

Year In Review 2016-17



COUNTER  PART

Women supporting women with cancer

Connecting,  
supporting and  
informing women  
with breast or a  
gynaecological  
cancer to live well.

“

*I felt right at home. I knew straight  
away I was accepted for myself.*



Jessie, volunteer

## Our Service Principles

### **Acknowledge Difference**

We recognise that every person's experience of breast or a gynaecological cancer is different and must be seen in the broader context of their lives.

### **No Advice**

We share experiences and give support, we do not provide medical, legal or financial advice or counselling.

### **Welcoming Environment**

We provide a welcoming, accessible and safe environment.

### **Encourage Participation**

We actively encourage people to participate in the development and operation of the service.

### **Empower People**

We are committed to enhancing people's skills and capacity to make their own informed choices.

### **Respect Privacy**

We respect the privacy of people using our service.

### **Non-Judgemental**

We provide information and support in a non-judgemental way.

### **High Standards**

We maintain high standards in all aspects of the service and regularly evaluate the service's relevance to consumers, its sustainability, and effectiveness.

Cover photo: Volunteers at the launch of Counterpart, May 2017.  
Front (L-R): Helen, Meril, Lois S, Pam, Chris S.  
Back (L-R): Pauline, Rhonda.



(L-R) Helen Coleman, Chair, Counterpart Advisory Group; Desiree Yap, Chair, Women's Health Victoria Board; Rita Butera, Executive Director, Women's Health Victoria; Dale Fisher, CEO, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, at the launch of Counterpart, 31 May 2017.

## Rita's message

Women's Health Victoria is a not-for-profit, statewide organisation that works to improve the health and wellbeing of Victorian women. Our vision is *Women living well – healthy, empowered, equal*.

As one of five priorities in our Strategic Directions 2015–2018, our cancer support service, Counterpart, provides services by women for women, recognising the role of gender in the experiences of women with cancer.

We are proud of Counterpart and its achievements this year. The highlight was the launch of our new brand, Counterpart – women supporting women with cancer, by Dale Fisher, CEO of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

The new name has been warmly received by health professionals, women who use our service, volunteers and staff. As Counterpart, we continue to provide high-quality, holistic, free and confidential support to Victorian women with cancer.

We also welcomed a new manager, Dianne Hill, who, along with her small staff team and the Peer Support and Program Volunteers, has delivered a range of programs designed to connect, support and inform Victorian women affected by cancer to live well.

I am continually inspired by the stories of women at Counterpart. The volunteers show amazing skill in providing emotional support to other women who have experienced a cancer

diagnosis. Our new brand celebrates these stories and you can read about them in this report.

We look forward to the coming year as we consolidate Counterpart's role in cancer support and expand our programs to support more women with cancer in Victoria.

**Rita Butera**  
Executive Director  
Women's Health Victoria

## Helen's message

Women and Cancer is a key priority of Women's Health Victoria (WHV) and on behalf of the WHV Board, I have been honoured to Chair the Counterpart Advisory Group.

It has been a dynamic year for everyone involved. After months of consultation we unveiled our new brand: Counterpart – women supporting women with cancer.

Since 2003, BreaCan has provided high quality peer support to Victorian women with breast cancer, expanding to gynaecological cancer in 2008.

Our new brand recognises peer support is the heart of our service and pays tribute to the compassionate women who volunteer at Counterpart to support and give hope to other women with cancer. I am inspired by their commitment and I thank them for their great work.

Three Peer Support Volunteers joined the Counterpart Advisory Group this year. I'd like to thank Victoria (who, sadly, died in August 2017), Pam and Janice for their insightful perspectives about the service.

I'd also like to thank the other members for their contributions to Counterpart, particularly with the service development project. This vital work provided a clear plan for the next two years, focusing on extending services to reach more women, particularly in outer metro and rural locations.

I'd like to thank the Victorian Government, Treasure Chest Inc., Pink Affair and the LUCRF Community Partnership Trust for their generous financial contributions, the wonderful individuals and organisations who partnered with us to promote and deliver our programs, and staff for their excellent work during the year.

Supportive care and survivorship continue to be important areas of growth in the cancer sector, as survival rates improve and more people are adjusting to life after a cancer diagnosis. Counterpart will continue to evolve as we strive to connect, support and inform more women with breast or a gynaecological cancer to live well.

**Helen Coleman**  
Chair  
Counterpart Advisory Group



## Coralie's story

Being a Peer Support Volunteer in the Bridge of Support Western Health program during the last 18 months has been surprising, educational and inspirational. The women I meet may speak English as their second or third language, be the sole carer in an extended family, be caring for grandchildren whose parents are absent for various reasons, or be young women with toddlers. Whatever the situation, a cancer diagnosis creates common ground for emotional support and shared stories.

On any day volunteering, I might meet with women who are being treated for breast cancer in Radiology or Day Oncology, or attending

outpatient appointments at the Breast Clinic. Our contact often comes at a time when these women may feel at their most vulnerable, when the diagnosis is raw and the course of treatment unfamiliar and frightening. As I listen to their stories, I hear anxieties, fears and uncertainties that have a familiar ring with my own experience. As a volunteer, it is rewarding to be able to share and at times alleviate some of their anxiety. They see another woman who has finished treatment, who is comfortable to talk about her experience and this can offer hope.

We often talk to women at different stages as they face various

challenges during their treatment. It can be heartwarming to hear that they have reached a particular milestone! They will often request another volunteer visit: a follow-up chat can provide the space to explore a further issue or gain confidence with their decision-making. The hospital setting is also a great opportunity for carers and family to talk about the challenges they are facing.

At such a crucial time, it is valuable for women to know that they can share their fears and not be judged, there is reliable information at hand and they are not alone.

## Dianne's message



It has been a year to celebrate. As BreaCan, our service supported women with cancer over 25,000 times. However, the 2016 evaluation found BreaCan's brand lacked broader recognition amongst women with a gynaecological cancer and some health professionals. It was time to find a new name, one that reflects our values and the work we do, and provides a warm, professional brand to women with cancer and health professionals.

Over 100 guests attended the unveiling of Counterpart – women supporting women with cancer, at a ceremony hosted by Dr Sally Cockburn. In a fitting tribute to the service, Dale Fisher said, 'Counterpart provides a very special and unique service to women living with breast or a gynaecological cancer'.

Counterpart honours the vision of the women who founded the service and all those who contributed over the last 14 years. The new brand celebrates the essence of our service: the warmth, trust, care and positive energy created when women connect and support each other.

During the past year, we have:

- delivered high quality programs and evidence-based information to Victorian women with breast or a gynaecological cancer over 2400 times
- supported women diagnosed with cancer in our Resource Centre and at the Bridge of Support programs at Royal Melbourne, Royal Women's and Sunshine Hospitals
- delivered 96 exercise, health and wellbeing sessions and webinars with qualified presenters
- provided six Stepping into Wellness exercise programs
- completed a service development project to identify our future priorities.

As you read through the *Year in Review* you will find inspiring stories about the women who use, support and deliver our service.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our counterparts in cancer care – our funding partners, health professionals and service providers who promote and refer women to our service, contribute to our health and wellbeing sessions, or partner with us to deliver outreach and other projects.

Thank you also to my own counterparts – the inspiring women I work with – the small staff team and our Peer Support and Program Volunteers whose dedication and caring brings hope and courage to other women as we strive to connect and support women living with cancer to live well.

And lastly, to the women themselves who use our service: you are the reason we do what we do. Thank you for trusting us to be your counterparts. Whether it's for a short time or a long time, you are not alone.

In the year ahead, we look forward to growing our service to support and give hope to more Victorian women affected by cancer, so they can live well too.

**Dianne Hill**  
Manager  
Counterpart



The BreaCan 10th Anniversary Quilt, handmade in 2013 by volunteers, service users and other supporters of the service.

## Looking to the future

During the year, we completed a service development project to identify our future priorities. Along with delivering our existing activities and increasing awareness of our service, our key development priorities for the next two years will focus on increasing Counterpart's reach to more women with cancer across Victoria.

This includes:

- expanding our outreach activities
- improving access to our programs for rural women
- exploring new ways to use technology
- developing a Navigator app for women living with a gynaecological cancer.

Counterpart will remain at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre for the next three years, a building in central Melbourne dedicated to the provision of services to support women.

# Volunteering at Counterpart

**Volunteers are the heart of our service. Averaging over 50 hours of volunteering every week, our volunteers contribute to every aspect of Counterpart.**

Whether listening to and supporting other women who have experienced breast or a gynaecological cancer; assisting with fitness programs to give women the confidence to get back into exercise; or restocking information booklets for the library — Counterpart volunteers are dedicated to empowering other women to live well following a cancer diagnosis.

## Peer Support Volunteers

In 2016, eight women completed peer support training and a three-month orientation period, where they teamed up with experienced volunteers to develop their skills as Peer Support Volunteers. Now volunteers like Margaret (whose story is opposite) have the confidence and skills to give women who use the service the support that can only come from shared experience and understanding.



*I have gained a sense of purpose: that I am able to make a positive difference. I have met some wonderful people – both staff and volunteers. Counterpart has given me the opportunity to give. This is priceless. I call it a 10 out of 10 human experience. Incredibly rewarding.*

**Volunteer evaluation 2016**

In June 2017, another 12 women successfully applied for the next intake of Peer Support Volunteers and they will complete their training and orientation at the end of 2017.

Quarterly in-services give our volunteers tools to help them keep up-to-date with information, look after their own wellbeing and support other women as best they can. Guest speakers also provide expert knowledge. In the last year, Courtney Smyth

from the Familial Cancer Centre at Monash Health discussed the complexities of genetic counselling. Annemarie Ferguson and Hayley Russell from Ovarian Cancer Australia spoke about their research and services for women living with ovarian cancer. To increase volunteers' confidence in supporting women living with advanced cancers, counsellor and educator Jo Gniel facilitated an engaged and thoughtful discussion with contributions from our volunteers who have advanced cancer.

## Program Volunteers

Our volunteers also stepped forward to take on new program roles this year. With six Stepping into Wellness exercise programs run, there was need for some of our volunteers to head out across Melbourne to assist with the

programs. An extra mail-out coinciding with the Counterpart rebrand also meant more work for Program Volunteers who, along with volunteers from the National Australia Bank, filled over 10,000 envelopes with flyers for our What's On program, brochures and other information.

## Fostering community

In November 2016, nearly 50 volunteers and staff celebrated the volunteers' achievements with a delicious Italian meal at Mezzo in central Melbourne. The room buzzed with laughter as volunteers had a chance to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. In May 2017, we came together again to celebrate National Volunteering Week at a morning tea in the Resource Centre.

In 2016-17 **56** volunteers contributed **2596** hours of their time.

### Peer Support Volunteers:

**1590** hours  
Resource Centre



**256** hours  
Bridge of Support programs  
(at Sunshine, Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's Hospitals)

### Program Volunteers:

 **123** hours  
supporting exercise programs

**330** hours in the library

 **129** hours helping with mail-outs and promotional events

**168** hours as Peer Link Volunteers at Sunshine Hospital



## Margaret's story

I was blindsided when diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013. I was at a time in my life when I felt really healthy, having been a fit and active bushwalker for many years. I had regular mammograms, but the cancer did not show up at screening.

The diagnosis was very scary. Having lost friends and colleagues to breast cancer over the years, I did not know anyone who had survived more than a couple of years.

When I first phoned Counterpart (then BreaCan), I was reassured to know all the volunteers had experienced cancer and many have volunteered for a long time. It put my mind at rest to speak to women who have been through a diagnosis and treatment and emerged on the other side.

At the end of my treatment regime, with my hair still gone and no eyebrows, I tottered along to several What's On sessions. These were helpful, but two years after my treatment finished, I still had not fully come to terms with 'life after cancer'.

By the next year my attitude had changed: I applied to be a Peer Support Volunteer in 2016 and undertook Counterpart's excellent training program. The other women in my training intake were all inspiring and impressive, as are the current volunteers and staff!

I have felt supported and encouraged as I settled into the volunteer role. I can relate to the women I talk to: even if their experience is different, we share similar fears, concerns and apprehensions.

## Sophie's Story

I am a Breast Surgeon and work at Western Health where we have two breast clinics every week. We have had Bridge of Support Peer Support Volunteers attending our clinics for about a year. I refer patients who have been recently diagnosed with breast cancer as well as those who are one or more years since their initial diagnosis. A large proportion of the patients to whom I offer this service are interested and all have told me that the meeting they had with the volunteer was useful.

As clinicians, we haven't experienced breast cancer, but the volunteers have actually experienced a cancer diagnosis and have walked in the patient's shoes. It has been especially useful for patients moving into the survivorship phase after active treatment.

The Bridge of Support program is easily accessible and complements the multidisciplinary team. It also helps to transition patients from hospital, to home and the community.



## Bridge of Support

Bridge of Support evolved as a means of improving early access to Counterpart services by connecting with newly-diagnosed women during their hospital treatment.

This acute-community sector partnership demonstrates how the medical and social models of health can work in harmony to provide a high-quality service for women undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

The program represents an extension of Counterpart's overarching philosophy and service model, recognising the integral role of peer support in the provision of optimal supportive care for women with cancer. Skilled Peer Support Volunteers, who have had their own cancer experiences and are living well, provide comfort to women during this challenging time.

Bridge of Support is provided at the Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's Hospitals thanks to the generous support of Treasure Chest Inc, a charity supporting women with breast cancer. Peer Support Volunteers visited women at the hospital to provide emotional support and tailored information. Many women then had contact with volunteers through our Resource Centre and health and wellbeing sessions, providing a seamless transition from hospital to community-based support.

Now in its eighth year, the program would not be successful without the support of Professor Bruce Mann, the amazing breast care nurses Kerry, Sue and Monique, and ward staff. Later in 2017, the program will extend to women with a gynaecological cancer at the Royal Women's Hospital and Day Therapy at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre.

Bridge of Support Western Health was provided at Sunshine Hospital thanks to the generous support of LUCRF Community Partnership Trust.

Operating in the Breast Clinic, Day Oncology and Radiotherapy, this program has gained significant momentum in its first full year. Our partnership with the Breast Service has seen the program achieve nearly 200 contacts with women from the west, with 53 per cent born in a non-main English speaking country. Our thanks go to the Program Steering Committee, including Dr Meron Pitcher, Coralie, Chris, Ilana, Jo, and breast care nurses Melanie, Kylie, Leanne, and Sara. Victorian Government funding has secured this program for a further 18 months.

“  
*They made me feel like there are people who care.’*

Bridge of Support Sunshine exhibited two poster presentations this year:

- *Bridge of Support – a collaborative approach to a peer support program*, Survivorship Conference, Adelaide, February 2017
- *Peer support from hospital to the home – a partnership in supportive care*, Integrated Cancer Services Conference, Victoria, May 2017.

“  
*I had problems with the language barrier but they were very friendly and joining the mail list was helpful.*  
**Service users at Sunshine Hospital**

Our thanks and admiration go to the volunteers for their dedication and commitment to travel to these outreach locations so women can have the benefit of peer support at a crucial time in their cancer journey.



## Mithila's story

I was a 30 year-old who had not known anyone to have any cancer let alone breast cancer and I was scared shitless. I thought I was going to die before I started chemo, then I thought I was going to die during chemo but now I think I'm not going anywhere. That's taken time and crucial help – help I first got from a Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer.

It was during my chemotherapy treatment at Sunshine Hospital that I met my 'counterpart' volunteer. When the coordinator came around to ask if I would like to speak with a Peer Support Volunteer I was ecstatic. I wanted to see how a woman actually looks after breast cancer. Will she be flat-chested? Will she stand out in a crowd? Will she

be partially bald? Maybe she'll be ugly? It was so important for me to see and hear the experiences of another woman who has been there, done that. And if I was lucky I'd get to have a feel!

It was the very first time I had seen a walking, talking breast cancer survivor and that certainly gave me hope. Hope that it wasn't the end of the world. Hope that if she can get through it, I can get through it. Hope that I too would one day be alive and well. Hope to be fit and healthy. Hope that I too would have hair and eyebrows again. Hope to wear pretty dresses just like her!

She was like an angel sent from Heaven. I instantly took a liking to her. No questions were off the chart and with

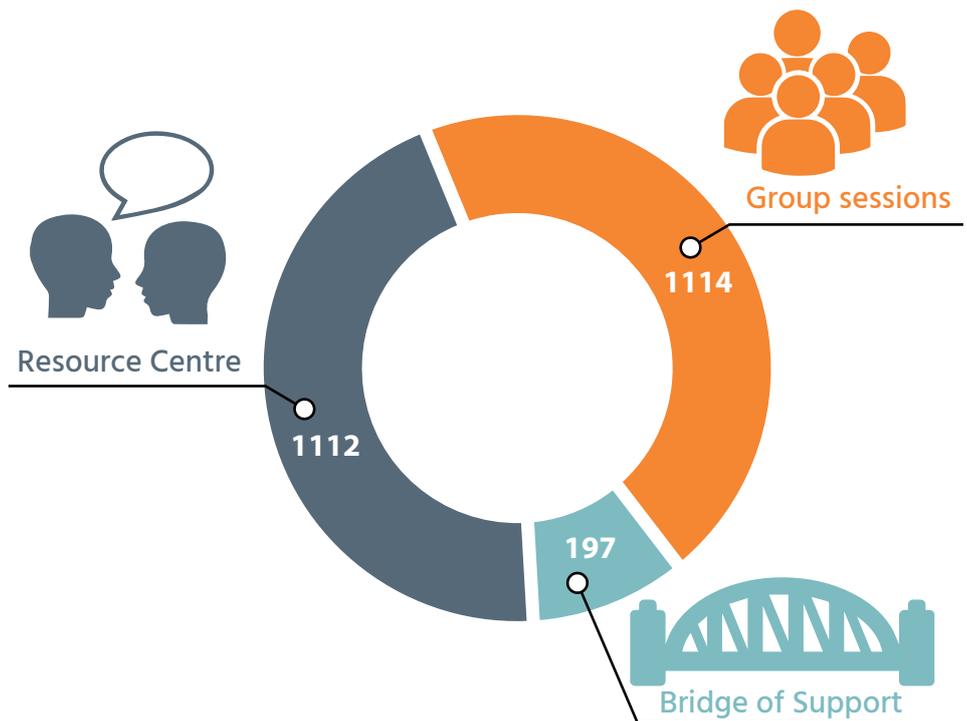
her calm demeanour she certainly made me feel I could pass through my recently diagnosed cancer. I spoke of my dislike about chemo and she just understood. I looked forward to meeting her during my regular chemo sessions as I knew Counterpart did the rounds on Mondays! I had questions ready for her in advance.

My outlook on cancer life was positive after we spoke and that benefited me immensely. It's exactly what I needed to turn things around at the very start. I would like to encourage women to talk to a Peer Support Volunteer. It may just change your view on life during cancer!

# At a glance 2016–17

We had **2423** contacts with people affected by breast or a gynaecological cancer.

**12%** 



## Demographics\*

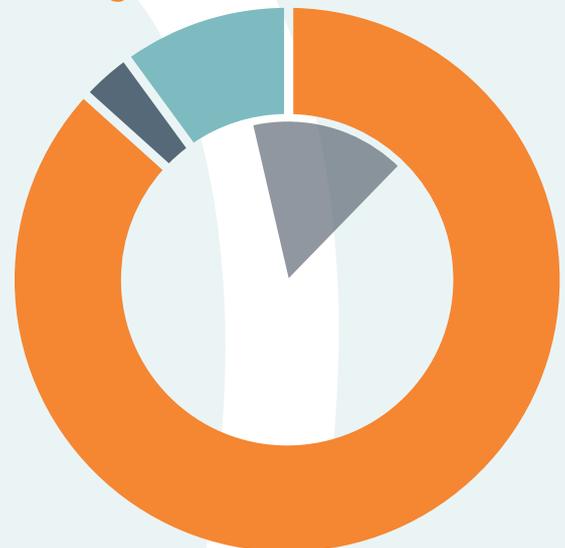
**27%** contacts with people born in a non-main English speaking country

(Compared with 19.6% of the Victorian population in the 2011 census)

**26 languages**

spoken at home by women who use the service.

## Diagnosis\*



\*Of those contacts where data is recorded.

## Group Sessions

**96**  
sessions  
held



**28** What's On  
**6** Making Connections  
(events for women living  
with advanced cancer)  
**58** Exercise (Feel Good and  
Stepping into Wellness)  
**4** Yoga program

**15** webinars



**45** in  
community  
locations



## Online Information



**10,016**  
unique website  
visitors

**5%** ↑



**713**  
webinar videos  
watched

**37%** ↑

## Volunteers

**2596**  
hours  
volunteered

**9%**  
↑

**1846**  
by Peer Support  
Volunteers

**2%**  
↑

**750**  
by Program  
Volunteers

**32%**  
↑

## Communications

**4560**  
people on  
our mailing list

**5%** ↑



**1003**  
health professionals



**3557**  
individuals

## Informing and connecting



Photographer Bob Clothier, Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer Janice (far left) and City Street Photography participants.

### What's On

Health and wellbeing sessions are another way Counterpart connects and supports women with breast or a gynaecological cancer to live well. In 2016–17, sessions covered a wide range of topics including research, treatment and living well, while creating a warm, safe space for women to connect.

Our creative and lifestyle sessions provided the opportunity for women to come together to relax and have fun. Sessions such as doll making and photography encouraged women to use creativity to direct energy into looking at their cancer experience in different ways, while fostering connection between women.

We often ask women who attend these sessions to provide feedback. Women give ideas for future sessions and provide information about their individual cancer experience.



*Very informative and natural speaker.*

*What's On session participant*

### Making Connections

While women with advanced cancer participate in many Counterpart activities, our Making Connections program offers events tailored to their specific needs. In 2016–17, this program included information on research and health information, as well as wellness-focused sessions.

We held our first Making Connections outreach session, with support from Eastern Health, in Croydon. Fifteen women with advanced cancer enjoyed Tai Chi, afternoon tea and a discussion on communicating with their oncologist, along with peer support from two Counterpart volunteers with advanced cancer. Feedback from the women who came along was very positive.



Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer Nadia and Dr Dani Bullen in conversation at the Gynaecological Cancer: Self-esteem and Intimacy forum organised in partnership with Ovarian Cancer Australia, November 2016.



*Would have benefited having this information seven years ago.*

*What's On session participant*

### Webinars

Many sessions were also presented as webinars so women could join in from the comfort of their own home or meet with a group in a community location. Once recorded, webinars are posted on our website as ongoing resources.

We extend our thanks to our presenters who share their expertise, empathy and compassion generously with the women we support.

### Library

Women with breast or a gynaecological cancer can borrow resources from our library for free and these can be posted anywhere in Victoria. Our library contains a range of books, CDs and DVDs containing evidence-based resources and personal stories.

A range of free digital resources are available through the Counterpart library and 112 hard copy resources were borrowed in 2016–17.

## What's On

### Clinical

#### **Breast Reconstruction**

Dr Kim Taylor, Plastic Surgeon

#### **Hormones and Cancer**

Dr Sabashini Ramchand, Endocrinologist and Researcher, Austin Hospital

#### **Lymphoedema**

Helen Eason, Physiotherapist, Victorian Lymphoedema Practice

#### **Menopause Symptoms After Cancer**

Faith Rees, Nurse Coordinator, Menopause Symptoms After Cancer Clinic, The Royal Women's Hospital

#### **Obesity and Breast Cancer**

Kristy Brown, Head of the Metabolism and Cancer Laboratory, Hudson Institute of Medical Research

#### **Peripheral Neuropathy**

Dr Shirley Wong, Consultant Medical Oncologist

#### **Science of Exercise**

Dr Karen White, Medical Oncologist

#### **Understanding Your Pathology Report**

Dr Eric Sumithran, Anatomical Pathologist, The Royal Women's Hospital

#### **Vitamin D and Cancer**

Dr Allison Hodge, Cancer Epidemiology Centre

#### **Your Immune System and Cancer**

Professor Jonathan Cebon, Medical Director, Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre

#### **Your Pelvic Floor**

Libby Oldfield, Specialist Continence and Women's Health Physiotherapist, Fitwise Physiotherapy

### Wellbeing

#### **Anxiety and Cancer**

Dr Maria Ftanou, Clinical Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

#### **Dietary Choices After Cancer**

Dr Maree Brinkman, Accredited Practising Dietitian and Honorary Research Fellow in Nutritional Epidemiology, Cancer Council Victoria

#### **Feldenkrais**

Thalia Castles, Feldenkrais practitioner

#### **Gynaecological Cancer: Self-esteem and Intimacy**

Dr Dani Bullen, Clinical Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

#### **Introduction to Wellness**

Dr Leon Tan, Wellness Medical Practitioner and GP

#### **Health and Healing for Body and Mind**

Associate Professor Craig Hassed, Monash University

#### **Healing Yoga**

Swami Karunananda, Doncaster Yoga and Meditation

#### **Learn About Oncology Massage**

Kate Butler, Oncology Massage Therapist, ReMed Ancora

#### **Managing Chronic Illness**

Mary Macheras-Magias, Consumer Representation and Training, Health Issues Centre

#### **Shrinking the Worries**

Lynda Evans, Clinical Social Worker and Family Therapist

#### **Support for Young People when a Parent has Cancer**

Christina Strouzas, CanTeen

### Creative and nurturing

#### **African Drumming**

Jeremy Prentice, African Drumming

#### **Bellydance**

Charni, Happy Hips Bellydance

#### **City Street Photography**

Bob Clothier, Photographer

#### **Morning Tea and Reflexology for Women with Gynaecological Cancer**

Bernadette Voss, Reflexologist

#### **Tea, Nurturing and Mindfulness**

Sarah Cowell, Teasense

#### **Transformation Through Doll-Making**

Lisa Fam, Art Therapist

#### **Sashiko**

Leanne O'Sullivan, Kimono House

## Making Connections

#### **Breast Cancer and Bone Metastases**

Dr Yoland Antill, Medical Oncologist, Cabrini and Peninsula Health

#### **Tai Chi Workshop for Women Living with Advanced Cancer**

Margie Brett, Celestial Tai Chi

#### **An Afternoon for Women Living with Advanced Cancer**

Dr Jacquie Chirgwin, Medical Oncologist

#### **The Role of Exercise in the Management of Advanced Cancer**

Associate Professor Prue Cormie, Australian Catholic University

#### **Listening to Music for Energy, Relaxation and Creativity (Advanced Breast Cancer Awareness Day)**

Kay Kilham, Music and Imagery Therapist

#### **Decision Making for Women with Advanced Cancer**

Dr Michelle White, Medical Oncologist, Cabrini and Monash Medical Centre

#### **Morning Tea for Women Living with Advanced Cancer**

## Supporting women in rural and regional Victoria

As a state-wide service, supporting women in rural areas is an important part of our work. In 2016, the Department of Health and Human Services funded Counterpart to run a rural project for three years to assist rural women with cancer to access peer support and information and our Rural Program Coordinator commenced in November 2016.

In this first year the project has focused on engaging with key service development agencies and service providers to:

- promote Counterpart and its programs
- demonstrate how existing programs can be accessed by rural women and health professionals
- strengthen partnerships with service providers

- identify gaps and opportunities for further development of Counterpart's programs to meet the needs of rural women.

Meetings and site visits have been held with Integrated Cancer Services and other service providers in Ballarat, Maryborough, Bendigo, Horsham, Hopetoun, Mildura and Swan Hill, with other areas scheduled later in 2017.

Highlights to July 2017 included:

- a pilot of hosted webinars with Ballarat Wellness Centre
- engagement with Wimmera Cancer Resource Nurses
- presentation to a forum of General Practitioners, practice nurses and allied health professionals in Mildura (25 participants)

- engagement with Castlemaine GPs and service providers.

More than 100 women attended a Rural Women's Health Forum in Elmore. Presentations were given by the Counterpart Rural Programs Coordinator and a Peer Support Volunteer and many participants visited the Counterpart display stand.

We look forward to working with our rural colleagues over the next few years to bring peer support and other Counterpart programs to rural and regional women with cancer.

### Louise's story

As a McGrath Breast Care Nurse (BCN) working in Mildura, I aim to increase the level of support and advocacy for women with breast cancer and their families.

At Mildura Base Hospital, I work closely with Breast Nurse Specialist Kaye Matthews to support women and their families during their cancer experience.

Additionally, I support women who present to Mildura Private Hospital, BreastScreen Victoria Bendigo, General Practitioners, local and visiting specialists and community-based care providers, including the large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse population. I am also able to support women returning to Mildura following cancer treatment in larger Regional and Metropolitan settings.

I inform all my new patients about Counterpart and give them information about the service. Women tell me that it is difficult to pick up the phone and call Counterpart themselves, which I completely understand, so I get their consent to do an online referral and they get a call from a Counterpart Peer Support Volunteer. The feedback from these women has been very positive to date. For example, I have been told that 'it was nice to talk to someone else and not my doctor or family because I don't like to burden my family, the Counterpart volunteer understood because they had been through it'.

I have passed on details about this wonderful service to the other McGrath BCNs and I would recommend other health professionals refer to Counterpart.

Tammy Boatman, Counterpart; Anne O'Callaghan, BreastScreen; Jayne Hunt, Murray PHN; and Louise James, McGrath Breast Care Nurse, Mildura at a presentation for GPs and health professionals in Mildura, 18 May 2017.



### Stepping into Wellness

Recent research has shown exercise is beneficial during and after cancer treatment and can help prevent cancer recurrence. However, not everyone feels confident to resume exercising or begin a new regime following a cancer diagnosis.

Stepping into Wellness is a six-week gentle exercise program designed to motivate women who have experienced breast or a gynaecological cancer to participate in regular exercise. The program aims to boost women's confidence and increase their physical activity by providing exposure to a range of exercise types in a safe and social environment.

“

*I had a double mastectomy and I found it helped getting my arm moving again. I can now sleep on my stomach again.*

**Stepping Into Wellness participant**

Women participate in range of motion exercises, resistance training, body-weighted exercise and Tai Chi as well as discussions about lymphoedema awareness and goal setting. They get to meet and share common experiences with other women from the local community who have had a cancer diagnosis.

In 2016–17, 62 women participated in six Stepping into Wellness programs across Melbourne.

Participant feedback shows that many women reported positive physical changes – particularly in arm movement, freedom of movement, general flexibility and perceived

muscle strength. The social connection was also highly valued, as was the variety of exercises, including the specialist Tai Chi instruction. Most women stated they intended to continue exercising beyond the conclusion of Stepping into Wellness.

This program would not be possible without the generous support of Pink Affair. We would also like to thank:

- our community gym partners who have been very welcoming and supportive of the women who participated in our programs

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*I feel I have more flexibility and movement and by doing the exercise I feel happier in myself.*

**Stepping Into Wellness participant**

- our volunteer instructor Judy and our three new fitness instructors, Kaye, Dawn and Michelle, who provide a safe, friendly and supportive environment for everyone
- our Peer Support Volunteers who assisted with the sessions.

## Stepping into Wellness Programs in Melbourne



## Feel Good

Counterpart also continued our Feel Good Gentle Exercise Program, running 23 fortnightly exercise sessions at Genesis Fitness, Lonsdale Street in Melbourne’s CBD.

## Deborah’s story

When I participated in the Stepping into Wellness program at Berwick in October 2016, I was a year after recovery from breast cancer, my treatment being a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation.

I used to go to aerobics years ago into my 50s but stopped due to a sore shoulder or a sore foot or a sore something. I tried walking and water aerobics but nothing grabbed me.

Counterpart’s Stepping Into Wellness program reminded me just how much I love aerobics. I think I’m dancing at a party.

The program had been very beneficial to me, the instructors very friendly, welcoming and professional. It was also comforting to be amongst the other participants who were fellow ‘travellers’ ... a term my husband came up with as I didn’t like to be called ‘sufferer’ or ‘survivor’ and still prefer ‘traveller’ to describe my journey.

Since Stepping into Wellness, I joined a very low-key aerobics class run by a friend whom I met through my original aerobics class. She had also been through our journey and has come out as fit as a fiddle and a very positive and supportive friend. I was very unsure as to just how much I could manage and this friend and her class gave me the confidence to move on and up.

How lucky am I that my original instructor is still conducting classes at the extremely fit age of 70. I attend her over 50s classes twice a week and love it.



## Navigator for women with early breast cancer

The BreaCan Navigator app provides information for Victorian women recently diagnosed with breast cancer. It was developed following our involvement in a Victorian Government-funded Cancer Survivorship Pilot Project, and launched in October 2013.

Women reported that following diagnosis they were overwhelmed with information when they were stressed and needed to make decisions. The Navigator directs women to existing, consumer-focused information from reliable sources.

A 2016 evaluation of the Navigator confirmed that women appreciated having easy access to high quality information, which informed their decisions about treatment and lifestyle. Health professionals were satisfied that the information was evidence-based and appropriate for their patients.



*Sometimes you are so overwhelmed you don't know what to ask. The Navigator helps you think it through and makes sure you get to ask questions during appointments instead of thinking of it afterwards.*

**Navigator user**

## Navigator Statistics

**838**  
unique users

**1782**  
times used

**12,823**  
pages viewed



## Navigator for women with a gynaecological cancer

DHHS has now provided funding for the development of a Navigator app for women diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer.

The project team consulted women with experience of a gynaecological cancer, to find out what information they wanted and how it could best be presented.

A Working Group, consisting of service users and Counterpart Peer Support volunteers, who

all have personal experience of gynaecological cancer, and two nurse consultants with experience in gynaecological oncology, is meeting regularly to advise on content and design.

Consultation with women who have experienced a gynaecological cancer and health professionals is an important component of the development of the app.

The app is expected to be launched in April 2018.



## Wendy's story

In my role as Gynaecology-Oncology Clinical Nurse Consultant at Epworth Freemasons in East Melbourne for almost 10 years, I have been involved in supporting women with gynaecological cancers both psychologically and clinically. Part of this support includes referring women to Counterpart for ongoing support as they progress through treatment.

Women often express the desire to speak with another woman who has undergone similar treatments, to see how they coped and to reinforce their hope for survival. This is particularly important for our rural patients who are often isolated on farms and small communities with few specialised support services. The benefits to these women in providing peer support cannot be underestimated.

Speaking to others who have been in a similar position is like a lifeline of connection to people who really understand what practical and emotional issues are involved in coming to terms with a cancer diagnosis.

I am also pleased to be on the working group to assist Counterpart in producing a Navigator app for women with a gynaecological cancer. This will be a valuable tool for the women I support, and I am looking forward to its launch in 2018.



Volunteers at the launch of Counterpart, May 2017.

## Our people

### Our volunteers in 2016–17

Our volunteers are the heart of our service — without their passion, skill and dedication to supporting women with breast or a gynaecological cancer to live well, Counterpart could not exist. As always we are truly grateful.

#### Peer Support Volunteers

Aaltje	Heather	Lois M	Sandra
Annette	Helen	Margaret	Sue G
Bridget	Jan	Maureen	Sue S
Chris G	Janice	May	Teresa
Cindy	Janine	Nadia	Trish
Coralie	Jenny	Naideen	Victoria
Danni	Jessie	Nikki	Vivien
Denise	Jo	Pam	Wendy
Elizabeth	Joan	Pauline	Yvonne
Grace	Joy	Rhonda	
Greta	Lianne	Rita	

We remember with fondness Peer Support Volunteers Kerry, who died at the end of 2016, and Victoria, who died as we were writing this report.

#### Program Volunteers

Chris G	Liz D
Diana	Lois S
Gwen	Lyn
Jan	Maryse
Jennifer	Meril
Jewels	Patricia
Judy	Paula
Jules	Vivien
Kene	

We would also like to thank volunteers from the National Australia Bank for assisting with the mail outs:

Amanda, Cheong Hin Chue Kee, Faye, Gaihari, Kara, Katrina, Leah, Leanne, Max, Rena, Rohan, Shir Reen, Tamara



The Counterpart staff team with Rita Butera, Executive Director, Women's Health Victoria, at the launch Counterpart, 31 May 2017.

## Staff

### **Dianne Hill**

Manager (from October 2016)

### **Fiona McRae**

Team Leader, Programs

### **Tammy Boatman**

Rural Program Coordinator and Stepping into Wellness Coordinator

### **Katherine Bradstreet**

Communications Coordinator

### **Robin Curwen-Walker**

Bridge of Support Western Health Project Manager

### **Lauren Ferris**

Digital Resources Coordinator (from November 2016)

### **Kellie Holland**

Volunteer Coordinator

### **Wendy Pullan**

Program Coordinator

### **Linda Rehill**

Program and Resources Coordinator

### **Brooke Underwood**

Administration Officer

### **Helen Mertin**

Special Projects Officer (from March 2017)

### **Simone Nelson**

Casual Program Coordinator

## Farewells

### **Lee Kennedy**

Manager (until July 2016)

## Counterpart Advisory Group

Helen Coleman (Chair, from November 2016)

Lyn Allison

Monique Baldacchino

Kate Broun

Danielle Carpenter

Christine Evely

Judy Hacker (from November 2016)

Alison Murphy

Penny Sanderson

Beth Wilson

Janice (Counterpart volunteer)

Pam (Counterpart volunteer)

Victoria (Counterpart volunteer)

Rita Butera (WHV Executive Director)

Dianne Hill (Counterpart Manager)

We would like to thank the outgoing Chair, Tania Angelini, for her contribution to the Advisory Group.

## Our supporters

Thank you to all the people and organisations who have supported us in 2016–17. Your support makes it possible for us to continue to connect, support and inform women with breast or a gynaecological cancer in Victoria to live well.

### Donors

Coburg Basketball Association  
Sara Elkas  
Vera Gontscharow  
Gregory Hillard  
Janet McMenamin  
Jennifer Pietsch  
Judith Watts

*There were also donors who wished to remain anonymous.*

### Project funding

Victorian Department of Health and Human Services  
LUCRF Community Partnership Trust  
Pink Affair  
Treasure Chest Inc.

### In-kind donations

Yoland Antill  
Belinda Astl  
Annemarie Ferguson  
Beaconsfield Fitness Centre  
Bob Clothier  
Genesis Fitness, Lonsdale Street  
Kasey Haldane  
Swami Karunananda  
Lilydale Squash and Fitness Centre  
Mill Park Leisure Centre  
Noble Park Aquatic Centre  
Faith Rees  
Hayley Russell  
Courtney Smyth  
Sunshine Leisure Centre  
Kim Taylor  
Karen White

### Gynaecological cancer Navigator working group

Jillian Brown  
Wendy Dawson  
Annie Howitt  
Lisa Taylor  
Jenny (Counterpart volunteer)  
Nadia (Counterpart volunteer)

### Friends of Counterpart

African Drumming  
Arena Printing  
Margie Brett  
Clear Horizon  
Community Data Solutions  
Digicap  
Jo Gniel  
IT Strategic  
National Australia Bank  
Judy Sammut  
Skysdesign  
Squisito  
Bernadette Voss  
Dawn Roleff  
Michelle Taylor  
Kaye Elias



October 2017 DESIGN: [www.enganagraphics.com.au](http://www.enganagraphics.com.au) TEXT: Counterpart staff PRINT: Arena Printing STOCK: Hanno Silk

“

It's very rewarding to feel you have made a difference to the life of another woman.



# COUNTER PART

Women supporting women with cancer

## Contact Us

1300 781 500

info@counterpart.org.au

counterpart.org.au

## Counterpart Resource Centre

Queen Victoria Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne, VIC 3000

## Hours of operation

Monday 10am – 5pm

Wednesday 10am – 5pm

Thursday 10am – 5pm

Peer support is offered from

10am – 2pm on these days

(Closed public holidays)

## Postal Address

GPO Box 1066

Melbourne VIC 3001



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Watch us on Vimeo /CounterpartSupport  
Subscribe to our mailing list at counterpart.org.au



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Women's Health Victoria



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