



Auckland Women's Centre QUARTERLY

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Women in our Prisons: the Intersection of Indigeneity, Gender and Sexuality

By Ruth Busch

This is the second part of my article on the Women in Prison panel held at the Auckland Women's Centre in June. The first article covered the challenging and inspirational presentation given by Dr Tracey McIntosh, Associate Professor of Sociology at Auckland University. Without re-summarising the significant points she made, Tracey's talk focused on the intersection of sexuality, gender and ethnicity, not only in terms of the vastly disproportionate number of Māori, especially Māori women, held in the prison system today but also on the leading roles played by indigenous women and members of the LGBTI communities in the drive for prison abolition. One of her major themes was that the neoliberal narrative/analysis so pervasive today takes prison for granted and claims that we as a society are all safer because of their existence. However, Tracey contends that we fail to acknowledge what goes on inside them and what comes out of them. That prisons colonise our landscapes, geographically and socially and that for Māori, prison colonises the future as well.

The two remaining speakers on the panel Emmy Rāketē and Johanna McDavitt also gave thoughtful and stimulating presentations. Emmy described herself as a Queer Trans Prison Activist and as a graduate student

of criminology. She is perhaps publically best known for having participated in the very small No Pride in Prisons demonstration during the 2015 Pride Parade.

Emmy was protesting the treatment of trans people in NZ prisons. With us, she shared the meaning for LGBTI prisoners of having prison guards and police (on horseback and on motorcycles, being led down the street by Judith Collins) allowed to march as occupational groups in a Pride Parade.

She then recounted that her arm was broken in three places by a security guard who wrestled her out of the parade to cheers from a number of parade onlookers.

The controversies that this group of three queer protesters stimulated still echo around our LGBTI communities.

Are there values shared by a majority of the LGBTI communities that involve the Treaty of Waitangi? How do we balance our communities' long held commitments to human rights with a desire to have a fun night where we let our hair down (literally and figuratively)?

Continued over page



Emmy Rāketē



Johanna McDavitt

Feminists are Funny

Our 'Feminists Are Funny' comedy night was hilarious and raised \$6,000!

So many women told us they laughed until their bellies hurt and we have our MC Michèle A'Court to thank for that. She organised the excellent line-up of witty women: Louise Beuvink, Cissy and Anne from Rock and Speir, Justine Smith, Livi and Amanda from The Fan Brigade, Melanie Bracewell and Lana Walters.

We are also very grateful to Tart Bakery who provided us with delicious food. If you want to grab a yummy lunch in Grey Lynn – head to Tart Bakery. ■



The comedians, back row: Cissy Rock, Anne Spier, Justine Smith, Amanda Kennedy, Melanie Bracewell and, Lana Walters. Front row: Michèle A'Court, Livi Mitchell and Louise Beuvink



Cissy Rock, amazing auctioneer and Michèle A'Court, marvellous MC

Women in our Prisons: the Intersection of Indigeneity, Gender and Sexuality, continued

Emmy discussed what she called the whakapapa of prisons. She told us that the first use of prisons in Aotearoa occurred after the destruction of Parihaka. More than 600 people were held for long periods in the South Island, far from their home, without trial. Some died there, their crime being passively resisting the armed constabulary advancing settler land grabs.

Much of what Emmy said about the treatment of trans prisoners has been discussed in part I of this article. Her presentation pinpointed the intersectionality of sexuality and ethnicity in today's prisons and repeatedly challenged the neoliberal narratives that sustain the mass incarceration of Māori. In an interesting footnote, Dr Adele Norris spoke last week at the Women's Studies Conference about mass incarceration of African-Americans in the US. She too cogently illustrated how the Jim Crow system of segregation was still sustained through mass incarceration coupled with the loss of citizens' rights (eg the right to vote, the right to have a conviction deleted after a term of years to enhance job possibilities, disqualification from obtaining a state house, etc).

Our final speaker was Johanna, a Pākehā lawyer practicing in Auckland. She represented JustSpeak, a national network of young people that seeks to empower people to speak out about the criminal (in)justice system. Their hope is to challenge the messages going out to the vast majority of Kiwis. As an example, the right wing discourses of the Sensible Sentencing Trust dominate discussion of the need for prisons and propound the view that mass incarceration makes all of us safer. JustSpeak challenges these discourses and disseminates information about the social harms caused/reinforced by prisons. They provide spaces for new and more progressive discourses about prisons, ones that show the connections between mass incarceration and poverty, racism, and societal stigmatization.

It was a great night! In the end I was most moved by the urgency of the presentations of Emmy and Tracey because they represented those who often have to shout (and get their arms broken) in order to be heard and who have been voiceless for long enough! ■

Stop the Sanctions on Single Mother Beneficiaries

The Auckland Women's Centre strongly opposes the sanctions imposed on single mother beneficiaries where she does not identify the father of the child. These sanctions are penalising and putting into further hardship families already struggling to survive.

Our submission to the Social Services Select Committee calls for the removal of Sections 176, 177 and 178 from the Social Security Legislation Rewrite Bill (previously Section 70A).

While the original intention of Section 70A was to identify the father so the Government could make non-custodial parents pay Child Support, this is clearly not working because as many as 18% of single mother beneficiaries are not naming the father. The unintended consequence of the law punishes the mother and the 17,000+ children for which this sanction is imposed. The deduction of \$22-\$28+ for one child (\$44+ for more than one child) puts these families at increased risk of being unable to meet the basic needs of their children, such as food, clothing, education and adequate housing.

There are many reasons why a woman is unwilling to identify the father of her child, and fear of violence, including psychological abuse, is a frequent one. Under the current policy, it is at the discretion of Work and Income to assess the risk of domestic violence. Having to relive these experiences and justify their very real fears in front of a Work and Income case manager, further disempowers and victimises these women.

There are many other reasons that a woman may be unwilling to identify the father of her child, for example, cultural stigma, shame, the fear of social exclusion, or non-reported rape. Requiring women to explain, justify and validate the circumstance around the conception of her child and the reasons for her non-adherence to this policy impinges on her privacy and autonomy.

Currently there are over 13,000 beneficiaries in Aotearoa New Zealand for which a Section 70A deduction is imposed. Nearly all of these beneficiaries are women, and 52.8% are Māori. Given these numbers, this is an issue that disproportionately affects Māori women.

In order to get the sanction lifted, Work and Income requires women to present a letter from a lawyer establishing the nature of their accordance with this criteria. After years of legal aid funding cuts and the Government announcing recently that is to close six of its eight legal aid offices around the country this requirement places a large barrier to accessing the full benefit.

Legislation like this, which allows the welfare system to economically punish women and their children, particularly Māori, has no place in New Zealand law. We have joined Auckland Action Against Poverty's campaign for the removal of the relevant sections from the rewrite of the Bill. The campaign has already had successes, quickly gathering support from the Greens, Labour, the Māori Party and NZ First giving it 60/121 votes in Parliament. Only the Act Party is committed to the sanctions, so political pressure has a good chance of working – please [sign the petition here](#). ■





SAVE OUR SERVICE
AUCKLAND WOMEN'S CENTRE
FILM FUNDRAISER



Tickets on sale now \$20 from Eventfinda

This event is part of the Auckland Women's Centre's fundraising activities to ensure its continued support for women.

Please Save Women's Support by Giving a Little

Recently the Government cut our \$30K per year contract that for the last fourteen years assisted the Auckland Women's Centre to provide Women's Support: free, vital support to women.

Please donate to our Give a Little campaign to replace these lost funds. You've donated \$6,500 so far, which is over 20% of our Give a Little goal. Thank you! Still a lot of ground to cover and every dollar counts. Please note we have no guaranteed funding and must rely on successful yearly grant applications and donations.

Any woman can contact our Women's Service and receive assistance. There are no criteria. Our staff are experts in women's concerns, sexual and domestic violence, eating disorders, mothering, questioning your sexuality, women's health, sexual harassment, and more.

Our trained staff help over 3,000 women a year by offering:

- crisis intervention to women with complex needs
- support, information, advice and referral for emergency housing, women's refuge, rape counselling, child abuse reporting, abortion, parenting
- links to AWC's low cost community education programme and counselling
- referral to the right service based on particular needs

We are the first point of contact for women who are not yet ready to ring a specialist violence prevention service and we work with them until they are confident to ring the right service.

Watch our video of Natalie Thorburn, policy advisor, talking about how Women's Support is a non-judgmental, supportive, by women, for women service, ensuring women feel safe and comfortable.

Many women need support. We earn 14% less than men, often have more responsibility for children, and one third of women are abuse survivors. Please Give a Little if you can. ■



Watch Natalie Thorburn talk about Women's Support

New Centre Counsellor, Jane Tyrer



In August we bid farewell to our much loved counsellor Joan Prairie. Joan first started working at the Centre as a tutor over 25 years ago! We wish her peace, joy and a flourishing creative retirement.

We warmly welcome Jane Tyrer to our team as our Centre Counsellor. Jane has worked as a counsellor, social worker and in a range of social service roles for the last 30 years. She enjoys supporting people to navigate their way through difficulties, clarify their values and strengths and find enthusiasm for new possibilities. She believes that Counselling is a respectful, negotiated process that highlights skills, resources and insights and that it can offer a place to explore challenges from fresh perspectives and facilitate positive change.

We currently have appointments available with Jane on Thursdays. The fee is between \$40 and \$80 taking account of your income; with after work appointments costing \$80. To book an appointment, please call us on 376 3227 x 0 or email info@womensz.org.nz. ■

Auckland Women's Centre



Contact & Services

Contact us

09 376 3227 x 0
info@womensz.org.nz
www.awc.org.nz

Centre Hours

Monday to Friday
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Library Hours

Monday to Friday
9:00 am - 4:00 pm
First Saturday
of the month
11:00 am - 1.30 pm

Services

- + Women's Support: free support, info, advice and referral
- + Community Education
- + SKIP Single Mums Positive Parenting Project
- + Community Events
- + Counselling
- + LGBT support
- + Low Cost Massage
- + Self Defence Classes
- + Opportunities to talk and support feminism
- + Diversity Forums
- + Young Women's Youth Development Projects