

CASHELLE DUNN:

Good morning, if you could all take your seat and get ready, an exciting day. Good morning and welcome to the launch of the WWDA network, my name is Cashelle Dunn, Vice President of WWDA and the Manager of the WWDA Youth Network.

Women with Disabilities Australia, or WWDA, is the peak organisation for women with a disability in Australia. WWDA initiated the Network to empower young women and girls with disability through human rights education.

As Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said, "Knowledge is power. Information is liberation. Education is the premise of progress."

Housekeeping: the women's toilets are just to the left, near the front. The accessible, and men's bathroom, is next to the reception desk, back past the elevator.

We have an exciting morning ahead with speeches from Senator Michaelia Cash, Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell, from our President, Rayna Lamb, and Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick and WWDA Youth Member, Bonnie Millen.

Following the speeches, please join us for morning tea, and sign our 'banner of dreams' and our Polaroid attendance book. Ladies and gentleman, distinguished guests, it is my pleasure to welcome Yvonne Weldon for the Welcome to Country.

AUNT YVONNE WELDON:

My name is Yvonne Weldon, I am originally from Cowra in New South Wales, the Deputy Chairperson of the Aboriginal Land Council and I am the representative of the Gadigal Elders who could not be here today. To bring a message of acknowledgement of the land of the people of the Eora Nation. To bring respect and recognition of the Eora Nation, to promote a vision of working together as one community, and achieving as one community.

I pay my respect to Elders past and present, your country covers from the Hawks River to (inaudible), on behalf of the Gadigal Elders, and I welcome you to Gadigal land and acknowledge the ancestors for remaining with the land, and Mother Earth.

My people have been part of the land for 50,000 years and we will continue to maintain the land, and practices, for another 50,000 years, at least.

Could we all pause for a short time to reflect and remember the many young women with disabilities who have been affected by discrimination? Let us all draw upon my people's spirit as we continue our

journey together, walking forward to support these women and their families.

May my people guide you, and walk with you, as you bring about positive change, through the important work of continued engagement with young women with a disability – thank you.

(Applause)

CASHELLE DUNN:

Now I would like to invite to the podium the Honourable Sen Michaelia Cash, to officially launch the WWDA Youth Network.

SEN THE HON MICHAELIA CASH:

Good morning, a pleasure to be here with you to launch the WWDA Youth Network. Congratulations to everybody who has been involved in what is going to be an incredibly influential network.

In particular we should pause and acknowledge Carolyn Frohmader. There are many people who motivate you in life, and then you meet Carolyn. Carolyn has spent her life making sure that women with a disability have a voice.

On behalf of the Government, thank you for everything you do for women with a disability.

(Applause)

I am ad-libbing here, going off my written speech. Carolyn and I met in Perth about 12 months ago, we had a long and honest chat about women with disabilities, and what the Government could do to assist. That chat so affected me that I was determined to do what I could to find even a modest amount of funding, but I know you appreciate it.

When you give someone like yourselves, an organisation like this, \$275,000, it suddenly becomes \$2 million, in terms of the work that you will do. It was based on your advocacy that I made it my personal mission to deliver something on behalf of the Government.

Can I always acknowledge Megan Mitchell and Elizabeth Broderick and Cashelle Dunn? Instead of signing an attendance register – boring! – we get to stand in front of the WWDA banner, have our Polaroid taken, and put it into your 'book of dreams'. Make sure you do it before you leave.

I had a look at the WWDA Facebook page. It shows you have been incredibly busy since going live in March. I wanted to share some of the stories. Each host tells an incredibly motivating story.

The first is 12-year-old Claire. The love of soccer could not be dampened by a deterioration in eyesight that affected her depth perception and three-dimensional vision. She has not only continued to enjoy the sport, with the help of an audible ball, she has been a passionate promoter of inclusive soccer, forming her own not-for-profit, known as FEVER, which is short for 'Football for Everyone', and is an advocate for players with different abilities.

FEVER has one rule, if the game needs to be modified for their needs, it will be. Claire has not only changed the way she played sport, but make sure other kids are not held back because of their disability, and the disability is not allowed to get in the way of doing something they love.

The network page also connects us with the most amazing story of 2015 Young Australian of the Year, 22-year-old Drisana, the first deaf Auslan user to undertake jury duty. Growing up deaf, so much focus was given on her ability to speak and hear, rather than who she was, her values, skills and personality. When it came to participating in a jury, her thought was, "Why would I turned down a civic duty when I am more than capable of doing so?"

She became the first deaf Auslan user to fulfil civic duty, and works hard to make sure the wider community understands that it is OK to be deaf.

The Youth Network, I am so glad, is going to help connect us with stories like Drisana and Claire, and then engage with other young women with a disability. It will also relay practical, up-to-date information to followers via the website, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

There are a number of everyday challenges that any young Australian may face, such as keeping up to date with events, obtaining advice about sexual and reproductive health, managing chronic illness or tips on getting a job. But for young people with a disability, they are often much harder to navigate.

The Youth Network will make traversing those challenges easier. And it will remind followers there are so many other girls out there just like them, having the same experiences, facing the same hurdles and asking the same questions.

Sometimes you think you are all alone in life, only to find there are others out there that are sharing the same experiences, and isn't it wonderful to be able to connect with those people?

I want to pause briefly to reflect on violence against women and children. We know that women and girls with disability are much more likely to face disadvantage when it comes to education, employment, family and reproductive rights. We also know, when it comes to violence against women and children, they are more likely to experience physical and sexual violence.

A quarter of rape cases reported by women in Australia are committed against women with disability. Victimization of women and girls with disability can be up to 10 times higher than other women. That is absolutely abhorrent. No woman in Australia should be denied the right to live a life free from violence.

Everybody here today would agree that knowledge is power. So when girls are armed with knowledge of their rights and freedoms, they instantly have more choice, they instantly have more control, and they add power to the voice that says, "Enough is enough."

In terms of the Government's priorities, I can assure you, we are resolute in our commitment to ending the scourge of violence against women and children. As you know, and many of you have given us some amazing feedback in relation to the Second Action Plan, under the National Action Plan, to reduce violence against women and their children.

We have specifically had a strong focus on delivering the benefits for women with diverse experiences of others, and in my discussions with Carolyn, when we looked at the pathway we wanted the Second Action Plan to take, Carolyn expressed a very strong voice that Women With Disabilities had to have a specific focus in the plan because the needs are so specific. Based on your advocacy, we ensure that is exactly what happens.

Government cannot act alone. When we develop policy, one of the most important things for us is to ensure that we are readily speaking with you and tapping into the experience and knowledge of organisations such as yourself.

Women with Disabilities Australia is run by women with disability, so you know what you need most, because you are the experts. So you come to us with the solution.

You've got the most innovative ideas about how our system can better support disabled Australians, because you live it every single day. And you have a whole network of women and girls whose collective knowledge and experiences you are able to draw upon.

That is why I am just so delighted to be able to announce today that the Government has provided \$275,000 to support WWDA to continue its important work.

(Applause)

This funding is going to enable Women with Disability Australia to run a national forum for women with disability, it will enable you to be engaged in the work of the NDIS and National Women's Alliances.

I hope it will also give the Youth Network a voice.

One other exciting piece of news... In September, the United Nations Population Fund will bring together disability advocates from all over the world for an Expert Group Meeting on Youth and Disability.

The talks will apply best practice social inclusion policy to the challenge of how best to protect young people with disability at national, regional and global levels.

And I'm thrilled to announce that Women with Disabilities Australia has been invited to take part in the meeting and join the Advisory Group for its Global Program on Youth and Disability.

WWDA Executive Director Carolyn Frohmader will travel to Montevideo, Uruguay to join in the talks.

It is a huge honour for WWDA to be recognised at this level. I have no doubt that Carolyn will do us all proud. This is a very, very exciting organisation and I look forward to hearing more about what happens in Uruguay, with the Advisory Group.

In conclusion, it is again my pleasure to launch the Youth Network today. My congratulations to Women with Disabilities Australia for being a powerful voice for more than 2 million women and girls, and congratulations to Cashelle, Carolyn and everybody involved in bringing the Youth Network to life. Well done.

(Applause)

CASHELLE DUNN:

Thank you very much, Senator Cash. I would now like to welcome the amazing Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick. She is a powerful force when it comes to gender rights and we are very proud to have her here today.

(Applause)

COMMISSIONER ELIZABETH BRODERICK:

I am going to be very brief today. It is such a great pleasure to be here and in a room with so many powerful, gorgeous young and older women, like myself, to really celebrate the Youth Network.

I have had the joy of working with Carolyn and many women in the room today, travelling to the United Nations, to New York, to really see the work that WWDA does on the international stage. WWDA quite rightly gets funds it so deserves from the Government, and good on you, Minister, for finding the

funding.

What we are launching today, the Youth Network, will transform the ability for younger women with disabilities to connect. That really matters. I'm so glad to be part of this as Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner. I am in awe of the young women with disabilities.

Thank you for inviting me today, and I will look at the Network regularly to get the stories as well.

CASHELLE DUNN:

I would now like to welcome Megan Mitchell, the Commissioner for Children. This is a Youth Network and it is important to include the Children's sector. So please welcome Megan Mitchell.

COMMISSIONER MEGAN MITCHELL:

When they say I am the Children's Commissioner, is for children over 18, but it doesn't mean I don't talk to children over 18, I often do.

(Laughter)

But it is a complete joy to connect with children and young people in my role - adults are OK, but they are the best.

I would sincerely like to thank WWDA for inviting me, and I will also be brief. It is an honour to be here alongside Senator Cash, and we should all be confident we have a very powerful advocate within government in Senator Cash.

And Rayna, Bonnie, my colleague Liz Broderick will be sorely missed.

Since I was appointed National Children's Commissioner, my (inaudible) has been to promote the respect for the rights of young children and young people in line the United Nations Rights of the Child. Rights are fundamental, basic, something we all have them in common. It is about our safety and inclusion. It's about having an education, good health, and it also puts the onus on adults in particular to make that happen.

It is also incredibly important that children and young people know about their rights, because that keeps them strong and makes them stronger. I like to think of it as a piece of armour that they put on, that strengthens their nerve and their steel, and that helps them go forward and stand up to themselves.

So it is important that young children know their rights, and we have a duty to uphold them.

We have ratified the Convention, 25 years ago this year. It's took a long time to come, but it is never too late.

I would also like to acknowledge what Senator Cash said about women and children with disabilities being much more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse and violence throughout their lives. People whose powerlessness sometimes puts them at serious risk of human rights breaches.

I did some work last year on self-harm among children and young people and it was clear that children and young people with disabilities are particularly prone to self-harm and suicide.

There is work further down the track to examine this year in the light of a broader national conversation, the impact of domestic and family violence and the rights of children and young people, which I will be reporting on in my 2015 Report to Parliament.

One of the most powerful tools is education. I am delighted to see this network has been created for young women with a disability, to educate and inform each other about their rights and freedoms, and support each other in their achievements, and the enjoyment of their rights.

I would also like to acknowledge Cashelle Dunn, Rayna Lamb, Carolyn Frohmader, and everyone behind the scenes at WWDA in establishing this network.

It will be an excellent source of education, and empowerment, for women and young girls with a disability. It is all about power.

(Applause)

CASHELLE DUNN:

Thank you. That was a very insightful speech. You will see on our website an article on self-harm. (Inaudible) has the travelling mic now.

This will be fun. Overcoming self-harm... There you go, Commissioner, that is for you.

The WWDA website uses a masonry grid layout that is accessible. It has been designed with disability considerations. All images have ALT-Text and all articles have been tested for readability.

We have recently been called 'the age of bite-sized learning'. Each WWDA Youth article is a bite-sized insight into issues relevant to women and girls.

They can be navigated by topic. As you can see, with my amazing clicking skills... Oh! I know how to work this.

It can be navigated by topic, if you wish. The WWDA Youth Network are encouraged to share their ideas for the article through the Connect portal... There are the topics, I told you they were there (Laughs).

They can share their poetry, stories and art work and we promote these through the website and our social media. All WWDA Youth can subscribe to our monthly newsletter by entering their name and email address. All articles can be shared through social media.

Just hover over it. It can be shared. We also have a live feed from our Twitter and Facebook accounts. These accounts, as well as our Instagram account, can be accessed through the links at the bottom of the webpage.

If you click on Facebook. Facebook has been running since March, we aim to share a vast array of information from events, interesting facts, empowering stories and infographics.

We invite you to share the articles, the webpage, and follow us on social media. It is important to expand our visibility so that all girls and women with a disability can become more aware of their rights and options.

Are there any questions? No? You are all feeling empowered and strong? I feel it in the room.

(Laughter)

I would like to now invite up here the amazing and powerful Rayna Lamb.

RAYNA LAMB:

It is a long way from Perth. I am incredibly moved to be here today and have been on the verge of tears over the last 20 minutes, just overwhelmed by everything. I would like to start by acknowledging the Gadigal people. Is that how you say it? I tried to pay attention earlier. The Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, on whose land we meet today, and Elders past and present.

Thank you so much, Aunty Yvonne Weldon, that was a moving and relevant Welcome to Country. I can clearly remember being a young woman with a disability, living in small towns, before the internet, very isolated and unhappy and alone. It would have been an extraordinary thing to read the experiences of other women and girls and make connections with them. (Inaudible) and they will not have to suffer the isolation of previous generations.

The teenager I was then would not believe that I am the President of such a world-renowned organisation that is making a difference to the lives of women and girls with a disability. It is huge, it really is. I'd better get going before I collapse! (Laughs)

My job today is to thank a number of people for their support with the initiative. Firstly I would like to thank Minister Michaelia Cash, and the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet, for providing a funding grant to help build the capacity of our organisation and assist young women with a disability.

Minister Cash has for many years showed support of and belief in WWDA. We are all very grateful for her strong commitment to ensuring a better life for women and young girls with a disability. Particularly her strong commitment to women and young girls living their lives without violence – that is something we have to get right, otherwise nothing else can be done.

I would also like to thank the Department of Social Services for the ongoing support of WWDA which helps with our day-to-day work.

On behalf of WWDA I would like to acknowledge the Australian Government through the Department of Social Services and Australian Human Rights Commission, for funding the Disability International Participation Funding Program.

What you see here is a very tangible outcome of the Australian Government's investment in building the capacity of people with disability. We do hope to see this important funding program continue so that more young people with disability can be encouraged to develop their talents and make great contributions to Australia and the world.

We need more young women as leaders to continue to work for the rights and wellbeing of women and girls with disabilities. And to take up (inaudible) before Carolyn and I fall off our perch! (Laughs). I'm a bit tired, jetlag! (Laughs)

Could somebody get me some water, please? I am not coping well with the air-conditioning.

The value and importance of the Disability International Participation Funding Program cannot be overstated. Many thanks must go to Megan Mitchell and Liz Broderick for attending today and their support in their roles of Sex Discrimination and Children's Commissioners, respectively.

I would like to pay respect to my long-time friend, Elizabeth Broderick. During her term as Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Liz has been a staunch supporter and a formidable advocate in advancing the human rights of women and girls with disability.

She has on many occasions gone above and beyond the call of duty in advocating on our behalf. Thank you so much for that. Liz is an extraordinary women who we are indebted to for everything she has done over many years to support the rights of women and girls with disabilities. We are privileged to call Liz our friend.

(Applause)

I am sure everyone I have just mentioned will forgive me if I say I have left the very best to last. In fact, I am certain everyone would agree with me.

Cashelle Dunn, our Vice President - she seems to have boundless initiative and energy - is the founder and driving force behind the WWDA Youth Network. In the few years she has been with us, she has been a wonderful advocate for the rights and interests of young women and girls with a disability. I feel very privileged to be working with her in leading WWDA.

Cashelle embodies and represents the future of WWDA and of disability rights... I'm getting to the point where I'm going to seem drunk, going round saying, "I really love you, I love you, mate." I can really see it!

(Laughter)

Cashelle, along with a group of young people with disability, and many of whom are here today, represented Australian youth with disabilities in the 7th Session of the Conference of State Parties to the Committee on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities in New York.

Many of these delegates have gone on to do amazing things, taking up Board positions of Disabled People's Organisations, undertaking training and education. And of course here today, supporting and establishing the WWDA Youth Network.

Lastly, but never, never the least, I do, of course, need to acknowledge and thank our incredible Executive Director, Carolyn Frohmader. There are no words expressive enough to describe who Carolyn is and what she does for all of us and what she does for WWDA and women and girls with disabilities, not only in this country but all over the world.

Carolyn and WWDA seem to be the same thing to a lot of people, and WWDA would not be the highly respected organisation it is today without her round-the-clock commitment. It is quite literally 'round-the-clock'. Thank you so much to Carolyn and Cashelle for organising today's launch and to the volunteers who helped set up the venue and make the launch a success.

Thank you to all the women with disabilities and our allies and supporters who have made the effort to attend the launch, especially in this cold winter weather... It's not actually that cold! (Laughs) I spent the last two weeks whingeing about having to come to Sydney in the winter, and I come here and I feel I have been a bit of a drama queen. But it was well worth the trip from Perth to see you all here today. Thank you.

CASHELLE DUNN:

Thank you, Rayna, that was wonderful. I'd now like to welcome the amazing Bonnie Millen who is a WWDA Youth Member, my best friend, and we met when we both went over to the (inaudible). That doesn't even make sense! COSP at the CRPD. She is an amazing advocate for people with a disability. Please welcome Bonnie Millen.

(Applause)

BONNIE MILLEN:

I am super-chuffed be asked today to speak to you all and I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work that Cashelle and Rayna have put together to make this wonderful thing happen. It has been a long time coming, the youth and women and girls with disability.

I have come today from Adelaide which is why I may look dishevelled... I have had to get to know my way round Pitt Street and George Street!

I am proud that a Youth Network is now available for young women and girls living with a disability. I visualise the network becoming a central front for women and girls with disability to come together, share stories and experiences and become the next generation leaders for the organisation.

Leadership developed in young girls with a disability, living anywhere in Australia, will mean that, while living with disability, they will have more potential to identify new challenges, set priorities for their gender, implement strategies for equality and take action for their own service needs and what is required for their rights and independence.

One of my passions is education. Education for all women and girls is vital to ensure they have access to a better quality of life and enable the ability to educate others about disability and feel confidence.

Education leads to positive effects in girls with disability becoming more involved in society and leadership as they become women. They gain more self-esteem and greater knowledge. If they are left behind, without support and that vital cheer from their peers and our organisation, their confidence in themselves and the ability to educate, advocate and inspire would not be achieved.

I have been hard of hearing since birth, a confidence buster in a mainstream country school. The confidence I have developed and show today in order to educate others has been through hardship and several bashings to my own self confidence as I grew up.

It occurred to me when I reached my teens, that I know my disability, I know my capabilities and strength, I know what I can do, and it is up to me to educate others. Nobody can do it for me. Nobody is standing in my shoes.

I am now inspire girls and women that removing 'disability' from their thought will improve their confidence in being able to achieve. "I have a disability, I cannot participate in that activity" becomes, "I want to give that activity ago. What can I do to make it more accessible/achievable?"

It is a difficult realism to face but it has enabled me to support others in their journey to be more confident in their ability to work, advocate and inspire.

Leadership doesn't mean being at the top – but it does mean education. Educating others in individual expertise is vital to ensure that young women and girls with a disability come to the front of the room, and not fade to the back. This is a fantastic initiative for our next generation, for leaders to be heard and have a voice, and be proud of what they stand for.

It is an opportunity for them to become involved with girls and women of their own age, from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, to share their knowledge and see opportunity through fresh eyes.

It will enable the future of advocacy of girls and women in Australia, and internationally, to be carried. I want to give a leg-up to future leaders through education, inspiration and change, and WWDA is a starting point. Thank you.

(Applause)

CASHELLE DUNN:

Thank you, Bonnie. If you want to hear more from Bonnie, she has a contributing opinion piece right on our website.

OK, that is the end. Now the exciting part – morning tea. Thank you all for joining us today. Special thanks to Carolyn Frohmader, WWDA CEO, who has worked tirelessly to advocate for the rights of girls and women with disability in Australia and is internationally recognised for her advocacy.

I proposed the WWDA to her last year; she straightaway saw the potential and instigated it (inaudible).

Thank you for being the amazing person you are.

(Applause)

I would also like to thank Senator Cash; with the funding, WWDA is able to take a large step forward in educating young woman and girls with disability to make decisions for their own future and be the leaders of tomorrow.

We encourage you to browse the table during morning tea, it has samples of articles from our website and related resources from other organisations.

Don't forget to write a message on our 'banner of dreams', and get your Polaroid taken for a book of attendance. Welcome to the beginning; we are excited to grow our content, expand our reach, and innovate new ways to empower young women and girls with a disability.

Let's challenge stereotypes and take inclusion a step forward.

(Applause)