

five minutes with

Karen Guilliland

Some Christchurch women will know of Karen Guilliland from when she led New Zealand's first equal pay case for women in 1993, winning midwives the right to be paid the same as doctors when doing the same maternity work. Others will know her as an author and co-author of numerous publications utilised in national and international midwifery and women's health curricula. And others will know her as the founding President and current CEO of the New Zealand College of Midwives.

Karen has many other strings to her bow, both nationally and internationally. She was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2000 for services to New Zealand Midwifery and health services. As the newly built New Zealand College of Midwives' head office reopens in central Christchurch, Metropol caught up with this tireless worker in midwifery and community health services...

You began your career as a nurse and midwife what drove you on to becoming instrumental in New Zealand Midwifery and health services?

I saw so many women who didn't know they had choices about their bodies and how they gave birth...it just wasn't right to me. That was the catalyst - I didn't set out to change the system.

You have had 40 years' experience in the women's health field - what are three of the most important advances you have seen during this time?

Aside from the major increase in knowledge of how the human body works and what we can do to fix it when it's out of order, I think legislation around the rights of patients really changed the dynamic in the health sector for the better. Informed consent was then a natural follow on. These factors were very significant for women and their reproductive rights in particular. New Zealand women now have one of the most developed human rights environments in the world.... not that we all feel like that sometimes!

Formerly, the NZ College of Midwives National Office was in an historic brick villa - was it a difficult decision whether to restore or rebuild?

Repair and restoration was our first choice as we all loved the old house, the history and feel of it and we did draw up plans to repair and restore but as each aftershock did more damage we couldn't make that work. It was over a hundred years old, brick and in very bad shape so also quite scary for the staff to think of going back into it. Our all woman board of twenty-four midwife and

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consumer members from throughout New Zealand, together with the staff, were very focused in getting on with it and providing a strong message of resilience to College members and the women of Christchurch so we all worked very hard to get up and running again as soon as possible. The feedback from everyone who has seen it is very positive. Because we got on to it very early we were very lucky with our Architect (Stuart Manning) and Corbels our builders. We had no trouble with the insurers or the Council but then we were very organised and knew what we wanted. It is gorgeous even if we do say so ourselves.

Your new modern building is on the same site at 376 Manchester Street what does the building now house?

The New Zealand College of Midwives has over 3,100 members nationally and the new building houses our National Office, our sister organisation the Midwifery and Maternity Provider Organisation (MMPO - which provides management and practice support for self-employed midwives), drop in



Karen Guilliland with Indonesian midwifery students.

pregnancy testing and information on birthing/midwifery options, and also clinic rooms for Christchurch midwives, mums and babies.

How do you think midwifery and women's health in New Zealand is doing compared to other OECD countries?

New Zealand really does lead the world in maternity care for women. I am often asked to speak overseas at conferences and professional gatherings of maternity specialists to explain how we achieve the positive outcomes we do. Save the Children report NZ as the second best place to be a mother and the fourth best place to be a baby.

Where we still need to see improvement is in the outcomes for Maori and Pasifika women and babies who will make up 50% of the birthing population in a few years. Poverty is the underlying issue that must be addressed. I worry about the increasing antagonism towards single and struggling mums. A successful and healthy nation does not create a blaming culture but prioritises and protects new mothers and their babies whatever their circumstances.

You are one of the first organisations to have completely rebuilt and moved back into the central city - what is your vision for the new CBD?

Vibrancy! People friendly spaces, sidewalk cafés, innovative architecture, big green open spaces, small intimate gardens with seats, trees and water features to relax the mind, river walkways, city apartments mixed with self employed businesses, offices combined with boutique and speciality shops.... can you tell I have just been to New York... a wonderful city.

What is your proudest achievement?

That my children grew to be happy, self aware, kind and generous and that my daughter and daughter in law had confidence in their ability to grow and birth their babies without fear.

On a more personal note - what is your favourite item of clothing?

My black cardy!

If you could go back and tell your teenage self something, what would it be?

Be kind to your mother.

Which is your favourite café, restaurant or bar in Christchurch?

Smash Palace... Owners Anna, Johnny and Rosie Moore run it with an energy that is infectious...passed on from their wonderful parents.

What were you doing the last time the thought went through your mind, "I shouldn't be doing this?"

Kayaking down a very large river with no idea how to stop a very skinny boat going around in circles!

What is your favourite drink?

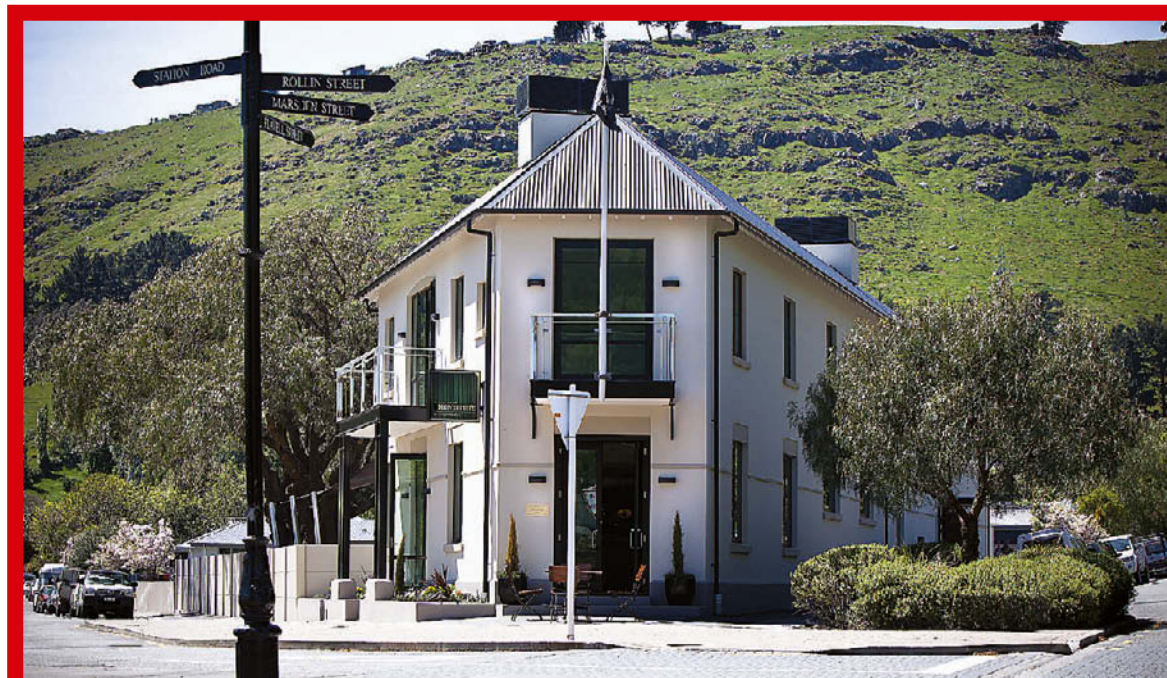
Cappuccino and a chilled Sauvignon Blanc fight for supremacy.

What are you like at parties?

I used to be what my children termed a 'party animal' but that was a while ago!

What's next on your wish list?

I don't wish for much more than I have...pretty full and good life, lovely partner, family and friends and love my job. On a world stage level I wish fundamentalism would disappear, that women had equal access to the worlds resources and that NZ women remember the gains feminism made and never take them for granted.



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