



OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S HEALTH

This resource looks at some of the ways we can support women to have more power over the circumstances that influence their health.

What helps women to be healthy?

- ♦ Access to resources (eg income, food, housing, transport, childcare, education, maternity leave, employment)
- ♦ Social inclusion and support (feel valued, share family responsibilities, access to friends and services)
- ♦ Freedom from discrimination and violence (safe, respectful relationships and safe spaces)

What helps women to be powerful about their health?

- ♦ Respect for the lived experience, knowledge and skills of women to identify and inform decisions about their own health care. A strengths-based approach values and builds on women's existing knowledge and skills in a positive way.
- ♦ Women are always informed about health care options available to them.
- ♦ Women have control over decisions that affect their body and their lives. And their decisions are respected.

What are some ways to support women to be powerful about their health?

- ♦ Provide opportunities for women to express and share their life experiences.

This might be through writing newsletters, support groups, internet groups or art. Explore different ways to inform women about their options (eg peer education, drama or the internet).

- ♦ Support women to become more actively involved in planning and decision-making processes such as implementing and evaluating health promotion activities, project reference groups, committees and boards.
- ♦ Women and service providers can lobby to improve women's social and economic circumstances. Talk to your local council or state government member, identify demand for services, write submissions for funding, get the local media to write a story about your issues and concerns.

Where to start

The Women's Power Handbook written by Moira Rayner and Joan Kirner (Penguin, 1999).

The book gives women the tools and strategies to get, keep and use their power.

VicHealth's *Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing*, 2005 resource guide looking at ways to promote mental health in community settings.

To borrow these resources call Joy on 9689 9588 or email joy@whwest.org.au

An example of supporting women to plan an event to improve social connections and awareness of local services for young mothers living in Melton

The Young Mum's Rock! Event was planned by young mothers for young mothers. The aim of the event was to help young mothers in Melton to meet other young mothers and to find out about local services. The young mothers decided that the event should be held at a local indoor playground in Melton because a lot of young mothers go there and it is a familiar place. The event included a range of fun activities for women to choose from to help them feel more comfortable and provide them with a chance to meet. Women could also meet and talk to service providers in an informal and friendly way. There was a lot of written information about services and support groups that women could take home. The event had lots of media coverage on the needs of young mothers and what services they require. One young mother got a list of women who were interested in having a new young mothers support group in Bacchus Marsh and worked with service providers to get the group running. Two of the young mothers involved in planning the event have been on a working group to plan and host a second event for mothers in Melton.

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Produced as part of the Young Mums Rock! project by Joy Free, Researcher, Women's Health West, March 2006

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