



ROSE Stonehouse, Carol Tindall and Robyn Hill have much to talk about at the inaugural meeting of New Girl in Town.

New girls network

By Louise Bettison

A DIVERSE group of women, most of whom had no prior connection, drew some curious glances as they took over all the café tables in Museum Village recently.

They were kicking off New Girl in Town, the brainchild of Splash Out owner Louise Stewart-Brown and a group designed to address the social isolation faced by many women upon arriving in Esperance.

Of the roughly 20 participants, ranging in age from their 20s to 60s, most had arrived in Esperance within the last 12 months.

Despite being confident, lively women, they shared experiences of the difficulty in trying to meet people and link into existing community groups in Esperance.

Women with partners on farming properties, particularly during harvest time, and those who had recently moved from farms to town appeared to be most concerned about the lack of support networks.

According to Mentally Healthy WA project coordinator Kath Menck, herself a recent arrival to Esperance, groups such as New Girl in Town can go a long way towards protecting the mental health of new arrivals.

"Moving somewhere new can be very stressful as women adjust to all the changes involved and a key factor in surviving this period is having friends to talk to," Ms Menck said.

"Having friends and social networks is a very important factor in managing your stress levels and the more social networks you have, the better off you are to problem solve things that come up."

Ms Stewart-Brown said she was aware of women finding it hard to find friends or 'break into' Esperance social circles and had wanted to do something to help.

"I just wanted to do something for the community and as I don't have time to do fundraising or things like that, and I knew this was needed, it seemed a good idea to start it off," Ms Stewart-Brown said.

The group was loosely structured as an informal way to provide a social network for women new to town.

"For me, it was really wonderful to see some intergenerational networking going on, which in that kind of format, can be very successful," Ms Menck said.

"All up, the group is providing a chance for people to share ideas on how to become more closely involved in their community, which is one of the best ways to be mentally healthy."

Ms Stewart-Brown said the next New Girl in Town event is being planned for February.

New residents can also access an information pack, recently created by the Esperance Shire Council in conjunction with the Esperance Chamber of Commerce and Industry.