

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE2147

Women's Network

(1984 -)

Born 1 January, 1984, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Migrant Women's Organisations

Summary

From the time of her election to parliament, Franca Arena was hopeful of forming a “network” of women of all backgrounds who could meet informally, exchange ideas and help and support each other. In January 1984, she sent a letter to twenty to thirty women asking them to come to a meeting at Parliament House. They met in Feb 1984 for the first time, and the Women's Network – Australia was born. The first Women's Network guest was Frederika Steen, the head of a newly established Women's Desk at the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in Canberra.

Details

The women who gathered for the 1984 meeting decided that there was a need for a women's network so that women from the older established groups, such as Anglo-Celtic, the Italian or Greek women, who had gone through the difficulties of the early years could advise and be supportive of the new groups of women, such as the Indo-Chinese, Laotian, Central American and Moslem women. They decided to meet for a few hours every two months, to have guest speakers and to be completely unstructured. Meeting in parliament house was regarded as symbolically important, as many of the women felt it was a seat of power from which they felt alienated and, at best, intimidated by.

‘Meeting the ministers’ was a regular event at the network gatherings. Sometimes these meetings happened away from parliament house. There was a social evening in 1985, a Chinese dinner in honour of the then Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs was arranged.. Nearly 200 women attended, but the minister didn't talk. Instead, five women were chosen to speak on a range of issues, including the problems encountered by Isolated Arabic speaking women, migrant women in the bureaucracy, Multicultural education, Child care in the Western Suburbs and Tenosynovitis. None of the women had ever spoken in front of a minister before.

By 1985, the number of members of the network had grown to 300.

Published resources

Book Section

Double Disadvantage: Migrant and Aboriginal Women, Sawyer, Marian, 1990

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Franca Arena - papers, ca.1960-2000](#)

State Library of South Australia

[Papers of the Migrant and Indigenous Women Action Group](#)

State Library of New South Wales

[Franca Arena - correspondence, 1984-1996, concerning the Women's Network](#)

Author Details

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