



Believing Women for a Culture of Peace Inc

ANNUAL REPORT

October 2011– September 2012

Introduction

May God's peace and blessings be upon you all. I begin in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Compassionate.

This has been a "quieter" year than usual in terms of internal activities for BWCP. However, we are still finding that new people are interested in joining the group or being on our contact list, a sign of the need many people feel to build bridges across diverse faith and life ways. The continued interest in bridge-building initiatives is especially inspiring and heartening as we must acknowledge that recent items, activities and events such as the release of the so-called film "Innocence of Muslims" and the subsequent protest by a minority of Muslims worldwide do set us back a bit,

I have been involved in interfaith work for 18 years now, and one thing I have learnt along this journey is that in order to meet these challenges and build genuine coexistence and sustainable peace, interfaith must go beyond just merely speaking politely to one another or simply leaning about one another's faith – it must deeply involve a process of intra-faith, where we look inwardly at ourselves, and deeply reflect how our faith informs us, our worldview and our relationship with others, especially those who are "different".

I firmly believe that in its 9 years of existence, BWCP has been able to make great gains in harnessing that culture of genuine and meaningful coexistence and if we have more peacemakers like you assisting, we can, as my good friend Dave Andrews consistently states, "rebuild the bridges between us that the extremists keep blowing up."

Flying with Two Wings Project

As mentioned in last year's Annual Report, one of the plans for following up the publication of the toolkit was to invite representatives of other relevant organisations to meet and plan an event for the 2011 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to be held on or near 25th November.

The planning involved representatives of WILPF (the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) and the Violence against Women group of Amnesty Brisbane. (BWCP and WILPF had partnered on a couple of earlier occasions to stage public events to mark the 25th November.) The planning group decided to organize two events, one in the middle of the day at Logan Central and the other in the late afternoon in Brisbane City.

Speakers at the Logan event were Aboriginal community development worker Kerry Charlton; Maria Delaney, Association of Women Educators, working with teachers on violence prevention; Norma Forrest, WILPF; Brisbane City Councillor Kim Marx, Karawatha Ward; and Sue Donaldson, Amnesty.

At the Brisbane City public event the presenters were Cathy Devine & Norma Forrest, WILPF; Alimatul Qibtiyah & Sarah Mehmet, BWCP; Maree Klemm, Amnesty (also a member of BWCP); and William Carson, a member of the public and winner that day of an Indigenous violence prevention award.

Tsoof Baras (son of Ronit and Gal) and Sarah La Sala provided musical performances for both

events, and the WILPF Performers for Peace provided two items for the Brisbane event. We were grateful for the support of Councillor Kim Marx at the Logan event, and Councillor Helen Abrahams, The Gabba Ward, at the Brisbane City event. Manijeh Monsef helped with the practical arrangements at both events.

We have continued to use the opportunity to make the toolkit available at all relevant events.

Other Special Events and Activities

Our key internal dialogue event for the year was a pre- Mother's Day presentation by Alimatul Qibtiyah on "**Motherhood from the perspective of religious feminism**". In the process of completing her doctoral thesis, focusing on Muslim feminist identity and gender studies in Indonesia, Alim provided a wide-ranging and in-depth analysis of gender and faith issues. Unfortunately the lack of time did not allow for an adequate presentation of responses from women of other faiths or more general discussion and dialogue.

In October 2011 BWCP co-hosted with Peace Bene an evening event at the Parliamentary Annex, featuring Kathy Kelly, a renowned Peace and non-violence activist from the USA. Kathy's presentation on '**The Cost of War, the Price of Peace**' drew participants from a range of peace and justice groups in Brisbane. The organizer, BWCP Committee member Carole Powell, has since undertaken a lengthy peace and non-violent resistance training program.

In June 2012 BWCP co-sponsored, with AMARAH and the Multi-Faith Centre, an speaking event at the Centre with Avigail Abarbanel, a Jewish woman now residing in Scotland, who visiting Australia on a promotional tour of "**Beyond Tribal Loyalties - the Personal Stories of Jewish Peace Activists**". It was also an opportunity to recognize the contributions to the book by BWCP Committee member Margot Salom and BWCP friend Ray Bergmann.

In the coming year, Committee member Sue Zaphir plans to promote and implement a **new peace building initiative**, bringing small groups of women from different faiths together to share food and life experiences. We also hope to continue our dialogue series, '**Sharing precious**

gems of spiritual wisdom and inspiration' from different faith traditions and to hold a weekend retreat.

Faith-related celebrations

The **BWCP Christmas celebration** continues to be one of our treasured annual events, open to all members, contacts, friends and families, and including special activities for children. For our 2011 event, Kerry Pierce kindly arranged the use of the hall at the Yeronga Uniting Church hall, along with a talented pianist to entertain us. A highlight of the event was watching the children 'recreate' the traditional story of Jesus' birth.

This year we were unable to hold our traditional multi-faith **Eid ul-Fitr** celebration. Instead, Committee member Fenti Forsyth kindly arranged an open invitation to BWCP members and contacts to the Indonesian community event. It was an opportunity to meet up with many in our multi-faith and multicultural networks, as well as to enjoy the entertaining program and the delicious food.

Other International Commemorations

WILPF kindly provided space on their stall for the display of BWCP materials for the **International Women's Day** annual fundraising breakfast organised by the local UN Women branch at the Brisbane Convention Centre. Manijeh Monsef and Wendy Flannery were present, and Manijeh used the opportunity to promote our toolkit to high school students. Several BWCP members attended the IWD fundraising event organized by Janeth Deen. Manijeh arranged for the Baha'i Dance Troupe to perform as our contribution to the program.

Instead of organizing our own event for this year's **Harmony Day**, we advertised the intergenerational schools program, '**Wisdom in the Wrinkles**'. It was organized under the auspices of Together for Humanity by Ronit Baras. Christine Fensham, Fouzia Peer and Wendy Flannery took part and had a thoroughly enjoyable experience with upper primary students from 4 schools.

On 21st September, for the 2012 **International Day of Peace**, we organized a screening at the Multi-Faith Centre of 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell',

documenting the courageous and inspiring peace-making movement of Christian and Muslim women in Liberia. The screening drew a number of people who hadn't been to one of our events before and who appreciated the opportunity to engage with others in a multi-faith context.

Public Engagements

The 2011 **Qld Multicultural Festival** included an interfaith space, with panels of speakers and dialogue sessions at different times during the day. I was very pleased to have the opportunity to be the Muslim presenter on several of these. I also shared the Muslim perspective at the Interfaith Dialogue event at the 2012 Buddha Birthday celebrations at South Bank.

BWCP supported the nomination of member Janeth Deen for the 2011 **Queensland Multicultural Awards**. Janeth, a lifelong champion of harmony and multiculturalism was honoured with the Volunteer award.

Having served as a judge for the first two years of the WILPF **Qld Peace Women Awards**, BWCP activities coordinator, Wendy Flannery, was presented with a 2012 award herself. The award was in part recognition of her commitment to fostering positive relationships across faiths and cultures, including through BWCP.

Towards the end of 2011, in the name of BWCP, Wendy responded to the invitation by the then events coordinator in the Queensland Premier's Department to offer ideas for the regular public **multi-faith ceremony for Australia Day**. As it happened, the event had to be cancelled for weather reasons. Wendy has attended a planning meeting for the ceremony in 2013.

Wendy also represented BWCP at the community event for the annual **Global Day of Action on Military Spending** organised by Just Peace. She used the opportunity to promote 'Flying with Two Wings' and the 'Charter for Compassion'.

Fundraising

Our main fundraising event this year was a multi-faith Trivia afternoon, held at St Bernard's parish hall, Upper Mt Gravatt. In addition to the enjoyment of team work for the quiz, there was a

delightful performance by the Baha'i girls Dance Troupe and a delicious afternoon tea. Azima Omar and Manijeh Monsef organized a silent auction to help augment the funds raised. We are happy to make the prepared quiz available to other interested groups.

Relationship with the Multi-Faith Centre

BWCP members welcomed the opportunity to join in a number of different activities organized to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Multi-Faith Centre (M-FC). Our members continue to be regular attendants at the Centre's events. On 28th March a few members of the BWCP Coordinating Committee met for lunch with Yaseen Haider, who was resigning as M-FC Administrative Officer. We presented him with a certificate in appreciation of his friendship and support for BWCP's activities over many years.

Community Connections and Networking

BWCP has continued to promote the events of and collaborate with other faith, interfaith, community and women and peace groups, such as the Northside Interfaith Group, the Qld Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims, the Federation of Indian Communities of Qld, the Baha'i Centre of Learning, the Women's Ethnic Network of the Ethnic Communities Council of Qld, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Together for Humanity. This year we have been trying to build a more collaborative relationship with the Pure Land Learning College in Toowoomba, especially by promoting its multi-faith programs.

An opportunity to build a **new community connection** opened up recently when four BWCP members accepted the invitation to meet with a group in **Boonah**. This Anglican-church-based study group is keen to be more involved in promoting interfaith understanding in their community. We shared our experience with them and discussed some options for local initiatives. The group has now invited us to be involved with them next year in an event designed to involve the wider Boonah community.

Our e-newsletter, News & Events Updates, goes out to around 130 subscribers every 4 to 6 weeks, as well as extra events updates from time to time.

Our Facebook page provides a space for members to interact and network informally, as well as for promoting our events. We are still in the process of arranging for the regular updating of our website.

Conclusion

Friends, this was my third year as Chairperson of the Coordinating Committee and what an honour it has been to be part of such a vibrant and dynamic organisation, surrounded by women like you who truly believe that we cannot build a better world until we start dialoging and engaging meaningfully with one another.

My heartfelt gratitude to the Committee for your contributions, making my role as chairperson just that much easier. And a special thanks to our Activities Coordinator and Secretary/Treasurer, Wendy Flannery, who gives so much of herself to BWCP. We would not be able to achieve half of what we do without her commitment.

Since September last year, Wendy has been able to work out of an office in Justice Place. We thank the Brisbane Sisters of Mercy for make this space available free of charge, and for enabling BWCP to use the Justice Place facilities for so many of its meetings and gatherings.

And to you all, our members and friends, who continue to support us in whichever way you can, a huge thank you.

I wish you all peace my fellow peacemakers.

Nora Amath
Chairperson, BWCP 2010-2011