

## Article for Canterbury Tales

### An afternoon of Inspiration and Empowerment

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The Canterbury Women's Legal Association held its fifth annual conference on Thursday 24 August 2017 in Christchurch at the Rydges Latimer Hotel. The theme of the conference was "Be inspired and empowered", and the 157 participants certainly were.

The conference was chaired by Kathryn Dalziel with her usual charm and wit. The Hon. Justice Christine French gave an inspirational opening to the conference and was followed by presentations from Annah Stretton, Stacey Shorthall, Metiria Turei, Lizzie Mavelly and Gemma McCaw.

Justice French used the conference theme of inspiration and empowerment to stress the importance of the mentors and role models in her life who ranged from her grandmother to Ethel Benjamin. She recalled the historic moment in New Zealand legal history in 2015 when she and two other female judges, the Hon. Justice Winkelmann and the Hon. Justice Ellen France, presided over the Court of Appeal. The event was marked by the male staff wearing pink shirts and the cutting of a cake. However, she noted that she was most inspired in her life by Sandra Day O'Connor. The first woman Justice of the Supreme Court of United States who showed what women can do.

Annah Stretton spoke about her initiative, RAW (Reclaim Another Woman) based in the Waikato. RAW offers supported accommodation and mentoring primarily to women leaving prison, giving them skills to be able to turn from a life of crime and establish themselves again in the community and reconnect with their children.

The emphasis is on education, housing, mindfulness, activity, and nutrition. With support from Wintech, the University of Waikato, Corrections and corporates the project has an 86% success rate with a demographic that is 100% likely to fail.

Annah also introduced Ina, a young woman who is currently a RAW participant. Ina described how difficult it was to turn her back on a life of crime which was the only life she knew and, in many respects, an easier life. Ina is now focussed on completing her hairdressing training and reconnecting with her children.

Stacey Shortall inspired with her description of her pro bono work in New York as an advocate for underprivileged women clients. The gap between what was normal for them and herself led her to her desire to do things differently. After returning to New Zealand and becoming a partner at MinterEllisonRuddWatts, she started her initiative, the Homework Help Club with a decile one school in Porirua. It involved her colleagues giving up 2 hours after school to help school pupils with reading. The Homework Help Club has expanded and has become part of "Who did you help today?". Who did you help today is a charitable trust which supports her continuing work to encourage volunteering by businesses and organisations. This includes

“HelpTank” which connects community group in need of specialist skills with professional volunteers . The Mothers Project also connects volunteer lawyers with incarcerated mothers to provide assistance to maintain family ties while separated from their children.

Metiria Turei, List Member of Parliament for the Green party, spoke of her childhood experience of racism and the effect of government economic policy during the 1980s which caused great hardship to her family. This was the key to her political ambition and her resolve to make a difference for those who do not have a voice. Questioned about how she stayed in touch with those she wanted to help, she said that her constituency work was very important and her commitment was to be available to people. She will continue to be a voice for those people in New Zealand who do not have a voice.

Lizzie Marvelly spoke about her schooling at Rotorua Girls High School and subsequently Kings College, where she developed a strong feminist passion that has followed her career. She found early success as a singer but after suffering depression, authenticity became her goal. She achieved this in producing her album, “Collisions” which consisted of her own songs and gave her the opportunity to express herself.

In 2015 she created Villainesse, an online platform for young women to address different issues. She also created #MyBodyMyTerms when a group of people came together to talk about hard issues including revenge porn, sexual assault, victim-blaming and consent. It’s a campaign that encourages people to think about opinions, beliefs and perceptions that they may hold. #MyBodyMyTerms aims to challenge those perceptions head-on. The video associated with the campaign has attracted over 600,000 views.

Lizzie strongly emphasised that the power of sisterhood is the way for change, and that we should never apologise for being feminists.

Gemma McCaw called the conference delegates “Wonder women”. Her message was not to make impossible goals but to strive to be the best version of yourself. She encouraged positive goal setting by knowing the “why” of your goals. To make a difference in the world you need to know yourself first and then you can have a ripple effect for change. She also reminded us of four key areas of our lives – eat, sleep, move, think. Finally Gemma emphasised the importance of her mother and nana in her life. They are her wonder women.

The delegates appreciated and enjoyed the quality and content of the presentations, but also the honesty, warmth and personality of all the speakers. CWLA are extremely grateful for the sponsorship and support of Buddle Findlay (platinum), Kendons (gold), Baldwins (gold), Anderson Lloyd (silver) Anthony Harper (silver), Chapman Tripp (silver), Harmans (silver) and Thomson Reuters (bronze) without whose support the conference would not be possible. Thanks also to the 14 goody bag sponsors who enabled the goody bags to be bursting at the seams.