

The Gloucester Women's Gathering

Dreaming beneath the Bucketts

By Emma Regan, Rural Women's Network, Orange

This was to be my first Women's Gathering, and I was looking forward to it with much anticipation.

As I drove into the beautiful Gloucester Valley at the base of the World Heritage Barrington Tops Rainforest, you could tell *something was in the air*. The town was buzzing with excitement as over 300 ladies had travelled to Gloucester to experience the wonderful community spirit. They were looking forward to having some *down time* and to exchange knowledge and information with other like-minded women, increasing their confidence, and learning new skills.

The wonderful community spirit was evident from the moment of registration where each person was welcomed personally by one of the Committee members and presented with a unique hand printed scarf to commemorate the Gathering.

Friday we were free to wander and explore Gloucester Shire to our hearts content before we gathered under the marquee for *Tastes of Gloucester* to savour locally produced finger food and wines. Julie Lyford, Chair of the Gloucester Rural Women's Gathering Committee, welcomed everyone to the gathering. This was followed by the *Welcome to Country* Smoking Ceremony, led by Auntie Norma.



Guests sampling locally produced wines

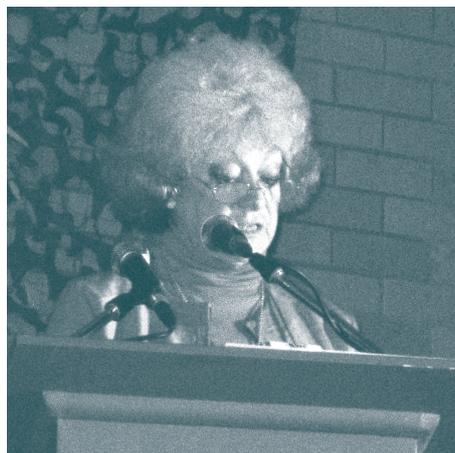
Friday night's entertainment showcased some of Gloucester's entertaining and very talented local poets, including Claire Reynolds, Gabby Colquhoun and Wyatt Hall – Gloucester's very own up and coming young poet. We thoroughly enjoyed both Wyatt and Claire's poetry and were left in stitches of laughter from Gabby's hilarious and clever comedic poetry!



Gabby Colquhoun

After a restful sleep there was opportunity the following morning for some early morning healthy lifestyle activities including: the *Birds of Gloucester walk: a walk up the Bucketts* or tai chi in the park.

Saturday got off to a great start with free time to enjoy the many trade exhibitions. We then convened to the main hall for the Welcome to Country and Official Opening Address from the Rural Women's Network.



Nerida Cullen, Co-Chair, NSW Rural Women's Council

Nerida Cullen, the Co-Chair of the NSW Rural Women's Council gave a comprehensive and passionate overview into the role of the Council and the Rural Women's Network.

A highlight of the weekend was the official opening of the Gathering and the announcement of \$30,000 funding for this year's gathering at Parkes 12–14 October 2012, by Mr Troy Grant, Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources. He also launched the 2012 Hidden Treasures Honour Roll, acknowledging the efforts of NSW rural women volunteers.



Launch of 2012 Hidden Treasures Honour Roll

Keynote Speaker, Lauren Anderson, then spoke to us on the *Collaborative Consumption* movement she is pioneering. *Collaborative Consumption* is the rapid explosion in swapping, sharing, bartering, trading and renting being reinvented through the latest technologies and peer-to-peer marketplaces in ways and on a scale never possible before.

A lovely morning tea of yummy, fresh home made cooking fuelled our bellies for the day ahead! The marquee was busy with new and old networks connecting.

After morning tea we were given an inspiring presentation by special guest Father Chris Riley – *Youth Off the Streets – We Can Make a Difference* which allowed everyone the opportunity to provide input, ideas and inspiration for his important youth work.



Father Chris Riley

Lunch and trade exhibition in the marquee was followed by the afternoon workshops. This was a chance for everyone to enjoy themselves learning a new skill and having a bit of fun. The workshops on offer ranged from art for beginners and bee-keeping, to cheese making and lead lighting, from photo editing and mind mapping! With over 30 trade exhibits and 39 workshops operating over the weekend there was plenty for everyone to see and do. Even the men had workshops to keep them engaged!

A magnificent dinner was on the agenda for Saturday Night. The evening started with pre-dinner drinks and some enjoyable singing by the local choir. This was followed by the Gondwana Rainforest Dinner. The sumptuous, locally grown food and wine was magnificent. The atmosphere was set with white tablecloths adorned with centrepieces of wooden candle holders crafted by local men from the Men's Shed. The Gathering decorator and artist in charge again displayed her creative talents and imagination.

During the evening we were privileged to enjoy the amazing inspirational life story of Guest Speaker Lorna Tomkinson. She gave us an insight into her life growing up in different parts of the world, often in difficult circumstances and the challenges her family faced.

Many of the ladies got into the spirit of Saturday night's theme and dressed in their favourite *House of Vinnies* frock. Prizes were awarded for the best dressed ... this provided all with a step back in time of the wonderful array of fashion over the years!



House of Vinnies competition

Sunday morning provided another opportunity for some early morning healthy lifestyle activities. The Ecumenical Service was held at the Gloucester Primary School – *Reflecting and Connecting Under the Buckets*.

This was followed by keynote speaker Elizabeth Rogers, CEO Regional Arts NSW Arts & Culture, who provided an overview of her *Vital Communities* work. This was followed by another lovely morning tea and trade exhibition in the marquee.

On returning to the hall we were then inspired and motivated by the final Keynote Speaker of the Gathering – Mahboba Rawi. *Mahboba's Promise* was born from one woman's suffering to free herself from depression by working to relieve the desperate circumstances of others.

The weekend wound to a close with Julie Lyford's closing address in which she thanked her very dedicated and hard-working committee volunteers for a wonderful community effort to ensure everyone had time out from the trials and tribulations of life with their excellent program of diverse workshops, tours and guest speakers.

She then handed over the gathering candle to President of the 2012 Parkes Rural Women's Gathering Committee, Caroline Rice. Caroline introduced her committee members and invited us to the Parkes Gathering on 14–16 October 2012.

I left with a renewed energy and inspiration from the wonderful speakers. All in all it was a fantastic weekend and I am looking forward to repeating the adventure at Parkes this year! I will finish by quoting a lovely thank you letter received from one of the ladies who attended the Gloucester Gathering.

Thank you for a truly amazing and inspiring weekend! That really doesn't do it justice. It was just SO WONDERFUL! The management of this wonderful event was superb. Every detail was covered ... I couldn't get over how the meals were so perfect – nothing cold and nothing over-cooked. And everything was yummy! The speakers were of impeccable standard. I have started spreading the word about the Gathering and the speakers – Social Media is a wonderful thing! I purchased this week's Gloucester Advocate and saw myself on page 6! I was so inspired I couldn't sleep when I returned home on Sunday. Without your generosity this wouldn't have been possible.



The Gloucester Gathering Committee