

OLDER WOMEN MAKING IT COUNT!

Making It Count! was the 2004/5 project of the Older Women's Network(Australia) funded by the Office for Women in the Department of Family and Community Services under the Women's Development Grants. It followed on from the 2002/03 project, *Measuring Social Capital: an action research project for older women in Australia* in which older women were surveyed to broadly map their contribution to Australian communities.

Making It Count was an attempt to make obvious the importance of what older women do. Older Women want people to notice that they provide a huge range of services to the community at no cost. We all know that volunteer work, caring and community groups all contribute to well-being, reduced health-care costs and 'happiness'. However the women in this project also show that the personal advantages are equally important. Research now shows that being actively involved in communities leads to healthier lives (less medical intervention), and overcomes social isolation and depression. In reading this report you will understand the practicalities of how difficult it is to keep doing this work without the support of the wider community through acknowledging the importance of the work of older women.

Making It Count! worked with Older Women's Network groups in six areas across Australia

- Identify, survey and record what older women contribute in terms of membership of community groups, carers and voluntary work.
- Process this local information to form a profile of older women's contribution
- Identify important projects that need support (financial and other)
- Help groups to prepare submissions for funding and other support

This project provides a framework within which individual OWN groups could increase their understanding and build their skills in project planning and developing grant submissions in a real-life scenario to support their own group activities.

Many of the outcomes of the project will not be seen for some time. In the short term the outcomes of some grant applications are not yet known.

What is the Older Women's Network?

The Older Women's Network (OWN) is a community based network run for and by older women. It was established to provide an avenue by which older women could meet others with similar interests and to challenge the stereotyped images of the older woman. It aims to:

- lobby for a fairer deal for older women
- encourage discussion about ageism and sexism
- promote appropriate policy in the area of older women's health, income security, housing, home support services and transport
- assist older women to develop skills
- provide information to older women
- provide enrichment, support and friendship to older women.

