

Celebrating Latrobe Valley women

By MICHELLE SLATER

WOMEN of the Latrobe Valley are being celebrated this week as part of International Women's Day, where the achievements of our local shakers and movers are put in the spotlight.

The worldwide day, commemorated on March 8, celebrates women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements, while highlighting calls to address gender equality and pay parity.

Latrobe Women in Business founder Michelle Anderson said Valley women have many things to be proud of, with local women leading the way in what are traditionally male-dominated industries.

"International Women's Day is important to the community. It reminds us to celebrate the success

of all women, whether they are community leaders or not," Ms Anderson said.

"Our keynote speakers are women who have succeeded in many different roles and women in Gippsland have done some outstanding things."

Ms Anderson said Latrobe Valley Bus Lines general manager Anna Tyben was a great example of a woman taking a leadership role in the transport industry, perceived as a male dominated sector.

She also pointed out the number of women working in the local power industry.

"You would have to see these as success stories," Ms Anderson said.

However, she said there was still a lot of work to be done, with issues such as high rates of family violence and youth unemployment hindering

women in the Latrobe Valley.

She said Latrobe Women in Business was working towards building resilience and helping women punch through the glass ceiling into higher leadership roles.

"If you look across the ratio of women to men in local government, there are more male councillors. We need for more women to stand up and be leaders in the community," she said.

"Women have the ability and the skills. Gender should have nothing to do with how they are seen as being a leader."

Latrobe Regional Hospital is running its annual fundraiser for International Women's Day.

This year will feature author and journalist Sue Smethurst who has written for Australia's biggest

magazines.

Hospital board chair Linda McCoy said it was important for the hospital to embrace International Women's Day because women make up 77 per cent of its workforce.

"We've had some terrific local women share their story, including shooting victim Kay Nesbit. In recent years the Governor of Victoria Linda Dessau and AFLW player Moana Hope have joined us," she said.

"We bring women and men together with a great guest speaker in a forum where they feel comfortable to discuss issues like equality and inclusivity."

The lunch which has been running for the past 15 years, is backed by both men and women across the corporate and community sectors.

Jessica backs herself to ease their pain

By MICHELLE SLATER

ONE Gippsland woman making her mark on the world is Traralgon chiropractor Jessica Thatcher who has just come back from India where she used her expertise to ease the pain of some of the world's most disadvantaged workers.

The 26-year-old was part of a group of 30 chiropractic volunteers who went to the Siliguri community, near the borders of Nepal and Bhutan, with the not-for-profit organisation Hands on India.

Ms Thatcher and the team administered aid to about 6000 locals many of whom worked in rock-breaking quarries or picked tea on the plantations.

"One elderly woman had two broken hips that had been broken for more than 12 months. She was fortunate that it had healed so she could walk," Ms Thatcher said.

"Some of these people would never have seen a doctor before and people had to line up all day and miss out on a day's pay to wait for treatment.

"But none of our patients complained about being in pain. They just keep working."

Ms Thatcher has been a chiropractor for three years and wants to treat the cause of pain instead of masking it.

She said part of this interest comes from her belief in empowering women, and communities in general.

The young shaker and mover is part of the Latrobe Young Professionals and has been a keynote speaker at Inspiring Young Women events and networking opportunities for local high schools.

"I want to encourage young people to take an active role in their future and strive towards their own goals, no matter what their background



Healing hands: Jessica Thatcher gives an adjustment to a local needing help in India. photograph supplied

is," she said.

Ms Thatcher's Indian trip was also about helping to empower women by helping locals to kick-start their own income streams and help build schools for their kids.

"Some children are not sent to school because of fears they would be abducted for child trafficking," she said.

"There are also high rates of domestic violence but this is halving with these women's empowerment

programs. Women are looking out for one another."

Ms Thatcher said many of the patients she saw had lower back or neck pain from heavy labouring. Rock-breakers smashed gravel by hand to make building materials, and tea-pickers carried laden baskets on their heads.

She said the volunteers had a red flag screening process which they used to identify urgent cases for hospital treatment.

Ms Thatcher has been to Bali and Egypt as a tourist but said volunteering gave her a whole new insight into visiting a developing country.

"We saw what things are really like and what people have to deal with," she said.

Ms Thatcher is currently volunteering with administration to organise future visits and is keen to volunteer in other developing countries including Cambodia, the Philippines and Vanuatu.