

Wellingtonian to Head International Service Organisation

3 July 2012



Next Thursday in Torino, Italy, Lynn McKenzie, will be installed as the President of Zonta International, the first New Zealander to achieve this office.

“I feel so honoured to be given this opportunity,” says Lynn. “This is about making a difference to the lives of other women, making a contribution. Being able to do that is a complete privilege.”

Founded in 1919, Zonta is an international service organization that works to advance the status of women. With more than 30,000 members belonging to more than 1,200 Zonta Clubs in 63 countries, Zontians all over the world volunteer their time, talents and support to local and international service projects, as well as scholarship programs aimed at fulfilling Zonta's mission and objectives. During the 2010-2012 biennium, Zonta contributed more than \$2 million to international projects and since 1923, has provided more than NZ\$12 million to projects benefiting more than 2 million women in 37 countries.

“Having seen first-hand some of our Zonta projects, I am very proud to be able to make a contribution. As well as New Zealand projects, our international projects such as working with UNICEF in Rwanda to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV, our safe cities for women programmes in Guatemala City and San Salvador and our work with women

suffering from obstetric fistula in Liberia are making a significant and practical difference in the lives of women.”

Zonta’s internationalism provides the vehicle for its members to support the development of women in parts of the world where women and girls do not enjoy the same benefits and access to basic human rights as men, such as in health, education and safety. Zonta works to improve the life chances of women and girls.

“It’s not about me” says Lynn. “It’s about what I can help Zonta do to make the world a better place for women and their families.”

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- CV, Lynn McKenzie
- Kiwi High Flyer : Frequently Asked Questions
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Curriculum Vitae: Lynn McKenzie

Wellington, New Zealand

President Zonta International 2012-2014

Lynn McKenzie is a member of the Zonta Club of Wellington, New Zealand. Since joining Zonta International in 1989, she has served as club president, District 16 Governor, Trustee of D16 Charitable Trust, international director, Chairman of the Zonta International Status of Women Service Committee and president.

Lynn will take the office of Zonta International President on 12 July 2012 at the 2012 Zonta International Convention in Torino, Italy.

Professionally, Lynn has consciously worked for organizations that are driven by a need to improve everyone's life chances. Like Zonta, to be effective these organizations need to be relevant, grow and be socially innovative.

Currently, Lynn is a management consultant providing leadership of projects in the not-for-profit, non-governmental organization and government sectors, focusing on organizational review and development, management and operational development and the operational integration of volunteer support.

Prior to consulting, she held senior leadership positions in the health and social divisions of not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations and government sectors.

An active volunteer, Lynn is a member of Social Development Partners a national umbrella group for voluntary social service agencies, and is the past chairman of the New Horizons for Women Trust, a New Zealand registered charitable trust formed to provide grants to women to develop their potential through second chance education and research opportunities. She is also a member of the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand, and "Friend" of the Leader to Leaders Institute (based in New York).

Lynn McKenzie holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and Post Graduate Diploma in Regional and Resource Planning from the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Lynn McKenzie-President, Zonta International

Kiwi High Flyer: Frequently Asked Questions

1) How did you become involved with Zonta?

A family friend introduced me to Zonta when I moved back to Wellington. At that time I wanted to become involved in an organization that made a real difference to people's lives.

2) What motivated you?

I knew it was time for me to give something back to the community. I was in my early 30's and had the advantage of a supportive family, good education and career opportunities. It was pay-back time.

3) What circumstances in your own life have led to your involvement in the organization?

I grew up in a family where my parents always supported their community through serving as volunteers, and supported and encouraged us to think about community, locally and internationally, rather than ourselves. Dad travelled with his work which meant as children we were aware of the world around us, within NZ as well as overseas. I was also fortunate to be a Rotary Exchange student which opened up a world of possibilities to me. A natural step for me was to join a community organization that sought to improve people's life chances.

4) What field do you work in? And why?

I've consciously worked for organizations that are driven by a need to improve everyone's life chances. Like Zonta, to be effective these organizations need to be relevant, grow and be socially innovative. In both cases mission driven leadership secures this.

I started my career as a planner in central and local government before moving into social policy and then into senior leadership roles in human resources and latterly service delivery for Plunket. Today my primary responsibility is leadership of projects, focusing on organizational review and development, management and operational development

5) Do you have a mantra or philosophy that you live by? If so, what is it and why?

To serve is to live is my mantra which I have borrowed from Frances Hesselbein, a wonderful inspiring woman who is the President and CEO of the Leader to Leader Institute in New York.

6) What's the single biggest achievement in your life?

Being elected President Elect for Zonta International.

7) How did you feel when you found out you'd become President Elect?

Delighted! It is an honour and a privilege.

8) What does this role entail? Are you operating in an international capacity?

As President, I serve on both the Zonta International and Zonta Foundation Boards providing leadership and support to all Zontians worldwide so that they can work confidently and purposefully within their communities and world wide to improve the lives of women.

Zonta is an international service organization that works with other organizations to advance the status of women. Internationally it funds international service programmes in many parts of the world and supports women to pursue education through scholarships locally and internationally.

I will be Zonta's world President, for two years from 2012 – 2014. I won't be able to continue to work full time during my time as Zonta president, because of the travel involved, which includes board meetings at the Head Quarters in Chicago. The position of president is unpaid, but being able to help others will make up for that!

"This is about making a difference to the lives of other women, making a contribution. Being able to do that is a complete privilege."

9) Why are organisations like Zonta needed today?

In many parts of the world – even in New Zealand – women and girls do not enjoy the same benefits and access to basic human rights as men - health, education and safety. Imagine a world where there was no difference in the human rights of men and women and where women and girls could realize their potential. Organisations like Zonta, work to improve the life chances of women and girls.

Zonta's internationalism provides the vehicle for its members to support the development of women in other parts of the world. Our dollar goes a long way in Rwanda for example, where Zonta is working with UNICEF in a project to prevent Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV.

10) What can they teach the future generation of women?

Working with other like-minded people and organizations we can significantly make a difference and make the world a better place. Zonta provides a vehicle for individuals committed to improving the lives of women and girls.

11) What do you do to relax and unwind?

My idea of relaxing is spending time with my family and friends. I live on a hill overlooking Wellington's harbour, which is magic whatever the weather! It's a view I look forward to after my travels.

12) How do you find life balance?

It can be challenging! While I sleep my fellow board members in the northern hemisphere are awake so we have Zonta going 24/7! My work and Zonta commitments mean that life is full on, rewarding and full of opportunities.

13) What are the five key things that you believe make a successful woman?

1. Focus
2. Belief in others and self
3. Perseverance
4. Balance
5. Bring people with them

14) What do you want to achieve in your new role?

A higher profile for Zonta - internationally, nationally and locally leading to:

- Zontians thinking globally and acting internationally and locally
- New opportunities to advance the status of women with like-minded organizations
- Growth in members seeking service, advocacy and fellowship opportunities.
- Encourage a new generation of Zontians
- Making technology work for us after all we are all volunteers!

15) What change do you want to facilitate in developing countries?

A measurable improvement in the status of women – through increased access to all levels of education, improvements in maternal health, the wellbeing of women improved in terms of safety and security and more women elected to Government. It's important that we work with and not at them.

16) Who are your mentors and role models?

My mother Josey and Frances Hesselbein are role models for me. Both are insightful, see possibilities and believe in people.

I had the privilege to be with Frances when she attended the Plunket's Centennial Conference as the Fulbright guest speaker. She has an amazing vision, and way of engaging people.

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Liberia: Reflections from Zonta International President Lynn McKenzie

It's 5 a.m., and it's pitch black outside as we leave the lights of Liberia's airport and drive the 50 minutes to the capital, Monrovia. As we travel, we pass people walking along the sides of the road, no torches, just travelling in a single file along either side of the two lane road. My visit to this lush, determined people and land has begun. My task is to complete a site inspection of Zonta's Liberian fistula project, a project designed to eliminate obstetric fistula and thereby reduce the rate of maternal and newborn mortality (death) during pregnancy and childbirth.

Ravished by thirteen years of civil war, the first democratically-elected government, led by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – the first woman to be elected to the role of president in Africa and one of three women awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize – is in its fifth and final year of rebuilding its country and infrastructure before elections this month.

The Government is concentrating on rebuilding its infrastructure at a basic level, and there is a quiet air of confidence and hope as the people rebuild their lives and country. The main roads have significantly fewer potholes, although the side roads make up for it; training of medical and nursing staff is underway, along with building of hospitals and health facilities; and efforts are being made to increase the education level of its people with primary school now compulsory for all children.



It's not surprising, however, that the maternal mortality (death) in Liberia is very high – 940 women die for every 100,000 live births; and, of those women that die, 578 die in childbirth. The life time risk of maternal mortality in Liberia is 1 in every 20 women. Compare this to the same ratio in Japan (1:12,000), Germany (1:11,100), Australia (1:7,400) and the United States (1:2,100) (Source: UNICEF). Visualize living in Liberia, a country in West Africa with a population of 3.7 million, which is served by only three obstetricians, few medical facilities and a very high ratio of patients to doctors. One 175-bed hospital I visited had just two doctors and one anesthetist. On average, women will have 5 to 6 children, of whom 2 to 3 will die, and it is not uncommon to see children die from preventable diseases in Liberia's case especially malaria.

Many women in Liberia survive childbirth but suffer severe complications in the process. Fistula, one of those severe complications, is a debilitating and isolating condition which is largely preventable and almost nonexistent in the developed world but still quite prevalent

in the developing world. Obstetric fistula is the main type of fistula and accounts for 94% of fistula cases in Liberia. Traumatic fistula, caused by rape and genital mutilation, is the other type of fistula.

Obstetric fistula occurs during prolonged childbirth when the baby is unable to move down the birth canal and instead puts constant pressure on the mother, resulting in a hole in the birth canal which will leave the mother chronically incontinent and in most cases the child, stillborn. The mother may also suffer some paralysis to the leg. The average age of women with obstetric fistula in Liberia is 11 to 20 years! Obstetric fistula can be prevented through the presence of trained birth attendants during childbirth and access to contraception, which is only around 11% in Liberia. Surgery to repair an obstetric fistula costs just over US\$300. Zonta's project supports the surgery as well as prevention and rehabilitation.

So what is Zonta supporting and why? Zontians have donated just under US\$1 million to the Liberia Fistula Project since 2008, and we are the largest donor. Zonta's money is donated to UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund), who work with Liberia's Ministry of Health



and Social Welfare and other NGOs on the ground to administer the program. The Liberian Fistula Project is fantastic, as it is a three-in-one approach – it has a prevention side, treatment to surgically repair the fistula, and then a four-month rehabilitation program which combines counseling and teaching of literacy, business management and income-generating skills. Most importantly, when patients complete their rehabilitation, they are given a starter kit for

their newly acquired skills – a sewing machine in the case of tailoring, for example.

Rehabilitation is optional; and, during the past year, 38% of the women receiving treatment elected to take advantage of this opportunity. Other fistula programs do not always include rehabilitation; they focus only on the health issue, while Liberia combines treatment with income generation. The Liberian Fistula Project has a very high success rate at 83%, and the Project is now looking at ways to permanently support those women whose repair has been unsuccessful, including supporting women living together in a community near the rehabilitation center and base hospital.

What did I see? I saw a very successful project. Essentially, the project provides women with a “help up and not a hand out.” Women are:

- Accessing free fistula surgical repairs with an 83% success rate.
- Undergoing rehabilitation and leaving to create a better future for themselves and their families.

- Learning how to prevent fistula through prevention campaigns, including radio and drama, to raise awareness of fistula, its causes and treatment, in the community. These campaigns are the main source of referrals for women living with fistula.

All involved in the project are working collaboratively and are committed to the success of the project. The Minister of Health has taken steps to ensure the project is an integral part of Liberia's maternal strategy so it is not solely dependent on donor aid. Most importantly, the project is being driven by Liberians for Liberians, and services are largely delivered by Liberians. I think this is one of the project's key success factors.

My program involved being briefed by the Fistula Project team and meeting other project partners and Ministry of Health officials before attending the launch of the annual fistula awareness campaign in Kakata. The campaign focused on prevention and a concerted effort by a small medical team to undertake fistula repairs around the country. I went to Phobe Hospital, which is now the center for the fistula program and met with women and a young girl about to undergo fistula repair surgery, seeing their faces and the condition they have had to live with, and then moved on to meet with those women that have been successfully treated and are now in rehabilitation – the smiles. One lasting memory I have is of a beautiful mother who just over 18 months after receiving treatment and rehabilitation has used her newly acquired soap making skills to buy a piece of land so she can build a house for her family.

Each night, I returned to my Western hotel room with air conditioning, security guards, hot running water and a hot shower and wrote down reflections on my day, grateful that I live where I do and with a renewed commitment to continuing work to achieve Zonta's mission.

I left Monrovia at 2:45 a.m. for the airport, complete with a security escort to ensure safe passage as we were inside the UN curfew hours. Liberia is a country with potential, striving to realize the liberty of its name. The Liberian site visit was an amazing opportunity. Thank you. Know your donations are well spent, and you are fundamentally touching and providing hope to the lives of Liberian women and their families. You are giving women back their smiles, enabling them to fully engage with and contribute positively to their communities. Your donation gave them their lives back. Thank you, what more could you ask.