

Extract from a letter from Lynette Grave of Dunedin New Zealand
to Della Saltiel of London

I have been devoting myself to Zonta, an International Organisation of (mainly) women in business and the professions who work together to advance the status of women internationally through service and advocacy. It was established in New York in 1919 and has its headquarters in Chicago. There are 1236 clubs and 33,000 members internationally. I govern District 16, which is New Zealand, where we have 820 members and 28 clubs. We do things like support legislation pertaining to women as it goes through parliament, provide scholarships for women to continue with their education, raise funds for things like look good feel better programmes for women who have recently become blind, make breast cushions for women who have undergone breast surgery, provide toilet bags for people who arrive at the women's refuges with no clothes or toiletries, provide good quality second hand garments for women going for job interviews who do not have the right clothing to wear, and other initiatives.

We have a District Project, which is to support the Teen Parent Schools in New Zealand. These schools have recently been introduced, off-site from the local high school. The mothers and their babies attend, there is onsite child care for the babies, the students learn by correspondence but there are teachers in attendance who help the girls. The students are mainly those from modest socio economic backgrounds, so would have no chance of education were it not for these schools. There have been some amazing success stories of girls who have gone on to study at university - a chance they might not have had if they had not attended a Teen Parent School. We provide money for food for them to purchase and cook food for their lunches, provide scholarships, mentoring, books etc.

My Zonta club has been pricking out seedlings, planting cuttings, then repotting them and other cuttings into larger pots as they grow for an ecosanctuary about a 30 minute drive from town. Yesterday we potted up flaxes, fuchsias and broadleaf (a native New Zealand plant) into larger pots. We hope to be able to plant next autumn. At the moment the sanctuary has been surrounded with a pest free fence and we are in eradicating rabbits, possums, rats, mice etc from the area prior to planting and stocking with native bird life. It's a satisfying task: though it does not meet with Zonta's mission, we are providing something for our community.

This morning, the brain is a little slow in kicking in to remember all our key initiatives. We work on a biennium - in the uneven numbered years have conferences somewhere in our districts (this year Dunedin) and the even number years an International Convention somewhere in the world, last year Melbourne, next year Rotterdam, the following two years USA. Internationally we have scholarships that are awarded to women in business and the aerospace related sciences, the Amelia Earhart Scholarship and Fellow Awards. I was able to tell Moshe, who has a photo of Amelia Earhart in his book that she was a Zonta member. We also support young women in public affairs in the last year of high school. We work closely with the United Nations and other accredited organisations to support projects overseas.

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This year we have projects in Niger - the Valley of the Widows - which is in its second phase and a follow-on from the initial micro credit programme to provide health and education for women. Niger has the highest incidence of aids in the world. In Sri Lanka we have a self sufficiency/education programme for women following the effects of the war and tsunami there. In Afghanistan we are trying to introduce education and self sufficiency following the reign of the Taliban. In Bolivia we have health and education of women programme. We also have ongoing anti-trafficking of women programmes and anti-violence against women programmes around the world. The two best past projects for me have been the immunisation of the women and their babies in Nepal against tetanus, and the abolition of female circumcision in Burkina Faso and surrounding area.

It is not all responsibility. My club has commissioned a kakahu, a Maori cloak, for me to wear for ceremonial duties. Kakahus are made from native plant materials, especially prepared for the purpose. It will be worn on official occasions and should last so that my successors can wear it with pride on the international stage. I shall do so when I carry the New Zealand flag at the opening ceremony of the Zonta International Convention at Rotterdam next year, when I hope to visit my European relatives.

Lynette Grave