International Women’s Day (IWD) draws women together in unity and friendship to commemorate past achievements and highlight current social, economic and political issues. It also provides the opportunity to develop networks and facilitate partnerships between women, organisations and the broader community.

When women on all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate their Day, they can look back to a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, peace and development.

International Women’s Day is the story of ordinary and extraordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society that increases opportunities and widens choices by working together.

**The History of International Women’s Day**

The first IWD was held on 19 March 1911, when more than a million European women and men rallied for the right of women to vote, work and hold public office. The inspiration came from a New York march against poor working conditions and child labour, held in 1908. In 1910, an international conference of socialist women voted to hold a yearly International Women’s Day.

The date became fixed as 8 March in 1917, in commemoration of a strike by Russian women involved in the peace movement. Their action led to the abdication of the Czar, and the winning of the right for women to vote.

Peace, human rights, and social, economic and political issues have therefore always been an important focus of International Women’s Day. The first International Women’s Day in Australia was held on 25 March 1928. The first recorded recognition of IWD in WA was on 13 March 1936 and included speeches by prominent men and women. From its inception IWD has stood for equality between men and women.

The United Nations officially recognised IWD in 1975 and declared that it be celebrated on 8 March.
**International Women’s Day Colours**

The 1908 demonstration in New York was organised by the newly formed Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). The marchers wore white, purple and green as their political colours. Symbolically, white represented purity, purple was for dignity and self-respect, and green stood for hope and new life.

**Ideas for celebrating International Women’s Day**

Throughout the world, thousands of people, young and old, celebrate International Women’s Day (IWD). It’s the day women celebrate what they have achieved and speak up about what needs to change.

Some ideas for celebrating International Women’s Day might include:

- Workshops / exhibitions in the arts;
- Morning tea / brunch / lunch / dinner with an inspirational woman speaker;
- Nominations and awards for women;
- A women’s festival;
- Poster designing;
- Showcase of Indigenous women’s talents;
- A tribute to female role models;
- Evening events that whole families can attend;
- Mother and daughter events for bringing together women from different communities and ethnic backgrounds;
- Women performers presenting original work;
- Public lectures / forums on current women’s issues;
- Eminent women speakers to address your local community or group;
- Spend time with other women for the day eg. picnic, sports day;
- Plant a tree to commemorate;
- Storytelling evening; and
- Involve local groups / community in your activities.

For more information or to register an event on the annual Canberra International Women’s Day Program of Activities email: IWD@act.gov.au or contact the Women’s Information and Referral Centre on (02) 6205 1075.

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