



Head start for women in overcoming loss

By Jacqui Garrity

Tucked away in Calvary Hospital's Lewisham Building is a haven for women suffering from temporary or permanent hair loss.

Breast cancer survivor Sue Owen is the founder and coordinator of HeadsUp@Bruce which specialises in providing new and second-hand headwear and embellishments for women who have lost their hair.

HeadsUp@Bruce was the recent recipient of the 2011 ACT Quality in Healthcare Award, recognised for leadership and innovation in patient safety and quality of care.

Ms Owen was also runner-up of the 2011 Women of Spirit Award, which is given to women who have overcome adversity.

"I was surprised to win the award particularly as we only opened in February last year," she said.

"It is quite humbling when there are other people who are doing such amazing things as well, so it was a wonderful and welcome surprise."

Ms Owen was an outpatient at Zita Mary Clinic in 2005, following breast cancer diagnosis and surgery.

It was during this time she realised fashionable and affordable headwear was not easily available to women experiencing hair loss.

Her own experience led to the creation of HeadsUp@Bruce, which operates on Wednesdays and Thursdays in the Lewisham Building at Calvary Hospital.

Ms Owen works with a team of 12 volunteers to operate HeadsUp, showing women how to wear and embellish headwear and giving them tips on how to re-create looks at home.

"I was used to wearing head scarves from the '70s when I was younger and had a knack

for being able to tie scarves," she said.

"I realised HeadsUp wasn't just the sale of accessories but also showing women what they've got at home, how they can do up a turban to look really funky.

"Our aim is to help all women, particularly those women who are suffering hair loss, whether it's through chemotherapy, through surgery or permanent alopecia.

"HeadsUp is not about breast cancer or cancer only; it's about women who have lost hair and who want a damn fine hat."

When it opened in early 2010, HeadsUp started with the idea of becoming a "one-stop shop" for visitors to Calvary Hospital "so that when people are coming to see their oncologist, their doctor or happen to be passing they can just pop in", Ms Owen said.

Now, HeadsUp@Bruce has expanded to include HeadsUp Australia Incorporated, which aims to provide seed funding, support and training for community groups interested in opening their own HeadsUp outlet.

"We were getting people from down the coast, from Sydney and from all over Canberra coming to visit us and we realised that this was such a great service and such a wonderful formula," she said.

"From there, this was just a natural progression to go on to seed fund other people.

"It became a wonderful idea that we should be able to help rural areas, but even people in the big cities can be very isolated and also need to have their head covered when they're going through hair loss phase."

For the future, Ms Owen hopes to secure a major sponsor and to expand operating hours to five days a week.



UNDER COVER: Founder and coordinator of HeadsUp@Bruce, Sue Owen, chats with Frances Chaloner at the shop in Calvary Hospital. The business has expanded to provide seed funding, support and training for community groups interested in opening their own HeadsUp outlet. Photo: STUART WALMSLEY