

# BreaCca

Year in Review 08/09





**COVER:** The Women's Healing Circle is a statue which represents we, as women, coming together to honour, rejoice and share our lives together, in a safe and supportive environment.

**QUOTES:** Please note that some names have been changed to protect people's privacy.

## contents

Manager's Message	3
About Us	3
Highlights	4
Information & Support	5/7
Experiencing Through Participation	8/9
Our People	10
Our Volunteers	11
At a Glance	12
Collaborating with Partners	13
Extending Our Reach	14
The Future / Donors / Thanks	15
Contacts	16

DESIGN Lin Tobias/La Bella Design  
TEXT Melissa Bowen & BreaCan staff  
COVER PHOTO Justine Dalla Riva  
PRINT Red Rover Pty Ltd  
STOCK 170gsm Envi Silk Recycled

OCTOBER 2009

# Valerie's Story...

5:00am, and already on the road, on a pre dawn drive through the cane fields for a half hour trip to a small jetty. We clambered aboard the little dinghy, with a load of camera equipment, to head up the Daintree River. We pulled away from the banks as the first rays of sunlight were touching the very tops of the rainforest, with the valley still dark and deep in shadow. Pure joy, complete peace.

On returning to our rooms that evening, there was a short message on the mobile with a request to return to BreastScreen for a follow up mammogram. Strange. Obviously an error had occurred. So for the moment I gave it no further thought. However, throughout the remainder of the week, it did lie there in the back of the mind, stirring occasionally.

Back home in Melbourne, and ahead lay the tumultuous ride. Those first days were spent in a state of suspended belief, all senses softened, a sensation of drifting. A tumble of questions, of doctors appointments, booklets and pamphlets and searching the internet, decisions to be made, biopsy, three episodes of surgery, six weeks of radiotherapy then medication. It consumed my days. How fortunate I was, all along the way, to be nurtured by my loving and generous family and friends, who enriched my days.

On the morning of that first visit to the hospital I had written in the diary: ' This day will demand of me, strength and positivity, a deep well of resolve and construction of a vision of a bright new future'. And a bright new future it is becoming, and in abundance, and in a large part due to the very fine resources available at BreaCan, a flyer for which I picked up at the Radiology Centre.

Through attending some excellent information sessions, the regular fortnightly Feel Good exercise program, using the library and speaking with the volunteers, I have gained information and guidance, improved my fitness level and met some wonderfully positive, courageous and inspirational women.

Valerie



## Manager's Message

**During the course of a year we talk to many women and hear their stories – all of them different but in some way connected by the common experience of being diagnosed with breast or a gynaecological cancer. We see women grapple with their shock and fear. But equally I am always amazed by the laughter and messages of hope that I also hear in the resource centre as women share their experiences and reflect on the unexpected turning point that for many, has changed their lives.**

It is now just over six years since BreaCan began and we continue to learn from the experiences of women and particularly our volunteers. I think BreaCan is unique in the way it informs and supports women, their families and friends.

I was talking to one of our volunteers about the challenge of describing the service to women and health professionals. We can talk of concepts like supportive care which is increasingly recognised as essential – but it is often difficult to translate the ethos of BreaCan in a way that is true to its essence. The volunteer reflected that for her, BreaCan was like a village well where women gathered to talk, replenish themselves and share their experiences. I think it is such a beautiful image.

There is still so much potential to gather more women, their families and friends around the well – to reach those who still find it difficult to call or walk through our door. Having said that, we have again done an enormous amount of work in the previous year and attempted to innovate and think creatively about how we can best deliver information and support. We have, and hopefully will continue to influence how services, policies and programs can be improved by working constructively with government, health professionals, cancer services and consumer groups.

It is indeed a privilege to work with such committed, passionate and hard working staff and volunteers. We look back on the year with a sense of achievement and celebration. So thank you to everyone who has supported and contributed to making BreaCan the service that it is.

**Di Missen** BreaCan Manager

## About Us

BreaCan is a unique information and support service for people affected by breast and gynaecological cancers throughout Victoria. A service of Women's Health Victoria, BreaCan is committed to providing a women-focussed service that is shaped by what women say.

## Our Vision

- 🌱 **Support** more women with breast and gynaecological cancers to actively participate in their care and to live well;
- 🌱 **Empower** our volunteers to bring the principles of the service to life and to support other women with breast and gynaecological cancers;
- 🌱 **Improve** the effectiveness, profile and reach of the service;
- 🌱 **Innovate** in response to the diverse needs of people affected by breast and gynaecological cancers;
- 🌱 **Share** what we've learned so far and continue our learning; and
- 🌱 **Collaborate** with our colleagues in other organisations to improve care and support for women with breast and gynaecological cancers.

## Highlights

Developed the **BreaCan Strategic Plan 2009-2012**. This is the first time a three year strategic plan has been put in place. It marks the transition to a three year funding cycle with the Victorian Department of Health and provides a blueprint for the future development of the service.

Completed the fourth **peer support volunteer training program**, comprising 45 contact hours for the 13 participants all of whom completed the training.

Developed a **new stand-alone website** for consumers and health professionals which will improve the online accessibility of the service to women and health professionals throughout Victoria.

Celebrated the completion of **'Our Voices Our Songs'** – an innovative music therapy program developed in partnership with The Women's, The Royal Melbourne Hospital and Western Health.

Collaborated with the **National Breast Cancer Foundation** about its public speaking training program, which was conducted at BreaCan and involved BreaCan volunteers and service users as participants.

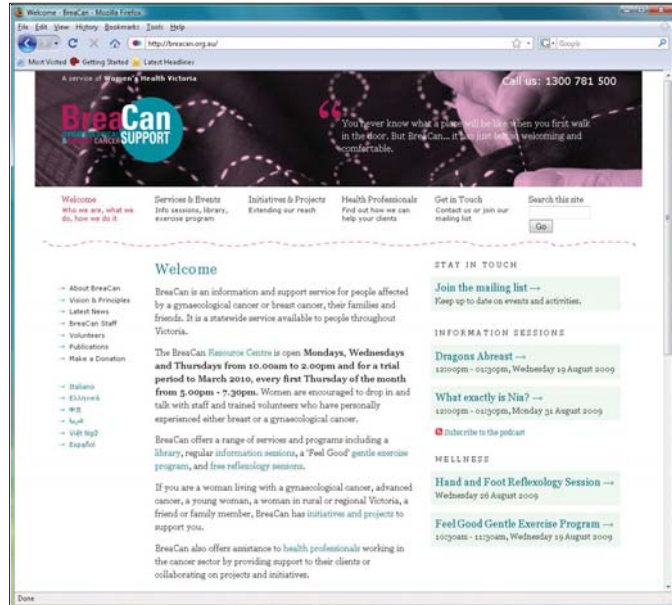
Hosted a successful morning tea for women living with ovarian cancer as part of **Ovarian Cancer Awareness Week**.

Collaborated with **Camp Quality** to conduct a pilot program providing 10 families (35 participants) with a weekend away.

Presented a paper at the **11th National Breast Care Nurses Conference**, about the benefits of a community-based service model such as BreaCan in meeting the supportive care needs of women with breast or gynaecological cancers.

Presented a paper at the **15th International Reach to Recovery Conference** in Brisbane, which explored the benefits of trained peer support in meeting the needs of women with breast cancer.

Commenced the development of a **promotional DVD** about what BreaCan can provide to people affected by breast and gynaecological cancers.



The launch of the stand-alone website for BreaCan



A family enjoy the Camp Quality weekend

“ In the 12 months I have worked with her, tonight is the first time I have seen her smile. A Breast Care Nurse's comment about a participant at 'Our Voices Our Songs' CD launch

## Information & Support



Provision of information and support continue to be the focus of the service and the main way in which BreaCan contributes to meeting the supportive care needs of women with breast or a gynaecological cancer throughout the state.

One of the four action areas of the Victorian Government's *Cancer Action Plan 2008-2011* is 'supporting and empowering patients and their carers through their cancer journey.' Both evidence and practice wisdom confirm that if women are provided with good quality information and support at the time of diagnosis and treatment, it can relieve their anxiety, normalise their experience and help them feel more empowered about the decisions they make. Of course women contact BreaCan at various stages in their cancer experience.

During the year 947 people attended a total of 73 BreaCan events such as the *Feel Good* exercise program, What's On information sessions, workshops and events for women living with advanced cancer.

### The Resource Centre

The resource centre offers a welcoming environment for women to seek out information and support either individually or by participating in one of BreaCan's group programs. A constantly evolving program of activities opens up opportunities for women to share, heal and learn together. Being located in the historic Queen Victoria Women's Centre in Lonsdale Street, Melbourne enables women to access support in a non-hospital environment. It is significant that many women comment on the importance of the service setting and the value that comes from being in a safe place that focuses on 'living well' rather than on 'illness'.

Trained volunteers, each with a personal cancer history or experience caring for a loved one, are able to discuss a range of psycho-social, emotional and practical issues related to a cancer diagnosis. They are able to listen and share their experiences in a way which resonates with women who are facing similar challenges. The volunteers' knowledge comes from their lived experiences – which, while different for each woman, hold common themes – fear, uncertainty, fatigue, managing the side effects of treatment, the impact on relationships and questions about the future, to name just a few. Women can discuss a range of issues often too confronting for friends or family. Referral to other relevant support services available is also provided.

## Information & Support



### One-on-One Contact

BreaCan is committed to empowering women to make informed choices about their care and treatment. For many women, especially in the early stages of diagnosis, one-on-one contact is a critical form of support. In this regard, the service complements the role of health professionals who provide medical treatment and care. The opportunity to speak to someone who has experienced a cancer diagnosis is often not available within existing support structures. Through BreaCan, women can speak to a trained volunteer at the resource centre, on the phone or via email. BreaCan does not provide medical advice or counselling but one-on-one contact affords women an opportunity to speak privately with a volunteer and/or staff member in a very personal and intimate way.

### Information Sessions

It is essential that women have access to up-to-date, reputable and timely information. In recognition that women seek out and process information in various ways and at different points of their cancer experience, BreaCan continues to offer a range of information sessions. During the past twelve months BreaCan hosted 31 information sessions attended by 541 women. Sessions included talks from health professionals about various clinical issues, as well as workshops focussing on creative therapies and wellness. The program of sessions is a mix of successful existing and new initiatives guided by the feedback of the women who take part. *(For featured sessions refer to page 8-9)*

### The Library

The BreaCan library has over 600 items including books, journals, CDs and DVDs for people to browse or borrow. Recently updated lists of recommended resources for women living with breast cancer, gynaecological cancer, advanced cancer and for parents and partners can be downloaded from the new website [www.breacan.org.au](http://www.breacan.org.au). Feedback from consumers and regular scanning of potential resources by staff contribute to ensuring that up-to date and reputable information resources are available .

### Coffee, Cupcakes and Connections

BreaCan recognises that women living with advanced cancer have particular challenges and issues. *Coffee, Cupcakes and Connections* provides women living with advanced cancer the opportunity to meet in a safe relaxed setting and a chance to share and connect with other women. Two morning tea events were held in the last 12 months and representatives from the Breast Cancer Network Australia and Ovarian Cancer Australia attended to provide information about the resources they offer.

Coffee, Cupcakes and Connections morning tea



## Information & Support

“ The group remains an anchor and an inspiration, even as I am well recovered.

Bridget, 58 years

Feel Good Exercise Program



“ I was in need of a feeling of 'returning to normal' of taking part in some organised exercise program that was designed for women following surgery. The Feel Good Program was exactly what I was looking for. I would hate to miss a session.

Valerie, 68 years

After treatment the body and self are a bit battered and being in such a positive place (reflexology session) enhanced my feeling of self worth and esteem.

Sue, reflexology participant

### Feel Good Exercise Program

BreaCan's fortnightly *Feel Good Exercise Program* was initiated in 2003. The program, run by a qualified instructor, offers gentle exercise to tone the body and help the lymphatic system. In parallel with the aim of *Feel Good*, there is increasing evidence that not only does physical activity contribute to general well-being but it may reduce the risk of recurrence after a diagnosis of cancer. While more research is being undertaken about the benefits of exercise the personal comments of *Feel Good* participants certainly affirms the value of the program.

- ♥ It has helped keep me fit during treatment
- ♥ I've gained hope, from being with others who are in a similar situation or in some cases have worse health issues than myself
- ♥ Being on a low income I'm glad it's free!
- ♥ I've learned exercises specifically to get the lymph nodes working
- ♥ It's lifted my spirits and given me a sense of positivity
- ♥ I felt light on the feet and loose in the limbs
- ♥ It helped me to relax about cancer

### Reflexology

During the past decade there has been much research into the health benefits of complementary therapies for people living with cancer. There is now growing evidence that some complementary therapies such as reflexology, can offer relief to some women living with cancer and the side effects of treatment.

Since 2007, reflexology has been offered at BreaCan by a trained reflexologist who is also a registered nurse. Always keen to trial innovative strategies, BreaCan decided to offer the sessions and then evaluate the impact and benefits. In a recent internal evaluation, 94% of women who responded stated they found the session relaxing and 50% said the reflexology session had prompted them to seek out other forms of relaxation or self care.

## Experiencing Through Participation

As part of its service delivery and planning BreaCan must continue to be responsive and innovative in meeting the needs of people who use the service. During the year BreaCan seeks feedback from group participants from selected sessions to evaluate the relevance of the topic and the session. The evaluation process has a high response rate so it provides valuable insight into what women want and what works.

This section features a sample of BreaCan “What’s On” sessions held in the past twelve months and draws on the comments of 92 participants across various sessions.



### Wordplay

Wordplay provided an opportunity for women to try different creative writing, exercises or ideas. Eleven of the 17 women who participated were either still having treatment or had finished treatment less than 12 months ago.

Despite some of the women never having tried creative writing, all of the participants said they benefited from the session and enjoyed listening to the writing of others in a supportive, safe environment. For some it was an opportunity for self-expression, whilst for others it was a creative escape.

### A Picture Paints...

Art therapist Emma Rose who facilitated the session said ‘the session aimed to provide participants with the opportunity to tap into a valuable tool for enriching their lives... and their own creativity’. Women came with open minds and adventurous spirits wanting to have some fun, experiment with art and connect with a group.

Participants said that the informal nature of the session was suited to meeting new people and provided for valuable and helpful exchanges between the women. While the participants said the session was fun, several also reported high relaxation benefit. Thirteen of the 19 participants said they would continue with some kind of artistic pursuit.

### Chemobrain

Women are keen to understand the evidence for ‘chemobrain’ because many believe that chemotherapy has directly affected their own ability to think clearly. Professor Paul Maruff from the Centre for Neuroscience, University of Melbourne discussed the connection between cancer, chemotherapy and brain function as well as recent research findings which suggest that chemotherapy can result in subtle changes in cognitive function.

Of the 33 participants, 16 provided feedback and described what chemobrain meant to them – for some it meant forgetfulness, memory loss and confusion – others felt vague and unable to concentrate. Women also talked more broadly about their experiences of chemotherapy and shared ideas for trying to cope with its impact.

# Experiencing Through Participation

## Sleeping Soundly

For many women lack of sleep is a frustrating and debilitating aspect of diagnosis and treatment. Justine Diggins, Clinical Psychologist at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre discussed practical ways to 'sleep soundly' to a group of 24 women. Of the 16 women who provided feedback, all stated that their sleep habits had changed since their diagnosis. Increased anxiety, drug regimes, pain and night sweats were mentioned as hindering sound and restful sleep. Participants stated that the session was very useful in helping them access information and new ideas about sleeping strategies.

## Bringing Death to Life

This was the first time that BreaCan had conducted a session on the issue of death and dying. Having faced their own mortality, many women had requested a session to learn about how best to take control and ensure a meaningful end to life. Women wanted to know – in their words – the 'how' and 'when' of death as well as to gain more information about legal and formal processes.

Josie Scott, who facilitated the session, drew on her extensive experience in palliative care and as a counsellor to provide information and an opportunity to openly discuss issues such as funeral planning, legal requirements, the physical processes of dying and ways to talk to family and friends.

A total of 33 women (across two sessions) shared their thoughts and feelings about death and dying. Less than half of the attendees have advanced cancer suggesting that women at all stages of the cancer journey are looking for information and open discussion with others. As well as finding the practical information beneficial, many participants said they felt empowered by being 'allowed' to talk about a topic often not discussed in society. Having a compassionate and experienced facilitator and a group of women in a similar situation was key to them feeling safe enough to engage in the discussion.



## Our People

**BreaCan is the culmination of the vision, expertise and dedication of varied groups of people. In a respectful partnership, staff, volunteers and advisors work side by side acknowledging the unique and valuable contribution each makes to the service.**



BACK ROW: Justine, Katherine, Nicole, Di, Fiona  
SEATED: Helen, Wendy

### STAFF

**Di Missen** *Manager*

**Helen Shepherd** *Services and Volunteer Co-ordinator*

**Nicole Wilton** *Information and Support Officer*

**Wendy Pullan** *Information and Support Officer*

**Fiona McRae** *Project Officer*

**Justine Dalla Riva** *Project Officer*

**Katherine Bradstreet** *Administration Officer*

### BreaCan Advisory Group – Chairperson’s Message

The BreaCan Advisory Group was set up to provide high level advice to BreaCan and to support the development of the service in meeting its ongoing commitments to women with breast and gynaecological cancers. The Advisory Group is multi-disciplinary and includes health care professionals, specialist advisors and consumers – and members are drawn from a range of health settings. Members give their expert advice as well as provide opportunities for BreaCan to directly engage with cancer treatment and support services across Victoria.

The Advisory Group meets every third month and canvasses a range of innovations to assist BreaCan staff in retaining their unique position as a leader and provider of psychosocial services for women with cancer. In the past twelve months, the Advisory Group has participated in several workshops which have assisted the BreaCan Manager and staff in the development of a three year Strategic Plan designed to fulfil its requirements to its major funder, the Department of Health – as well as consider how best to innovate and develop services for women with cancer. The Strategic Plan has now been completed and will be the benchmark from which BreaCan will measure its achievements over the next three years.

As Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Advisory Group for their participation and commitment to the ongoing success of this unique service.

**Annabel Pollard**, BreaCan Advisory Group Chair

### The BreaCan Advisory Group is:

**Annabel Pollard** *Chair (WHV Council Member, Clinical Psychologist)*

**Heather Beanland** *(Consumer)*

**Christine Evelyn** *(Consumer)*

**Bronwyn Flanagan** *(Breast Care Nurse)*

**Jane Fletcher** *(Consumer)*

**Angela Hill** *(Communications Adviser)*

**Jenny Macindoe** *(Breast Care Nurse)*

**Jane McNeilage** *(Gynae-oncologist)*

**Katy Weare** *(Nurse Manager)*

**Marilyn Beaumont** *(WHV Executive Director)*

**Di Missen** *(BreaCan Manager)*

Thank you to Suzanne Phillips (consumer) who resigned as a member in February 2009.

Annabel Pollard Chair



Volunteers are central to the work of BreaCan. Their life experiences contribute relevance to the concept of a women-focussed service. BreaCan's skilled and compassionate volunteers work in the resource centre providing a safe place for women to meet and an opportunity to talk with someone who has faced similar issues and challenges.



The effort BreaCan puts into training reflects, to me, the importance placed on volunteers.

Kirsten, BreaCan volunteer



**The BreaCan volunteers are:** Heather B, Joy, Cindy, Janine, Ellen, Rhonda, Ojdana, Teresa, Chris, Paula, Heather D, Florence, Meril, Aaltje, Carolyn, Fredrika, Jenni, Rita, Leola, Mary, Annette, Leanne, Julie, Kirsten, Ang, Pam, Betty, Christine, Dianne, Sandra, Jules and Pauline,

Pat bakes shortbreads for service users

Judy facilitates the Feel Good exercise program

Thank you to Angela, Grace and Meena who resigned during the year.

## Our Volunteers

The current workforce of 34 peers support volunteers:

- ♥ Provide face to face, phone and email information and support to individuals about a range of issues (not just cancer)
- ♥ Refer people to support groups, specialist services and community services
- ♥ Assist with group programs and activities
- ♥ Promote the service through speaking engagements
- ♥ Undertake Resource Centre operational tasks

Whilst volunteers come with their own personal experiences, all have undertaken a rigorous training program to enable them to connect with others in a constructive way.

In October 2008, BreaCan finalised its fourth volunteer training program. All 13 participants completed the training; the 100% completion rate reaffirms the service's commitment to its rigorous recruitment process. For the first time there are two trained volunteers living with gynaecological cancers who will contribute their experiences to BreaCan in its endeavour to extend the service to women with these cancers.

The 45-hour training program comprised lectures and skills development workshops run over a 7-week period. More than 20 speakers including BreaCan staff, health professionals from the cancer sector and existing volunteers contributed to the training. Topics presented included both the physiology of breast and gynaecological cancers and their impact on a woman's life, communication and the role of the volunteer. Participants learned about the unique role and objectives of BreaCan as well as the effectiveness of working with health professionals and other support services. Communication skills training was a core feature to ensure volunteers are able to create a relaxed exchange with people, listen and convey their experience effectively.

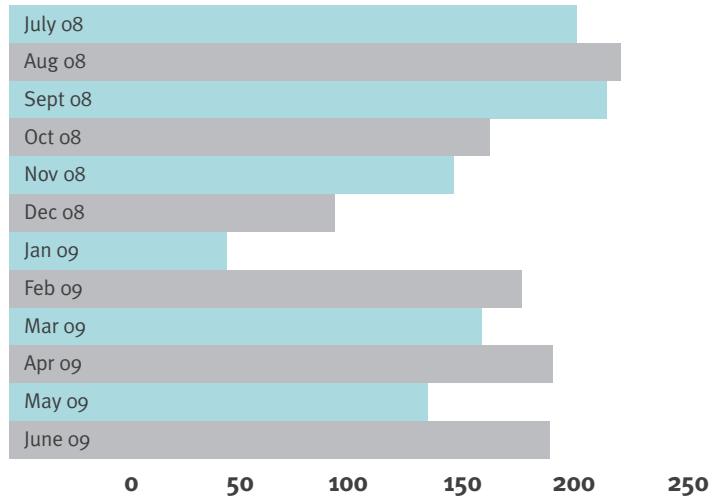
The capacity of the service is intrinsically linked to the size, experience and diversity of its volunteer workforce. Recruitment and development of BreaCan volunteers continues to be a strategic priority in future service development.

While the priority remains staffing the resource centre, the increasing number of volunteers means there is a greater opportunity to diversify their role.

# At a Glance

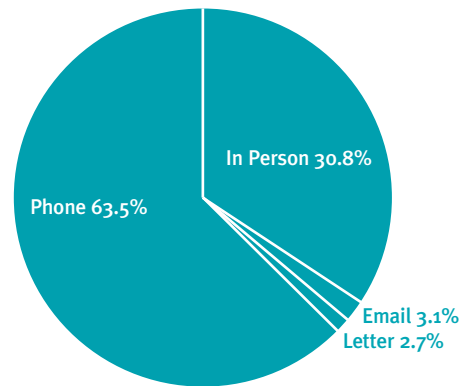
Since beginning in 2003 BreaCan has enjoyed a steady growth in contacts. For the period of July 2008 to June 2009 BreaCan recorded 1922 individual, group and service provider contacts.

## Total Service Contacts (July 08 – June 09)

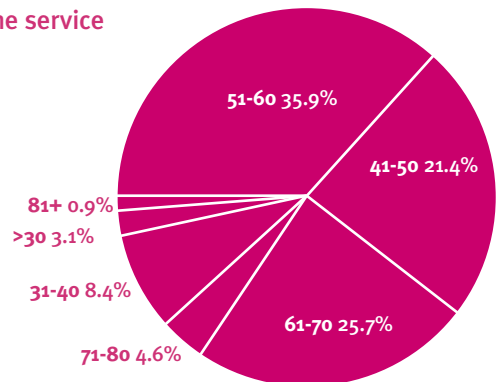


Frederika, BreaCan volunteer at a forum display

## Types of Contact



## Age range of people contacting the service



I have been able to speak about things that I really hadn't been able to speak about to any one else...I'd been given permission to feel bad; I didn't have to feel brave with these people (BreaCan).

Pam, 56 years

BreaCan subscribes to the philosophy that the best service is delivered in collaboration with a range of partners. Many in the cancer sector share this multidisciplinary view of support. In the past year BreaCan has forged new relationships, strengthened existing partnerships and embarked on some exciting new joint initiatives.

### North Eastern Metropolitan Integrated Cancer Service Project

BreaCan has been pleased to partner with North Eastern Metropolitan Integrated Cancer Service (NEMICS) in a joint two year project funded by Cancer Australia. The project is trialling strategies to improve the access of women with gynaecological cancers in the northern and eastern suburbs to information and support. As one initiative, 25 women attended an information forum held in December 2008 in conjunction with the Mercy Hospital. BreaCan and NEMICS are continuing to work with service providers in the region as there is much scope to improve supports available to women with gynaecological cancers.



BreaCan staff flanking Breast Care nurses, (centre left to right) Kathy Wallace and Kerry Shanahan at the Reach to Recovery Conference, Brisbane

## Collaborating with Partners

### Key Centre for Women's Health in Society

BreaCan has entered into a research partnership with The Key Centre for Women's Health in Society to benefit women of reproductive age diagnosed with breast cancer. This is an exciting and innovative collaboration to explore and respond to the unique needs of young women with breast cancer particularly in relation to their fertility concerns.

### Conversations of Influence

BreaCan has firmly established itself as a reliable resource for health professionals and service providers. During the past twelve months BreaCan has provided practical advice on various aspects of its service model through participation in conferences and direct approaches from individual organisations. Some examples include:

- ♥ Dr Maznah Muhamad from CaRE Malaysian Support Group was interested in setting up a similar support service for women living with cancer in Malaysia. She spent time observing the operation of the resource centre and learning about the service model and the volunteer program.
- ♥ The Border Wellness Clinic in Albury-Wodonga approached BreaCan for advice on trialling a supportive care service model for women in the region living with gynaecological cancers. BreaCan was able to offer its 'practice wisdom' and contribute to shaping a model of support which will continue into the future.
- ♥ The Australian Stroke Foundation sought BreaCan's advice on how to develop volunteer and peer support programs; this included a Foundation staff member observing the daily operation of the resource centre.
- ♥ Through the BreaCan mailing list, the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) informed over 1,000 women about the opportunity to access public speaking training and be an NBCF ambassador. BreaCan offered the resource centre as a venue and in return some BreaCan volunteers participated in NBCF's comprehensive and innovative training program.
- ♥ BreaCan presented papers at the 11th Breast Care Nurses Conference and the International Reach to Recovery, Breast Cancer Conference.

“The visit was a valuable learning experience for us. We have energised your centre concept to be incorporated in our Cancer Resource and Education Centre (CaRE). We have also drawn upon some of your ideas in planning and implementing our education and support programs.

Dr Maznah Muhamad, CaRE, Malaysia

## Extending Our Reach

During the past year innovative strategies have continued to be developed to extend the capacity and reach of the service.

### Camp Quality

Camp Quality is a national organisation which provides recreational programs to children living with cancer and their families. During the year, Camp Quality approached BreaCan with a proposal that together the services could deliver a similar program to women living with cancer and their families.

Ten families (35 people) enjoyed a fabulous weekend away in Daylesford which was facilitated by very experienced Camp Quality volunteers. It gave families who have had limited opportunities to have a break, time to relax, be pampered and be together in peaceful surrounds. This initiative demonstrated the mutual value of being able to work with an organisation with a similar philosophy and which is keen to broaden its reach as is BreaCan. BreaCan looks forward to future opportunities to work with Camp Quality.

One of the families with Camp Quality volunteer, John (far right)



### New BreaCan Website

In 2009 BreaCan launched its new website. The stand-alone site maintains links with Women's Health Victoria but focuses on promoting BreaCan and encouraging people to contact and utilise the service. Prior to the launch, the service embarked on five months of planning and research to find BreaCan's place within the online environment. The site was carefully positioned to reach the target audience and designed to meet the needs of users but not duplicate existing online information and support services.

The dynamic site features podcasts and a video to keep people tapped into the service and up-to-date with past and upcoming sessions; it also has information about BreaCan in languages other than English.

Volunteers were asked to contribute their stories and feedback in the development of the site. A website reviewers group included volunteers, service users, service providers and general public to ensure the site was relevant, informative, accessible and innovative. The website is an important entry point to the service.

[www.breacan.org.au](http://www.breacan.org.au)



Thank you for giving us the opportunity to go away as a family, as well as spending time getting to know other families touched by cancer.



### Our Voices Our Songs Music Program

Building on the success of previous music workshops BreaCan decided to offer women who had finished treatment for breast or gynaecological cancer the opportunity to explore ways of healing through music. In mid 2008, BreaCan entered into a partnership with The Women's, The Royal Melbourne Hospital and The Western Hospital to provide two five-week programs. Each of the hospitals sent letters to patients who had recently finalised their treatment inviting them to participate in the program which was facilitated by Emma O'Brien, an experienced music therapist. Two groups embarked on different programs of song writing and singing which gave them the opportunity to reflect on their cancer experience and connect with other women.

In the evaluation women reported that the program gave them the opportunity to:

- ♥ Express their thoughts through song writing
- ♥ Reconnect with creative pursuits
- ♥ Relax, have fun and connect with others

The program culminated in the joyful launch of *Our Voices Our Songs* a compilation CD of the women's songs which were performed to an audience of family, friends and staff from the partnering hospitals.

## City Visits and Regional Forums

BreaCan recognises that there is a need to be proactive in improving the access of women and health professionals from country Victoria to information and support. The service keeps in contact with the Regional Integrated Cancer Services and from time to time women and health professionals visit the service. As examples, the Breast Care Nurses from Wangaratta Hospital and members of the Loddon Mallee Allied Health Oncology Special Interest Group, visited BreaCan to find out what resources the service can provide to women in rural areas.



## The Future

BreaCan has always recognised the value of long term planning and goal setting in order to ensure the relevance and growth of the service. In December 2008, the Women's Health Victoria Council endorsed the BreaCan Strategic Plan 2009-2012 which was developed in parallel with the overarching WHV Strategic Plan.

The BreaCan Strategic Plan reaffirms the service's vision and principles. It also identifies three key goals: to increase the number of people using the service, to expand our capacity and to extend our influence. The Strategic Plan is available on the BreaCan website.

Throughout the lifetime of the Strategic Plan the service will strive to be focused yet open to new opportunities and challenges.

## Donations

During the past year many individuals, companies and organisations made generous financial contributions or gave their time to help BreaCan deliver the best service possible to Victorian women. We are extremely grateful to the various donors who requested to remain anonymous and to the individuals and groups listed below.

Carol Bates  
Heather Beanland  
Julia Campbell  
Cheryl Collins  
Mary-Ann Cooper  
Julie Cousland  
Cheryl Ebeut  
Jan Fortune  
Ketrion Halasa  
Pat Hodges  
Margaret Leahy  
Deborah Lewis  
Bernadette Lohan  
Marie Lohan

Sue Malta  
Ann Mitchell  
Sandra Moore  
Toni Moynihan  
Pauline Neil  
Lesley O'Gorman  
Heather Scott-Branagan  
Sheryll Watson  
Beverly Wong  
The 'Oaks Day Ladies Lunch Group'  
Morack Ladies Golf Club  
National Australia Bank  
BHP Billiton *Workplace Giving Program*  
Opera Australia *generously donated tickets for women to attend performances.*

Donations made in memory of Eleanor Roberts.

Thank you to those presenters of sessions who donated their time free of charge to BreaCan.

### A Final Thank You

BreaCan would like to say thank you to all the people who have generously supported BreaCan in many ways during the past year.

Visit our new website at:  
[www.breacan.org.au](http://www.breacan.org.au)

# BreaCan

GYNAECOLOGICAL  
& BREAST CANCER SUPPORT

**PHONE 1300 781 500**

(for country callers it is the cost of a local call)

**FAX 03) 9921 0840**

**EMAIL [breacan@breacan.org.au](mailto:breacan@breacan.org.au)**

**WEB [www.breacan.org.au](http://www.breacan.org.au)**

## RESOURCE CENTRE

Ground Floor

Queen Victoria Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale St

Melbourne VIC 3000

## HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday 10am-2pm

Wednesday 10am-2pm

Thursday 10am-2pm

From August 2009 – March 2010 (excluding January) BreaCan is trialling an extension of the resource centre's hours of operation. For the first Thursday of every month the centre will open from 5pm – 7.30pm. (Closed Public Holidays)

**POSTAL GPO Box 1066 Melbourne VIC 3001**

BreaCan is a service of Women's Health Victoria;  
A state-wide women's health promotion, information  
and advocacy service.

BreaCan is funded by the Victorian Department of Health



BreaCan has offered friendly, comforting support to me over the past few years. The comprehensive resource centre is most useful and offers material on every aspect of coping with this disease.

Lois, 74 years