

Living the dream

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My participation in a two-week Anna Stewart Program immersed me in union life and left me feeling even more energised and enthusiastic than when I arrived.

The program was set up in honour of one of the incredible female activists of last century, my fellow participant Teresa Calder and I explained to a group of colleagues at Blacktown Teachers Association.

“It’s been amazing!” I said. “We’ve been able to have meetings with nearly all of the Senior Officers as well as many of the other officers of our union. They’ve answered all of our questions and really taken the time to make us feel welcome here.

“I’ve done that program!” a woman spoke up brightly. Her experience in the role inspired her to stand as a Relief Officer and consider furthering her activism in Federation.

Inspiring is the right word for it.



When I began studying to become a teacher, a unionised workforce was important. Becoming a member of Federation didn’t seem like a choice — my mother, a close friend and a few other teacher activists I knew had been regaling me with tales of inspirational union activism and its benefits since long before I received my acceptance in my chosen teaching program. I was one of those lucky recipients of targeted graduate permanency early in my first year of teaching.

I wasn’t completely aware of Federation’s crucial role in my “luck” until my Anna Stewart program experience when a sharp-eyed Organiser explained the Federation’s policy to ensure teachers are appointed permanently to any vacant positions.

What an incredible accomplishment! Could any one of us have imagined that might be possible, let alone take the steps to turn it into a reality?

From the workplace committee, right up to Senior Officers of Federation, we have a weighty responsibility to stay informed and critically literate in departmental and union policies, as well as the award and staffing agreements.

Fierce, wily and politically informed, we, the teachers, are the strongholds of justice in our workplaces, whether we are formally elected representatives or simply attending workplace committee meetings.

We carry the power of our collective voice, while the union’s job is to mobilise us, to support us to become the activists we need to be. Over the two weeks of my Anna Stewart Program experience, I felt a growing sense of confidence and pride in this responsibility.

It came to me when I attended the launch of *Teacher for Justice*, a biography of one of our union's early activists, Lucy Woodcock. I suddenly felt so honoured to be following in the footsteps of the likes of Lucy Woodcock and Anna Stewart, by contributing to our union.

It is not through luck, but through the tireless collective activism of many that we, the socially engaged women of the teaching workforce, can live the projection of these women's dreams for equity, unity, and justice.

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WHAT IS THE ANNA STEWART PROGRAM?

The Anna Stewart Program is aimed at developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of women members and empowering them to be actively involved members in their workplace, local association or state level. Applications are considered by the Women's and Anna Stewart Program Restricted Committee, made up of six women Federation members elected for two years by Council. Anna Stewart Program participants are given the opportunity to work with Federation Officers, attend Saturday State Council and associated meetings, and observe Federation campaigns to develop an understanding of the processes and practices in our operations and dealings with the Department of Education and TAFE NSW. Interested? For more information on the program [click here](#).