

## **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group**

I am honoured to co-chair the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group and have done so since 2011 and currently share this role with MP Jo Hayes. Set up in 1989, the group is a unique forum for women parliamentarians from around the Commonwealth to work together for gender equality, including increasing the participation of women in Parliament; to discuss and act on gender related issues; to provide development opportunities for women parliamentarians and to develop closer relationships between members.

This year we have been involved in several activities to empower women and develop women parliamentarians. We participated in the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum in Samoa where we looked at developing a legislative basis for the economic empowerment of women. Women Parliamentarians from Bougainville joined us for a parliamentary study programme and we hosted a mentoring and study programme in Wellington for Pacific Women Parliamentarians.

Our ongoing objectives range from taking steps to ensure women are represented in all Pacific Parliaments, women's safety from domestic violence, to supporting the Pacific Island Forum to eradicate cervical cancer in the region to building relationships with NGOs and women's groups to enhance legislative outcomes.

We believe that promoting gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but on practical level is about improving the lives and status of women, so that women and girls have the opportunity to participate equally in society.



*“Ko te puawaitanga o nga moemoea, me whakamahi – Dreams become reality, when we take action”.*

The words of Te Puea Herangi, Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko i te Ora’s (Maori Women’s Welfare League) first Patroness so aptly reflect the spirit of the Maori Women’s Welfare League (MWWL).

Maori women were called to action by the need to prepare their whanau for the rapidly changing economic and social conditions experienced during the 1940s. The need for work meant that Maori were rapidly becoming urbanised and experiencing problems adapting to their new lifestyle, including finding suitable housing, coping with poor health, adapting to a cash economy and racism.

Arising from these problems, was the desire of Maori women for an organisation that would be a real force and play a major role in facilitating better outcomes for Maori families. The MWWL was formed in 1951 in response to this need and it helps to support whanau by working collaboratively with government agencies and not for profit organisations to achieve positive outcomes for Maori families. The League is a strong voice for Maori on issues that affect women, children and whanau and it seeks to challenge, question and offer solutions.

I am proud to have joined the MWWL in 2004, and I thank the late Parekura Horomia, who as a lifetime member of MWWL encouraged me to attend yearly conferences when I became a Member of Parliament. The importance of this commitment is that I am able to keep up to date with issues facing our whanau, contribute to solutions and offer assistance where I can, and to make connections and learn from the leadership shown by Māori women in our communities.

The League remains a formidable force in New Zealand which has persevered and grown since its inception to put constant pressure on government, the private sector and organisations to ensure the needs of Maori women, children and whanau are understood and addressed. Today, MWWL is a strong voice for Maori throughout New Zealand and continues to work to improve the wellbeing of Maori whanau.



## The journey to marriage equality

My Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill inserted a definition of marriage into the Marriage Act to define marriage as ‘A union between two people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity’ and therefore would allow same sex couples to get married. It was drawn from the ballot in July 2012 and it was passed into law seven months later, in April 2013.

During these seven months, there was a lengthy and emotionally charged public debate and a demonstration of the intensity of feeling on both sides was reflected in the 21,533 submissions received.

At the heart of the law change, was the basic right for all New Zealanders to be recognised as equal citizens under the law. The fact that same sex couples could only express commitment to one another by civil union and that opposite sex couples could choose either marriage or a civil union was unjust and discriminatory. To breach the basic human rights of a group of people based on their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity was intolerable. All people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity should have the same legal rights and that includes the ability to choose for themselves how they express their love and commitment for another person. My Bill enabled all people to have the same choices about how they make a commitment to one another and to form a family; it was my opportunity to rectify this discriminatory, unequal and unfair application of the law.

My Bill had its third and final reading on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013, with 77 voting in favour and 44 opposed and was passed into law on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013. The passage of this legislation not only eradicated a discriminatory law, but it also sent an important message about the value and dignity of all LGBTI New Zealanders as equal citizens.



## Why is sport important for our children?

I have been passionate about sport from a young age. I had a dream to represent my country. The Silver Ferns were playing at the 1987 Netball World Championships – this inspired me and I achieved this goal as a 17 year old and later became a Black Fern too. To me, playing sport is much more than getting kids moving, it plays a vital role in equipping kids with many life skills they can use now and in the future. Sport can get motivate a you to you get out of bed and to have dreams and aspirations; sport helps to determine what we want to do with our lives.

Sport teaches our children many life lessons, providing a safe environment where they develop lasting personal qualities. Personal values such as respect for authority, themselves and their peers, discipline, patience, persistence and the importance of hard work. Social skills including leadership, team work and communication skills, learning to channel their emotions in the right way, conflict resolution, assertiveness and of course bonding with their peers.

Children become more resilient when they play sport. They learn to accept failure and use their setbacks as growth opportunities; to learn from their mistakes. Sport provides our kids with many challenges and moments of high pressure, where they learn to persevere, adapt and develop better coping skills. These coping skills will be incredibly vital as they continue to meet greater challenges as they grow into adults.

It is inevitable that children will face competition at school and eventually in the workplace. Sports participation helps children learn to cope with competition, how to accept and cope with losses and win graciously. These are healthy competitive skills that will be with them for the rest of their lives.

Good sportsmanship is another important life lesson from sport. Children who learn to be 'good sports' learn to cooperate better with others and make moral-based decisions rather than ego-based decisions.

There is a strong relationship between academic achievement and involvement in sport. Kids are able to apply the principles they learn from sport, such as dedication, hard work, time management, goal setting and discipline to their studies often resulting in higher achievement.

It's so important that our children experience not only the pleasure of playing sport, but also the life lessons that sport provides them with. Life lessons that will be with them forever and will help them to steer their way through challenges and reach their full potential.

