



gen x, gen y and baby boomer women – a generation gap or a listening opportunity?

gen wisdom and politics

In 2008/2009 the Women's Participation in Local Government (WPILG) Coalition will host events which support women's participation in Local Governments by calling on the expertise of member organizations (below).

The reflections and learning gathered at these events will become e-bulletins to WPILG members and supporters, all women Councillors and others who may be interested.

In August 2008, a small group of young women and others involved in politics was convened by WPILG Coalition member YWCA Victoria. The following are some reflections and pointers from the "gen-wisdom" of young women in politics to encourage young women's civic and political participation.

Participants included Natalie Goharpey Board VIRWC, Sarah Capper VWT, Cr Michele MacDonald Mayor, City of Maribyrnong, Cr Alice Pryor City of Moreland. Jenny Wills WPILGC, Dr Rosemary Kiss WPILGC, Cr Beth Ripper Chair WPILGC (Wellington), Liz Billings YWCA, Linda Bennett VLGA. Professor Johanna Wyn Melbourne University was able to confirm that the findings were consistent with her research (references below).

"It doesn't just happen" - early pathways to politics, family and social life

Getting involved requires a searching out of specific interest in politics, and being encouraged and invited, often with active recruitment.

"It's step by step - it was a 12-14 year journey before I came to Local Government. Family experiences can instill this passion for community, reflected in my journey to politics. Finally ...when the opportunity arose, I thought "That's something I always wanted to do."

It involves a social friendship group and this element of friendship and fun makes it sustainable.

"All along the way I was supported" - what kind of support?

You need to be in an environment where running for candidacy is accepted and supported (family, friends, work).

"Public speaking vs. leadership training?" The question is about specific skills vs. creating a broad new way of thinking about your potential.

The idea of “being prepared” for Council is a misnomer because it’s really about learning on the job.

The importance of encouragement by others to get involved – “in my candidacy I felt supported and that the group was committed to me.”

“I am constantly surprised when I get asked to do leadership things.”

Need the nurturing entourage, the context; young women need to be part of a group which nurtures the drive towards politics.

Is there a mentoring role for women Councillors? If you stay more than one or two terms, you need to build in mentoring for succession planning – learning the ropes, achieving something, grooming someone to take over.....

Our lives are very different - “What does Local Government even mean? I don’t know.”

“Our lives are very different compared to the lives reflected in the current political structures, whether of Local Governments or of political parties which were formed 50 or 100 years ago.”

Is politics: “a conspiracy of the old against the young” ??

“There’s a whole demographic which doesn’t think about Local Governments – partly because they are not linked to services, maybe they (the demographic) are apolitical”.

Challenges: Affordability and time

“It cost me \$10,000 to run my campaign and \$5000 for solicitor fees when the result was challenged in the courts at the end of my second term.”

“We are time poor.”

“I am not running again because it’s a 4 year term.”

“Children are political gold” - Opportunities

Having children is a huge bonus in relation to informal and formal networks.

The key is education and community development - reaching out, for example, girls are ready for the stories from year 10, “get them young”.

The key in getting the message out about women in Local Government is personal connectedness – the power of the speaker can still be mighty even if it is one-off.

“It’s about relationship”. - Reaching out

Reaching out to young women takes an attitude of respect and listening as well as understanding where they are - some examples:

Young women are in sport, swimming, dancing and drama, and they often join outside their own geographical area because they join with friends. They are also at the mall, at TAFE, at work and on the web and at school.

Example 1: Listen, value, respect

There was a threat to close an outdoor pool and this led a protest group to come to Council to save the pool. One outcome has been that the group members have now become involved in other issues – the main reason is we listened to and valued them.

In our Youth summits, our first priority is to report back on how we acted on their recommendations. Whatever the issue we make sure it's a positive experience for those involved. They feel listened to, valued, respected.

Example 2: Young women rely on their computers and internet.

It is not optional. "It's huge (yet) in our lives we have overwhelming time constraints: sometimes I feel bombarded with information, whereas if I feel I have the knowledge and the links, I get clearer. We need the engaging issues."

An example of use of web is the recent VWT Suffrage forum which was promoted through FaceBook and MySpace. Plus having popular celebrities as hosts is good.

Example 3: The responsibility is on the institutions themselves to be more inviting, open. "We had a problem with the consultations for our Councils Structure Plan. We had terrible trouble getting people engaged. We knew that 50% were renting and we had to work out how to start the conversation. So what we did was a celebrity comedy debate in the Pub, we had to turn people away!"

Shire of Wellington has sought out all the women who have been elected to its Local Government ever and gave their stories one page each (via print and web **LINK???**).

What if? Other ideas from the experts...

Could WPILGC be a Facebook site? What about if WPILGC was a club with a group page? All you would need would be a moderator.

Even Councils could easily do this one! It's cheap, cost effective and quick.

What about if every women on Council had a Facebook page?

What about if we could find ways to normalize women being in politics and in Local Government? Through celebrations? Promotions of role models? And so on.

1. Background reading

In our limited literature search, we found nothing specific about the political participation of young women. Most research was focused on workforce participation. Following are several articles which may provoke thought about young people's participation in general.

Dusseldorp Skills Forum: *Fearless and Flexible - views of Gen Y* prepared by Saulwick Muller Social Research October 2006
(Available to download <http://www.dsf.org.au/index.php>)

TAFE: ICVET: The Changing Face of the Workforce and Intergenerational Impacts prepared by Avril Henry AH Revelations for ICVET

(Available to download <http://www.icvet.tafensw.edu.au/index.htm>)

Australian Youth Research Centre: *Rethinking Youth Citizenship Identity and Connection*, authored by Anita Harris, Johanna Wyn, Salem Younes

Also a literature search commissioned by City of Melbourne about young people's civic engagement, citizenship and participation.

(Available to download

http://www.acys.info/directory/organisations/research_list/youth_research_centre
)

MAV, Connecting Young People in Local Communities – developing a Local Government Youth Charter (available at www.mav.asn.au)

Examples of Local Government policies for young people - City of Melbourne City of Greater Geelong, many others....

3. Definitions (from Wikipedia search for “Gen Y”)

Baby boomers: born early 1940's through 1960's

Gen X: born 1961 through 1981

Gen Y: born 1982 - 2001

Gen Z or the E-gen? born late 1990's through ?

END

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