



2015 Glen Innes Communique NSW rural women's challenges & ideas for action

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L-R Mary Hollingworth, Councillor Dianne Newman (Deputy Mayor)
and The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC

The NSW Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to working with rural women who are providing leadership that is improving the lives of women in NSW by supporting the annual rural women's gatherings.

The Rural Women's Network (RWN) within the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) engaged directly with 350 women participating in 2015 Rural Women's Gathering at Glen Innes to identify key challenges for rural women in NSW. A one hour facilitated workshop session harnessed the wisdom of gathering participants and this '2015 Glen Innes Communique' is a record of these conversations.

The wealth of ideas generated from this activity are recorded below and it is our hope that it encourages innovation and action across government, industry and the community who all have their role to play in improving the lives of women and families living in rural, regional and remote areas of NSW.

Mary Hollingworth
Chair, Gather in the Glen
2015 Rural Women's Gathering Committee



Glen Innes
Women For All Seasons

Five most often mentioned challenges:

24%

1. The tyranny of distance, lack of public transport and travel time impacts on opportunities to engage in sports, community activities; take up employment, access childcare and education services (mentioned in about 24% of responses).

'Availability and accessibility of training for career progression. Long distance travel is required if you would like to further your skills.'

22%

2. Access to health services (mentioned in about 22% of responses).

'Distance to available health resources, impact this has on waiting times, delay in treatment, availability of support, finances and time away from home/families.'

20%

3. Improving access to internet and mobile telecommunications was critical and overlaps many other challenges (mentioned in about 20% of responses).

'We are expected, pushed, encouraged, demanded to do more and more of our daily business on-line. There is a wonderful opportunity for rural women (and families) to take part in activities, events and learning through webinars and the like. We cannot do this unless we have decent internet access - I believe this is one of the biggest challenges we face in this electronic, tech driven world. I live only 20km from an area that has broadband and NBN fixed wireless yet I cannot download emails at an acceptable speed. The thought of watching something on YouTube or taking part in a webinar is otherworldly!'

10%

4. In tough times - coping oneself and supporting men and families (mentioned in about 10% of responses).

'As drought increases - trying to hold families together. Husbands are getting more depressed and wondering what the future holds for him and his family. Women going out and getting paid work - women are so strong but they are caught between keeping strong, keep husbands on an upper so they don't think of themselves as useless!! Weekends like this are a great stress release for women to not think about home life for a couple of days.'

5%

5. Gender equality and acknowledgement of the role of women in agriculture is still an issue (mentioned in about 5% of responses).

'Women fought for equality in the 60's and I still feel we are no further ahead. We are still second class citizens to a lot of males, who know nothing.'

Other identified challenges included:

home tutors, supporting new people coming to town, local solutions to local problems, drug and alcohol, time, work life balance, money, water, domestic violence, isolation, succession planning, caring responsibilities, mining versus agriculture, working off-farm, nurses returning to work, career and employment opportunities, weather and climate change, cost of regulation and R&D, access to inspirational speakers.

Outcomes of gathering 'Ideas' workshoping session

Identified challenges sourced over the weekend and via survey monkey (86 responses received: 64 provided at the weekend Gathering and 22 online through Survey Monkey) were developed into questions used to spark conversations around solutions and ideas. Seventeen groups of women workshoped for one hour to develop one top idea to share publicly at the gathering. 'Other ideas' have been documented.

How could we better support each other in times of adversity? (drought, men, women, kids with health, drugs/alcohol issues) (2 Groups)

'Weather changes brings challenges for families, more isolation due to constant feeding of stock, more financial debt due to feed costs, more mood swings/ depression. No time for sport. This can bring ill health and this then becomes a problem with travel to medical doctors etc.'

Top Idea Group 1: Set up a 'When In Need' (WIN) phone buddy support system. Identify a 'buddy' (trusted friend/neighbour living close to you. Ask if they are happy to be your WIN buddy and have their mobile number circulated to your family. Give your WIN buddy name/number to family and friends knowing they can call the buddy to 'check-in' if and when needed.

Top Idea Group 2: Increase opportunities that promote social connectedness activities and increase access to information and ideas using social media.

Other Ideas:

- » A phone line for rural women manned by rural women for rural women and not be put on hold. This to be advertised.
- » Promote local services and build awareness around the importance of social connectedness and people getting together, through talks at local gatherings, stalls at council fun days, free barbecues, social functions and get messages out through the media - radio/TV/newspaper.
- » Ask around: Are You OK? Specifically ask.
- » Fundraise through community groups/Rotary/schools.

How could women better manage the challenges of caring for kids and/or elderly relatives? (3 Groups)

'Navigating the dual pressures of caring for children and caring for elderly relatives sandwiched in between. Also the major challenge of accessing and coordinating care for elderly relatives who wish to stay in their own home. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, a proliferation of services and service providers. All with different eligibility criteria etc.'

Top Idea Group 1: Expand bus laws (explore reasons) so pre-schoolers can take school buses to and from town to access long day care/pre-school.

Top Idea Group 2: Hold more community days that bring women together once a month to talk, understand medical issues and create community support programs eg regular World Women's Clinics.

Top Idea Group 3: Make sure women are aware of local services available eg activities for elderly (Meals on Wheels, home care) and children (play groups). These services ease the burden on women who are already stretched for time.

Other Ideas:

- » Share hosting of a playgroup around the playgroup.
- » Develop a network of older people who get together weekly for lunch dates. One person collects others - goes out for lunch and drop them back home.
- » Promote available services provided by Government.

- » Modify Family Day Care service/model to share responsibility of childcare.
- » Network with friends/neighbours to share child minding (and transport) while meeting needs of older relatives.
- » Accept help when offered. Ask for help. Be assertiveness about your own needs.
- » Ask The Gruen Transfer (ABC TV) to do their advertising challenge for some of today's topics eg attract young people to agriculture. Value of older women in society.
- » How could women better manage the challenge for caring for kids and/or elderly relatives?
- » Manage children and elderly by establishing strong routines.
- » Create community children caring rosters to share the responsibilities communally.
- » Create volunteer community support networks to share caring for the elderly.
- » Increase knowledge among the community and GPs of where to go for support. Have a list of first point of contact for help.
- » Reduce the expense of childcare and create more flexible hours for childcare.
- » Government support needed to train more local child carers.
- » Re-train the retired/jobless for childcare and create jobs.
- » Address the gap for what defines the duties for a carer. More assistance and recognition of families that stay on the farm.
- » Assistance from the younger generation to help parents stay on the farm.
- » Using aged care facilities and day care facilities.
- » Other options for childcare - getting nannies on 88 day visas.
- » Women supporting each other, offering childcare to each other rather than paying a baby sitter.
- » Get men to help out with childcare and share some responsibility.

How do we facilitate younger women to come to rural women's gatherings? (2 Groups)

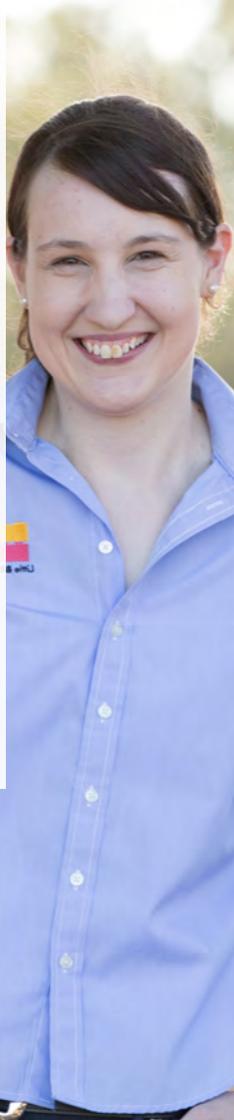
'Time, whether for tasks, chores, self, children, hobbies. Also time to breathe and enjoy life's joys and challenges.'

Top Idea Group 1: Create key messages that target younger women and what they will get out of participating in a rural women's gathering - think of incentives to offer. For younger women to invest precious time and money they need to be aware of what the gathering can/will offer and what skills/contacts they are going to walk away with. It would be most effective to target advertising/communications to leaders of groups that are respected and trusted amongst younger women.

Top Idea Group 2: Provide subsidised childcare with things to do for the kids.

Other Ideas:

- » Have a speaker who appeals to younger women (target young women from local high schools - possibly year 11?) and provide 'mini scholarships' for this group to attend just for that speaker and maybe (a workshops on something that would appeal to them) plus morning/afternoon tea or lunch. Doubt this group would want to give up their whole weekend for an event such as this... but this could be a way of sowing some seeds for the future.
- » Gatherings are not just about mental health but are also about learning and having fun.
- » Look into grants to subsidise costs. Struggling working families have barriers that are not just about money but they are also time poor and need access to child care.
- » Use community group leaders to promote the gathering and explain what it can offer younger women. Encourage representatives of local youth/Aboriginal/support groups in the community to engage and invite people to come to gathering.
- » Provide childcare facilities to the women who attend the gathering.



- » Advertise through social media and technology eg Facebook/Instagram.
- » Ensure there are some speakers that are known to the younger generation.
- » Target advertising to younger demographics/audiences through various means eg preschools/gyms, clubs where younger women are.
- » Have workshops around life, health and beauty; also risk taking/adventurous type activities and video. Make it FUN!!
- » Younger women want instant gratification: what can I put on my resume, can I find mentors, develop business and financial skills.
- » Younger working women may have difficulty with timing of the gathering
- » Groups may be able to offer subsidized funding for members to attend.
- » Develop a buddy/mentor system with those who have attended previous gatherings.
- » Childcare and activities – subsidised.
- » Conversations with the men about the importance women’s gatherings.
- » Year 11/12 high school scholarships or discounted rates for high school students. Get a program going where someone goes to the schools to talk about what happens at the gatherings and then have two scholarships at each school...maybe the ones that are close to the gathering each year?
- » SMS younger groups – use social media.
- » Gathering can be life changing experience for younger women. Promotion needs to be very clear what would be discussed at the gathering.
- » Target agricultural industries to encourage their women workforce to attend as part of their professional development.
- » Include a speaker directed at the younger generation. Ask younger women who they are interested in listening to. Ask them the best way to communicate. Communication is the key.

How do we start the conversation and plan for life – post farming and paid work (retirement, transition)? (2 Groups)

‘Succession planning and retirement off farm.’

Top Idea Group 1: Communication and open transparent discussion is critical. Break the planning down to a step-by-step process and make a date for a family ‘meeting’ to start the process.

Top Idea Group 2: The biggest problem is how to fairly treat all of our family whilst looking after ourselves post farming: Get professional help and starting early to communicate with the whole family. Tip: take meeting notes and send them round.

Other Ideas:

- » Always speak about what will happen – in the long term.
- » Women can start intergenerational discussions between sons and husband.
- » Take time away from the property to create space to think more clearly.
- » Recognise the sentimental attachment over generations of farm ownership/management.
- » Initial discussion could help if you involve an outside facilitator.
- » Focus on ‘normalising’ the transitioning process through workshops, publications etc.
- » Ask, listen, join groups where women will speak about problems – generally, but also where ‘information’ is garnered.
- » Build a comfortable relationship with a professional eg accountant.
- » Communicate with everyone in the family.

How can we acknowledge the skills and life experiences of older women and use these to improve rural communities? (2 Groups)

'Ageing isolation usefulness. We are a great untapped resource. Education needs us. We have a particular skill set to help disadvantaged children read and achieve, find their passion, develop their confidence.'

Top Idea Group 1: Hold local story telling/gathering days with inspirational speakers and encourage local women to speak.

Top Idea Group 2: Set up play groups in nursing homes.

Other Ideas:

- » Develop good strategies to market 'what's in it for me' messages to get participation of all ages.
- » Involve and engage people in various 'communities' eg reading in schools by grandparents and school helpers in aged care facilities = sharing of experiences across the ages.
- » Use social media to gather and share skills and life experiences eg create DVDs of women's stories, run webinars.
- » Link and build on ideas through existing networks using social media.
- » Link into existing networks eg School of the Air, CWA, Lions, etc.
- » Recognise that one solution is not the answer. Circumstances and life experiences vary dramatically.
- » Have university students live in nursing homes.
- » Living saints day at Church on a Sunday.
- » Have a community radio segment by older women about issues that affect them.
- » Source semi-retired/retired skilled women for local volunteer committees (eg Landcare) through a targeted skills recruitment process.
- » Involve older women in activities where no one is the expert.

- » Encourage older women to get involved in 'other' groups eg women in business or other non-traditional groups.
- » Develop flexible employment opportunities.
- » Have a register of volunteers and voluntary jobs suited to older women who want to 'work' in the community.
- » Develop resources/assistance for older women who may want to explore a change in their occupation/job/vocation.

How can we improve the recognition of women in agriculture? The bloke is still seen as the 'farmer'.

'Being acknowledged and treated equally as men when dealing with rural businesses and suppliers eg stock sales, mail, banks, phone calls, marketing etc.'

Top Idea: Women are a major player in rural agriculture. All rural agencies, suppliers and businesses need to be encouraged to be more aware and show empathy for women who work in the rural and agricultural areas by providing more equitable marketing of products, female specific educational field days, workshops and general dealing with female clientele.

Other Ideas:

- » When negotiating with a bank - go as a couple and make arrangements to do financial transactions such as loans together.
- » Build awareness around the contribution women make - a lot of off-farm income has come into the business by female partners.
- » Local Land Services, rural suppliers, TAFE, Tocal College, universities to run education and professional development programs and field days specifically targeted at farming women.
- » Machinery dealers/agents have women specific field days.

How do we better communicate and create relationships between the bush and the city?

'How do you communicate and create relationships with bush and city and vice versa?'

Top Idea: Ensure the education curriculum includes excursions, projects and activities that increase an understanding of life in the country and the city. Use technology to link students. Establish 'sister schools' and instigate swaps where country children go to the city and city children go to the country (1-2 weeks).

Other Ideas:

- » Family sponsors to work through the Education Department at both state and federal.
- » Use TV, social media and technology to more effectively market positive country messages that values what the country provides for the city and what the city provides for the country.
- » Encourage people to put themselves forward to represent country areas (advocates/ambassadors for your area) eg Chamber of Commerce, also rural representatives.
- » Improve networking and cohesion between industry bodies eg Meat and Livestock, Target 100, small business.

How could we better support country kids (and adults) going to the city for education, career progression and work? (2 Groups)

'Lack of tertiary educational opportunity for women and their children - exacerbated by rising uni and TAFE fees/ high cost of relocating for study/ low speed satellite incapable of streaming if studying externally. Adds up to costly, stressful environment compared to city experience.'

Top Idea Group 1: There needs to be better promotion/awareness of the financial support available for distance education tutors, secondary, tertiary scholarships and accommodation eg highlight support available through the Country Education Foundation and Isolated Children and Parents Association.

Top Idea Group 2: To address fear and lack of awareness or familiarity with transport and support services in the city establish a mentoring system with volunteer 'Friends of University/College/School' groups (using Facebook, website or an app). Create personal connections by developing a volunteers register that matches those needing support.

Other Ideas:

- » Simplify the application process for youth allowance and financial assistance.
- » The high cost to educate children in boarding houses needs to be considered.
- » More support and recognition for students doing distance education.



- » Accommodation for uni students to be more secure and early confirmation.
- » Create a website/phone app orientation program that helps introduce country kids 'to life in the city' - trains, ferries, buses.
- » Provide support in accessing accommodation - a website with affordable accommodation that gave priority to country students.
- » Develop home town school based education of what's ahead with information on funding/financial support options available.
- » Establish on-going support and create 'extended families'.

How to attract young people into agriculture?

'The difficulty for young farmers to enter the business of agriculture at the grass roots level, to own property and to afford to set up a farming enterprise. With less youth staying on the farm how do we encourage them to stay in the business of farming? How do we entice/enable youth? Access?'

Top Idea: Buying a property is virtually impossible unless through a family inheritance. Research the Queensland Aboriginal land purchase scheme. Develop a government initiative that buys country for a group of likeminded agricultural youth, trained by experienced rural mentors in the industry. Aim would be for the young people to work as a team to ultimately buy into the business and run the enterprise as a co-operative.

Other Ideas:

- » Start in primary and secondary schools Australia-wide giving students early rural experiences and creating an awareness of new pathways.
- » Make agriculture sexy and viable using social media to change perceptions in the wider community.
- » Provide financial support/incentives for young people to bring them into the rural areas and continue to support them so they remain in the agricultural sector.

How could geographically isolated women be better supported with health services (ideas for creative delivery models)?

'Distance to available health resources, impact this has on waiting times, delay in treatment, availability of support, finances and time away from home/families.'

Top Idea: Lack of availability of reliable mobile or internet services is a huge issue. Where possible introduce more tele health facilities to rural/remote areas and educate staff in using them. This would open up the possibilities of skypeing and teleconferencing with specialists. Need to ensure there is also sympathetic listening by specialist with local GP/nurse available to support the patient.

Other Ideas:

- » Skypeing between GP's and patients.
- » Pressure on rural GP's needs to be relieved - patients are on waiting lists and struggle to get a GP, particularly if new to a rural area.
- » Further education needed on the schemes and services that are available to them (IPTAAS, patient transport).
- » 1800 GP - mental health emergency number.
- » Build awareness about Country Carelink support for people going to the city for health reasons.
- » Nurse practitioners.
- » Travelling government funded 'one stop shops' - similar to Breast Screen; travelling GP/dentist etc that stays in the rural villages for several days.
- » Difficulty of getting remote GP's. set up a 1800 GP - phone a GP line as hospitals are not legally able to provide advice to patients.
- » Enabling pharmacists to ally with health professionals by keeping records - blood pressure (if you have a pharmacy).

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