




Rural Women Online

In the last two years, various research and evidence has emerged that speaks to the critical barriers experienced by women in rural and remote areas to online participation.

The most significant of these is the Australian Digital Inclusive Index 2020 & 2021 (ADII), which identified three crucial pinchpoints: access, affordability, and ability.

VWT will continue to advocate for greater access and affordability, but it is on that third point—ability—that we feel we can really make a difference.

Launching in mid 2022, **Rural Women Online (RWO)** is an initiative aimed at helping rural women connect online by fast tracking their access to IT training, support and mentoring.

The project was originally conceived in May/June 2021, and is co-funded by the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and the Bendigo Bank Community Enterprise Foundation, with in-kind support from VWT.

The project will consist of a public-facing website that focuses on the three pillars of RWO:



1. Training

A self-directed, mini-curriculum of advice covering a wide range of tech knowledge—from e-safety to how to use various software, providing effective and clear communication by using videos and women's stories.

2. Support

VWT will run a one-day-a-week 'help desk' in real time—fielding email and phone enquiries that provide instructive advice that empowers, not condescends, to users.

3. Mentoring

The most intensive pillar, RWO mentoring will provide up to 30 hours of one-to-one learning to a select group of users (capped at 300). Entry to this program will be filtered according to a number of considerations including user's level of IT literacy, hardship, how remotely they are located, and if they live in bushfire-affected areas.

VWT is contracting the services of Your Creative, a multi-disciplinary studio based in Melbourne, to build the RWO website, which will act as the central hub for accessing online training and sign-up forms for mentors and mentees.

In addition to the website, VWT will coordinate a series of 12 in-person 'Open Day' sessions at various rural locations, including 4 bushfire-affected areas: Mildura, Swan Hill, Ballarat, Hamilton, Horsham, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Wonthaggi, Corryong, Myrtleford, Mallacoota and Buchan - Bairnsdale.

These open-day sessions will:

- Engage women in the RWO program and activate their participation
- Build a constructive atmosphere leaving users feelings valued and enlivened by their participation
- Provide exciting promotions and/or guests at sessions
- Provide IT support on the day for questions on computer equipment and software



- Provide access and assistance on training and support through the distribution and dissemination of IT educational materials
- Assist in signing up mentees and mentors
- Promote and engage in collaboratively devised communications strategy to attract participants



The Trust has established a project team, consisting of:

Project Directors: Alana Johnson AM (Chair, VWT Board) and Mary Crooks AO (Executive Director, VWT)

Project Manager: Bronwyn Johnson

Project Officer: Lily Mooney

Project Consultants: Tammy Atkins and Sue Gold from *It's On Purpose* (IOP), delivering the twelve Open Day sessions that the initiative will run in regional Victoria.

All of RWO's work will be governed by 10 key values:

1. Integrity

We will foster honest, authentic, open, transparent communication, and be accountable to the team, to participants, stakeholders and all others connected to the project as it unfolds.

2. Kindness

We will be sensitive to different backgrounds and expectations, conducting ourselves with civility in everything we do.

3. Fun and Adventure

We will bring fun and enjoyment and a sense of adventure to the project and its promise.

4. High Quality Endeavour

We will listen well and aim to exceed expectations. We will seek to create ways for people to move forward to achieve great outcomes through clarity in all our communications.

5. Fairness

We will be sensitive to inequity. We will grapple with issues of affordability and access and advocate for these wherever possible.

6. Realism

We will be realistic in our offerings so that people's expectations can be met and not crushed, working within budget constraints and not exploiting people's time and efforts.

7. Inclusion

We will actively strive to be as inclusive as possible and non-judgemental.

8. Respect

We will practice respect and look for the best in everyone.

9. Exemplary Feminism

We will strive to be exemplary in our feminist values and practices e.g., Men as allies, collaborative and committed to creating better outcomes for rural women.

10. Encourage Opportunities

We will create and encourage opportunities for rural women wherever possible. We will work to enhance rural women's IT access.

→ For more information, please visit the Rural Women Online website at: www.ruralwomenonline.org.au

RURAL WOMEN ONLINE GENERAL PARTNERS



LEFT: Australian bush