

Spring 2012



Auckland
**Women's
Centre**

Auckland Women's Centre
G O S S I P

Contact us:

Ph 376 3227

info@womensz.org.nz

PO Box 78 271

Grey Lynn

www.awc.org.nz

Centre hours

Monday to Friday

9am - 4pm

Library hours

Monday to Friday

9am - 4pm

plus

Sat 11am - 1.30pm

on the first Sat

of the month

At the Women's Centre...

The Women's Centre is humming along as we enter the final term for the year. A big thank you to all those wonderful people who came to our fundraiser *Sing for your Supper* and especially a huge thank you to all those who donated their time and talents. This was such a great evening, the continuous music performed by individuals and groups was excellent, the community spirit was amazing, and everyone had a fantastic time. Thank you also to the volunteers who helped in no small way, without you we couldn't have managed. We are already looking forward to next year's event.

Te Paa Whare

The Playgroup at the Ranui Caravan Park (named Te Paa Whare by the families) is thriving and most of the families in the caravan park have joined up. Our wonderful Coordinator, Anne Kelly, organised a welcoming BBQ, has arranged for a local librarian to visit fortnightly and is organising walking trips for the children to introduce them to the local Playgroup, Playcentre, library etc.

SKIP Single Mothers Positive Parenting Project

Recent highlights of this project include the energy of, and great numbers, attending the Single Mums Peer Support Group, our new SKIP volunteer, Wendy, and more community agencies referring their clients to our project. If you would like to join our SKIP project please contact Rochelle Carr:

email skip@womensz.org.nz, phone 376 3227 ext 203, mob 021 0293 7195

Counselling

Low cost counselling is available by professionally trained and supervised counsellors on a sliding scale of \$40 to \$80. Ring the Centre for an appointment.

Women's Library

Great books currently on our recommended shelf include: *Lark and Termite* by Jayne Anne Phillips, *Brixton Beach* by Roma Tearne, *I remember nothing and other reflections* by Nora Ephron, *When God was a Rabbit* by Sarah Wynn and *Nothing but the truth* by Anna Politkovskaya (thanks Marian and The Women's Bookshop).

Courses, groups and workshops

Term 4 offers a variety of activities, kicking off with a two hour question/answer session with Lisa Dudson called Towards Financial Freedom. We have fun and crafty mosaics and bookbinding to get you brimming with the joy of making handmade Christmas presents, belly dancing, Yoga and Pilates to get you fit and calm the internal Christmas chaos, book club, self defence for girls and a new four week course called Power to Change. Check out our brochure for more details.



The Grey Lynn Ukuladies at our recent fundraiser *Sing for your Supper*

Aorewa McLeod - Forty years of feminism

The Auckland Women's Centre is lucky to have women of all ages on our Governance Collective. Two women are in the 20s, one in her 30s, one in her 40s, one in her 50s and one in her 70s. This is Aorewa's story:

I have been involved in feminism since 1971. I taught in the English Department at the University of Auckland for 37 years, where I specialised in women's fiction and in feminist theory. In New Zealand, works like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* (1970) spread the concepts of feminism, primarily from the States. Consciousness-raising groups, where women shared their experiences, were significant through the seventies. The eighties were a time of a growing populist stereotyping of feminists as bra-burning, hairy-legged, doc marten-wearing dykes who hated men. The nineties onwards were a time of some saying feminism had done its work. Some young women were saying "Well, my mother was a feminist, and I'm grateful for what they did, but it's no longer necessary." Other young feminists were part of the feminist "third wave" incorporating queer theory, DIY feminism, riot grrrl and more. Today (at last) we are experiencing another revival of feminist activity.

But despite an increased number of women in politics, business and academia, there are still far fewer women than men in positions of power. When I was an undergraduate at Auckland doing a BA in English in the early sixties, we did not study one woman writer. Not one. In **1979**, as a result of the growth of feminist critical theory and the resurrection and recuperation in Britain and the US of ignored or forgotten women authors, I set up a paper on Twentieth Century Women Writers. The response of the then Head of Department, in Metro in **1983**, was this:

The difficulty is that there are really not enough (women writers) to go around. At Stage Three we have Women Writers of the Twentieth Century in response to the feminists' requests. But I feel a course like this is artificial and arbitrarily defined. We could just as well have homosexual writers.

In **1970**, 1.3% of professors were women; in **1983**, 2.9%. Women comprised only 13.5% of all academics employed in New Zealand universities in 1983. By **2011**, 20.8% of professors are women. That's an improvement, but it's taken 41 years and it still means 79.25% of professors are men. Domestic violence is still prevalent. One in three women are assaulted by their male partner. Women's Studies Departments at Victoria, Auckland, Christchurch and Waikato have been closed. Feminism has done so much, but there's still so much to be done.

Crucial dates that show the impact of feminism in Aotearoa

1971	Establishment of lobby for choice over abortion, which was illegal.	1982	New Women's Press established - first publishing company with only women authors.
1972	Gay liberation founded by Ngahua Te Awekotuku.	1984	NZ Women's Studies Association established.
1972	First steps of Equal Pay Act, enabled the elimination of gender discrimination in remuneration.	1986	National Collective of Rape Crisis set up, which provided support for women and child survivors of rape and sexual abuse.
1972	Feminist magazine <i>Broadsheet</i> , ran until 1997 .	1988	<i>Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by NZ Women</i> published. Michele Leggot, ed.
1973	DPB set up for all parents raising dependent children without the support of a partner.	1989	Sylvia Cartwright became first female Chief Justice.
1974	Committee on Women founded. 1984 became Ministry of Women's Affairs. Purpose: advise Government on impact of policies on women.	1989	<i>Where did she come from? NZ Women Novelists</i> by Heather Roberts.
1977	Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act passed, legalising abortion in some circumstances.	1993	<i>New Zealand Women Artists: a survey of 150 years</i> by Anne Kirker.
1970s	Refuges began; by 1981 , there was the National Collective of Women's Refuges, by 1984 had Government funding.	1996	Domestic Violence Act, with emphasis on safety of victims, came into force.
1978	Waikato University established the first academic women's studies programme.	2001	Property Amendment Act passed, providing women with 50% of couple's property.
1980	Women's Gallery opened.	2002	Paid Parental Leave Act - 12 weeks paid parental leave.
1982	Domestic Protection Act provided non-molestation and non-violence orders.	2004	Civil Union Act, recognising the union of both different and same-sex couples.

The status of women in New Zealand is declining

By Natalie Thorburn

Four more Women's Suffrage Days have passed, but New Zealand's progress towards women's equality has been slipping backwards. The United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which New Zealand has been a signatory since 1985, requires four-yearly reporting on the ways in which participating countries have furthered women's wellbeing and equality.

Given the expertise and commitment that can be found in community organisations throughout the country, New Zealand's report card was found to be distinctly lacking. There are a few positive aspects listed in the CEDAW report, including the It's Not OK campaign, improvements to the Employment Relations Act to encourage breastfeeding, and a greater uptake of cervical screening tests.

The alarming rates of violence against women in New Zealand and the Government's inadequate response was a major concern for CEDAW. The report questioned whether current changes in New Zealand such as legal aid restrictions, the introduction of fees in the Family Court, the restructuring of family violence funding, a lack of training in gender discrimination for justice professionals, and a trend towards encouraging the resolution of relationship disputes out of Court, may be increasing the barriers for women seeking to leave violent relationships and thereby risking their safety.

The report also questioned the Government on the lack of progress in implementing the recommendations from the report of the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence which called for changes to New Zealand legislation to reduce stress and trauma faced by complainants in the criminal justice system. (Since the CEDAW report was released, the Government has cancelled its plan to introduce these changes.)

Furthermore, the Government's preference for gender-neutral terminology to describe violence against women minimises and normalises this violence. Gender neutral terminology also undermines work for women's equality. At the CEDAW meeting, the Minister of Women's Affairs, Jo Goodhew, accepted the challenge to avoid the use of gender neutral language in the future.

Ms Goodhew celebrated the fact that more women are undertaking higher education than men, but is that a sign of contemporary success or an indication that women still require higher qualifications to get the same jobs and pay rates as less qualified men? CEDAW also outlined the barriers New Zealand women face due to the still pervasive stereotypes about gender roles and gendered behaviour. This is reflected in both education and employment statistics, with women still training and working in 'caring' roles and consequently having lower incomes and higher student debt.

CEDAW noted with concern a lack of progress on pay equity; women's reproductive rights; the deplorable status of vulnerable groups of women, including Maori women, women with disabilities and migrant women; the impact of the 2011 earthquake on women; the inadequacy of targets and benchmarks to advance women's rights; and the insufficient dissemination and promotion of the Convention.

We can only hope that by the time four more Suffrage Days have passed, New Zealand will have taken quantum leaps forward in the quest for women's true equality.

You can support equity for women by attending the public meeting to extend paid parental leave. Please see the information on this page.

26 for babies
EXTEND PAID PARENTAL LEAVE!

More time for babies

Come to this entertaining and informative meeting to show your support for extending paid parental leave to 26 weeks

Michele A'Court
Female Comedian of the Decade, chair

Jaquie Brown
Actress, radio and TV presenter, star of the popular TV One show *Keep Calm and Carry on*

Sue Moroney
Labour MP

Jan Logie
Green MP

Marama Davidson
Te Wharepora Hou

Professor Tim Hazledine
Economist

Organised by Auckland 26 Weeks for Babies: Playcentre Association, National Council of Women, Auckland Women's Centre, the Equal Justice Project, Working Women's Resource Centre, Women's Health Action Trust, North Shore Women's Centre, the Hand Mirror, Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, Barnardos, Whakawhetau, Post Primary Teachers Association, Public Service Association, Feminist Action, Te Kahui Mana Ritiki, La Leche League, Waitakere Women's Centre, Tertiary Education Union, Service and Food Workers Union.

Your organisation is welcome to join the Coalition – contact Leonie at akcentre@womenz.org.nz

<http://26forbabies.org/>

Sue Moroney's Bill to extend paid parental leave to 26 weeks has passed its first reading and looks like it will have enough votes to become law. National says we can't afford it, but we need to show them that 26 weeks is not only popular, but is affordable and a good investment.

A coalition of groups has formed to show that there is strong public support for extending paid parental leave.

Changes to the Family Court unlikely to assist mothers

By Geraldine Whiteford, solicitor

In the Autumn issue of Gossip, I reported on the Ministry of Justice's Review of the Family Court. While noting that the review addressed a wide range of issues, my article commented that the review seemed to be driven significantly by the Government's wish to cut costs.

Before the review was completed, and in an obvious move to reduce costs, the Government introduced filing fees for some Family Court applications from 1 July. All parenting order applications now require a filing fee of \$220 and applications for division of relationship property require a filing fee of \$700. There are no filing fees for domestic violence applications, for people who are legally aided and for those who can demonstrate serious financial hardship. For people just above the low legal aid thresholds, my experience suggests it will be probably impossible to establish hardship to get filing fees waived.

New changes announced

In early August 2012, the Minister of Justice announced the following changes to the Family Court:

1. A Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) Service will be established to create a formal approach to out-of-Court dispute resolution, principally for care of children and guardianship proceedings. Parties will work with an approved FDR provider such as a trained mediator, to reach agreements that focus on the needs of their children. FDR will be subsidised for those who meet the legal aid threshold, but will cost approximately \$900 for the rest.
2. Three new Court tracks will be implemented:
 - a. The "without notice track" for urgent applications, for example temporary protection orders.
 - b. A "simple track" for non-urgent and single-issue matters, such as contact arrangements for children. The simple track is designed so that parties are able to represent themselves without the need for a lawyer.
 - c. The "standard track" involving more serious issues, for example, applications for day-to-day care. The standard track is also designed so that parties can represent themselves without lawyers for most of the process. If matters are not settled, the case moves to a formal hearing, where lawyers are present.
3. The Minister has pledged to simplify Court processes and provide clear information to help people navigate Court processes without a lawyer. These include new simpler forms and questionnaire affidavits.
4. The use of Court professionals will be more targeted and lawyers for children will only be appointed where serious issues are involved.
5. The penalty for breaching a protection order will be increased from two years to three years imprisonment.

Domestic violence treatment programmes for both parties are to be improved and the definition of domestic violence in the Domestic Violence Act will be extended to include "economic abuse".

Comments

I support the domestic violence changes, albeit with some words of caution. In my experience, the Court does not treat psychological abuse seriously enough. It is virtually impossible to obtain a temporary protection order based on psychological abuse, as the judges seem to require acts of physical violence. Yet psychological violence has hugely damaging impacts on women who are usually the primary caregivers of children. These impacts include a loss of self-confidence and reduced power in all areas of life, including the ability to manage Court processes.

The other changes appear to be driven by cost-cutting as opposed to a critical evidence-based analysis of what is actually happening in the Family Court. Do we know the effect of Court orders in promoting children's emotional and physical well-being? Having practised family law for eight years, I have little idea. As soon as the ink has dried on Court orders, my clients tend to disappear, for the understandable reason that they have had enough of legal processes.

It is a pity that the review of the Family Court was not driven by better evidence, a more coherent and people-affirming philosophy than the need to reduce costs and delays, and more regard to the discriminatory impact of Court processes and outcomes on women. The best evidence so far is that, despite some strengths, the Family Court system fails many women, particularly those in abusive relationships. It is hard to see that the proposed changes will improve this.

Silent Injustice: Women's Experiences of the Family Court Where to next?

Last month's Cartwright Seminar, *Women and the Family Law Courts*, was powerful, with many mothers sharing their dreadful experiences of the Family Court.

Women's Health Action and the Auckland Women's Centre are organising a follow-up meeting to discuss where to next on Friday 12 October, 1pm-3.30pm, at the Auckland Women's Centre.

If you are unable to make this meeting but would like to support the issue, please contact Leonie:
akcentre@womens.org.nz