



COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INCORPORATED)

THE CWA STORY

At the turn of the last century, country women in many parts of the world were beginning to work together to overcome the problems of isolation. In Australia, the formation of the Country Women's Association commenced in New South Wales and Queensland in 1922. Two years later in 1924, the first branch in Western Australia was established in Nungarin.

The Aim of the Association was, and still is, to improve the welfare and conditions of life of people everywhere, especially those living in the country, to foster friendship and understanding and to encourage co-operation and community effort.

Although the Country Women's Association was formed in the first instance, to meet the needs of the time, changes continue to occur in the organisation to meet the needs of today. Isolation was one of the early problems to be overcome, yet even with modern methods of communication, people can still be isolated, both physically and emotionally. Friendships made through CWA's supportive network can help to overcome this feeling of isolation.

In order to belong to the Country Women's Association, women need not be a farmer or a farmer's wife, nor earn their income from rural pursuits. All that is required is for women to be willing to abide by the democratic rules set by the members and to work for the Aim of the Association. In doing so, they can find friendship, fellowship and fun.

There are two kinds of membership – Branch membership and Associate Membership. A branch member pays an annual subscription to the branch of her choice. Branches meet monthly for business and sometimes for social activities in between. There are currently almost 140 branches throughout Western Australia. A State Conference is held annually and each branch, regardless of size has, one vote. An Associate Member joins through State Office, and does not belong to a specific branch.

CWA branches are found throughout the metropolitan area and the rest of WA. Each branch endeavours to meet the needs or requirements of its own community. This is achieved by providing educational opportunities through talks, discussions and demonstrations; by providing cultural experiences; and participating in cooking and crafts of all kinds. The care of plants and the making of gardens is also fostered along with ways of preserving home grown produce. All of these skills are just as useful today as they ever were and perhaps will become more so as the earth's resources need to be conserved.

The Association is non-party political, but speaks out when the need arises to express the views and concerns of rural people. Members are encouraged to keep informed about what is happening in the community, particularly social issues affecting the family, children and young people. A Social Issues Fact Finding Team within the Association collates the various views sent in by members on subjects of social concern. Submissions are prepared by this group for consideration by the State Management Committee before being forwarded as an Association viewpoint to the appropriate authority. This could be the State or Commonwealth Government, Parliamentary working parties, special Inquiries, or the Law Reform Commission. CWA has had an important constructive input into many of these.

The yearly State Conference is also the arena where branches have the opportunity to put forward Motions that contribute to the wellbeing of all people of this State and country. These motions, if passed, are also forwarded to the Government of the day as an expressed view of the Association for consideration and action.

The ideal of service - helping others - is a very important one to members of CWA. "Service to the Country" is one of the Association's main Aims and in pursuit of this Aim, much service has been given to the country and its people. Examples of the practical ways in which help has been given recently are:

Natural Disasters: Almost \$70,000 of assistance from CWA of WA branches was provided during severe bushfires in 2016, particularly in Yarloop and Esperance areas of Western Australia. Emergency catering was also provided. Assistance was also provided to rural families as a result of extensive frosts. In 2017, with the drought affecting some areas of Western Australia, the CWA is on hand again to help struggling farming families.

Welfare and Education Relief: Each year, the Sir James Mitchell Education and Welfare Fund disperses approximately \$200,000 for emergencies, health needs, education assistance and bursaries; items for hospitals, women's refuges and outback communities. Rural Medical, Nursing, Dental and Agricultural Scholarships are offered which encourage students to return to rural areas to practice.

Statewide Fundraising Projects: In 2016, over \$90,000 was raised by the Association for the Motor Neurone Disease Association of Western Australia. Two years earlier, the Association raised \$75,000 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The CWA of WA is also a full constituent member of the Associated Country Women of the World. This is a world-wide body of rural women's organisations with approximately nine million members in almost 70 countries with its headquarters in London. A world conference is held every three years and the CWA of WA sends delegates to attend.

Outside Australia and in support of rural women's groups in the South Pacific Area of the Associated Country Women of the World of which Australia forms a part, assistance has been given to Timor Leste, Vanuatu, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea in the form of direct assistance with building projects to sewing and educational aids. Parcels of needles, pins, threads, patterns, buttons and other sewing materials are regularly sent from Western Australia to these islands. The promise of a brightly coloured new singlet for her baby is often sufficient enticement for the mother to bring her baby back to the clinic for immunization and regular checks.

The Country Women's Association offers members and the general public, seaside cottages and holiday units around Western Australia's coastline to provide comfortable and inexpensive accommodation for families to have a holiday. The Association has holiday homes in Albany, Busselton, Jurien Bay and Esperance run by local committees.

State Committees also administer three Retirement Lodges for those who are over 55 years of age, men or women, members or non-members, and able to live independently. These are South Coast Lodge at Albany, Bluff Point Lodge near Geraldton and Cockburn Lodge in Rockingham.

CWA members have a formidable reputation as cooks - a reputation of which they are justly proud. CWA House in West Perth, which is the administrative headquarters and members' city home, was built largely from the proceeds of many catering ventures. Members do not mind in the least having the "tea and scones" label applied to them. Catering itself is a service to the country. Wherever events are held, people always need to be fed, so CWA catering fills a real need on these occasions.

The State Office of the Country Women's Association is located at CWA House at 1176 Hay Street, West Perth. A wide variety of CWA merchandise goods is available for sale at CWA House. These includes the iconic *CWA Cookery Book and Household Hints* which was first published in 1936. This is a well-loved recipe book with a reputation for reliability.

With a colourful window display at the front of the building, the CWA Showroom offers items for sale that have been handcrafted by members of the Association and include knitted, crocheted and sewn baby and children's clothing and blankets; clothes hangers with brightly coloured knitted, crocheted or woven covers; handmade toys; pottery; woodwork; china painting; jewellery; handmade gift cards; tea cups and pots with covers and tea towels. The Showroom is open between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

The Association, and its membership, has a history of independent self-help. No Government funding is received except for the occasional Lotterywest Grant provided for the maintenance of CWA buildings. The projects members aspire to do through the Association's Aims and Objectives, and the service given, are all financed by members through various voluntary activities. Hence the need to first raise the funds, then set about using that money in ways approved by the members to give "service to the country, through country women, for country women, by country women".

**For further information, please visit the Association's website at
www.cwaofwa.asn.au**