



Auckland  
**Women's  
Centre**

Auckland Women's Centre

**Gossip**

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Hours: M-F, 9am-4pm

Library Hours

M-F, 9am - 4pm

Sat 11am - 1.30pm

on the first Sat of the month

**Services offered:**

- Free Info, Referral & Advice
- Support Services
- Community education classes
- SKIP single Mums Positive Parenting Project
- Early Childhood Education support in Ranui
- Counselling
- Lesbian support
- Low cost massage
- Flower Essences consultation
- JP service
- Opportunities to talk and support feminism

# Gender equity strategies at our AGM

By Sabrina Muck

## Five Year Action Plan

Dr Judy McGregor told an impassioned audience of more than 50 women at the Auckland Women's Centre AGM in December that a five-year action plan is key to achieving gender equity in Aotearoa. Judy, who is the inaugural patron of the Women's Centre, a professor at AUT and New Zealand's former Human Rights Commissioner spoke on "Strategies to achieve gender equity in Aotearoa". She also gave an update of her recent presentation to the United Nations in Geneva which included an ultimate recommendation that a five-year action plan for NZ women be put in place this year.

## Feminist renaissance

Judy went on to discuss her optimism about a renaissance in women's rights and gender equality, especially at the grass-roots level and among young women. She also asked whether those active in the women's rights movement may in fact be too reliant on parliamentary politics and political will to achieve our aims. Judy proposed that we could be the ones driving change and setting the agenda, particularly on issues such as equal pay and pay equity (for example, the recent Kristine Bartlett case), increased paid parental leave (26 for babies), and preventing violence against women, and urged all of us to think about what concrete actions we could carry out.



Dr Judy McGregor

## Change the narrative by telling your story

One of Judy's key points that resonated with me was this simple message: "We need to tell our stories". She said that women's stories and lived experiences often remain untold and invisible. By speaking up and *telling our story* (repeatedly, if required) we could start to draw real attention to the matters we live with every day. Again, Kristine Bartlett is an excellent example of this in New Zealand. Judy also pointed to the young feminists in the UK who successfully campaigned for "Page 3" centrefolds to be removed from supermarkets and for a woman (Jane Austen) to be shown on the 10-pound note.

## Young leaders

On the topic of young women, Judy moved the discussion onto "succession planning" for feminism. She talked about how we could connect with young women who are aware of and passionate about gender equality and women's rights. Social media is obviously a significant tool in this area as it is a new way of connecting, organising and sharing our experiences. It is also important to remember that young women should be the ones to drive how they can best be connected into feminist advocacy and a continuing movement for women's rights.

## Action points from the AGM

- **Audit the political parties** - we should notify the political parties that we will be auditing (whether collectively, individually, formally or informally) their policies and how those policies affect women.
- **Hold Auckland Council accountable** for local government policies that affect women, for example, the development of the Unitary Plan, the Living Wage campaign, the number of female councillors and local board members.
- **Develop our own Women's Election Agenda Aotearoa** – something proposed by Catriona MacLennan in her feminist TV series "Womenpower".

# Wonderful New Collective Members

We recently welcomed two new members to our Governance Collective: **Sylvia Baynes and Ella Cartwright**. Sylvia joined the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960s and has been an active feminist ever since volunteering for a number of women's organizations, including the Women's Studies Association (WSANZ). Sylvia presented a number of papers to various conferences, wrote for the New Zealand Feminist magazine, *Broadsheet* and tutored in the Continuing Education Women's Studies Programme 1990 – 2000. Sylvia retired recently and is keen to support our Governance, especially by being a bridge between the Centre and the newly revived Auckland branch of the WSANZ.



Ella Cartwright, who has been a volunteer for the Centre for the last six months, describes herself as a mother (for choice), radical feminist, and a bisexual woman with a keen interest in poetry and women's writing. Most of her feminist self-discovery has been via online communities and social networking. She is passionate about the young feminist sector and bridging generational differences in feminist thought. She is particularly interested in reproductive justice, the sex and gender education of children and teenagers, and the intersection of sexism and racism.



We were sad to farewell Cissy Rock who has been our excellent Chairperson for the last two years. Nikki Whyte, who was our fabulous treasurer, has also moved on, as has Aorewa McLeod. We are fortunate to retain Aorewa's love and knowledge of literature as she continues to volunteer in our library. Thanks very much to the following Collective members who have stepped up, with Sarah-Jane Olsen becoming our chairperson, Katie Palmer du Preez our treasurer, and Ruth Busch our secretary.

## Justice for Rape Survivors?

**Trigger Warning:** For support ring HELP Support for sexual abuse survivors 24/7 HELpline 09 623 1700

Part of the reason the police treated the "Roast Busters" so lightly is that it is ridiculously hard to get a conviction for sexual violence offences in New Zealand. The generally accepted figure is that about one out of a hundred incidents of sexual violence against an adult results in a conviction. The other huge problem with our criminal justice system is that it re-traumatizes sexual violence survivors.

Our legislation requires the prosecution to prove, beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant knew that the survivor did not consent. This bar is too high, and justice will not be served until it is lowered. In Canada they have implemented a change whereby if the defendant rests on "I thought she wanted it" he needs to show what he did to establish that belief e.g. did he ask her? Such a change could help to support a cultural change about asking for consent.

(The exception to the above rule applies when the woman is intoxicated. However this law was tested in Auckland recently and the Judge acquitted the accused ruling that while the survivor claimed she was intoxicated, technically she was not because just prior to the alleged rape she had successfully made an ATM withdrawal!)

### Other essential law changes

The law should provide a positive definition of consent, rather than just defining what is *not* consent. This would include the idea that consent was freely given and that the person had the capacity to give consent. This kind of change has been made in a number of jurisdictions which share our legal base.

Currently the defendant has the right to choose a jury trial. Research undertaken by Elizabeth McDonald and Yvette Tinsley (2011) found that the effect of jurors "cognitive illusions" (such as, the acceptance of rape myths) lead to bias in collective decision-making. While judges can also believe rape myths, the



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authors suggest that they could undertake specialised training to limit the impact of rape myths on their decisions.

Last year the Government halted the work of the Law Commission on alternative trial processes for sexual violence offenses. The next Government must provide the Law Commission with resources to complete its work on alternative trial processes, with a commitment to implement the recommendations of the final report by 2017.

These concerns have been raised by a succession of investigations into our unjust system over the last thirty years and still have not been addressed. We call on all electoral parties to support these fundamental changes to the criminal justice system as they are the only way to provide real justice to sexual violence survivors.

We also need sexuality education that promotes respectful relationships and gender equality in every school. There is also an urgent need for sustainable funding for our specialist sexual violence providers. The Social Services Select Committee is currently examining the make-up of sexual violence services, including the haphazard funding regime where multiple government departments are involved and nothing is certain.

We also need to stop avoiding the difficult sexual violence justice issues.

## Livingstone tragedy: preventable and foreseeable

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**Trigger Warning:** For support ring SHINE, Safer Homes in New Zealand Everyday 9am - 11pm 0508 744 633

"Today our courts and police frequently ignore women's fears, minimise dangerousness and fail to prioritise the safety of women and children," said Leonie Morris, spokesperson for the Auckland Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children. "From media reports, we can see that there were many red flags that indicated Edward Livingstone was a real threat to his ex-wife and children. In the face of these risk factors, it is shocking that the judge awarded the killer not one, but two, discharges without conviction."

In this recent tragedy the Judge prioritised Edward Livingstone's continued employment over the safety of his ex-wife and children, resulting in the deaths of Bradley and Ellen.

Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. As recently as November 2013, Sarwan Lata Singh was found killed in her Wellington home

after the accused had breached a protection order she held against him. In June that year a Hawkes Bay mother of two, Gail Bower, was murdered by her ex-partner despite having a protection order against him.



A breach of a Protection Order is a breach, no matter what the action entails. It is an action defying a court order and should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law whether it is a text message or a serious physical assault. When a perpetrator thumbs his nose at the court and gets away with it, his power and confidence increase at the same time as the safety and confidence of the victim decrease. A woman will not take

the risk of calling the police unless the consequences for the perpetrator are swift, predictable and severe enough to provide a deterrent.

These systemic failures raise grave concerns about the adequacy of protections and processes in place for those experiencing domestic violence. The Coalition strongly contests the view that these tragedies are unforeseeable and unpreventable.

*The article above is from a press release by the Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children. For more information about the Coalition and its policies check out [www.awc.org.nz/hottopics](http://www.awc.org.nz/hottopics).*



# Improving the well-being of children

The aims of the Vulnerable Children's Bill, to improve and protect the well-being of vulnerable children, are laudable, but these aims may be thwarted by the model the Bill is based on. This model does not look at the wider picture of the part played by poverty, poor housing, social isolation etc in the neglect and abuse of children. Nor does it consider the fact that state agencies such as WINZ and CYFs are in need of vast improvement. Focusing on the individual child and the State's response to individual abusers may in fact continue to undermine the well-being of children.

## For the Bill to succeed in its aims the following principles must be followed:

- All Government-led policy and legislation should be informed by human rights principles.
- Poverty has been shown to be a key influencer on child well-being. Women, who continue to be the main carers, suffer the effects of poverty disproportionately. Addressing the gender pay gap, considering a universal child allowance and increasing paid parental leave are central to improving the well-being of children.
- Child vulnerability cannot be addressed in isolation. Legislation and policy focused on the broader aim of improving the well-being and support for mothers, family and communities will ultimately lead to improved well-being for children.
- The Bill is too oriented towards surveillance interventions (which generates a climate of fear and mistrust). The research finds that support-oriented interventions are more successful.
- Ensuring that access to services is universal.
- Defining who is or may become a vulnerable child is difficult. The vulnerability of a particular child cannot be predicted by environmental circumstances. For example, child sexual abuse occurs across all socioeconomic groups. We need interventions that address deprivation as an important factor in vulnerability, but that do not presume that children in deprived homes will be abused.
- All interventions must be evidence-based. For example research shows that improving support and reducing vulnerability for women who mother alone, and for families, is absolutely necessary to the success of the Bill.
- Ensuring the provision of quality child-centred services where workers are well-trained and centres are well-resourced.
- Related issues such as domestic and sexual violence, poverty and discrimination of Maori and immigrant women must be taken into consideration as these factors have a direct impact on a child's well-being and vulnerability.

The Bill is currently being considered by a Select Committee, whose report is due on the 17 March.

*This article draws on the submissions to the Bill by Women's Health Action Trust and the Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children, with thanks.*



## SINGLE MUMS FAMILY FUN DAY

Free event

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February, 10am-12pm

Roskill South Oasis Hub, 56 Glass Road, Roskill South

Ice blocks  
Free raffle  
Face painting  
Bouncy castle  
Tasty healthy food  
Old school family fun



Meet other  
Single Mums, whanau,  
and friends  
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information