



Keeping Women in Rotary

The issue of gender equality in membership is no longer about getting women to join Rotary, it's about enticing them to stay.

By joint membership chairs D9500/D9520

WOMEN are joining Rotary in Australia and New Zealand at approximately the same rate as men and have been since 2010. Whoopee you might say – gender equality is working!

Unfortunately, unlike the male recruits, they are not staying. The highest rate of women resigning is in the first two years of their membership.

These were some of the discoveries from a joint D9500/D9520 district consultation held recently to discuss the topic of *Women in Rotary*. Sixty Rotarians – 45 women and 15 men attended – and through small groups, discussed four questions:

1. What will attract and retain women in Rotary?
2. How can we work together to engage women and men together in Rotary?
3. How do we guide and promote diversity and inclusivity in the club?
4. How do we deal best with gender/culture disturbances in the club?

The atmosphere in the room was energising and 246 individual ideas were offered, discussed and finally voted on to come up with some strategies for the way forward.

Sexism, lack of respect and humiliation were the main reasons put forward by women in exit interviews. Unfortunately, if one woman in a club decided to resign for one or more of these reasons, a whole group of women members resigned with her.

The answers were:

- If clubs changed their culture to acknowledge the different service, projects, fundraisers and social interests of women, women would join in numbers and stay. Women are passionately interested in *Service Above Self*, but not necessarily delivered through last century's male models.
- Social events that could include families and friends are much more enticing to women than traditional weekly meetings, especially those with the stuffy formalities of the past and little opportunity to network meaningfully with other members.
- Respect and recognition of all members, no matter their gender, race or religion, is a hallmark of Rotary ethics, but it must be practised, and be seen to be practised, by all members of a club.

Good leadership in clubs does not allow disrespectful behaviour to go unchallenged. Often older members don't recognise their remarks as being offensive, because they have lived through a male culture of Rotary for most of their membership. Just as in the workplace today, such remarks must be called to account immediately. •

30 Years of Women in Rotary

Events have been held across New Zealand to celebrate the 30th anniversary of women in Rotary.

ANNIVERSARY commemorations included parties, dinners and more, ranging from the top of the North Island at the Rotary Club of Keri Keri, to the bottom of the South Island at the Rotary Club of Invercargill Sunrise.

District 9970 held a multi-club cocktail event, with the first female members of the Rotary clubs of Nelson, Alison McAlpine, Jenny Black and Jenny Dickie, presenting on their experiences of joining Rotary and what it has to offer women.

The Rotary Club of Keri Keri held a celebratory dinner with guest speaker Elizabeth Forgie, their first female member, who was invited to join in 1990. The Rotary Club of Papanui also highlighted women in Rotary at their meeting, with female president Jenny Haworth holding a special induction of a new female member.

Rotarians from districts 9910 and 9920 – joined by some furry friends – combined to stride out 2km around the Wynyard Quarter and Westhaven Marina area in celebration of diversity and Women in Rotary. They collected donations along the way for *End Polio Now*, finishing up with a picnic in the park.



Meet Brenda Cressey – The Rotary Foundation’s first female leader



Brenda Cressey became a Rotarian in 1989. Since then, she’s held a variety of leadership positions within Rotary, including district governor, regional membership and Foundation coordinator, RRFC training institute moderator, Endowment Major Gift advisor, Rotary International president’s representative, and Rotary International training leader, to name only a few. In 2016, Brenda was nominated by Ian Riseley and elected to the Foundation Board of Trustees, her term began in July 2017 and will conclude in June 2021.

This year, Brenda was asked to serve as the vice chair of The Rotary Foundation, and in April 2019 was transitioned into the chair role for the remainder of the Rotary year – the first woman to serve in either of these roles.

“The Foundation and its mission to eradicate polio is the very reason why I joined Rotary 30 years ago,” Brenda said. “I am extremely humbled by my appointment and will do the best job I can in keeping our Foundation in good financial standing, while supporting all the good works made possible through your ongoing support.”

BELOW: Sarah Smith and Christine Rasmussen joined fellow Rotarians from districts 9910 and 9920 in a (wet) 2km walk around the Wynyard Quarter and Westhaven Marina area in celebration of 30 years of Women in Rotary.

“What keeps me in Rotary is ‘Doing Good’ for others in need and assisting with the education of underprivileged children, as I believe education will eradicate poverty.”
– Joyti Singh, Rotary Club of Auckland Harbourside, NZ

“I love what Rotarians do out in the community helping others in need and enjoy the variety of projects on the go. During this time, I have met so many incredible people and made fantastic friendships, business connections and gained so much knowledge.”
– Georgina Richards, Rotary Club of Westhaven, NZ

“To me, Rotary is about connection – whether it’s to other members, the community, a cause or a project. Rotary is connecting.”
– Hannah Stoddart, Rotary Club of Next Rotary Generation North Shore, NZ

In District 9940, Claire Matthews spoke on a Radio National program, which went out across the country to a very positive response from the community.

PDG Liz Courtney also ran a Women in Rotary Facebook campaign on

the Rotary Oceania Facebook page, highlighting women Rotarians from all walks of life and asking them to write about their Rotary journeys, interests and achievements.

“This has been going for the past three months, featuring approximately one woman per week. It’s been amazing to see the engagement received,” Liz said.



“Who else can say they are making a difference with friends and Whānau (extended family)? How many people can say they have contributed to eradicating polio? Rotarians can.”
– Leole Malama-Prasad, Rotary Club of Hutt River Valley, NZ

“Rotary has extended my connections into my local community and enabled me to be part of the wonderfully global organisation that Rotary is.”
– Barbara Whitton, Rotary Club of Tauranga Sunrise, NZ