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# Westpac Australian Community Idol 2009

Communities in Control Conference  
Melbourne, 15 June, 2009

Hosted by

**Wendy Harmer**

**Broadcaster, author and humorist**

Introduction by

**Peter Hanlon**

**Group Executive, Retail & Business Banking, Westpac**

## Peter Hanlon

Thank you very much Rhonda and thank you for that introduction. Good afternoon everybody. It's a great pleasure for me to be here and it's certainly a great pleasure for a number of my colleagues from Westpac to be here as well.

We've now been involved with Our Community and also with Westpac Community Idol for around about six years. It's something that while Rhonda's saying nice things about us, I must repeat it, but not just for the sake of it. We've had a fantastic relationship with Rhonda and Denis from Our Community.

We were getting so many people within our organisation who were pushing us in effect to become more involved in the community sector, so we decided to forge the relationship with Our Community. It really has enabled us to find out a bit more about ourselves but also to work out how we could use our expertise and our way of doing things to actually provide more support for the community sector.

As Rhonda mentioned we do have a specialist team right across the country who focus on providing support to community groups and the not for profit sector. Rhonda's already alluded to some of our product development. Many of you would have seen the online membership tool that Rhonda was referring to which is on display outside.

Obviously the now hundreds of people that we've provided specific training to – and again with the support of Our Community so we can actually help you, particularly with the things

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that hopefully we're good at to do with finance – one of the examples I just looked at before is this booklet here which is a guide for community treasurers. So the whole idea of Westpac being involved in the community sector with not for profits is to hopefully take our expertise and see if we can lend that to you. This is all about helping and assisting treasurers of community organisations to manage their books better. So hopefully that's of some support.

Of course earlier this year we did hand out the Westpac Community Treasurer's Award which is another award that we sponsor for those very hardworking treasurers of not for profit organisations.

I should just mention one other component that we're focused on at the moment, which is providing mentoring. So as much as we produce documents like this around the financial side of things, what we also do is make sure that we provide mentoring support, whether it be in human resources or financial areas or any range of areas where we think across our 40,000 employees we have some degree of expertise. We provide that as a mentoring capability for community organisations.

Up in Sydney recently we hosted six very large Australian community organisations on a full day workshop just to assist them with areas where we think we might be able to provide them with some support. We've now kicked off another program over the next twelve months of providing mentoring to large community organisations as well.

That's the large ones. But obviously Westpac Community Idol is also seeing how we can become involved in providing support and in fact recognition for those organisations who

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really do provide fantastic support at the grassroots right around the country. And so that's why we're here today, to listen to all of our excited nominees for the major award.

But before we get to the three major nominees I just wanted to talk about eleven groups who have been highly commended. They didn't get to the final three. But that doesn't take away at all from the fantastic work that they've been doing right across the communities within which they live. There's many more than eleven, but these eleven stand out as being particularly brilliant.

So first of all we have the Adults Surviving Child Abuse from NSW; the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre from the ACT; the Groote Eylandt and Milyakburra Youth Development Unit from the Northern Territory; La Luna Youth Arts from Queensland, Nagidah from Queensland; New Horizons Club from Tasmania; Palms Australia from NSW; petrescue.com.au from Western Australia; the Walpole Community Resource Telecentre Incorporated from Western Australia; Youth Projects from Victoria; and Yaapect Community Club from Victoria. Please join me in congratulating those groups.

And now to the three major nominees for our Westpac Community Idol Award. Now as Rhonda said there's voting slips that Rhonda and Wendy will take you through the detail later on. Those announcements are being made tomorrow. It really is our pleasure to be a part of such an event and an award like this.

The three finalists. Congratulations to get this far amongst thousands upon thousands of great community groups. Firstly, we have the Cerebral Palsy Support Network from Victoria;

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Edmund Rice Camps in South Australia; and just to show we're a national organisation, the Western Australian AIDS Council.

So once again, congratulations to all the groups here today because you all do great work. Westpac in our own small way try to assist it and one of the ways we assist is to be a part of such an event like today. So thank you very much and congratulations to the three nominees and best of luck. Thanks very much Rhonda.

**Rhonda Galbally:**

Thank you very much Peter. And thanks very much for allowing this Australian Community Idol competition to take place. Congratulations to the eleven and the three.

And now it's my absolute delight to introduce Wendy Harmer. The weekend before last I sat in bed for nearly the whole weekend and read *Love and Punishment*, her novel of revenge. I said to her why didn't she bring them down. It's a great book. But it was very, very funny. It was very delicious because it was full of revenge. And it was actually very profound. It was a very profound book, Wendy.

So this Wendy Harmer is a great writer I reckon. One of Australia's great journalists originally.

She's a playwright, she's a broadcaster, she's a comedian, a television presenter and really needs no introduction. But one of the projects that Wendy is currently working on that I'm very excited about, go and have a look at BBC Ouch on the BBC website because it's the most brilliant attached website to the BBC about disability issues. With Wendy we're setting up the

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same thing in Australia with the ABC called Attitude which I think will be absolutely stunning. So go and have a look at BBC Ouch and then you can see what Wendy's helping to create in Australia.

So Wendy, over to you.

### **Wendy Harmer:**

Thank you very much. Thank you darling Rhonda. We've known each other for so long.

Before I go on I would say I'm very, very pleased to be here. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of Moonee Ponds who when I was a kid growing up with Dame Edna Everage and her bridesmaid Madge Alsop. No actually it is of course the Kulin Nation on whose land we're gathered today. I do honour them.

I have come here on the invitation of one amazing woman, Rhonda Galbally AO who we all know is a woman of immense charm. When she is determined to make something happen she makes it happen, doesn't she? She is like a beautifully decorated, lipsticked piece of earthmoving equipment. She's a wonder. You're an inspiration. We love you.

Rhonda is my noble leader on the National People with a Disability and Carers Council which is the longest name for any committee that I have ever been a part of, I have to say. The acronym is NPDCC which is very hard to say. My kids have taken to calling it, "You know that thing you go and do Mum and you can't make our tea." That's what my kids call the National Carers Council.

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My kids are in Sydney. You know that thing that you always do when you're away from your kids, "What can I bring you back?" Well have a guess what they've asked for? Swine flu, exactly. "If you come back Mum and even if you haven't even really got swine flu you can cough and then we'll get the week off." So I might have to develop that.

I'm enjoying my time on the Council. Of course when Rhonda asked me along I was very pleased to come. Seeing all that Communities in Control does for community groups, and I know how short money is, I'd like to make an announcement. I haven't really told Rhonda about this. It's a bit of an excitement. It's a bit of something I've just decided to do. I'm very pleased to announce to everybody here today that I've decided to help with fundraising by getting my gear off for a nude calendar. Thank you very much.

I can feel that there's a little bit of apprehension in some corners of the room. I want to assure you all that the shots are going to be tasteful. Dannii Minogue, when she did her Playboy shots, she used a saucy bushman's hat to protect her modesty. I'm going to be using a mahogany side table and a set of six matching chairs.

But it's empowering, that's what all the women tell you, apparently it's empowering to get your gear off. Is that what we're hearing girls? Demi Moore, Madonna, Elle McPherson, you name it, they all go on and on. Even Rachel Ward in the Sunday Telegraph yesterday apparently saying she wished she'd done more nude scenes in her acting work. Of course so do I but no-one ever bloody asks so there you go.

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It is empowering to go naked. I can think of few things more empowering than being stuck on the wall of the local servo and being perved on by a bunch of blokes balancing a new set of steel belted radials. That girls to me just says female power I must say.

Getting your gear off, I'm looking forward to doing it. I remember Kate Fischer, she's one of those ones, she's been holding out like I have. When Kate Fischer did the movie Sirens, remember with Hugh Grant, there was an interview with Kate where she said, "In the movie Sirens no-one saw my map of Tassie so I'm hoping to flog it off for a couple of hundred grand in a few years or so if no-one's ever seen it." And I thought by gee isn't it good to see a girl putting away something for the future. It's a hedge against inflation if you'll pardon the expression. It's a lot better than the deal the Government's offering on super, that's for sure.

So I've been thinking about my calendar, wondering whether I should have a little bit of work done. You know, you get to that age. But we're doing renovations at home and I'm a bit worried it might end up like the renos are at the moment. You know like you get a little bit done and then you want to get a little more done. I can imagine I get my eyes done and then the chin wouldn't match and I'd get the neck done and then the boobs wouldn't match and we'd have plumbers traipsing in and out of the joint. I'd have to end up getting my entire arse restumped.

As I say just a little bit reluctant to start. It's not my idea of looking good all this cosmetic surgery stuff. It's not my idea really of looking good, going to a complete stranger and saying, "What can you do for me?" And they say, "Well we can either burn all the skin off your face with a laser and then scrape it with a rotating wire brush. Or we can slice open your chest and

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put in two kilos of silicon.” And I think, stuff that. I’d rather have a new kitchen quite frankly. It’s not my idea of looking good.

Mind you I have started looking at the heavier duty skin care, that kind of thing. My favourite skin care claim, I love the claims that they make. I love the way they all walk around in the Ponds Institute in those white uniforms, as if they’re about to send a moisturiser into space. I love all that.

Nivea is my favourite and this is the Nivea promise. “With continued eight weeks use, you can look three years younger.” I thought, “Three years!” That is pathetic. Take me back to 2006 when I was looking so fabulous and glamorous. Sheesh. It’s not much is it. Especially when I can look ten years younger just using the dimmer switch in the lounge. I’d save myself \$90.

Anyway so stand by for the nude calendar. That is going to be a beaut.

This year’s conference, I looked on the program that Rhonda sent me, Crisis and Catastrophe. I thought, “Oh bloody hell. I’m not going to go to some conference about rugby league. You can forget it Rhonda!”

And then I thought maybe it was the NSW State Government. Have we got any long-suffering Sydneysiders here? Frank Sartor, could we have a bit of a talk about it for a minute? Anyway, let’s not go there. We might be getting a brand new Premier and this guy...anyway, anyway [groans].

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But it's also about rebuilding, renewing and recharging and of course that's what communities do in these challenging times of the global financial crisis which has hit everyone incredibly hard.

The thing about communities and good community groups is they're resilient, they're strong, they're innovative, they bounce back. I see the Macquarie Bank, who in the good times were paying their top executives \$33 million a year, have just started hiring again which is fantastic. I think we should give them a round of applause, the Macquarie Bank, for bouncing back so brilliantly ... Anyway.

And so we come to this year's Community Idol. From hundreds of entries across Australia our judges have chosen just three finalists. Yes, yes, yes they told me they had their share of Scottish virgins in there. They had people with monobrows, people named Susan. But they chose none of them. Do you know who the hell I'm talking about? Susan Boyle. That was a really good joke and you buggered it up! The Western Australians got that.

None of them made the cut. Just these fantastic people here. Now you know how it goes. We invite the representatives of three groups to take their turn at the microphone and speak for ten minutes. At the end of your speech the lights will dim. I want everybody to understand that we're doing that. You're not fading from a lack of alcohol. There will be a chance for drinks later. But that will be just to let our people know that the time is up. That's a lot kinder than a lot of the clubs I've been to, you know, "Taxi for Miss Harmer," that kind of thing.

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You, you lucky folk, you get the chance to vote for course for the 2009 Community Idol. Let's get cracking shall we.

Let's introduce first Miss Bee-Bee Busybody (Laura Cvetkovski wearing a bee headband) and her mate over there ... Victoria Garner and Laura Cvetkovski. The Cerebral Palsy Support Network is a self-help organisation run by people with a personal experience of cerebral palsy, which kind of makes sense really doesn't it? It doesn't make sense to a lot of people in the helping business, but it makes sense to everybody who knows anything about it.

It provides information, support and resources to children and adults and their families in Victoria. But not just in Victoria because the group's electronic membership - and this is great, an electronic membership service - and they now have members would you believe from India, Uganda and New Zealand which is absolutely stunning. The group doesn't stop at providing support to those affected by cerebral palsy. It supports their family members, their friends, allied health workers, social workers and other professionals. So they're looking after everybody.

The importance of individual choice and flexibility is an underpinning principle of the group, along with the notion that people with cerebral palsy can achieve the impossible. Of course they can.

To hear more about this great group please welcome Victoria Garner and Laura Cvetkovski.

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**Victoria Garner:**

Hi. I'd like to thank the selection committee for giving the Cerebral Palsy Support Network this opportunity to highlight our achievements.

In the beginning my daughter Arianne was diagnosed with cerebral palsy in 1993. Cerebral palsy is primarily a physical disability. I had very confused feelings and felt quite lost. 1993 was before we all had home computers so the automatic response of, "I'll just go and look that up on the internet," was not an option.

I wanted to meet other parents for mutual support and information sharing but there was not a specific group. With the assistance of the Regional Parents Support Coordinator a support group was organised. The first meeting was at my home and was a great success. I, like so many parents, had so many questions and few answers.

No two people with cerebral palsy are affected in exactly the same ways. It can be difficult and challenging to understand and cope with the way your child's symptoms unfold in front of your eyes.

In 1995 the CPS then became incorporated. A community grant covered the cost of venue hire and a carer to entertain children while parents chatted. So we finally got out of my lounge room.

Members lobbied anyone who would listen to the need for our organisation. As you can see Steve Bracks was on the list. No more dining table meetings. We moved our operations to an

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office in Carlton in 1997. The rent was \$25 a week. Can you believe that? It was a very small office.

Christine Campbell, the Minister for Human Services at the time, was invited to officiate. Now we were able to establish the all-important White and Yellow Pages telephone listing and a member volunteered to develop our first website. It was exciting.

We survived on disability self-help funding, community grants and fundraising. We did trivia nights, dinner dances, raffles, you name it, we did it. But the lack of recurrent funding was starting to become a real and very frustrating issue for the continuity of service delivery to our growing membership.

Member events were popular and well attended. We have come so far since those early days. We now have 385 members, 297 of whom have cerebral palsy and range in ages from under twelve months to over fifty years. We don't go any more than fifty recording wise.

Support groups meet regularly in local cafes every week across the metropolitan area. We deliver a fabulous bi-monthly newsletter which is sent electronically or in the post for people who haven't quite caught up with the internet.

We have also developed a unique cerebral palsy brokerage program where we broker respite funds for our members so they can have flexibility and choice with their respite worker.

Access All Areas teenage social group is a new group which was established by two of our teenage members. They identified that teenagers who have the ability to be independent in

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the community as adults needed some supported training, as well as the opportunity to meet other teens with cerebral palsy. The Triple A members are supported by a staff member and peer group volunteers. There's a no nans policy.

Melbourne's longest cake is our annual event, hosted by Crown Limited, and part of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival program. An event to raise awareness and funds was in the pipeline for four years before it evolved into Melbourne's Longest Cake. Christian Astourian, the President of the CPSN from 2001 to 2006, wanted to organise an event that would raise awareness of cerebral palsy in a big, big way, no less than a Guinness Book of Records world's longest cake challenge. The cake would have to be over 1.6 kilometres long.

Christian organised a meeting with senior management at Crown. A counter proposal was put on the table to scale down the event and Crown would host it. So instead of one big bang, an annual event was offered that could grow over time.

The rest as they say is history. Companies are invited to sponsor cake by the metre. Slices of cake plus a hot or cold drink, boxes of cake to eat later and our fabulous merchandise are sold at the event.

I would now like to hand over to Laura. Laura was luckily looking for an internship back in 2006 and we snapped her up and we haven't left her out of our sight since.

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## Laura Cvetkovski:

Thank you Victoria. Melbourne's Longest Cake has been a massive learning experience for everybody involved both personally and as an organisation. To be totally honest, none of us had done anything like this before.

In 2007 we had a very grass roots event. With no precedent, the hardest part was describing it to people when we didn't even have a tangible grasp of it ourselves. So we relied heavily on the limited network of people that supported our organisation at the same time as being very conscious of burning out our friends.

Shaun Micallef hosted the event with a performance by Glenroy Special School. We had Dipper, Billy Brownless and Anthony Koutoufides there to help us cut the cake.

For a first event we considered it extremely successful. We raised \$58,000 from sponsorship and cake sales on the day.

With the steep learning curve under our belt we went into 2008 with hope and excitement. Now we had an idea of how the event ran it was easier for us to go to people that we didn't know and ask them to be involved. No longer were we met with, "What big cake?" people were now intrigued and interested.

We took a huge step forward with the entertainment involved and we found that by asking instead of apologising for the interruption that Ricki-Lee, Matthew Richardson, Rob Mills, the

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Choir of Hard Knocks, Rhonda Birchmore, Peter Combe and Sue Stanley came on board with the event.

The weather was spectacular and all involved had a great time. We upped the ante from the previous year by streamlining the process. Our volunteers and merchandise added a new flavour to the event that we didn't have in the previous year.

So this year has been the most promising year for Melbourne's Longest Cake. By sheer chance of rain, our six months of planning was rearranged in twenty minutes at 6.00 am on the day of the event. It was moved into the Palladium Ballroom because that was the largest, driest area in the Crown complex and it definitely added a touch of glamour to the event. We had Carl Riseley there to perform and Brodie Harper, Heath Meldrum and some AFL football players also came along to help us out. The room was abuzz with people enjoying cake.

And while it's all well and good to have an event that's grown so much in three years and becoming marketable and attracting recognisable names, ultimately the core message is that it is about people with cerebral palsy and we actively encourage our members to come along to the event so that other attendees can see the varying degrees of how the disability affects people.

We rely heavily on our volunteers to assist with running our events. In 2007 our volunteers were a team of twenty people who all had ties to the organisation. One of our key avenues of recruitment is GoVolunteer, from which we routinely receive over 150 responses.

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We love the fact that so many of our volunteers come from all walks of life, whether they're younger, older, students, parents, they might have CP, they might not, people that have lived here their whole lives. We get a lot of people who have just come from overseas. They all share the same factor. They're keen to get out into the community to meet people and to have a go.

The other large component of the event is apprentice chefs and cookery students. We have 50 to 100 pairs of hands donated by these guys from across Victoria from different TAFEs. They're vital to the assembly and decoration of the cake.

One other key aspect of the event that we're very proud of is that all cake that's left over at the end of the event gets donated to Second Bite Food Bank. Second Bite then distributes this to disadvantaged people across Melbourne.

We were pretty chuffed last year when we did invite the Choir of Hard Knocks to come and perform that a few of them had stories of them receiving the cake in 2007 that we had left over. I'll pass you back to Victoria.

### **Victoria Garner:**

So what do we do with this money? Well we had a long, hard think about that and how best to make it work for our members. So we set up the Cerebral Palsy Support Network Members Trust Fund. The funds are deposited into that fund and all the interest generated every year is distributed back to the membership. It's a \$500 per person maximum at this stage and we anticipate that as the fund grows we might be able to make larger disbursements.

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There has been one funding round so far and here is a very small member with his second skin to help the functionality of his right arm. Members are encouraged to apply for something that is not funded anywhere else and that would enhance their quality of life.

### **Laura Cvetkovski:**

The other key event that we have during the year is Cerebral Palsy Awareness Week which happens in the first week of August every year. The mascot is Buzz the Bumblebee who helps us to take the sting out of cerebral palsy. We've selected him to be the mascot for a very particular reason and that is that aerodynamically he should not be able to fly because his wings are too small for his big fuzzy body.

So like Buzz, the aim of our organisation is to help people with cerebral palsy to fly, to achieve things that might seemingly be impossible. Over the years we've tried different events and activities, from having signage on trams to art exhibitions. In 2007 with our newly created Buzz merchandise we saturated the city with volunteers and staged the Bumblebee Cup with professional wrestlers. Many people stopped to watch the show but we feel that our messages got lost. Considering the effort we put into staging this event, we don't think it was a successful exercise.

### **Wendy Harmer:**

We all want to congratulate you very much. Thanks for that.

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Let's move on because we want to get everyone in with plenty of time to tell you about their brilliant work.

You've seen Melanie sitting around with a beautiful, tiny baby there. I don't know whether you're the same as me, women of a certain age in the room wanting to go and snatch that baby and run away with it.

Melanie Tate and Natalie King are from the Edmund Rice Camps in South Australia. Founded in 1990, Edmund Rice Camps South Australia is running 23 camps for children, young people and their families this year, giving more than 300 children and young people a holiday.

Most of the participants will be from disadvantaged backgrounds. In fact Edmund Rice Camps are known as the last stop for some clients. This is an organisation that is committed to helping people who don't have other respite options.

Participants are referred by social workers, carers or families and are selected according to a priority of needs. They might attend a co-ed camp or a camp just for girls or boys or families or siblings. Activities ... well I'll let you tell them all about it.

The organisation has a dual purpose. Not only does it provide opportunities for fun and development for campers, it's strongly committed to its 400 strong army of volunteers as well. Man, and you've got two little bobbies. You girls are incredible, I must say.

Melanie Tate and Natalie King from Edmund Rice Camps in South Australia. Make them welcome.

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## Melanie Tate:

Thank you. We are both delighted and honoured to be selected as finalists for this award. Today Natalie and I are speaking on behalf of the many volunteers, children, young people and families that make up the Edmund Rice Camps.

We've been providing these services since 1990 and believe we create real and lasting change for children and families in South Australia. Although camps back in the beginning were a far cry from the way we operate today - a ute, a few tents and some borrowed equipment was all that was needed back then – the heart of why ERC was providing the services remains true today, providing kids in need a break from their everyday lives and planting the seed of the idea within them that anything is possible, while at the same time helping young adults develop leadership skills and belief in themselves that they can make a difference.

As we've been in operation for a number of years now we are able to see the results of some of the seeds that ERC has planted with participants. At one camp there was a group of volunteers, most of whom were female, who were eagerly looking into a newspaper to check their Year 12 results and see what courses they got into. Some young female participants on that camp wanted to see what all the excitement was about and asked volunteers what was going on. After being told what the volunteers were doing, the participants shrugged and said, "What's the point? Girls don't get into courses that mean anything important anyway."

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The volunteers on that camp took the time to discuss their aspirations for study and future employment with the participants and let them know too that these paths could be possible for them if they wanted them.

Many years later we have learned that some of those participants have indeed successfully gone onto tertiary education.

From our humble beginnings, we have grown to become one of SA's leading organisations for respite and holiday programs for children, young people and families. Additionally we have become leaders in the field of adult education through child safe environment training.

For me, it's a privilege to work with our small but exceptional operational team which consists of only five staff members but the many generous extraordinary people who volunteer to assist ERC. At present we have over 400 active volunteers.

Our volunteers work in just about every area of the organisation's operations, from administration and management through to service planning and delivery of camps and trainings.

When I visited one of our camps for older boys I was met by a participant who had been making camp a particularly difficult one for others. It seemed he knew I was coming to camp and he made an effort to greet me. He asked me if it was true I was the boss. I think he was worried he was going to get into trouble. He asked me whether I get paid. I told him I did, but that everyone else on the camp was there voluntarily and they didn't get paid anything to come on camp. The look on his face was priceless. He asked me, "then why do they come on

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camps?” I said that the volunteers were there because they really cared about kids. They were there because they wanted to make a difference and they wanted to make sure that everyone on the camp had a good time.

He was totally speechless. This particular young boy is under guardianship of the Minister and lives in a residential unit, so for him to be attending a camp like ours and spending time with people that are not paid to be present with him is something that’s really special. Needless to say, for the remainder of camp his behaviour had totally changed. He left camp with tears in his eyes.

In telling you that story I want to also let it be known though that changing kids’ behaviour is, as I’m sure you’ll agree, rarely that easy.

### **Natalie King:**

The demand for our services, coupled with our ability to meet that demand, has grown enormously. Just eight years ago we conducted five camps, supporting 100 children. This year we are very proud to be supporting over 400 children, young people and their families by providing 23 camps, as well as conducting over 50 trainings for members of the community in child safe environments.

We deliberately try to ensure that our service is accessible to all of those who need it. At times this presents us with challenges. One of the many examples we have is where a young Aboriginal boy was flown down to camp from a rural area in South Australia. We arranged overnight accommodation for him prior to the camp.

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The boy had a developmental delay and was very quiet with the volunteers who met him at the airport, not saying a word. The host family though had a massive TV and upon seeing it the boy's eyes lit up and he said, "That's a bloody big TV." They couldn't stop him talking after that.

That boy has since graduated from camps and he's told us of his aspirations to start Edmund Rice Camps in his home town. This is not an isolated incident for us. We could give you so many more stories about collecting clothes, dropping off food for families, funding flights, arranging accommodation, or the many other support services we have and do provide for families when there's a need.

The outcomes of attending camps are often far more than the benefit of actual time away. One of the many traditions on our camps is to have everyone on camp write affirmations or notes to each other. These are then sent out to the volunteers and participants the week after camp. A foster carer of one of our participants told us that the notes were so special to him that once he received them he placed them in a special photo album. Whenever he has a rough day he takes the time to read those affirmations and they've really helped him through some tough times.

Looking into the not too distant future, it is hard to believe that in 2010 ERCSA will be celebrating twenty years of operating successfully as a grass roots NGO, making a positive difference to thousands of children, young people and their families.

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The future of Eddie Rice Camps certainly looks exciting with new programs and services, both in trainings and camps on the horizon for the next few years.

**Melanie Tate:**

We've been tested by some challenging circumstances. We've been encouraged by the outcomes of our initiatives and are on track to create a brighter future for the organisation and the many disadvantaged children it helps. Our agency is modestly resourced in relation to people and funds. However ERC supporters are abundant with passion and energy and we continue to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

We've prepared a short slide show that we hope will tell you a little more about Edmund Rice Camps and the services we offer. After that we were hoping we'd have a little bit of time for a camp song but I think seeing these guys ran out of time we may not.

So thank you for listening to us.

**Wendy Harmer:**

Now it is time to introduce to you the third of our finalists in the 2009 Community Idol. Patricia Langdon and Jonathan Hallett are with us from the West Australian AIDS Council which was formed in 1985 in the early days of the Australian AIDS epidemic, when stigma and extreme prejudice surrounding HIV AIDS was the norm. I'm sure we all remember the hysteria of those times and the friends that we lost from those times.

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The organisation kicked through that prejudice, working tirelessly to provide support for those who society wanted to ignore. In its roles as an educator, lobbyist and advocate, the Council has also worked with the highest levels of government on law reform and equal opportunity legislation, with police and corrective services, and with school teachers and education authorities to provide curriculum for schools.

It has embraced technology including establishing online forums and support sites for AIDS sufferers and at-risk members of the community. More importantly it's also worked hard to keep AIDS at the forefront of public consciousness and keeps on doing that job of reducing the stigma.

So to tell us about the organisation past and present please welcome Patricia Langdon and Jonathan Hallett.

**Patricia Langdon:**

Thank you Wendy. Jonathan and I are thrilled to be in Melbourne and have the opportunity to present the work of the WA AIDS Council, otherwise known as WAAC. We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and of elders past and present.

We're very humbled actually to be in the final three. After we've heard the fantastic work that the other two groups, we're up against it.

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My contact with the Council started as a volunteer over twenty years ago - I'm only 25 now - prior to being the chairperson for four years and then starting as a staff member. Jonathan started his contact with WAAC ten years ago, firstly as a client, then as a volunteer, then as a staff member and now on the board of management. In fact almost all of our board and two thirds of our staff either started as clients or volunteers so their connection to our community is cemented throughout the organisation.

In presenting the ongoing work of the Council, we'll be taking a trip down memory lane to show you where we've been, where we're going and what has changed.

AIDS is arguably the world's most devastating disease, having killed tens of millions of people around the world and leaving many children orphaned. It was first discovered in 1981 in the United States and combined the community's worst fears, a new, deadly infectious disease without a cure, nobody knew how it spread, it threatened institutions like the blood bank and disproportionately struck marginalised people such as gay men, drug users and sex workers.

The media went into overdrive with sensational stories and creating community panic. Despite this, communities mobilised everywhere to care for the dying and craft innovative education for those at risk. The affected communities were gripped by grief, organising candlelight vigils, wearing red ribbons for community awareness and making quilts for loved ones as a colourful and therapeutic response to the profound grief people were feeling.

In Perth the gay community decided to use funds it had raised for a retirement home to start WAAC to assist people. We became a fearless advocate for people living with HIV and other at-

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risk marginalised groups. While the general community was terrified, WAAC had no trouble attracting volunteers and worked tirelessly so that positive people could live and die with dignity.

Home care was provided for people with AIDS, people were provided with practical assistance and support groups were formed. WAAC also got itself organised and moved premises. So true to the groups we worked with, our second building was a brothel, or had been.

We established the universally unpopular but incredibly effective mobile needle and syringe exchange for people who injected drugs. We frequently drew attention from the police, local council and the media. We mobilised community volunteers to provide safe sex and HIV education for gay men. Social marketing and education resources were developed including a provocative full page ad in the West Australian of two naked men imploring them to get tested. The Health Minister was not happy.

Naughty nurses designed and distributed information and condoms at nightclubs and bars. We started help lines so that the public, including young people, could get anonymous information about their risk behaviours.

We also organised the buddy program where volunteers provided emotional support and retreats for positive people to help them through their illness.

WAAC began working with other gay groups on the lengthy process of law reform. This came to fruition only six years ago and fundamentally changed many lives.

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**Jonathan Hallett:**

It wasn't until the mid-1990s that news filtered through the community that new HIV treatments were working. HIV positive people who had been on their death beds were now able to think about living with a sense of hope and optimism.

WAAC had to change. Our support services department became the positive services department. We encouraged HIV positive people to manage their illness with the new treatments and focus on healthy living. We advocated for people wishing to return to the workforce. People were assisted to make psychological adjustments in order to plan for a future.

Services for gay and bisexual men were expanded to incorporate cultural diversity with tailored workshops, community development and specialist help lines. We provided outreach and clinical services in high risk settings such as male saunas. New resources were designed to prompt people to get tested and treated.

Family support via an annual family camp was started for HIV positive parents and their children to get together in a safe, confidential environment. Therapeutic counselling was available for people struggling with their HIV status or sexuality.

WAAC also participated in community events such as Pride. This had the purpose of raising awareness and involving community members, whilst having a lot of fun with glitter, satin and feathers as you'll see.

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During this period the Freedom Centre, a youth drop in centre, was born. Our experience of young men attending safe sex education groups was that HIV was the least of their issues. Many had been kicked out of home when they came out to their parents and some were self-harming and others contemplating suicide.

Research supported our experience. Members of the gay and lesbian community are at significantly higher risk of self-harm and suicide, not because of their same sex attraction per se but due to the marginalisation and stigma they experience.

The Freedom Centre is an entirely youth run service operating for the last fifteen years. Initially focused on young men, the program expanded to include young women and transgender youth. It continues to be funded as an early intervention strategy aimed at reducing suicide risk. Sexual and gender diversity training is also provided for professional groups. Freedom Centre Alumni are now working throughout the world as teachers, academics, community workers, lawyers, diplomats and doctors.

WAAC also expanded our services to include Aboriginal people, employing Aboriginal staff to deliver culturally sensitive services and build capacity in the Aboriginal community.

Prisoners and prison officers were provided with training and WAAC successfully advocated for condoms to be made available inside prisons.

WAAC sent HIV positive speakers into schools, putting a face to HIV, challenge stigma and prejudice. People often tell us that one of the most significant and enduring memories of school was the day they met a person with HIV.

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We have also produced a personal perspective DVD and schools package called *Being Positive*. We've been sending outreach teams to schoolies week for the past nine years to ensure young people are safe during their celebrations. 'Keep it Safe' summer teams also attend youth festivals such as the Big Day Out and university orientation days.

In more recent times we've been working with medical students to ensure that their knowledge and understanding of HIV and AIDS issues is up to date.

This period also heralded the start of Style Aid, our annual fundraiser which has the dual purpose of raising funds and HIV awareness in the general community. We have forged a partnership with the WA fashion industry, designers, models, hairdressers, makeup artists, sound and lighting technicians to create the event.

Now in its twelfth year Style Aid has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support our work and reduce our reliance on government funding. We also use proceeds to pay for programs that would otherwise not get funded.

Along with Style Aid, World AIDS Day on December 1 provides an opportunity for the community to contribute to and participate in the HIV AIDS cause.

### **Patricia Langdon:**

In 2005 WAAC held a twentieth year retrospective called *Reflection, Remembrance and Celebration*. We also wrote our history, called *Being Positive*, to honour the many people that

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went beyond the call of duty in often very difficult circumstances to support people with HIV as well as those vulnerable to being infected.

It also provided a chance for the current staff and volunteers to celebrate our successes and triumphs with the pioneers, as well as reflect on some of the difficult times. We use opportunities such as these and World AIDS Day every year to acknowledge and thank the many members of the community that contribute to the worldwide AIDS cause and those who contribute to our work.

We have entered into partnerships with private companies and Aboriginal health agencies, travelling to remote parts of the state to build local capacity. In our Design for Life program, local Aboriginal people are educated around HIV AIDS and use this knowledge to design posters, stickers and condom packs. Our Aboriginal staff members work with their colleagues throughout Australia to demystify HIV and AIDS and in so doing reduce stigma and discrimination in these communities.

We provide services to half a dozen sixty to seventy year old women, called the Golden Girls, who have discovered their HIV status late in life. They have formed a very close bond and attend retreats, treatment forums and life coaching along with other HIV positive people.

Our 200 volunteers from varied backgrounds range from seventeen to eighty years in age. They offer their time and commitment to activities such as condom packing, needle exchange, home care and safe sex angels.

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For the past five years WAAC has provide online outreach services to positive people, gay and bisexual men and young people via chat rooms and forums. Our Freedom Centre has a vibrant online community. It has recently facilitated Faces for Freedom, a project against homophobia and transphobia as part of the National Human Rights Consultation. This provided an opportunity for transgender people, who are increasingly seeking services from the Council, to be heard.

WAAC has also designed a new program in response to the increases in diagnoses among heterosexual men who have acquired HIV whilst travelling in high prevalence countries.

The WA AIDS Council sometimes attracts strident criticism but mostly support, occasionally from the most unlikely of places. We are here for the long haul and intend to stay responsive and relevant to our community's needs.

We would like to thank Our Community for the opportunity to share our story and Westpac for sponsoring the Community Idol Award, and the staff for coordinating the entry and for the visual presentation. And to the many people who have contributed to making the Council a vibrant and robust organisation.

### **Wendy Harmer:**

Thank you very, very much. I think we might wrap it up there. Please thank Patricia Langdon and Jonathan Hallett, coming all the way from WA.

You have your ballots here for the 2009 Community Idol. Mark an x in one box.

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I know Rhonda would like me to thank you all for your rapt attendance today.

Thanks very much for having me and it was very inspirational to listen to our contestants.

Thank you.

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