

Time for a she change

- Liz Porter
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ONE morning in April, PhD student Barbara Lemon swapped her jeans for neat corporate-style trousers and heels, left her minuscule studio apartment and made her way to a marble-floored enclave on the penthouse floor of the ANZ Bank's Melbourne headquarters.

The 27-year-old addressed an audience of some of Melbourne's wealthiest women: businesswomen, wives of rich businessmen, and heirs to family fortunes. Some of these women were also trustees of foundations dispensing large amounts of family money to different causes. What they all had in common was money, generosity and a desire for anonymity.



Off her back: Toni Joel, who started a program that gives coats to the homeless. Photo: *Rebecca Hallas*

"Women moving millions" was the theme of the meeting, held in the bank's plush East Asia Room. Lemon was the keynote speaker because she had just completed a PhD on Australian women's philanthropy. For Eve Mahlab, from the "ginger group" Australian Women Donors Network, Lemon was the ideal person to articulate the group's message to "think women" and direct philanthropy at projects that benefit women and girls - and therefore benefit their families and communities.

"The key to alleviating poverty is funding women," says Mahlab. The lawyer, former Westpac Bank board member, and former member of the Women's Electoral Lobby, is a passionate advocate of the need for women to apply what she describes as "not a gender bias but a gender lens" to thinking about philanthropy.

Not only do women and girls suffer more disadvantage, she argues, but projects that involve women in their design and implementation have been shown to have a greater chance of achieving success. And women need projects that help them into leadership roles in their community because they are often the sole providers for their families and the protectors and educators of their children.

The meeting was a joint effort by Philanthropy Australia and ANZ Trustees. But the "think women" agenda was Mahlab's. Her only brief to Lemon was that she "inspire".

Lemon told her audience about the pioneering efforts of Dr Lucy Gullett who co-founded the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children in Sydney in 1922, not only to offer a reliable service to female patients but to provide jobs for female medical graduates.

She spoke about the famous Ola Cohn, who carved the Fairies Tree in the Fitzroy Gardens, and left \$1 million for projects to benefit women painters and sculptors. And she paid tribute to an anonymous woman in the audience who had invested her \$500,000 inheritance and spent \$1 million of the interest it accrued to set up the Alma Unit for Women and Ageing. [Continued...](#)