



Auckland
**Women's
Centre**

Auckland Women's Centre

GOSIP

Contact us:

Ph 376 3227

info@womensz.org.nz

PO Box 78 271, Grey Lynn

www.awc.org.nz

Hours: M-F, 9am-4pm

Library Hours

M-F, 9am - 4pm

Sat 11am - 1.30pm

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

Self Defence Classes

Opportunities to talk and
support feminism

Alison Bechdel: building community, raising funds

By Mira Taitz

AWC recently hosted Alison Bechdel, legendary creator of *Dykes to Watch Out For* (*DTWOF*) comics. On a Sunday evening, Freeman's Bay Community Centre was full in what some have called "the lesbian reunion of the year". Bechdel ran out and jumped onstage as if on *Ellen* (must be an American thing); no shy cartoonist here! She was then the most confident storyteller, making her work accessible to both diehard fans and the uninitiated (although there weren't many of those).

Raucous laughter

She first told the story of the changing political context of *DTWOF*, with single frames projected onscreen in silence, then raucous laughter, as the punch line drove home a serious point. Tony and Clarice, who tried to change the system from within; Mo, who protested from the outside as an activist working at a feminist bookshop (which was, our MC Carole Beu of the *Women's Bookshop* assured us, spot on), Cynthia, the young lesbian whose Republicanism gets in the way of her getting it on, among others. Their rich lives illustrate the assertion that feminism is the "radical notion that women are people".

Lesbians becoming mainstream?

Bechdel bemoaned the fact that fringe LGBT culture of early *DTWOF* has become increasingly mainstream: as Mo says, "there's no *outside* left! You can buy 'Best lesbian erotica' at the 7-11!" But where we sat there were mutters of "What planet is *she* living on?" Answer: Vermont. The same transformation is not felt in Aotearoa.

Award winning graphic novels

Next, Bechdel spoke about her graphic novels that centre on her family, *Fun Home*, and *Are You My Mother?*, the latter drawing on her years in therapy. In *Fun Home* her childhood OCD came alive as seeing the layers of flooring that she was forced to count, we began to count them too. Like any good feminist, Bechdel critiques power in all its forms, with the exception of the patriarchal construction of psychology, which may be a blind spot. But it's a frame on which Bechdel has been able to make meaning of her life.

The two books are woven together by the image of Bechdel's mother on her bed, writing down what her daughter, overcome by obsession, cannot. A moving picture of women drawn together by words.

Please visit again

Alison Bechdel is an extraordinary writer and artist, but also a great performer. She raised nearly \$4,000 for the Centre and left the stage to thunderous applause and an implied open invitation: Alison, we'd love to have you back.



A big thank you to Carole Beu, the Women's Bookshop, Sophie Richmond, the volunteers and all who attended.

Photo: Alison Bechdel, centre front, surrounded by some AWC fans.

Back row Sophie Richmond, Dale Little, Rochelle Carr. Front row: Leonie Morris, Alison Bechdel, Holly Rae Taylor (Alison's Partner) and Mira Taitz.

Women's Talk - Preventing Sexual Violence

By Sabrina Muck

Recently, the Centre hosted our first Women's Talk event for the year on the question "How do feminists harness the rage against "roast busters" to help prevent violence against women?". Our speakers brought a wealth of passion and experience to this question: Stella Gukibau, Tumuaki/Director of Tu Wahine; Dr Kim McGregor, Executive Director of Rape Prevention Education; Kathryn McPhillips, Clinical Manager of HELP; Kiran Foster and Lila Bullen-Smith, former Avondale College students and founders of "Support Our Survivors"; and Dr Nicola Gavey, Associate Professor, School of Psychology at the University of Auckland.

The main themes which came out of a lively and well-informed discussion, facilitated by Cissy Rock, were: **Lack of Government support and funding** – Kim McGregor identified that sexual violence seems to be one of the most difficult topics for a government to deal with. Specialised sexual violence services remain underfunded, law reform is urgently needed and specific on-going funding is required for a wide variety of sexual violence prevention projects. Over the last thirty years all of these needs are repeatedly dropped off the political agenda.

She also spoke about how human attitudes and behaviours can be changed, with the example of campaigns about drunk driving and smoking. These have been successful enough that now it is well-recognised (especially among young people) that both are dangerous and you should speak up about it. This suggests that similar campaigns targeted at preventing sexual violence (together with appropriate education and community efforts) could help to prevent "rape supportive" attitudes from developing. She felt that we all know what needs to be done, we just need the resources to implement it!



Whānau Māori /Wahine Māori /Te Tiriti – Stella Gukibau discussed the fact that although the term "feminist" is not always consistent with her idea of who she is as a wahine Māori, both are driving forces for prevention of sexual violence. As wahine Māori, she felt the alleged rapes perpetrated by the "roast busters" and others raised complex issues about the attitudes of rangatahi that have their roots in the Government's failure to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and their consequent failure to protect the health and safety of all whānau.

All the panelists agreed that the best approach is for Māori to be empowered to lead their own communities in preventing violence, which was emphasised by a comment from Hera Pierce, one of Stella's colleagues in the audience. She spoke about the importance of Te Reo Māori, whānau, hapu and whakapapa in reaching Māori perpetrators.

Societal factors - Nicola Gavey asked us to consider what factors are shaping our society to create an environment where rape and sexual assault (and the broadcasting of such without consequence) can so easily happen. Everyone with a smart phone, including children, have easy access to mainstream pornography on their phone 24/7.

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The speakers: Kiran Foster, Lila Bullen-Smith, Stella Gukibau, Kathryn McPhillips, Dr Kim McGregor and Dr Nicola Gavey

Preventing Sexual Violence - Continued

Kiran and Lila graduated from Avondale College in 2012. While they were students there, they bravely spoke out against sexual bullying at the school. As a result they experienced first-hand the culture of denial, shaming and silencing, driven by a sense of "we protect our own". Nicola pointed out that we actually need to be disloyal to the cultural norms we live with, if we wish to see any social change.

Actions we can take – some positive suggestions that came out of the discussion:

- Continue to stay active on this topic – the speakers agreed that Governments are aware of public opinion, so signing (or starting!) a petition, making Select Committee submissions, protesting, or talking to your MP do make a difference; e.g. the Government recently committed funding to roll out a school-based healthy relationships programme throughout the country.
- Have conversations about preventing sexual violence in non-feminist circles – Nicola gave the examples of male builders working on her house and how outraged they were about the "roast busters" violence.
- If you have school-age children (pre-school, primary school or high school) continue to ask the school about their policies for sexual violence prevention and education (a member of Women's Health Action Trust has suggested an audit of schools in this regard – excellent idea!).
- Contact your credit card company to demand that they stop payments going through for certain internet sites promoting violence against women or sexual violence – almost everyone has a credit card and if they can do it for WikiLeaks, they can do it for this!

Many thanks to our speakers, our facilitator, and our dedicated and engaged audience who all contributed to this event.

Women's Election Agenda

The Women's Election Agenda Aotearoa 2014 calls for all political parties in Aotearoa to commit to defacto equality for women by 2020.

More than 120 years after women in Aotearoa won the right to vote, we are far from achieving equality. Women have the lowest incomes in the country and are grossly under-represented in all leadership positions in places ranging from Parliament to workplaces, unions, schools and businesses. In 2014, women in Aotearoa still do not have sovereignty over our own bodies, as is clearly illustrated by this country's shocking sexual assault and domestic violence statistics.

New Zealand in global terms is a wealthy country and there is plenty of money to implement policies to end discrimination against women and to treat women and children fairly.



The issue is whether or not we choose to spend money that way, or whether we continue to spend it on giving tax cuts and other benefits to the wealthy as has been done by all governments in recent years.

The \$14.2 billion spent by the Labour and National Governments in recent years on tax cuts for the wealthiest people in Aotearoa could instead fund the Women's Election Agenda Aotearoa 2014.

In 2014, it is time to put women and children at the forefront.

You can find the Women's Election Agenda here and send it to your local MP: <http://awc.org.nz/feminist-activities/hot-topics/>

And support it on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Womens-Election-Agenda-Aotearoa->




Single Mums Positive Parenting

Be part of SKIP Single Mums for inspiration, motivation, and information as we raise our children (0-5 year olds) in loving and nurturing relationships.

Coffee Group

10am - 12pm
9 May
6 June
4 July




Children welcome; free childcare is provided at the Meet Ups

Meet Ups

10am - 12pm
23 May
20 June
18 July

Auckland Women's Centre
4 Warnock St
Grey Lynn
Auckland



Please RSVP to Rochelle
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p: 376 3227 ext 203
m: 021 0293 7195

Wonderful New Centre Volunteers

The Centre is very grateful for our wonderful volunteers. They bring fresh perspectives and ideas and help us produce better outcomes for women. Since the beginning of this year seven new volunteers have been helping to staff our frontline. Four of them introduce themselves; below:

Umayya Ekanayake: "I was attracted to the Centre because I feel like it is a place where I can be myself, where I don't have to worry about people judging me. AWC gives me the opportunity to give



back to the community. I also enjoy getting to know lots of wonderful women. My main concern is for women living in countries without basic human rights. They don't have the right to education or personal freedom. They could get imprisoned for being a victim of rape. I am a third year Electrical and Electronics Engineering student. It is challenging, but I love it!

"If I could do anything I wanted I would help people in war-torn countries in Africa and the Middle East. I'd like to work with the Red Cross, Engineers Without Borders and the UN. What I like best about the Centre is its diversity - I get to meet fantastic women from a range of backgrounds."

Catlin Melhuish: "I see the Women's Centre as a warm, welcoming safe space for women and I wanted to be a part of that and put my efforts towards improving the lives of women as well as talking about it all the time via social media and debating with my friends. I've always preferred media that showed women in subversive roles (big fan of Disney's *Mulan*, here) and I found out about Feminism in my early teens through reading a lot. I've written a few essays on access to abortion in New Zealand, so that is one of my primary concerns as well as equal pay and domestic violence."



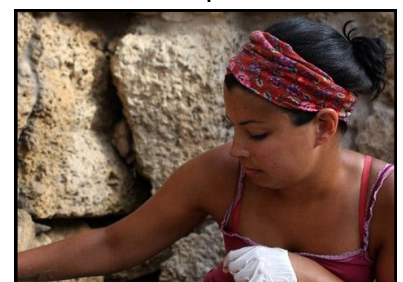
"I am in my final year of a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Psychology and Politics. I find both topics extremely interesting; I especially like social psychology as well as the tools that I have learned to analyse and form evidence-based arguments. I like these subjects because they are both geared towards making society better. I am also a part-time administrator at Auckland Libraries which I enjoy for its diverse environment and the driving principle behind Libraries that information should be free and accessible for everyone. I am a member of the Campus Feminist Collective at Auckland University. I am also involved in a pilot programme in collaboration with Auckland Libraries and AUT, to improve media literacy and to empower teenage girls, which is pretty exciting. If I didn't have to work for a living I would like to volunteer fulltime – sounds like I'm pandering but it's really rewarding!"

Veronika Rybova: "I like the warmth of the people working at the Centre and the variety of services and support provided to women at low prices. I have been concerned about women's rights for about ten years. I'm most concerned about the pressure on women to look perfect which leads to eating disorders, plastic surgery and mental health issues. Now that I have finished my psychology degree I would like to become a counsellor. I would love to spend much of my life travelling! I particularly like the people who work at the Centre, how they support each other, how they walk their talk."



Mary Kienholz: "I was attracted to the Women's Centre because I wanted to contribute to an organisation that empowers women. I have been concerned about domestic violence and rape culture for a long time. I just submitted my thesis for a Masters in Anthropology, while working part-time as a barista in the city.

"I am currently a full-time barista as I consider my career options. I really enjoy working at the coffee shop because I get to interact with people on a daily basis, and I also really like coffee! I would like to spend my life reading every book on my reading list while travelling the world! I only started volunteering at the Centre last week, but I really like the positive atmosphere. The library is really great too."



For more stories from AWC volunteers see <http://awc.org.nz/about-us/collective/>