

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**



29 July 2014

MEDIA RELEASE

Empowering Rural Victorian Girls

An exciting new initiative is launching today to empower rural Victorian girls and give them an opportunity to realise their leadership potential.

An 'Australian-first', Country to Canberra connects young female students from country regions with powerful female politicians and executives based in Canberra.

Kicking off with a nationwide essay competition, the winners will receive a trip to the nation's capital to attend an exclusive breakfast with the high-profile female leaders.

"Taking into account Australia's leadership and 17.1% gender pay gap,ⁱ it's clear that girls face more barriers to success," Country to Canberra founder, Hannah Wandel, said.

"Just 29% of Federal Victorian politicians are women,ⁱⁱ while the median starting salary for female Graduates in Victoria sits at just \$49,000 – that's three thousand dollars less than Graduate men. It's also lower than the national average for women.ⁱⁱⁱ

"Victoria is also geographically distant from Canberra, placing a financial burden on rural girls wanting to explore opportunities in their nation's capital. Country to Canberra gives these students a helping hand."

Ms Wandel says the competition aims to bridge the gap between rural areas and Australia's capital, connect girls to inspirational role models, and empower more women to become leaders in their local community.

"We're thrilled to have ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher, the Federal Member for Canberra Gai Brodtmann, and the highest female executive at the Department of Defence Rebecca Skinner already on board to inspire the girls at the winners' breakfast," Ms Wandel said.

"Over 100 high schools and colleges, from the Grampians to Gippsland, are being sent information about the essay competition today, in a bid to motivate hundreds of girls across Victoria to enter.

"The prize, which is open to girls in Year 11, also includes a behind-the-scenes tour of Parliament House and a tour of the National Gallery of Australia. Additionally, the top 15 essays will get published on the Country to Canberra website to showcase the girls' writing talents on a national stage."

Ms Wandel, who grew up in rural South Australia, began Country to Canberra after winning a Great Ideas Grant from the YWCA of Canberra in April 2014.



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The grants are awarded to young women with innovative ideas that bring about social change.

“I want this initiative to help raise the profile of women’s empowerment in regional and remote communities,” Ms Wandel said.

“I strongly encourage all teachers, sports coaches, politicians and community leaders to invest in our female leaders of tomorrow, and spread the word about the competition.”

Information about the program and the essay competition can be found on the Country to Canberra website (www.countrytocanberra.com.au), as well as through Twitter and Facebook.

The competition closes on 12 September 2014, and the winners’ breakfast will be held on 03 December 2014 in Canberra.

– Statement ends –

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Note to media:

Biographical information on Hannah Wandel, Katy Gallagher MLA, Gai Brodtman MP and Rebecca Skinner is available on the Country to Canberra website:
www.countrytocanberra.com.au/women

Country to Canberra Founder, Hannah Wandel, and select ‘powerful women’ will be available for interview.



Country to Canberra would like to acknowledge the support of the YWCA of Canberra.

ⁱ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, March 2014, *Gender Pay Gap Statistics*, https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/2014-03-04-Gender_Pay_Gap_factsheet_website.pdf
ⁱⁱ Parliament of Australia, July 2014, *Senators and Members*, http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members
ⁱⁱⁱ COAG Reform Council, November 2013, *Victoria Snapshot Women and Girls*, [http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/Tracking%20equity_Victoria%20snapshot\(1\).pdf](http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/Tracking%20equity_Victoria%20snapshot(1).pdf)



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