAYWARD (Women Alongside Young Women for Action, Research and Development) is a coalition of women working in Queensland's community sector who in 1991 formed a group to begin addressing the needs of young women using both government and non-government services.

WAYWARD members currently number around 25 and are drawn from agencies which provide information and support to young women or advocate on their behalf on issues including: physical and sexual abuse; accommodation; employment; disability; and health and well-being. Women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures other than English-speaking are involved in the group. Meetings are held monthly in and around Brisbane and minutes are sent throughout Queensland as required.

WAYWARD formed because its members were acutely aware that young women face issues and have needs which are very often different from those of either older women or young men. Services frequently fail to acknowledge or respond to this fact and in some instances actually exacerbate the difficulties confronting young women.

WAYWARD is still in the process of developing a formal statement of goals and objectives. Generally speaking, the group aims to increase awareness of the issues facing young women who are service-users; act as a catalyst for improving service-provision to young women; and increase opportunities for young women's meaningful participation in decision-making which affects them. In light of this last issue, members are currently considering ways in which young women can play a larger role in giving direction to the activities of WAYWARD itself.

Since its inception, WAYWARD has been involved in an impressive number of activities for a group which has no permanent funding or staff. In November 1992, WAYWARD ran its first young women's speakout on the theme "Young Women - Responsible Decision Makers". In February 1993 the group published "Just the Way It Is - Poetry by Young Women", a collection of poetry by young women who use community services. In June 1993, the second young women's speakout was held, and a third speakout will be held in October 1993. WAYWARD has made a number of submissions and representations to government departments about matters affecting young women, and will continue to do so.

WAYWARD meets regularly, and is always planning new activities.

#### What is YANQ?

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the independent, non-government umbrella organisation of groups and individuals from Queensland's youth sector.

YANQ aims to promote the interests and well-being of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people. It advocates for them to government and the community and encourages the development of policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people.

YANQ supports and resources a number of groups seeking to address specific issues affecting young people. WAYWARD is one such group.

## APPENDIX 2

### AGENCIES ATTENDING THE SPEAKOUT

**Aurala:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides medium to long term residential care for young women aged 14 to 16 years, who are under the care of the Department of Family Services and have been referred by it.

**Bahloo Young Women's Shelter:** a community organisation based in Brisbane, which provides short-term shelter for young women aged 13 to 18 years. Preference is given to Aboriginal women.

**Community Living Program:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which supports young people with a mild intellectual disability to live independently in the community. CLP resources the Wild Women's Group.

**Contact Youth Theatre:** a community theatre company based in Brisbane which uses drama to concentrate on social issues for young people aged 6 to 25 years.

**Gold Coast Youth Service:** a community organisation based on the Gold Coast which provides welfare and support services to homeless or "at risk" young people aged 12 to 25.

**Gympie-Widgee Youth Service:** a community organisation based in Gympie which works with young people who are homeless or at "risk". The GWYS runs a young women's network which provides support, information and housing for young women in Gympie who are homeless and "at risk".

**Hannah's House:** an accommodation and support service based in Ipswich for young women aged 13 to 21 years.

**Inala Youth Service:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides accommodation, information, support and advocacy for young people. IYS incorporates specific services for young women and young parents.

**Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides referral and support to women from non-English speaking backgrounds who are victims of domestic violence. MWESS is currently running a project which is researching the barriers to young NESB people accessing mainstream youth services.

**Redback Housing:** a community rent scheme project based in Brisbane which provides low cost rental accommodation to young women and men between sixteen and twenty-five years.

**Rosie's Youth Mission:** an organisation run by the Catholic Church which provides mission friendship, hospitality and support to young people who are homeless or involved with the justice system. Rosie's operates on the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Cairns and Mackay.

**Shop 101:** an Ipswich based agency which provides a comprehensive sexual health service for young people.

**South East Queensland Youth Accommodation Coalition:** the community based peak body for youth housing issues in South-East Queensland.

**St Mary's Supported Accommodation:** an organisation based in Brisbane which provides supported on-site accommodation and outreach services to young women in the community, particularly young pregnant and parenting women.

**Synergy:** a multicultural youth group, based at the Logan Migrant Centre (on the outskirts of Brisbane) which seeks to address the needs of young people on the streets.

**Young Parent's Program:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides a health and support service for young pregnant and parenting women.

**Young Women's Place:** a community organisation based in Toowoomba which provides information and support primarily to young women aged twelve to eighteen years on issues including health, education; housing and interpersonal relationships.

**Youth Housing Project:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides externally supported accommodation to young women and men aged between sixteen and twenty years.

**Zig-Zag Young Women's Resource Centre:** a community organisation based in Brisbane which provides resources for young women from twelve to twenty-five years and people who work with young women. Individual workers focus on health, housing and incest support work.



