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Club President

Lyn McArthur

(H) 9367 6984

lynmac@iprimus.com.au

Area 3 Director

Dianne Bryant

9245 5551

diannebryant@swantafe.wa.edu.au

District 23 PR Chair

Nan Martella

9721 7067

martella@bigpond.net.au

Club Meetings

Second Thursday of the
month.

Apologies by 8pm

Previous Monday

To: Sharee Simm
0439 923 468

INZERT

Please send any articles
or photos for Inzert to:

Carole Theobald

theobald@powerdsl.com.au

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Improving women's lives in Afghanistan

One of Zonta International's 2004-2006 biennium projects is to improve women's lives in Afghanistan. Following on from the interesting interview with Sakeen Yakoobi, Executive Director of the Afghan Institute of Learning featured in the Zontian of April 2005, this article provides an insight into the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan.

It is good to be mindful that when many agencies focus on a cause their effect can be synergistic—all to the benefit of women in Afghanistan. Here are the stories of 3 women and their contribution to Afghanistan. Editor.



Karen Bjornestad, the NorCross program manager and emergency medical trainer for the ambulance service. © ICRC ref. af-e-00326

Afghanistan: women play a key role in improving lives. Women are playing an important part in helping their fellow Afghans overcome decades of conflict, while trying to create new opportunities and improved services in the country. A series of portraits focuses on the women trying to put the country back on its feet.

Supporting Kabul's ambulance service— *Karen Biomestad*

One clear result of the protracted conflict in Afghanistan is the destruction of the infrastructure in towns and cities. Basic services that are taken for granted in many countries are either severely degraded or now non-existent in Afghanistan.

Even as the conflict continues in parts of the country, however, work is underway to restore essential services. The ICRC, the Afghan Red Crescent and other National Societies are making a valuable contribution to the restoration of essential services in Kabul.

The Norwegian Red Cross Society (Norcross) has undertaken to re-create an ambulance service in the city, having recently concluded a USD 1.2 million reconstruction of the Wazir Ak-

bar Khan Hospital, the only orthopaedic referral hospital in Afghanistan.

The Kabul Ambulance Service, the city's only functioning ambulance service, has been established as a free-of-charge service for the whole population.

A staff of 103, including a driver and nurse for each of the Service's 13 ambulances have been trained to operate from one base station and four sub-stations in Kabul. Staff are trained in two basic courses dealing with medical emergencies and special driver training, and they then receive annual refresher courses.

Karen Bjornestad, the NorCross program manager and emergency medical trainer for the ambulance service explains.

"Our key national staff are excellent, well trained and very motivated, and we hope that this will enable the standards of the Service to be maintained as the Service is taken over by the Ministry of Public Health."

The ambulance service has cooperation agreements with both the traffic police and fire brigade for disaster preparedness and a memorandum of understanding exists with international organizations in Kabul for the use of medical facilities in the case of a major incident that causes mass casualties.

Six of the ambulance service staff are female and, of these, two are ambulance nurses working at the call centre. Karen would like to see more female nursing staff at work with the Ambulance Service.

"Because the ambulance service is on 24 hour duty for patients it is necessary to have crews ready to respond at any time. But it is not easy to get families to agree to female nurses working in our depots or in the ambulances with male drivers. This is a challenge to be overcome in the future."

Educating Afghans about mine risk— *Malina*

Landmines and explosive remnants of war affect an estimated 6.4 million Afghans living in 2,400 landmine-contaminated communities in the country. After 25 years of landmine use in Afghanistan estimates indicate that more than 100,000 people have been landmine victims.



Malina is one of 54 ARCS volunteers, including 15 women, conducting mine risk education. © ICRC ref. af-e-00328

The ICRC and the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) conduct a Mine Action Programme. Through mine risk education – teaching people in mine affected communities about the risks of mines – and by collecting data about landmines to support demining activities, the Mine Action Programme seeks to reduce the number of mine victims.

Malina, from Bamiyan, is 28 years old and she has been working with the Mine Action Programme for two years. She is one of 54 ARCS volunteers, including 15 women, conducting mine risk education.

She and her colleagues carried out more than 5,000 sessions to mine affected communities in 2004, reaching more than 200,000 people to collect data and educate Afghans about the risks of mines.

Afghanistan – restoring family links—*Zohra*

Wars not only inflict human and material losses, they also devastate the social and cultural fabric of societies. Few nations have been exposed to this as clearly, or for as long, as Afghanistan.

Although wars are fought mainly by men, women and children are often

both the direct and indirect victims of conflict through mistreatment by parties to the conflict, through fragmentation of families and separation of family members; or by the loss of male providers during fighting.

The ICRC is mandated to assist the victims of armed conflict. It does this in many ways: providing assistance to victims; visiting persons detained as a result of the conflict; restoring family links during armed conflict, by tracing missing or displaced persons; and by providing a Red Cross message service to enable separated families to keep in touch. Zohra, 20, knows about being a victim of conflict.

"I was shocked and traumatised when I regained consciousness and realised that I had lost my leg in a rocket attack in Kabul. Luckily, I was referred by my neighbour to the ICRC orthopaedic centre," she explains.

"I was fitted with an artificial limb and got physiotherapy sessions to walk on my own legs. The ICRC offered me a job after I recovered and now I am standing on my own as an equal member of my society."

Zohra now works in the tracing department of the ICRC. Her function is to maintain a database of information of people detained because of the conflict. Sometimes she works with her Afghan Red Crescent Society colleagues to arrange the distribution of Red Cross messages.

Malina and her female colleagues conduct all mine risk education activities for women and girls in 18 provinces. In 2005, they will expand their activities to cover 24 provinces.

Malina is obviously proud of the volunteer work that she conducts. "Mine risk education activities are effective in reducing mine incidents because they raise the knowledge of people about the danger of mines and explo-



Zohra, 20, knows about being a victim of conflict. © ICRC ref. af-e-00330

"It is very important for people to know the whereabouts of their loved ones. We are maintaining relations between detainees and their families, or between family members who are separated as a result of fighting."

Often, Red Cross messages are the only means for people deprived of their freedom or separated from their loved ones to get news of each other.

Zohra gives an example of restoring family links.

"It was very exciting for me when a person from Paktia province came to my department to trace his lost brother, who he thought would not be alive.

"After searching our database his brother was found alive – he was being detained in Afghanistan. When he heard this news tears came to his face. He said it was as if the ICRC had given him back his brother."

"I am very proud to be working and helping my people, who are often in desperate need," she concluded.

sive remnants of war," she says.

Malina conducts much of her work at clinics where women come to see the doctor for treatment.

"As an Afghan woman, I am very happy to have a role in reducing the danger of mines and explosive remnants of war by educating people about these risks. In this way, I can do something useful for our war affected people."



In the spotlight...

From time to time our Club members and members of neighbouring clubs , feature in the media. If you spot a Zontian in the news—share their light and forward the article to the Editor.



Preserving our past, managing our future.

Above: Margaret Medcalf (second left) featured in *InterSector* on 6 May 2005 with the gathering of State Archivists.

(Spotter: Helen Margaria)



Partners at risk of conflict

Above: Lori Grech's work as a business coach was featured in the Business Owner section of the *Sunday Times* on 8th May

(Spotter: Yvonne Roberts)



Mayor attends Cabinet Meeting:

Left: Paddi Creevy, sitting front centre, member of Zonta Club Peel Region was recently elected the Mayor of Mandurah.

She is pictured left hosting a Regional Cabinet Meeting in Mandurah in May.

(Spotter: Yvonne Roberts)

Lisa's story

My name is Lisa, I am 26 years of age and on the 16th January 2005 I was diagnosed with Stage IV Vaginal Cancer. Since my original diagnosis distant metastases has been identified in both of my lungs, liver, kidney, bowel and most recently an aggressive tumor was discovered at the base of my spine.

What I am trying to state while attempting to maintain a politically correct explanation is that apparently I have approximately six months remaining of my life to enjoy my two beautiful children and my newlywed husband.

As you can probably imagine this news has been devastating to my friends and family and of course I have great difficulty accepting the fact that I may not be around to teach my children the important lessons in life. One of the most important lessons I believe my children need to learn is that the medical profession does not

have all the answers.

I have suffered recurrent thrush from the age of seventeen and combine this with the fact that I am a victim of sexual assault and yet the multitude of doctors I have approached have dismissed my cancer concerns due simply to my age. I was considered too young to have cancer even though I now know that all my past health issues could possibly have been related to an early cancer diagnosis.

Why are the words vagina, vulva and clitoris so shameful?

Early in 2004 I attended a genetic testing clinic because there exists an extensive history of cancer in my paternal family and I was curious as to whether I was at an increased risk of developing cancer later in life. I must admit I have not taken particularly good care of my body over the years.

I was hospitalized for anorexia after a four year battle in my early teens; I

am a moderate cigarette smoker and have a horrible addiction to the caffeine and sugar in coke. I was a mother at the age of sixteen and have a long medical history of endometriosis and Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome.

But do any of these facts contribute to my cancer diagnosis.....Not according to the numerous oncologists I have seen over the past four months. When I questioned the development time to reach a diagnosis of stage IV vaginal cancer I was told it was more

than likely I could have had cancer for maybe a couple of months but possibly for anything up to three years.

Because of the fact I constantly had thrush I had been to numerous doctors and been subjected to countless pap smears and internal examinations. Each time I was sent away with Canestan creams, pessaries and ointments. Even though these prescribed treatments did not work I just kept using them rather than be subjected to more discomfort.

If the doctor I had seen in 2002 after surgery for a rare illness known as Hidradenitis Suppurativa, had taken my health concerns seriously my condition may have been discovered in the earlier stages and could have been treated successfully with chemo and radiation.

Even though there is no medical evidence to prove my theory correct I believe that the eight miscarriages I have suffered since the birth of my daughter in 2001 may be directly linked to having vaginal cancer. There has been no medical explanation for the loss of these precious lives, just last May I lost my son nearing the end of my sixth month of pregnancy.

To add insult to injury, due to a rather aggressive inoperable tumor at the base of my spine I have been told that I will soon lose the ability to walk and



A recent article in the West Australian highlighted Lisa's story



Lisa's story continued...

everyday mobility will be restricted if possible at all.

I have referrals to palliative care services, counselors, support groups but nobody to acknowledge my emotions of anger and grief. Nobody wants to hear about my story and believe me I have tried. But my circumstances are too hard for most people to understand.

Of course I have questioned WHY???? I have sought second, third and even a sixth opinion of my diagnosis only to be instructed to enjoy the time I have left. You would think that after that brief explanation of my situation I would be more upset with the medical professionals who have poked, prodded, biopsied, and baffled me with their foreign language of medical terminology.

But my anger is also directed at the general public. The friends, family and community members who have made me feel ashamed of my diagnosis. I have encountered people who ask about the location of my cancer and then look at me with horror when I tell them.

I had begun explaining my diagnosis by telling people all the secondary locations the cancer had invaded and excluding the primary cancer, but I soon realized I shouldn't have to be responsible for the discomfort of other people, the fact remained the secondary sites were a direct result of Vaginal cancer.

Even though cancer is no longer a health issue discussed only behind closed doors, people still do not completely understand that it isn't contagious. I have had friends sever contact with me for reasons I still cannot understand. Some friends believed that by entering my home they would get cancer, others stopped contact because they didn't know how to deal with my diagnosis.

The second category I understand to a degree but the first made me angry. At first I thought maybe they were uneducated but my experience of these people told me it wasn't their education that was lacking but more the societal awareness of cancer.

During my courses of radiation and chemotherapy I met some amazing people of all ages. They inspired me as much as their stories were heartbreaking. Even though I was in the same position I struggled to find the words to comfort them.

But I am devastated by the attitude of the health industry and general media by their reinforcement that women should be embarrassed or ashamed of Pap Smears and intimate discussions about the essence of their femininity.

Why are the words vagina, vulva and clitoris so shameful?

These anatomical parts are what set the female race apart from the male population. Men can discuss their penises in public but women are raised to believe that their differences are dirty or to be kept private. It raises the age old debate about how men are the superior race and yet without women and their reproductive organs the population would not exist.

I may not have much time left to fight this battle but whilst I am still able I will be taking my story to as many people as will listen. I will stand alongside women like Kathleen Mazzella and GAIN Gynaecological Awareness Information Network Inc., www.gynsupport.com, the organization which she stands for in the hope that more women can find the confidence to speak out about these truly important feminine issues.

Due to the rather extreme nature of my situation I have had many people ask what they can do to help....I could be selfish and materialistic and ask for financial contributions which would certainly ease a lot of pressure on my grieving family, I could request an all

expenses paid holiday or I could mention a new car which is sorely needed but all I ask is this....

I want more women to come forward with their opinions and to take a stand against the general consensus that we cannot or should not discuss our sexual health or genitalia with the same acceptance that men can and do.

As a woman I believe I know my own body better than any doctor or any man. If your intuition tells you something is wrong then don't be discouraged from fighting for the truth. Keep battling the social intolerance and tear down the stigma relating to women and their bits.

So many issues may have contributed to having this alien destroying my body but if someone had told me there were risks associated with multiple surgeries or explored in more detail the reason for my miscarriages I may still have a future that extends beyond six months.

I pray that even if only one woman takes my story seriously she will have the power to save her own life.

With compassion - Lisa Mackay

This article was reproduced in full with Lisa's permission via Kathleen Mazzella. Many thanks Lisa for having the courage to share your story. Hopefully, your bravery will help others speak out about this disease.—Ed.

Queen for a day!

Kath Mazzella approached the Zonta Club of Perth when she learned that Lisa would love to be able to have one final night out with her husband before she loses the use of her legs. Her wish was to see Queen who performed at the Burswood on Wednesday 15 June.

Zonta Club of Perth agreed to donate \$120 to cover the cost of the two tickets. Kath Mazzella also managed to acquire a donation of two nights' B&B at the Ibis for Lisa and her husband.

Welcome to new members



Virginia Shotter (right) receives her Zonta badge and satchel from Lyn McArthur.

Virginia Shotter and Anne-Marie McNaughton were inducted at the June meeting.

Welcome ladies! We hope you enjoy the fellowship of Zonta and we all look forward to getting to know you better at future meetings.

It was also the first induction ceremony performed by our new President, Lyn McArthur. Hopefully the first of many Lyn!



Anne-Marie McNaughton (right) receives flowers and satchel from Lyn McArthur.

Welcome... Virginia Shotter

Virginia was born in Perth and grew up in semi rural lifestyle, enjoying the bush environment. At school in the '90's the girls were encouraged to go into science and the mathematics areas. At school, she took a keen interest in Chemistry and Biology and after graduating with a BSc from UWA embarked on a career in Environmental Science.

After graduating with a BSc, in the late 90's she worked as an Environmental Officer working in Environmental Monitoring and Reporting area. She enjoyed many interesting field trips up north and down south to study Water Quality of the Rivers and Estuaries of WA.

Virginia enjoys sailing and diving (in good weather with a calm seas!) in and around many

of the reefs and wrecks at Rockingham, Queensland and on the Great Barrier Reef.

Virginia has 2 dogs (a beagle and Labrador) and likes sewing when she has the time.

Welcome... Anne-Marie McNaughton

Originally from Queensland, Anne-Marie graduated from Queensland University with Honours in Dentistry in 1977. Anne-Marie and her husband Neal came to Perth in 1982 on their way back to Queensland from a working holiday in England so that Neal could take up a position at the University of Western Australia.

It was supposed to be a two-year position, but they have been here ever since!

Anne-Marie has worked as a dentist in private practice virtually

all the time since graduation, though she worked very part time while her three children were young.

She has worked in the same practice in Wembley for 22 years, becoming the principal eight years ago. It is a family-oriented general dental practice using the latest techniques to deliver high quality dentistry to patients of all ages. Anne-Marie has been involved in the Women's Dental Study Group for many years and is presently on committee.

In her spare time Anne-Marie is a bit of a fitness fanatic, regularly attending gym classes and she also runs for fitness. Anne-Marie usually participates in the 'City to Surf' and 'Bridges' fun runs. In 2002, Anne-Marie surprised everyone by winning her age category.

In quieter moments, she likes to do gardening and reads 'murder mystery' novels.

Women's Fellowships

Do you know someone that could benefit from the Western Australian Women's Fellowship.

The Western Australian Women's Fellowship provides grants of up to \$25,000 to:

- Work and study interstate or overseas
- Research an area of interest to women
- Have a positive impact on women in Western Australia.

Western Australians from all backgrounds are encouraged to apply. Previous academic experience is not necessary, just a passion for women's interests.

Preference will be given to applications focussing on the Government priorities below:

- Economic independence
- Safety and justice
- Leadership and governance
- Gender equality.

Applications are due on 2 September 2005. The application form and guidelines are available from <http://www.community.wa.gov.au/Communities/women>

For further information on the Fellowship, please contact the Women's Advisory Service on 9264 1900 or 1800 199 174 (TTY available on these numbers) or email wpo@dcd.wa.gov.au

WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR CLUB? VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT www.zontaperth.org.au
Email: zontaperth@yahoo.com.au

Diary Dates

Register on Zonta International Website at www.zonta.org

Your membership number is in the 2005/2006 Membership List booklet. If you want a hand, let the PR committee know at the July meeting.

13th July—Dinner Meeting 6.15pm for 6.45pm.

The July dinner meeting will be held at The University Club, UWA. Meal \$30 plus drinks at \$3.50 each. Guest speakers Freda Jacob and Penny Flett.

10th August—National Council of Women of WA Wise Women

Wednesday—All you need to know about human papilloma virus at NCWWA's Office 1st Floor, 10 Victoria Avenue, Perth. 12.30pm to 2pm. Bring your own lunch. Contact Kath Mazzella mazzella@bigpond.com

10th September 2005- Great Gynae Day Out

International Gynaecological Awareness Day. Make a note in your diaries.

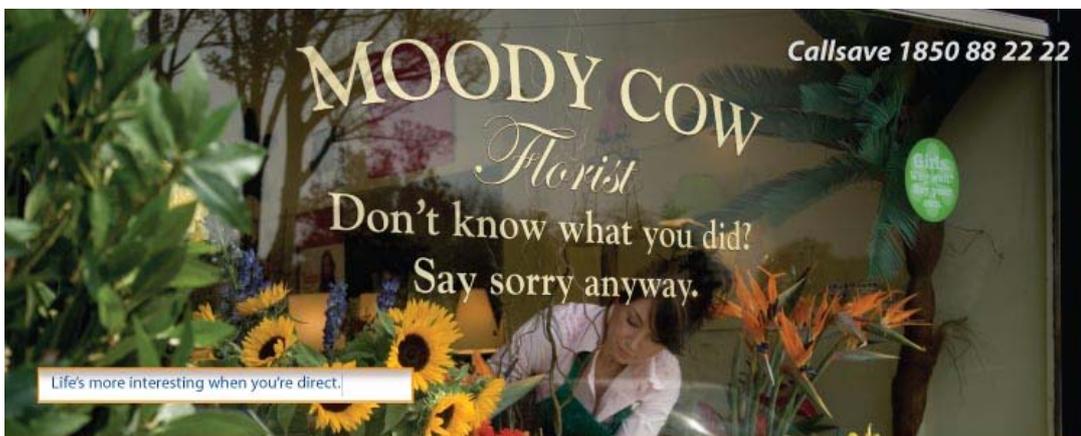
1st-3rd October 2005—District Conference, Glenelg South Australia.

The conference theme is Zonta Action through Partnership (ZAP). Conference will be held at the Stamford Grand Glenelg Hotel.

24-29 June 2006—International Convention, Melbourne

Georgina Costello will be among the speakers for this not-to-be-missed event. Make a note in your diary now!

Chuckle corner...



This photo was forwarded by former member Isobel Wilson.

Isobel has had a change in life direction and is now a student studying creative writing and French at Edith Cowan University.

Bon chance avec examinations, Isobel!