

The power of networking

By Sue McCreery

Past Reference Group member Sue McCreery has always been a keen networker and continues to share information through her email groups. But how did she really get into this networking obsession? Sue tells her story.

I think I am a born organiser and one to take up opportunities. In the early 90s I purchased a second hand computer to do my family tree. I decided to participate in a pilot program to learn about computers, internet and emails. Of the original Australia-wide group who participated in this trial, about twenty of us still keep in contact and have annual reunions.

We talk about every topic under the sun and help each other out with whatever arrives in our emails each day. We share ideas, dreams, births, deaths, marriages, travel, medical help, family, drought, floods, fires, fundraising ideas, recipes, books, genealogy, politics and religion—although these two get a bit touchy at times—and a host of other topics. We now have participants that have joined us worldwide. Might I add ... I am still to complete my family tree!

This and another email group were very helpful to me when I was trying to improve communications for Kalannie in 1995. This led to a plan for a Telecentre.

I came to realise what a powerful tool the internet is, particularly email, to network with others; to save time without trying to reinvent the wheel.

Still to this day, I cringe when I see the words 'need to be innovative', which is necessary in many grant applications. I actually have more to do with my life than be innovative all the time and the saying: 'If it ain't broke don't fix it', means that it worked well the first time, why change it. We are all busy people, especially those of you that work on the land, raise children and also volunteer in our communities. My policy is to share, care and help anyone that is looking for information.

Funding bodies don't realise the vastness of rural areas and the opportunities we have to deliver the same workshops in more than one area, without duplicating attendees. Travel costs and child care are the two most inhibiting factors in delivering anything in our regions. The smaller the catchment area, the more likelihood we have of participation.

This has lead me on to my own personal and professional development while community building as much as I can. I have taken every opportunity to better myself, doing courses, workshops and joining leadership groups.

In 1995 I had the honour of being nominated by the president of the Shire Mr Don Stanley for the ABC Rural Women Award. When he asked if he could nominate me, I said I did not think what I



Sue McCreery was a RRR Network Reference Group Member from 1998 to 2003.

did in my community was what the Award was about. He said, 'well if they aren't then they should be' and put my nomination in. I went on to win the Midwest region section and participated in a week-long intensive leadership training course in Sydney with 41 other like minded people—which changed my life.

The week I received the news of winning this award was my fiftieth birthday, I was coordinating first aid courses for 54 primary school students and organising a local gravel pit concert. Everything was progressing without a hitch until my family threw me a surprise birthday party. I became quite emotional—a result of the surprise and exhaustion.

In one month early in 1999 I had four significant incidents in my life: the loss of my dear Mother-in-law and her funeral to organise, a diagnosis of breast cancer, a son's wedding and notification that we had the funding to start the local Telecentre. Due to my four-month absence from the community during cancer treatment, I had to sit down and list what I did in the community to pass on jobs. The list was enormous! It was a good learning curve for me. Once the list was completed I phoned local people to ask them to take over for me. Most were happy to take on commitments and, on my return after treatment, some decided to continue with the job they had taken on. I wrote five reports the night before I went to hospital for surgery. I thought I was so organised—until we got the hospital and realised my bag had been left at home.

A lot of people thought that I would take a step back and slow down after my diagnosis, but I think it made me realise that life is too short and the need to get out there in the community and just do it.

Being one of the first to be diagnosed with cancer in my area was a huge challenge. There were few around in the district for support or information I needed to help make important decisions. After treatment I decided to set up a Cancer support group, which still functions in a loose form today. I still send out information packs to anyone in need and have many phone calls asking for help and support or just to lend an ear for those that want to talk.

It was about this time that I was appointed to the RRR Network Reference group—and that was an amazing journey. I was a member for four years and helped set up the website. To promote this I started hour-long Sunday afternoon chats and I also monitored the email group, injecting topics to motivate discussions. The chat room had people from all over the world popping in and I ended up buying jewellery from Norway and Sweden. I gained so much from this experience and still have email friends from other countries I met during this time.

One day my sister rang to see if I knew of help she could get for a young mother on a cattle station near her in the Pilbara region who was suffering from post natal depression. I sent out an email and by the evening I had 30 responses and all kinds of offers of help, mostly from women that had also suffered from post natal depression. The young mum accepted some of these offers and all went well for her. I think this experience proved to me just what the power of networking can do.

The RRR Network has grown from strength to strength and Marg Agnew, the founder of the concept, can be very proud of what she achieved. She was an inspiration to us all. I am also pleased that through my extensive email network I have set up in the Wheatbelt area that others have taken the opportunity to nominate for the board as well.

If you would like to join my email group - email me at suewa@bigpond.com , you never know what opportunities will come across my desk that I can forward on to you, that may just make a difference to your life.

Sue McCreery : suewa@bigpond.com