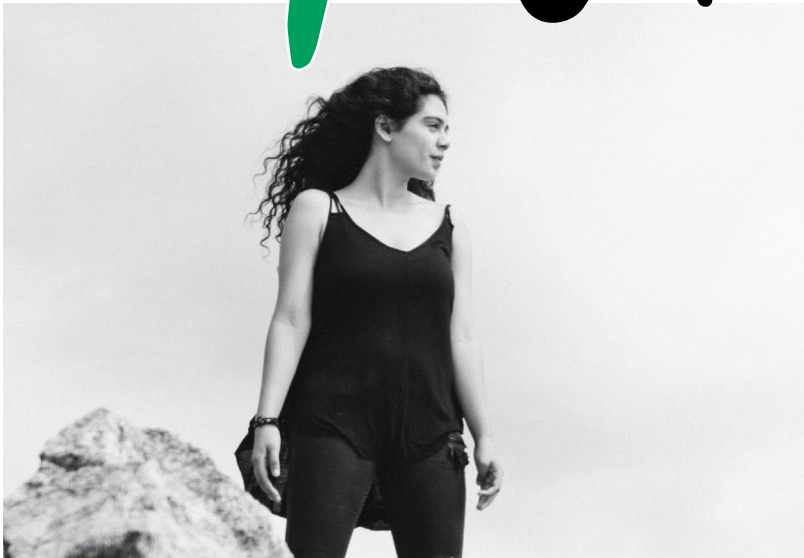




YACTION

ISSUE 6 | MAY 2019



Welcome to the latest edition of YAction!

YAction highlights YWCA Canberra's advocacy initiatives, the work of kindred organisations and the issues that are important to our members and the local community.

So why YAction?

Advocacy is at the heart of the work we do at YWCA Canberra and with the vision of girls and women thriving, we are focused on creating change by engaging with diverse groups and providing leadership through evidence-based policy and research.

Our advocacy agenda is directly informed by the work that YWCA Canberra undertakes across the ACT, drawing on the experience and knowledge generated by our programs and services.

YAction aims to amplify the voices and achievements of gender equality activists and organisations, increasing awareness of critical issues and presenting opportunities for our members, friends and supporters to get involved.

Ultimately, we hope to strengthen a movement that works together to achieve gender equality in the ACT.

We encourage you to explore YWCA Canberra's recent advocacy projects via the Advocacy tab on our website including *Voices for Change* - shifting the narrative on family violence, *Hidden Women* which explores older women's homelessness and our flagship gender equality advocacy platform *Leading the Change* as well as our policy and advocacy submissions.

In this edition we:

- **Highlight the launch of our newest charitable property management service, Rentwell, to increase affordable housing stock.**
- **Explore Voices for Change, the media advocacy program we launched on International Women's Day that supports survivors of domestic violence become trained media advocates.**
- **Discuss the importance of a gendered approach to homelessness and shifting some common misconceptions about homelessness with Felicity Reynolds.**
- **Get the latest from the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women from Board Director Ash Streeter.**
- **Hear from one of our Voices for Change advocates about the challenges facing those who decide to speak up about sexual, domestic and family violence.**
- **Look at how we're building member-based advocacy, and how you can be involved in 2019.**

YWCA CANBERRA LOBBYING SUCCESS BRINGS MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO CANBERRA

Recent legislative reform relating to ACT land tax exemptions for private rentals leased through community housing providers is set to improve affordable renting in Canberra and help create a new YWCA Canberra social enterprise.

In 2016 we launched our [Leading the Change: The Pathway to Gender Equality](#) report which analysed the current status of women in Canberra across four priority areas; gender responsive government, equality in the workplace, a life free from violence and housing security.

This report continues to underpin how we prioritise policy recommendations, respond to government inquiries and track progress against the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026.

We are pleased to report that following intensive lobbying efforts, one of our key Leading the Change recommendations for women's housing security was recently been adopted by the ACT Government.

Specifically, Leading the Change called for land tax exemption to be provided to residential property investors who lease their properties at less than 75 per cent of market rate, as properties managed by ACT registered community housing providers. This measure was modelled off Victoria's [Launch Housing program](#) where investors received Deductible Gift Receipts for rent forgone but also delivers a land tax exemption. The innovative model will help create more affordable rentals in the private rental market, particularly for those older renters and families who are being increasingly priced out of Canberra's rental market.

Rental affordability remains a tangible concern for many who live in Canberra. As the [2018 Vital Signs of Canberra report](#) highlighted, Canberra has seen some of the highest annual rental increases in the country and vacancy rates are less than one per cent. Open home inspections for newly advertised rentals are often brimming with prospective tenants, particularly for family-sized homes, increasing the likelihood of rental auctioning and further excluding those on lower incomes. As buying a house becomes an increasingly distant dream for many, improving rental quality and affordability will become pivotal to meeting the future housing needs of Canberrans.

YWCA Canberra has a long history of providing transitional housing support and innovative housing options to families and older women in Canberra. Our work with women experiencing housing stress means we have heard firsthand of how unaffordable rents, discrimination, and judgement by landlords can make looking for a place to live a needlessly stressful and overwhelming experience.

The new land tax exemption will mean community housing providers like YWCA Canberra can continue our good work in the community, leasing private rentals to tenants at affordable rates and providing them with stable housing options.

We congratulate the ACT Government in pursuing this important piece of revenue reform and to making such early progress against the ACT Housing Strategy.

INTRODUCING RENTWELL, OUR CHARITABLE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SERVICE BRINGING AFFORDABLE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION TO CANBERRA WOMEN AND FAMILIES.

In response to this revenue amendment, YWCA Canberra was joined by members of our Board and corporate supporters including [Griffin Legal](#), [Beyond Bank](#), [Christine Shaw Properties](#) and [Rowdy Digital](#) to launch Canberra's first charitable property management service, [Rentwell](#).

Rentwell will provide affordable rental accommodation to those who are on low incomes but who do not qualify for other forms of housing assistance. By leasing properties through Rentwell, philanthropic investors have the unique opportunity to change someone's life in a meaningful way; providing secure accommodation that is affordable and safe giving families and older women the chance to build meaningful and long-term community connections.

Our first property investor, ACT 2016 ACT Senior Woman of the Year Krishna Sadhana, spoke at the launch to reveal how Rentwell was the perfect fit for her investment property. Having experienced poverty and family violence



in the past, Krishna spoke of how Rentwell meant she was now able to give back to the community through an ethical investment decision.

The Rentwell [prospectus](#) is available online at www.rentwell.com.au and we welcome inquiries from prospective property investors.

VOICES FOR CHANGE SHIFTS THE NARRATIVE ON DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Content warning: The following content contains real life stories and people speaking about domestic and family violence.

[International Women's Day 2019](#) saw the launch of [Voices for Change](#), a new media advocacy program to change the community narrative on domestic and family violence.

As reported in [our December blog](#), Voices for Change is a joint YWCA Canberra and [Domestic Violence Crisis Service](#) (DVCS) project that works with women who have experienced domestic and family violence, training them to become advocates and highlight the drivers of violence against women and make calls for change. The project recognises that personal stories can be a powerful tool for social change and bring a human face to a significant community health and safety issue.

Almost 100 stakeholders from the community sector, ACT Policing and members of the ACT Legislative Assembly attended the Voices for Change launch which included the first public screening of the [short documentary](#) and also featured an advocate panel that was hosted by MC Genevieve Jacobs.

As highlighted in both the documentary and the panel, the advocates discussed some early signs of an abusive relationship, how to seek help from local crisis services such as DVCS and the importance of having a safety plan in place. They also discussed how behaviours such as downplaying violence against women and exerting control over women's decision making can be precursors to violence being used in a relationship or in the home. Further, the advocates shared important insight into how government, workplaces and communities can be part of the longer-term solution, including through respectful relationships education and supportive workplace measures.

The way media reports on domestic crimes and abuse has consequences for how gender-based violence is responded to or called out in broader society. For this reason, the role of the media in reporting on domestic and family violence was a key feature of the discussion and underpins the ongoing media campaign featuring the advocates.

In particular, the advocates have emphasised the role of traditional media in educating and building community awareness. One advocate, "Ella" discussed with [HerCanberra](#) how the media's tendency to emphasise physical forms of domestic violence in reporting can mean



VOICES FOR CHANGE changing the narrative on domestic & family violence

that those who experience emotional or financial abuse or other controlling behaviours in a relationship, may not feel justified in asking for help.

In another advocate interview with [The Riot Act](#), Teyarna reminded the media that questions or headlines like 'why didn't you leave?' are never helpful for those who experience violence. This line of questioning reinforces the misconception that survivors are somehow to blame for their experience and that those who use violence are not fully accountable for their choices.

personal stories can be a powerful tool for social change and bring a human face to a significant community health and safety issue.

With *Voices for Change*, we are reminded that domestic and family violence is underpinned by gender inequality and disproportionately affects women. The project ultimately aims to shift some of the common misconceptions around violence against women using media as an engagement tool, and we are all called upon to be part of the solution.

The courage shown by the advocates who are part of leading this change in our local community should inspire us all to play a role in building a life for everyone that is free from violence and gender inequality.

The short documentary produced for Voices for Change is available on [our website](#).

Voices for Change is a media advocacy program developed by Our Watch for survivors to share their stories with the public and the media in a way that challenges the drivers of violence against women.

Thank you to OurWatch and NAB for supporting this project.



THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDERED APPROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS, WITH FELICITY REYNOLDS

We spoke with Felicity Reynolds about the need to reconceptualise our longstanding approaches to homelessness and the need for a gendered policy approach. Felicity was CEO of the Mercy Foundation from 2008 until 2019 during which time she re-focused the Foundation on the issue of ending homelessness through supporting structural change, and encouraging the use of evidence-based approaches to link people experiencing homelessness with housing and housing support. She also gave the keynote address at our 2019 Innovation Breakfast.

1. Tell us what you love about your work and what you find most challenging?

I've been working on homelessness and housing for 20 years, but it wasn't long into that period in my career that I noticed there were some serious problems with our responses.

When I first started working in this space I, and others around me, could see what was needed was a complete re-think about how we respond to homelessness, rather than just proceeding with the existing crisis-focused formula because that was how we had always done it.

The crisis response system made good sense when it was invented. At that time, we had state and territory governments who invested massively in public housing.

There was also full employment, a credible social welfare net and a strong supply of affordable housing.

But this way of doing things makes less sense now. The supply of affordable and public housing has diminished, the welfare net isn't sufficient for those on already low incomes to keep up with the cost of living and opportunities for full employment have evaporated.

We knew then and we still know now, that we need to end homelessness not endlessly service homelessness. We need housing led approaches rather than crisis services that keep many people stuck for long periods moving between friends, family, crisis services, the streets, caravan parks or other forms of temporary accommodation.

2. Why is it important to look at homelessness from a gendered perspective?

When we continue to just service homelessness the issues that are ignored are the structural issues; the growing gap between rich and poor, the inadequacy of social welfare, and the overwhelming consequences of bad luck such as illness or separation that can result in poverty or homelessness. Women are disproportionately affected by these structural problems.

Poverty is of course a key driver of homelessness, and there are lots of complex reasons someone may be living in poverty. For women, particularly older women these reasons are underpinned by decades of economic and social inequality.

These structural issues must be addressed. It's not enough to just service the immediate need with a sandwich or a shower. Fixing the casualisation of employment, closing the wage gap and superannuation gap, building equality in the care economy - these are substantive structural deficits that governments need to address.

3. What is the most frustrating perception the general population has about homelessness and what can we do to change it?

There is a common perception that homelessness is a personal failing, a result of poor personal management or that homelessness itself is a choice. These stereotypes are not true. And the promulgation of these misconceptions means the issue is framed as one that is a personal failing rather than a systemic societal failing.

No one chooses to be homeless, and if you happen to think they do then the next question you need to ask yourself is 'why is it only those who are in poverty who choose to be homeless'?

In this way, homeless people in Australia continue to be blamed for their predicament, which then becomes normalised, and the focus becomes one of making the experience of homelessness slightly more comfortable.

Homelessness is never comfortable, and it should never be accepted as normal. Homelessness destroys people's health and mental health and it is particularly dangerous for women. We shouldn't normalise it by widely supporting programs that serve to make people comfortable rather than to make people housed.

4. The big one - how can we end homelessness?

Ultimately, housing is what ends homelessness. Some people will need support to sustain housing, but that is only a relatively small group).

After we make the mental leap towards understanding that homelessness is not a normal outcome of urban life, we need to take substantive action toward building an Australia that has the right blend of Commonwealth and State policy and program settings that mean no one experiences long term street homelessness and poverty is a thing of the past; people are assisted as quickly as possible back into housing or employment and support services are sustainable and suitable to their circumstances.

The structural issue of economic inequality and poverty in Australia, and its disproportionate impact on women, must also be addressed. Poverty is the problem but homelessness, while devastating, is really just the canary in the coal mine.

People will continue to have housing crises, so we still need an effective crisis response, but that needs to be backed up by a solid supply of affordable housing options which is where innovative models such as the YWCA Canberra's new Rentwell program comes in. There are other models that are also worth exploring such as shared equity housing, housing collectives, rental subsidies in conjunction with back to work programs. There really is a lot that any one community can do to increase the supply of housing rather than

increase the supply of crisis responses.

5. If people wanted to do something to help, what would you recommend they do?

An immediate thing people can do is to change how they perceive homelessness.

Ending homelessness in Australia is possible - but a critical first step for all of us is discarding some of our prejudices about those who live in poverty. These prejudices have consequences. They can be so embedded that punitive policies and tick box exercises for those experiencing homelessness are not often not given serious public critique.

If you are someone who believes that homelessness is a natural consequence of lack of hard work or merit or just a personal choice, you are not part of the solution.

The best thing you can do is become aware of how policies, systems and structures continue to benefit some or punish others and advocate strongly for change.

No one chooses to be homeless, and if you happen to think they do then the next question you need to ask yourself is 'why is it only those who are in poverty who choose to be homeless'?

CHALLENGES FACING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL, DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Content warning: The following content contains real life stories and people speaking about domestic and family violence.

Victims and survivors of sexual, domestic and family violence face many challenges when it comes to being heard, believed and receiving support. Lula Dembele (@dlulabele) is one of the [Voices for Change Advocates](#) who features in the short documentary available on our website. Since the launch of the Voices for Change project, Lula has been working with media to raise community awareness about the barriers, frustrations and misconceptions many survivors of domestic and family abuse endure when they choose to come forward. This YAction contribution is derived from [Lula's blog post](#) available on YWCA Canberra's website.

From the minute my mum suspected I was being sexually abused she sought appropriate assistance. Yet at every turn, she faced denial, minimisation, direct or indirect blame.

The first person she reported her concerns to, a female

doctor, did not take my mum's suspicion seriously, trying instead to rationalise why I exhibited physical symptoms of abuse.

Next, my mum took me to the children's hospital. Although they were clinically helpful confirming that I had been

chronically sexually abused, it was layered with judgement; 'how did you let this happen to your daughter?'

My grandmother said 'you know little girls, always wriggling around in men's laps', excusing the perpetrator and attributing blame to me.

Next came engagement with the law. My mother wanted to give me every opportunity for justice as part of my healing journey, so we reported the sexual abuse to police.

While police took our statements, but prosecution would be an exercise in re-traumatisation. I was

four years old and, as was the courtroom practice at the time, I would be by myself in the witness stand with the perpetrator present as lawyers peppered me with questions. To remove the perception of coaching, my mum

Sensitively responding to a victim's disclosure can be as simple as listening without interruption or judgement. You don't have to provide the solution. It is O.K. to say something if you have suspicions as well. Many people are glad to finally have the chance to talk about what they are going through.



would be prohibited from being in the courtroom, so I chose not to pursue criminal charges.

This sequence of historical events is still relevant not because legal or medical conventions haven't progressed, though improvements can be made, but because the attitudes they represent remain entrenched. Every flippant remark or every attempt to rationalise perpetrator behaviour is loaded with blame that can stop victims from speaking out.

The challenges victims face in feeling believed and supported can come from those closest to them and those who are there to protect us, the police and the legal system often aren't set up to properly support victims.

Sensitively responding to a victim's disclosure can be as simple as listening without interruption or judgement.

You don't have to provide the solution. It is okay to say something if you have suspicions as well. Many people are glad to finally have the chance to talk about what they are going through.

Your choice of words and attitude could be the difference in someone taking steps to escape abuse and violence or staying stuck in a harmful and dangerous situation.

Lula Dembele is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, and an advocate for Voices for Change Program. She is also CEO of 'A Man's Problem' @amansproblem.

For more information on how to support a victim of sexual, domestic or family violence, go to www.1800respect.org.au. If you are unsafe at home, please contact the Canberra Domestic Violence Crisis Service 24/7 on 02 6280 0900.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Ash Streeter-Jones is a YWCA Canberra board director. The YWCA maintains a commitment to ensuring that 30 per cent of all leadership positions and decision-making bodies are held by young women.

In March this year, I was fortunate enough to attend the 63rd annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference at the United Nations in New York City as a delegate for YWCA Canberra who was invited as part of the YWCA Australia delegation. CSW, established in 1946, is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission this year took place from 11-22 March and dialogue fell under the themes of social protection systems, access to public services, sustainable infrastructure and the empowerment of women and girls.

The atmosphere at CSW is tangible; activists, government and civil society leaders from all over the world come together representing a diverse cross-section of people across age, gender and religion and to discuss the most pressing issues facing women globally. 2019 saw more than 9000 delegates from across the world attend.

For the two-week event, CSW delegates can attend a

dizzying array of fringe events, panels and workshop discussions on anything from women's health, peace and security, the workforce, the family gender diversity, leadership and infrastructure. Participating governments and civil society groups often volunteer to run policy or workshop sessions. Each of these events is an opportunity to have your existing perceptions challenged, to learn

something new and to access emerging and influential leaders from around the world. Panels and workshops aside, the CSW buzzes with social activity; breakfasts and networking events fully showcase the incredible work done by organisations to further the cause of gender equality.

This year, CSW also brought together around 50 YWCA delegations from around the world; reminding us all of our role in the broader

YWCA global movement and allowing us to see how the valuable work of YWCA Canberra contributes to the broader global movement.

Along with the remainder of the YWCA Canberra delegation, which included CEO Frances Crimmins, the first event we attended was the YWCA breakfast on 10 March, prior to the formal commencement of the CSW. This event brought together all YWCA delegates and the

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Australian government to celebrate some of the work they have been leading in the Pacific region. For example, [the RiseUp project](#) was designed to harness leadership potential amongst the region's most marginalised women and was created by women at YWCA Solomon Islands. Hearing the stories from some of the young women who participated in the project and the difference this YWCA program made to their lives was a great way to start a fortnight of feminism.

The business end of CSW saw YWCA Canberra play a critical role in supporting the Australian Government and providing advice during the negotiations of [agreed multilateral conclusions](#). After two weeks of dialogue, the 63rd session on the UN Commission on the Status of Women moved a number of key recommendations to safeguard and improve women and girl's access to social protection systems and public services. Some of these recommendations include:

- ensuring that progress in women's access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure is not undermined by budget cuts and austerity measures, and levels of protection previously achieved are not reversed
- recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work by ensuring access to social protection for unpaid caregivers of all ages, including coverage for health care and pensions
- identifying and removing barriers to women's and girl's

access to public services, such as physical distance, lack of information and decision-making power, stigma and discrimination

- guaranteeing the availability of safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene, in homes, schools, refugee camps and other public places
- promoting the full and equal participation and leadership of women and women's organisations in policy dialogues and decision-making relating to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure
- strongly condemning the impunity and lack of accountability rooted in historical and structural inequality that accompanies pervasive violence against women.

While there were some challenges in the usual areas around sexual and reproductive rights and recognising the diversity of women, the final document is a comprehensive overview of agreed principles in the areas of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

CSW was an impressive and life-changing opportunity full of discussion, new ideas and emerging leaders from across the world and I'm grateful for the opportunity to participate as part of YWCA Canberra's delegation.

BUILDING MEMBER ADVOCACY IN 2019

Get ready for an exciting year for YWCA Canberra as we look to build opportunities for member-based advocacy.

Building off the success of our recent member advocacy work, 2019 is set to be filled with opportunities for members to continue participating in our advocacy work. Throughout 2018, YWCA Canberra was proactive in calling on members to help contribute to our policy and advocacy work, adding the impact of personal submissions to our

policy work. Notable examples included the positive consent legislation in the ACT Legislative Assembly and the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.

When making our [submission](#) to the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into positive consent, like many other community sector stakeholders, YWCA Canberra called for the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT) to be amended to include

“There needs to be significant cultural change coming from the top. Workplace policies can just sit there and not mean anything if the people you work with don't value them” - anonymous submission to YWCA Canberra Sexual Harassment in Workplace survey.



a more contemporary definition of sexual consent; one that required consent to be freely and voluntarily given. Members were called upon to reinforce our submission by filling out a prepared form-letter to email to the Inquiry and to actively engage in the online conversation under #yestoconsent. Some of these submissions, along with our own, were published on the Inquiry's website.

We continued this trend toward greater member engagement in advocacy and policy with our first written submission for 2019 to the Australian Human Rights Commission. Twenty-eight members responded to the call to participate by sharing their experiences and insight via an anonymous survey. This valuable contribution was shared in our written submission and also formed part of YWCA Canberra's participation in the Human Rights Commission, Canberra community consultation chaired by Commissioner Kate Jenkins.

In the political advocacy space, we started off the year with our Meet the Candidate event for the forthcoming federal election. This sell-out event was held on 1 May at the YWCA Canberra offices and all women candidates, running across the ACT, were invited to attend. We were pleased to welcome Alicia Payne and Nancy Waites (ACT Labor), Amma Davidson (ACT Greens), Mina Zaki



**“The introduction of a positive definition of consent in the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT) would be a progressive step forward for gender equality in the ACT”
- Letters from YWCA Canberra members to Justice and Community Safety Committee Inquiry into positive consent.**



(Canberra Liberals) and Therese Faulkner (Progressives Australia) who addressed attendees before separating into smaller groups to ask questions of individual candidates. YWCA Canberra has a strong history of running these events, and interest in them has progressively increased over the years. Unlike traditional election candidate panel events, our longstanding format allows all attendees to ask questions of particular candidates and be heard in a respectful setting,

without being subjected to raucous politicking and interjections. Members and supporters welcomed the opportunity to hear from candidates about their plans for Canberra, their policy agenda for gender equality and how they came to be involved in politics and the community more broadly.

This year also marks our 90th birthday celebration and presents a unique opportunity for members to make a lasting contribution to the story of women Canberra women. We will be marking this special occasion through our survey snapshot that will capture the aspirations and wellbeing of Canberra women and mark the legacy of the YWCA Canberra community in supporting women and girls to thrive over 90 years of contributing to Canberra.

EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Join YWCA Canberra on Tuesday 14 May from 6:15-8:15pm to hear from **Magistrate Louise Taylor In-Conversation with Hayley McQuire**. This candid conversation will centre around Louise's personal journey as a Kamilaroi woman and leader, including her experiences as the ACT's first Aboriginal judicial officer.

Louise will discuss her history in criminal prosecution and defence, her active contribution to the ACT community through various volunteer roles as well as her commitment to providing access to justice for women, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

For more information and to purchase your tickets today, head to our [website](#).

Addressing the housing needs of trans and gender diverse communities with A Gender Agenda - This training session aims to develop the capacity of homelessness and housing services and/or individual practitioners to provide accessible and inclusive services for trans and gender diverse service users.

The session is on Tuesday 28 May from 1:00-4:00pm and provides opportunities for participants to learn about a range of different topics.

For information visit the [website](#).

Don't miss **For Purpose's upcoming Federal Election Wrap Up**. On Thursday 13 June from 11:30am-1:30pm, this lunch forum will explore the outcome of the federal election and what it means for political advocacy and engagement.

Come along to hear from a panel of people working in government relations across the not-for-profit sector to discuss a range of policy areas impacting on the not-for-profit sector. Then hang around for lunch and the opportunity to connect with other people working to create change across the sector.

The public seminar, **Shortlisted: Women, Diversity, the Supreme Court & Beyond** will be held on Wednesday, 26 June -from 1:00-2:00pm.

Leadership in the legal profession does not reflect the public it serves, even though women have entered law in numbers equal to men for decades. Based upon her forthcoming book "Shortlisted: Women, Diversity, the Supreme Court & Beyond", Professor Knake shares surprising revelations about women shortlisted for the U.S. Supreme Court to inspire individuals and to aid organisations in bringing diversity to their leadership ranks.

For more information visit this [link](#).

The She Leads Conference will be returning for 2019 on Friday 2 August at QT Canberra.

The Conference centres around the theme 'Thrive' and includes a diverse and full program of keynote speeches, panels and networking activities that will build your capacity to thrive in your community or workplace while supporting other women alongside you.

The complete program, speaker line-up and scholarship availability will be released soon however, you will have the opportunity to hear from personality Jan Fran, television and radio presenter, Yumi Stynes, as well as non-Executive Director and author Marina Go, and the CEO and Executive Manager of HESTA Debbie Blakey.

For more information and Early Bird ticket prices, visit our [website](#).

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