

# BreaCan

Year in Review  
10/11



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QUOTES: Please note that some names have been changed to protect people's privacy.

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COVER: These lanterns covered a living tree at the BreaCan National Volunteer Week celebration in May 2011 (p.8). The lanterns signify the hope and light that BreaCan brings to many women, a beacon that guides their way to wellness.



## Lighting the Way... Mary's Story

I didn't find BreaCan; they found me through the *Bridge of Support* program at the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) and I am ever so grateful for it. To this day, the very thought of it moves me in an indescribably profound manner. Here's how it all began.

What started off as a day much like any other in August 2010 catapulted me out of my life as I had known it. A routine mammogram and ultrasound led to a biopsy and, the following day, it was confirmed that I had breast cancer. I would need a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. My heart ached. Dad had died five years before of bowel cancer. Mum had passed away one year before of lung cancer. I was still grieving. I decided to remain in Melbourne for treatment which meant being away from my partner and leaving my job. I missed them. In the process however, I learned many lessons like how sometimes those who appear close to you can't face what you are going through: the changes are too much for them to bear and their fear factor is so high. The pain of this, though acute, was thankfully tempered by unexpected kindness, sometimes from total strangers, often from loving relatives and friends and last, but certainly not least, from BreaCan.

One day while I was in the chemotherapy waiting room I was approached by Helen Shepherd, one of the co-ordinators at BreaCan, and offered the opportunity to share my experience with her and the volunteers present that day for the *Bridge of Support* program. You could say it was a pivotal moment for me. There they were, people with a common experience, non-judgemental and understanding. It was just what I needed and in the course of the following six months of chemotherapy and five weeks of radiotherapy I spoke to many volunteers, their support being invaluable to me especially as they had had a personal experience of what I was experiencing, and to Helen who could direct me to resources and often knew what was coming up next.

BreaCan also offered access to facilities and services that I now look upon as complementary healing modalities for me. Firstly, reflexology which was heavenly for my poor, swollen, sore and stumpy feet. I learned Mindfulness practice through a pilot program at the Royal Women's Hospital, something which I still do on a daily basis. I was referred to Music Therapy and enjoyed that immensely. I attended an information session on Sashiko, a type of Japanese embroidery which I have now taken up.

I have always believed that knowledge is power and in light of that I borrowed books, CDs and DVDs from BreaCan's library. They helped me transition through the various stages, armed with information, asking questions and in a sense, taking control of my experience. This helped me answer my partner's questions and when he came to Melbourne we looked at some of it together and were able to address his concerns too. I want to live and all that I have received from BreaCan keep that alive for me and that is why I am so glad they found me.

I didn't find BreaCan; they found me ...

## Manager's Message

Di Missen BreaCan Manager July 2002 – July 2011



Each year, the 'Year in Review' provides an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and acknowledge the people we have supported as well as those who have supported us. This year is different for me as it is my last year as BreaCan Manager.

Since BreaCan began, it has grown and thrived due to the vision, energy and commitment of many people. I want to take this opportunity to thank them. A decade ago, some very purposeful and passionate women advocated for a service like BreaCan to be established and their vision has become a reality. The vision has been shaped by a very skilled, dedicated staff team who have not only been a pleasure to work with but have been unwavering in their loyalty to the service and to me. Our inspiring volunteers have always been so committed to making a difference to other women by sharing their knowledge and experiences with empathy and care. So many times I have witnessed them shed some light on the dark places that women find themselves in when diagnosed with cancer.

As well as supporting individual women, BreaCan has also contributed to more systematic changes in the way the health system cares for those affected by cancer and their loved ones. Building trusting, enduring relationships has always been central to our work. The service has benefitted enormously from the skills and goodwill of health professionals and cancer services that we have collaborated with. The guidance and support provided by the BreaCan Advisory Group and Women's Health Victoria, as well as funding from the State Government, have been integral to the success of the service.

As with previous years there have been many highlights in 2010/2011 and these are outlined in this publication. These achievements have only been made possible by the consistent effort and commitment of BreaCan's staff, volunteers and the partners with whom we have worked.

During my nine years at BreaCan, I have been privileged to meet and work with so many inspiring people. Quite simply, you can't do a job like mine without being changed by it. I would like to sincerely thank people for all their good wishes. Like the lanterns from our volunteer celebration, I know that BreaCan's light will continue to shine because of all the good women who will continue to be part of its future.

*Di Missen*



A decade ago, some very purposeful and passionate women advocated for a service like BreaCan to be established and their vision has become a reality. The vision has been shaped by a very skilled, dedicated staff team who have not only been a pleasure to work with but have been unwavering in their loyalty to the service and to me.

## Highlights

Achieved the highest number of contacts recorded (2446) for BreaCan in a single financial year, an increase of almost 300 compared to 2009/2010. (page 5)

Acknowledged and celebrated the significant role volunteers have played in the provision of BreaCan services through a National Volunteer Week celebration. (page 8)

Guests at the BreaCan National Volunteer Week celebration.



Thinking and looking back, I don't know what I would have done without the support of BreaCan. **Julie**

WHV council member Annabel Pollard and The Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP, light the circle of women in recognition of all volunteers at the BreaCan National Volunteer Week celebration.

## About Us

BreaCan is a unique information and support service for people affected by breast and gynaecological cancers throughout Victoria. A service of Women's Health Victoria, BreaCan is committed to providing a women-focussed service that is shaped by what women say. Since 2003, BreaCan has provided high quality supportive care in our city-based Resource Centre and in communities across Victoria through strong collaborative partnerships.

Increased access by women living with advanced cancer, through the successful hosting of an information forum, in collaboration with the Cancer Council Victoria. (page 10)

Extended our capacity through the successful recruitment of a new intake of women into the BreaCan peer support volunteer training program. (page 12)

Continued to explore and respond to the needs of women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the western suburbs through the conduct of focus groups and an information forum in the west. (page 10)

Contributed to the field through presentation of a paper on the *Bridge of Support* program at the 13th National Breast Care Nurses conference. (page 14)

Strengthened our capacity to provide information and support to women with gynaecological cancer by evaluating the services we provide and through undertaking a collaborative project with Ovarian Cancer Australia. (page 13)

Implemented the Rural and Regional Expressions of Interest program to increase access to our services for women from regional Victoria. (page 11)



## At A Glance – 2010/2011

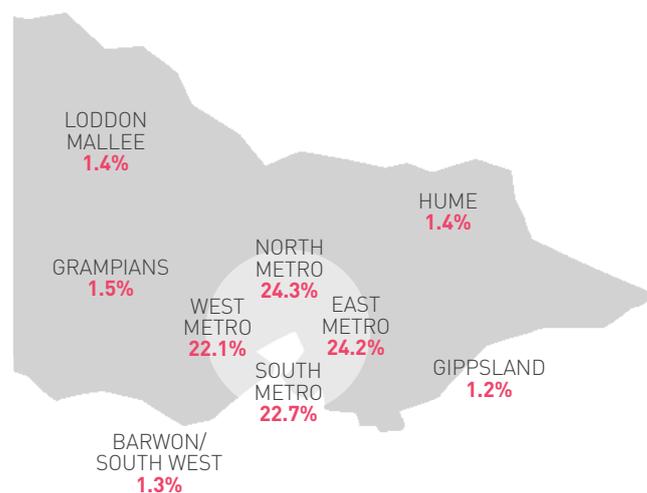
- BreaCan recorded 2446 contacts including 999 individual, 240 *Bridge of Support*, 1030 group and 177 service provider contacts. This is an increase of almost 300 contacts compared to 2009/2010.
- Of the 999 individual contacts, 40% were first time contacts with the service.
- An average of 14 people attended each of 75 BreaCan group sessions. (see Table 1)
- 127 women received reflexology offered in 29 sessions across the year.
- The age profile of people accessing the service (n=1607) is broad with 86% of contacts from people in the 41 to 70 years age group.
- Service users in 2010/2011 were from every region across Victoria. (see Figure 1)
- Of women from metropolitan Melbourne (n=1705), access by women from the western suburbs increased from 15% of contacts in 2009/2010 to 24% in 2010/2011.
- Of the service users for whom cancer status was known:
  - 92% have experienced a form of breast cancer and 8% a gynaecological cancer
  - 29% reported their cancer as ‘advanced’.
- BreaCan achieved a record number of website visits – 5254 from more than 3000 unique visitors.
- 13 podcasts of information sessions were available to download via BreaCan’s website.
- Over 3000 individuals (2258 service users and 816 service providers) were registered on BreaCan’s mailing list.

**Table 1: BreaCan Group Session Overview 2010-2011**

SESSION TYPE	No. of Sessions	No. of Participants*
What’s On Info Session	35	489
Feel Good Gentle Exercise	23	274
Information Forums	3	128
Making Connections Info Sessions for women living with advanced cancer	5	69
Here & Now Group program	7	53
Regional visit	1	10
Workshop	1	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1030</b>

\*An individual woman may have participated in multiple sessions

**Figure 1: Individual & Group Contacts by Residence (n=1829)**



## Our Information and Support Services

For most people affected by cancer, providing clear information that is tailored to needs and preferences and an opportunity to talk through their experience and concerns is a valuable way of alleviating anxiety and distress. BreaCan's core business is to provide supportive care for women with breast and gynaecological cancers and the people who care for them.

## At the BreaCan Resource Centre

The BreaCan Resource Centre is the hub of the service with most information and support provided in and from the Centre. The Centre provides a safe and welcoming environment for people to seek information and support either individually or through participating in one of the many group programs that are offered. The Centre is staffed by trained volunteers, each with a personal experience of cancer who are able to discuss the range of psychological, emotional and practical issues associated with cancer – issues often difficult to broach with friends and family. The volunteers are able to listen and share experiences in a way that only someone who has walked a similar path can. The volunteers work alongside the BreaCan Information and Support Officers who are also there to assist people seeking information and support. The Centre is located in the Queen Victoria Women's Centre and operates three days a week.

In 2010/2011 the following services were offered:

**One-one-one contact** with peer support volunteers in person at the Resource Centre or by phone or email.

An extensive **information library** including books, journals, CDs and DVDs for people to browse or borrow and a display of breast forms, bras, wigs and accessories.

Free **reflexology** appointments provided by a trained nurse and reflexologist for women at the Resource Centre; an important form of relaxation and a prompt for many women to seek out other forms of relaxation or self care.

**Referral** to other support services as required.

The presenter was very aware of her audience and spoke to us in an educated way yet not using medical language as a barrier. Marie



A Sashiko creation by Gaie.

**What's On Information sessions** including talks by health professionals about various clinical issues, workshops focussed on creative therapies and wellness and opportunities for social connections with other women. Sessions in 2010/2011 included:

- **Information sessions:** *Balancing the scales*; Bras, boobs and breast forms; Breast cancer and bones; *Celebrations and tributes*; Chemobrain – Cancer, chemotherapy and the brain; *Clinical trials*; *Focusing on ovarian cancer*; Hormones R Hopping; Making sense of the pathology results; *Mindfulness*; *Planning a funeral*; Radiotherapy – myths and reality; *Research into the needs of women living with advanced cancer*; *Shrinking the worries*; Take a bite into passionfruit; *Talking about difficult issues*; *The emotional impact of advanced cancer*; Too much, too little, too late; What it means to have a family history of cancer.
- **Creative therapies and wellness workshops:** A picture paints – Art therapy; A stitch in time – Sashiko; Drumming your own beat – African drumming; Belly dancing; Dance as if no-one is watching; Feeling good with Feldenkrais; Fabric origami; *Hana – Japanese flower making*; Meditation; Music for the mind, body and soul; *Pilates*.
- **Social gatherings and connections:** Coffee, cupcakes and connections – for women living with advanced cancer; End of Year Celebration morning tea; Stitch, knit and natter – monthly craft session.

The topics in **bold italics** above were new in 2010/2011 and developed in response to feedback from women. A number of information sessions are also recorded. The CDs can be loaned through the Resource Centre library and podcasts are available to download via the BreaCan website ([www.breacan.org.au/services-events/information-sessions/archive](http://www.breacan.org.au/services-events/information-sessions/archive)).

## In the Community



What's On information session.

BreaCan outreaches to women in their local communities through free information forums, gentle exercise programs and through the ***Bridge of Support*** program. In 2010/2011 these activities included:

The **Feel Good Gentle Exercise Program** offered on a fortnightly basis in the city and conducted by a trained fitness instructor who has personally experienced breast cancer. The program offers gentle exercise to tone the body and improve lymphatic flow.

**Steps for Fun and Fitness** is a five week exercise program, it includes a variety of gentle exercises to improve fitness and regain confidence following cancer treatment. In 2010/2011, BreaCan partnered with Nillumbik Community Health Service to provide the program to women in the Eltham area.

All day **Information Forums** in metropolitan, regional and rural locations. Forums comprise presentations by guest speakers on relevant cancer related topics and creative therapy and wellness workshops. In 2010/2011 BreaCan hosted forums in Melbourne, Altona and at the Mercy Hospital for Women.

The ***Bridge of Support*** at the Royal Melbourne Hospital operates every Thursday between 10am and 2pm. BreaCan peer support volunteers and staff provide support to women diagnosed with breast cancer while undergoing treatment or attending appointments at the hospital.

What's On information session – Bras, boobs and breast forms.



Mercy Hospital for Women gynaecological cancer forum.



“

I believe the satisfaction I feel with my treatment is largely attributed to the information and support I got from BreaCan. **Jeanette**



## Lighting the Way - Inspiring Giving

National Volunteer Week celebration

In May 2011, BreaCan hosted a National Volunteer Week celebration linked to the week's theme of 'Inspiring the Volunteer in You'. More than 80 people filled the BreaCan Resource Centre to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of many women who have generously volunteered their time, experience and expertise to shape and develop BreaCan and to support thousands of women affected by and living with a gynaecological or breast cancer.

Victorian Minister for Mental Health, Women's Affairs and Community Services, The Hon. Mary Wooldridge honoured the invaluable contribution of volunteers at the BreaCan National Volunteer Week celebration:

*"Volunteers contribute millions of hours across the state every year, giving to so many people and so many communities. I congratulate BreaCan for creating an environment where volunteers can thrive. Their contribution is so substantial and so greatly appreciated."*

The celebration shone the light on the work of Sue Lockwood, the BreaCan peer support volunteers and the other women who volunteer their time to support our service.

### Advocates

BreaCan is a true demonstration of collective action by women for women. The initial funding to establish and pilot an information and support service for women with breast cancer was influenced by the advocacy of women who had experienced breast cancer and identified a need for a service like BreaCan. Sue Lockwood, who in 2002 was the Convenor of the Breast Cancer Action Group, Marilyn Beaumont, the Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria and a consortium of Victorian women's health services successfully tendered for the service and BreaCan was born. Sue Lockwood died in 2009 and her significant personal contribution was acknowledged at the celebration.



Sue Lockwood gives a presentation to the first intake of peer support volunteers in 2003.



Peer support volunteers Joy (left) and Mary, with Mary's husband and son.

### Providers of peer support

Extending on our foundations, BreaCan is a women-centred, community based organisation with peer support provided by volunteers with a personal experience of a gynaecological or breast cancer at its core. Volunteers have been central to developing and delivering BreaCan services and in informing the strategic directions of the service.

BreaCan has a pool of 27 peer support volunteers whose personal experiences give them a depth of understanding, empathy and insight which they draw on in providing peer support to others facing similar challenges.

Olivia O'Brien, Emma O'Brien,  
Avis McPhee, Mary and  
Bernadette Chin.



Consumer advocate  
Avis McPhee with BCNA  
CEO Lyn Swinburne.

The volunteers are a diverse group of women. They undergo a rigorous training program which requires them to frame their own experiences and refine their communication skills in a way that equips them to listen and share their experiences with other women affected by cancer in a consistent way.

The peer support volunteers have shown enormous dedication to BreaCan with a high retention rate. This is a testament to their commitment, the strength of the partnership between BreaCan staff and volunteers and the value they derive from 'making a difference' in the lives of women who use our service. They have a strong sense of ownership of the service.

*"For the volunteers it seems natural to want to share our experiences and knowledge to help others as they embark on a journey we too have travelled. Our work at BreaCan can be challenging and confronting, however, it is all made worthwhile when you hear a woman after having spoken to a volunteer say, 'I never thought I would laugh again'."*

Mary, BreaCan volunteer

### Supporters and promoters of our service

Over time many women who have used BreaCan services have expressed an interest in giving back in some way and these women were also acknowledged at the celebration. These women support us through: facilitating exercise programs; helping with forums and mail outs; assisting with hosting events; staffing registration tables and conference stands; and maintaining our resource collections. These women all have a different connection to the service and make valuable contributions.

In addition to women with a personal experience of cancer, the National Australia Bank (NAB) has also supported BreaCan through their Employee Volunteer Program. On a number of occasions NAB employees have given their time to supporting BreaCan. BreaCan was also the recipient of a NAB Community Grant as a result of a nomination by an employee who had volunteered with BreaCan and been impressed by the service. We have been proud to participate in this productive and valuable community-corporate partnership.

**We acknowledge the work of all volunteers who inspire others through their generous contributions.**

L-R: Di Missen, Annabel Pollard (WHV Council Member & Chair, BreaCan Advisory Group), The Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP, Louise Johnson (WHV Chair) and Rita Butera (WHV ED).



Volunteering with BreaCan after my own diagnosis gave me a better understanding of the needs of the women who we talk to. Being a volunteer has added a dimension to my personal development as much as my years as a nurse did. I feel I offer compassion. **Sandra, BreaCan volunteer**



## Increasing Our Access

### STRATEGIC GOAL 1

Increasing access to BreaCan services through the implementation of new and innovative programs, collaborations, partnerships and events, continues to be a major strategic focus of the service. In 2010/2011, BreaCan partnered with a number of cancer organisations, health services and community groups to provide information and support to specific under-served and hard to reach groups.

We highlight three examples from our work in 2010/2011 focussed on increasing service use or creating new pathways to access for women.

Making Connections – Coffee, cupcakes and connections for women living with advanced cancer.

#### Women from the west

In 2009 BreaCan, in partnership with Western Health, secured funding from Cancer Australia to identify and address the supportive care needs of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with breast or gynaecological cancers living in the western suburbs of Melbourne. This two year project: *'Who does and who doesn't? The use of information and support services by women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds'* runs until December 2011.

Key project activities have included:

- The establishment of a Project Reference Group comprising staff from Western Health, BreaCan, Women's Health West and North Western BreastScreen.
- Focus groups: one with women from Vietnamese speaking backgrounds living with cancer; and one with women representing a number of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- An information forum held in Altona attended by 45 people whose lives have been touched by cancer with 12 different cultural groups represented.
- The establishment of new connections with many organisations and professionals including clinical staff, health promotion workers, allied health practitioners, community groups and the refugee/migrant sector.

In the final phase of the project: a tailored five week fitness program will be run in Yarraville; an information forum for the Vietnamese speaking community will be run in the west; and work to build the capacity of BreaCan to support women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will be undertaken to sustain the important gains made in this area.



Thank you for organising these wonderful events. They are a lifeline for women such as me. **Helen**



#### Women living with advanced disease

The **Making Connections** program offers a series of events specifically targeted to women living with advanced breast or gynaecological cancer.

In September 2010 BreaCan, in collaboration with the Cancer Council Victoria, ran a one day forum entitled *'Hope in the face of uncertainty'* for women living with advanced cancer, their families and friends. Thirty women and 12 partners and other family members participated in the day. The forum provided a range of opportunities for information giving and sharing, connections with other women, partners and family members and an opportunity for creative expression.

# Increasing Our Access

## STRATEGIC GOAL 1



Women enjoy one of the creative concurrent sessions at the Altona forum.

In 2010/2011 BreaCan ran five **Making Connections** sessions including: Breast cancer and bones – issues, treatment and the future; National research into the needs of women living with advanced breast cancer – survey results; Talking about difficult issues; Coffee, cup cakes and connections; and The emotional impact of a diagnosis of advanced cancer.

BreaCan also facilitated a ‘Here and Now’ group program. Eight women met weekly over eight weeks to talk about issues and concerns relevant to them. These women formed a strong and supportive relationship and are continuing to meet independently of BreaCan.

All women living with advanced cancer can join the **Making Connections** mailing list to be kept informed of relevant activities on offer through BreaCan and other support services.

### Women from rural and regional Victoria

For a small service with a city-based Resource Centre, engaging with and providing services that are accessible to women in regional and rural Victoria is a challenge. Each year BreaCan explores ways of engaging rural women. In 2010/2011, BreaCan implemented a Rural and Regional Expression of Interest program aimed at working collaboratively with health professionals, services and organisations working directly with women in their rural and regional communities across Victoria.

The Expression of Interest program offered a range of options for services and events that can be implemented by BreaCan in partnership with local organisations.

Examples include:

- a one day or overnight group visit to Melbourne with a program tailored to the needs and interests of the women. This may include information sessions on topics of interest, creative therapies and wellness workshops and opportunities for connections with other women and the BreaCan peer support volunteers
- tailored forums or speaking engagements run in a regional centre.

As a result of Expressions of Interest received, two group visits and two regional forums are being planned for the second half of 2011. BreaCan will offer this program again in 2011/2012.



*‘Hope in the face of uncertainty’* – Information forum for women living with advanced cancer.

I was very interested to read of the overnight city visits with an afternoon and morning session at BreaCan. It would be great for women from Sale, Bairnsdale and beyond.

Regional Health Professional

BreaCan display promotional materials at the BCNA Sale *Living well beyond breast cancer* forum.



BreaCan continues to focus on the provision of core services through the Resource Centre, while expanding the reach of the service through external activities, projects and collaborations. Expanding our capacity requires careful management and balancing of our staff and volunteer capacity whilst ensuring the highest standards of quality are maintained in all services provided.

In 2010/2011 BreaCan secured additional funding for a number of project initiatives and began work to build the capacity of the peer support volunteer workforce. Three particular areas of focus are highlighted here.

### **The Bridge of Support – outreaching and providing a pathway to BreaCan**

The *Bridge of Support* has now been running at RMH since April 2010. BreaCan volunteers and staff have been providing support to women diagnosed with breast cancer and their friends and family directly in the hospital environment.

While currently a pilot project, the *Bridge of Support* received a major boost in 2011 with a one-off funding grant from the Victorian Department of Health of \$40,000. This money has directly assisted BreaCan to provide staff support, a vital component of the project as it seeks to consolidate its position within the hospital.

### **Building our Peer Support Volunteer workforce**

The recruitment, training, orientation and ongoing support of the volunteers is a fundamental component of the BreaCan service model designed to enable the volunteers to support others in a safe and positive way, while also caring for themselves.

At the beginning of 2011, BreaCan called for enquiries to fill 14 positions in its fifth intake for peer support volunteer training. BreaCan received 58 enquiries from women who had used the service personally and in response to advertisements in their local papers. After a telephone and group interview process, all 14 training places were filled.

The training program commenced in June 2011 with eight days of training over an eight week period. Often not all the women who commence training will go on to become peer support volunteers. For those who do, a formal program of orientation and induction into the service is completed before commencing work as peer support volunteers.



BreaCan staff and volunteers in the Cancer Resource Room at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, where they provide the *Bridge of Support* program.

I think of you often and how much you and your volunteers helped me move along the pathways of cancer.

Cheryl

Feedback from women, RMH staff and BreaCan volunteers has reinforced the value of providing support directly to women as they face the challenges of a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. A final report will be completed later in 2011 that will present the findings of the *Bridge of Support* pilot and the next steps in continuing and growing this important outreach model.

I think as a volunteer at BreaCan, I offer other women hope. I think we offer a guiding hand to empower women to make their own decisions and to help bring back a sense of control at a time that can be very isolating,

Frederika, BreaCan volunteer



The fifth intake of peer support volunteers begin their training.



### Reaching out together to women with a gynaecological cancer

BreaCan has been providing information and support to women living with gynaecological cancers since 2007. These women continue to make up a small proportion of the overall BreaCan contacts (8%).

In 2010/2011, BreaCan received \$50,000 from the Victorian Department of Health to partner with Ovarian Cancer Australia on a joint project to examine how to improve the experiences of women with a gynaecological cancer. The one year project will:

- seek to improve women's knowledge of and access to information and support
- facilitate greater service co-ordination and integration across key service providers to share knowledge and resources.

In May 2011 BreaCan, in collaboration with the Mercy Hospital for Women, hosted an information forum for women with a gynaecological cancer which was attended by 42 women, family and friends. The event was extremely successful and has laid the foundations for future collaborations with the hospital.

The forum\* has been very insightful and I have learnt a lot about support available in the community. Plus, the food and dance session were wonderful.

Tess

\*Mercy Hospital for Women forum for women with a gynaecological cancer.



Her Excellency the Governor General Quentin Bryce AC visited the BreaCan Resource Centre as part of a tour of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre.



BreaCan is an essential service which I have come to value very much.

Karen

BreaCan has an important contribution to make to the supportive care and emerging cancer survivorship agendas. Our contribution is made through the services we provide, through productive collaborations, effective partnerships and the sharing of knowledge and expertise gained from eight years of service provision to Victorian women.

Progress in extending our influence was made in 2010/2011 through:

**A presentation in partnership with the Royal Melbourne Hospital at the 13th National Breast Care Nurses Conference** on the *Bridge of Support* project.

**Participation in a range of cancer sector activities** including the 36th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia; the launch of the Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre; and membership of the Victorian Cooperative Oncology Group.

**Representation of BreaCan** on the Department of Health's Victorian Cancer Survivorship Program Steering Committee.

**Participation on a Project Steering Committee** for the review of BreastScreen Victoria's consumer engagement strategy.

**Participation in strategic projects including** the Victorian and Tasmanian Gynaecological Cancers Workforce Project; and the Western and Central Melbourne Integrated Cancer Service project 'Linking acute and follow up services for women with breast cancer'.

**Provision of consumer and staff input for:** the Cancer Council Victoria's review of the booklet 'Breast Reconstruction: Your Choice'; and development of a web based resource 'My Kite Will Fly' for children of parents with cancer by The Women's Hospital.

**Participation in consultations** informing the Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**Contributing to research through promoting participation** in a mindfulness based cognitive therapy project being conducted by The Women's Hospital Oncology and Dysplasia Unit.

**Promoting BreaCan through strategic speaking engagements** including presentations to 'End of Treatment' Groups, support groups, Annual General Meetings (North Eastern Metropolitan Integrated Cancer Service; Breast Cancer Action Group, Victoria; and Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Service), and multiple presentations to health professionals.

## Our People

BreaCan is the culmination of the vision, expertise and dedication of a varied group of people. In a respectful partnership staff, volunteers and advisors work side by side acknowledging the unique and valuable contribution each makes to the service.



Staff L-R  
Fiona McRae,  
Nicole Wilton,  
Helen Shepherd,  
Di Missen,  
Katherine Bradstreet,  
Wendy Pullan and  
Justine Dalla Riva,  
at the farewell  
celebration for  
Di Missen.

Absent: Rebecca Tipper

### Staff

**Di Missen**  
MANAGER

**Helen Shepherd**  
SERVICES AND VOLUNTEER  
CO-ORDINATOR

**Nicole Wilton**  
INFORMATION AND SUPPORT  
OFFICER

**Wendy Pullan**  
INFORMATION AND SUPPORT  
OFFICER

**Fiona McRae**  
PROJECT OFFICER

**Justine Dalla Riva**  
PROJECT OFFICER

**Rebecca Tipper**  
PROJECT OFFICER

**Katherine Bradstreet**  
ADMINISTRATION OFFICER

Thanks to **Tess Pryor** for her support with the National Volunteer Week celebration

Welcome to **Alison Amos** (August 2011) and goodbye to **Di Missen** (July 2011) and **Nicole Wilton** (September 2011)

### The BreaCan Advisory Group

The BreaCan Advisory Group guides and supports the development and continual improvement of BreaCan and the services provided to people affected by and living with breast and gynaecological cancers.

The BreaCan Advisory Group membership is:

**Annabel Pollard** – Chair (WHV Council Member, Clinical Psychologist, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre)

**Lyn Allison** (WHV Council Member)

**Heather Beanland** (Consumer)

**Christine Evely** (Consumer)

**Bronwyn Flanagan** (Breast Care Nurse, The Royal Melbourne Hospital)

**Jane Fletcher** (Consumer)

**Claudia Ginn** (Consumer)

**Jane McNeilage** (Gynaecological oncologist, Monash Medical Centre)

**Penny Sanderson** (Manager, Mercy Lymphoedema Clinic)

**Katy Weare** (Cancer Services & Complex Care Manager, The Women's Hospital)

**Rita Butera** (WHV Executive Director)

**Di Missen** (BreaCan Manager)

Thank you also to **Marilyn Beaumont** who finished in her position as Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria in November 2010.

### The BreaCan Volunteers for 2010/2011

#### Peer Support Volunteers:

Aaltje, Ang, Annette, Betty, Carolyn, Christine, Cindy, Dianne, Ellen, Florence, Frederika, Heather, Janine, Joy, Jules, Kirsten, Lea, Leola, Mary, Meril, Pam, Paula, Pauline, Rhonda, Rita, Sandra and Teresa.

#### Non-Peer Support Volunteers:

Pat bakes shortbreads for the service.

Judy facilitates our exercise programs supported by Lois.

Jill, Patricia, Susan, Claudia, Dorothy, and Marie assisted with mail outs and events.

**We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Jo Smith to the Young Women Talking DVD. Jo died in July 2011.**

## Our Volunteers

Our trained peer support volunteers are central to the work of BreaCan. Their experiences of breast and gynaecological cancers and of life shape this unique woman-focussed service. With the commencement of the fifth intake of peer support volunteers we reflect on the important role each volunteer plays in sharing their stories with the women, friends and family who use the service. Two volunteers, Janine from the very first intake in 2003 and Sue from the 2011 intake share their stories and why they choose to volunteer with BreaCan.



Staff and volunteers present at the farewell for Di Missen.

### Holding the very first lantern Janine's story...

I was diagnosed in 1999, a year after losing my second child. People found it hard to know what to say. At that time a friend knew someone who had breast cancer and suggested I speak with her.

I chose to meet with a lady from a cancer support group in my local area; we had coffee together just before I was to start my first chemotherapy. She said she'd call me just after. I didn't ever receive that call and have always wondered why.

Holding onto hopes that I would not go into early menopause made my cancer journey a lot easier for me. A few years later when I was reading my local newspaper I saw an ad requesting volunteers for a new breast cancer support service and, thinking of my previous experience, I immediately thought "Yes, I want to do this".

I have been a BreaCan peer support volunteer now for eight years. At first and for quite some time I would wake up on my BreaCan day with an uncomfortable feeling about what my long journey would bring for that day. Having ongoing training from BreaCan and a partner who helps me so much, make my days at BreaCan a lot easier

now. I always leave at the end of my day with a happy feeling inside.

I am a *Bridge of Support* volunteer at the Royal Melbourne Hospital which I find very rewarding and think what a wonderful project BreaCan has decided to do. All my treatments (except for my first chemo) I would go alone. I hated walking through those hospital doors. One day while waiting to have radiotherapy, I spoke with a lady who volunteers just by talking with people in the waiting room. I found talking with her took things off my mind so now I do the same for women at RMH.

I am proud and passionate to be a BreaCan volunteer because of the care and consideration given to everyone who walks through the door. BreaCan is a professional, caring and considerate organisation with excellent guidelines and integrity, along with the most supportive and helpful staff that you could find.

For me I can't pinpoint why I volunteer, but if sharing my story can help someone just once then I am happy. I never lose sight of having had breast cancer, I never say I'm totally cured, but whilst I'm healthy and can help someone I gladly do it.



## Carrying the lantern on into the future

### Sue's story...

2007 was an extremely eventful year for me. In March I turned 44 years old, Mum passed away in April and two weeks later I was diagnosed with stage II breast cancer. Breast cancer is no stranger to me and my family. In 2001, my sister Ann aged 44 lost her fight to this disease within 18 months of her diagnosis.

I was in shock and did not have the time to comprehend what was happening to me. My cancer journey began with endless appointments, surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. I could not speak to my family of how scared I was – we were all still grieving for my mother and the memories of my sister's fight came back to us all. My partner at that time and friends told me “you

will be fine” or “be positive and you will beat this”. I soon realised that most people are not comfortable to just listen – they felt they had to make it better.

I discovered BreaCan via the internet but was not sure about “seeking help”. One cold winter's day I found the courage and wandered into BreaCan – not knowing what to expect and feeling nervous. I found friendly faces that welcomed me and made me feel comfortable. A volunteer named Janine and another lady sat with me and I started to speak. They allowed me to talk – to express my inner most fears without judging me. They listened without interrupting

and most importantly Janine understood me. At the time, she was a seven year survivor and seeing her in front of me gave me hope. In my mind, I had my sister's image and memory. I replaced this with an image of Janine – if she could come this far, why couldn't I?? I looked at Janine and thought ‘not everyone dies from this disease, there is hope for me’. I was able to openly ask her questions like “How do you cope with the uncertainty?”.

When I left the centre I felt more grounded. Although I didn't use BreaCan again during my cancer journey, the one time I did – it had a big impact on me. To be able to speak to someone who could relate to my situation was priceless and was a turning point for me.

Over the years, I have often thought of the day I wandered into BreaCan and promised myself that one day, when the time is right for me, I would like to be able to do the same - offer hope to someone.

Being on the BreaCan mailing list, early this year I got a flyer recruiting for volunteers. I didn't hesitate and sent an email off to offer my services. The interview process was very thorough and I was not sure if I would make the cut. I was ecstatic when Helen told me I was on the volunteer program. The training has been truly amazing – a range of topics were covered and we were privileged to have speakers who are experts in this field. I can now understand why the service is what it is. It is the efforts of the staff of BreaCan who are so passionate, the scrutiny to recruit the right volunteers, the training and most importantly each individual's commitment that makes BreaCan an outstanding service. I am extremely proud to be part of this team.

I was able to openly ask her questions like “How do you cope with the uncertainty?”.  
Sue



For me I can't pinpoint why I volunteer, but if sharing my story can help someone just once then I am happy. Janine

## Looking Forward

Alison Amos BreaCan Manager since August 2011

I am very honoured to take on this role following in the footsteps of Di Missen, the founding Manager of BreaCan. One of Di's many legacies is the motto coined very early in the development of the service which was to 'start small and do it well'. This motto and the careful, measured approach to BreaCan's scoping and development, the rigour applied to the recruitment, training and supervision of the volunteer workforce and the trialling and implementation of innovations over time has been a fundamental factor in the service's success. See over for a special thank you to Di.

Looking forward, BreaCan will continue to provide our innovative model of care and to seek opportunities to trial and implement new initiatives to expand our reach and effectiveness. Some key areas of focus in 2011/2012 will include:

- **Cancer survivorship...** BreaCan will commence work in partnership with The Women's Hospital, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Western Health, and the Melbourne GP Network on an exciting two year project seeking to improve information, support and transitions to living well for women at the end of active treatment for women with breast cancer.
- **Supporting women to be active...** BreaCan will explore opportunities to build on the work for the 'Feel Good' and 'Steps for Fun and Fitness' exercise programs. This will include the development of resources to support women to exercise at home and partnerships to build the knowledge and capacity of the fitness sector.
- **Continue to explore ways of increasing the accessibility of our services...** through continued development of the Rural and Regional Expressions of Interest program; continuing partnerships and capacity building to enhance our service provision to women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and identifying the next steps for the *Bridge of Support* program.
- **Setting our strategic directions...** In 2012, BreaCan will develop a new three year strategic plan. We will be actively engaging with women and with providers in the cancer, consumer, women's health and community sectors to define our vision and focus our efforts as we seek to further expand our capacity to improve the health and wellbeing of women affected by and living with a gynaecological or breast cancer.

*Alison Amos*

“

Thank you Di for achieving the vision of a few women into the reality of BreaCan today.

Heather B,  
BreaCan volunteer and advocate



Di Missen gives her farewell speech which includes showing the first white board notes in the planning for BreaCan.



Guests at the farewell for Di Missen.

In 2010/2011 many individuals, companies and organisations have made generous financial contributions to help BreaCan deliver the best service possible to Victorian women. We are extremely grateful. Donors have included:

Meg Biggs  
Wendy Brack  
Carlene Charlton  
Susan Cook  
Julie Czyzewski  
Stephanie Dahlsen  
Alysha Dominico  
Frances Emerson  
Susan Fairbrother  
Lois Ferne  
Anne Gowing  
Lisa Grady  
Leanne Hanrahan  
Lisa Hollingsworth  
Lynette Hunter  
Lisa Kitson  
Lynn Klavins  
Margaret Leahy  
June Leeming  
Rosemary Lewis  
Sally Lloyd  
Bernadette Lohan  
Sue Malta  
Catherine Mason

Pam Matenson  
Sandra Mayo  
Ann Mitchell  
Sandra Moore  
Sylvia Morrison  
Annemarie Nayna  
Karin Neilson  
Lesley O'Gorman  
Violet Powley  
Paulette Probert  
Jennifer Ray  
Deborah Ringwood  
Sam Robinson  
Susan Rourke  
Denise Ryan  
Pat Salomon  
Mee Eian Sim  
Donna Smith  
Lois Smith  
Martina Sonneveld  
Marie Stainwall  
Maureen Stavely  
The Forget-Me-Nots  
Mary Thirlwell  
Sandra Topp  
Dot Umney  
Sheryll Watson  
Linda Wharton  
Clive Wiggins  
Marilyn Wilson  
Beverley Wong

There were also donors who wished to remain anonymous

## Thank You

BreaCan would like to say thank you to all the people and organisations who have donated their time or resources to BreaCan during the past year. Special thanks to the Genesis Fitness Club for the use of their gym for the Feel Good Gentle Exercise program, the National Australia Bank volunteering program and the many What's On Information Session Presenters.

### A Special Thank You to Di Missen

Di Missen left BreaCan in July 2011 after nine years as the founding manager of the service. Di's passion, commitment, energy and considerable skill have been crucial to creating the unique, innovative and highly valued service that BreaCan is today. The strong value base that underpins BreaCan has been fostered under Di's leadership and enacted by both volunteers and staff. The shared set of values and commitment to providing an exceptional service have created a place of tremendous caring, respect and a 'safe haven' for women affected by breast and gynaecological cancers, their families and friends; to share, learn and live well. Di's significant contribution to BreaCan was celebrated in a farewell event attended by more than 80 well wishers. People that Di had worked with, developed partnerships with and collaborated with over the last nine years came together to celebrate Di's passion and dedication and the many friendships formed.

NAB employee  
Bernadette Chin with  
BreaCan volunteers  
Susan and Lois.



A special thank you to Bernadette Chin from the National Australia Bank who nominated BreaCan for a NAB community grant; Sue Malta and Sandra Moore for organising the Oaks Day fundraiser; and Frederika from the Studley Park Association. These three donations were over three quarters of the total received by BreaCan in 2010/2011.





# BreaCan

GYNAECOLOGICAL & BREAST CANCER SUPPORT

PHONE 1300 781 500  
FAX (03) 9921 0840  
EMAIL [breacan@breacan.org.au](mailto:breacan@breacan.org.au)  
POSTAL GPO Box 1066 Melbourne VIC 3001  
PODCASTS [www.breacan.org.au/services-events/information-sessions/archive](http://www.breacan.org.au/services-events/information-sessions/archive)

**BREACAN RESOURCE CENTRE**  
Ground Floor  
Queen Victoria Women's Centre  
210 Lonsdale St  
Melbourne VIC 3000

**HOURS OF OPERATION**  
Monday 10am-2pm  
Tuesday 10am-2pm  
Thursday 10am-2pm  
(Closed Public Holidays)

The *Bridge of Support* at the Royal Melbourne Hospital operates on a Thursday from 10am to 2pm.



BreaCan is a service of Women's Health Victoria; A state-wide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service.

BreaCan is funded by the Victorian Department of Health.

[www.breacan.org.au](http://www.breacan.org.au)

I understand now that having lived through a life threatening illness I can offer something valuable to other women – through listening, understanding and acknowledging their feelings – that can be very valuable to others.

*Kirsten, BreaCan volunteer*