



Breast Cancer Support Inc.

Newsletter

March 2011

Report from the Chair



It is now almost nine months since I took over as chair of BCS: months that have included the occasional steep learning curve, but also many moments of achievement and satisfaction. It is a privilege to chair the group of six talented and committed women who make up the BCS committee, with the exceptional backup of our Support Services Co-ordinator, Jane Bissell.

BCS is a vital and growing organisation, providing much needed support to women who have an experience of breast cancer. To keep pace with the needs and expectations of women today, we are constantly looking for ways to improve its services. The website and the 0800 number have proved very successful in this regard, and we have other excellent projects in the pipeline. These include setting up an online forum (with BCN) and a Breast Friends group for young women, establishing a new group in Wellsford, and holding our annual training day on 29 May for both current and new co-ordinators and volunteers. These initiatives are very exciting, and it's affirming to know that their worth is recognised by the agencies that have helped fund them.

Sometimes I feel like the parent of a gangly teenager – BCS has so much potential, but its feet have suddenly grown too big for the rest of its body! The BCS committee comprises six women – all of us fabulous, *but there needs to be more of us.*

This month I have begun to visit each Breast Friends group to talk about BCS's plans for the future and to get *your* suggestions on ways BCS could improve its services – both to its current members, and to the women we are not reaching yet. I encourage you also to think about whether you could contribute to the organisation by being on the committee. It is an exciting time to be part of the BCS vision, and the more of us who take part in it, the faster and more effectively it will be realised. That has to be good for women who come to us for help and support.

If you would like to talk to me about the possibility of being on the committee, please contact me by email, deirdreparr@xtra.co.nz, or phone (09) 815 2324.

This month our Survivor's Story is contributed by Violet Lawrence from the North Shore Breast Friends group. Last year I was honoured to attend the photographic exhibition, 'Portraits of Strength', by Damien Nikora, which featured eleven life-size portraits of breast cancer survivors. Violet was one of these and became the 'face' of the exhibition publicity. The exhibition, which can be seen online at <http://portraitsofstrength.com/>, included one mother and daughter, as well as Maori and Pasifika women. Damien's powerful portraits are a tribute to the strength and courage not only of the women he photographed, but of all women scarred by this disease.

Deirdre

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- *To become a Member of BCS, or to make a donation to support our activities, please complete the form on page 3 and post to us.*
- *For information about our support services, please contact us on 0800BreaCanSupport (0800 273 222) or visit our website and complete the Contact Us online enquiry form.*

A Tribute to Joan Kerr



Marie Goudge writes of our friend and colleague, Joan Kerr

When Joan was diagnosed with breast cancer she resolved to use her experience to help other women. In 2004 Joan came to the AGM of Breast Cancer Support and volunteered to become a member of the central committee.

Most people need to be coaxed to join a committee but that wasn't Joan's style. When she saw an area where she felt she had something to offer, she volunteered her service. Joan was prepared to tackle new tasks, to ask the difficult questions, to take calculated risks, to encourage others, to use her initiative and to work jolly hard. Joan spent six years on the BCS committee, three as deputy Chair. During that time she chaired a

subcommittee for strategic planning and had a leading hand in preparing and organizing the training programmes for support people. Joan was very thorough in all she did.

Joan became a friend to all the women who attend the breast cancer support groups that meet from the Hibiscus Coast to Papakura. She regularly attended her local group that meets monthly at the Cancer Society. The groups are fondly called "Breast Friends." Joan modelled that sentiment.

Joan was a gracious woman with quiet dignity and a ready smile. She had an excellent dress sense and always seemed to look a million dollars. She was a wonderful inspiration of how to look great even when going through chemotherapy. At her funeral it became clear that Joan had made a huge contribution to her chosen career, teaching. Principals from three schools and many teaching colleagues spoke glowingly of Joan's relationship with her pupils and her skill at representing teachers at both local and national level. Joan received a "Life Service Award" from the PPTA.

BCS acknowledges the support that Barry, her husband, gave Joan in her work with Breast Cancer Support. To Barry, Helen, Jennifer and Donald (Joan and Barry's children) and the grandchildren, the women of BCS send their sincere condolences. It has been a privilege to know Joan, to work with her and to call her, friend. Our lives are richly blessed for having known her.

Marie Goudge



Relay for Life 2011

From Volunteer Dianne Murray



As the Cancer Society moves to make the Relay for Life a more Community organized event I, along with Rosemary Geard, was asked to join a Committee to help the Society organize the Relay this year. We were given the task of encouraging survivors to join the Survivors' Lap to mark the start and end of the Relay. We were also in charge of the survivor's tent, taking registrations, handing out T shirts and sashes, selling candle bags and assisting survivors to make the survival rings which were hung in the tent. The weather was atrocious and we

were unable to site the candle bags around the track and light them at dusk, as usual, so they were displayed in the tent. Many people came by to admire and respect the absolute works of art, reflecting on the journey of loved ones affected by cancer. This is truly an emotional aspect of Relay and one which is encouraged as part of the healing process of dealing with cancer. It was so pleasing to see how everyone got in behind the cause and got out there to raise funds and enjoy being part of this annual event. First time participants are always keen to be associated again in future relays, a reflection of how important an event like this is to people. BCS is privileged to be part of Relay and I was grateful for the help of Committee Members Rosemary, Deirdre, Marie, and Mary who have been part of Relay in past years. Their management skills and experience ensured the survivors were well taken care of. Your efforts were very much appreciated and despite the weather and the early finish, we did very well. Thank you.



New Lymphoedema website a valuable resource

For women newly diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing treatment, it can be difficult to know where to source information and services for lymphoedema management and treatment in New Zealand. New Zealand lymphoedema therapists have collaborated to establish a New Zealand lymphoedema website – www.lymphoedemanz.org.nz – which has been funded by the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation. The website provides a useful resource for accessing information about primary and secondary lymphoedema, services and resources in New Zealand, as well as links to reputable international lymphoedema information. The website has:

- printable information pages explaining what lymphoedema is and lymphoedema prevention and management,
- international links to resources and information,
- DHB lymphoedema services, and
- a list of NZ National Lymphoedema Therapists.

So, what information does a newly diagnosed or treated woman need to have about lymphoedema? Firstly, an accurate explanation is needed of the surgical or radiotherapy treatments that have involved the lymphatic system. This will enable the risk of lymphoedema for that person to be assessed. Axillary dissection or sentinel node biopsy and radiotherapy are the most significant factors for risk and can be explained by the surgeon or other members of the multidisciplinary team, such as the breast care nurse or oncologist. Once a risk assessment has been undertaken, the woman should be given information that will help her take steps to protect against lymphoedema development, and information about the early signs and management of lymphoedema.

Denise Flett, Lymphoedema Therapist

(We reprint this excerpt with kind permission of Denise Flett and Upfront U Kaiora)



Supporting BCS

BCS gratefully acknowledges the support of our members and donors and wishes to thank the NZ Lotteries Commission, COGS, the Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust, the AH Watson Trust, the Strathlachlan Fund for their support of our work in 2011. We would also like to thank Zeald for their sponsorship of our website www.breastcancer.co.nz.

Would you like to become a member of Breast Cancer Support or make a donation? Please complete this form below and post back to us at Breast Cancer Support, PO Box 10150, Dominion Road, Auckland 1446, or call us on 0800BreaCanSupport (0800 273 222) for more information. Thank you!

Name.....

Phone(0)..... Mob.....

Email.....

Address.....

My membership/donation is enclosed:

- Individual membership (\$20) Group (\$30) Unwaged (\$15) Joint (\$30) I enclose a donation of \$.....
- I am a breast cancer survivor I would like to volunteer - please contact me

Please contact us for further information on 0800 BreaCanSupport (0800 273 222) or email us on admin@breastcancersupport.co.nz. **Donations over \$5 are tax deductible.**

Breast Friends – News from our Support Groups

The Central group got into origami in February...



All of our Breast Friends groups enjoyed end of year Christmas events, wonderful lunches, dinners and get-togethers to celebrate friendship and the joy of the Season. Some groups held informal meetings in January where Members caught up with their summer holiday adventures and activities. The formal BCS Breast Friends year began in February.

Central (from Christine Rule)

At our January meeting, the Auckland Central ladies shared stories from the festive season and then played *Table Topics*, a game given to us by one of our members. In the words of one of the ladies, 'We learned more about each other, drew closer together, as well as having some good laughs.' The time disappeared very quickly and we were loath to stop for afternoon tea. Those present requested that we play it again in the not too distant future! In February Irene and Lynne demonstrated the art of making Origami boxes and helped those who wanted to try it themselves. What skill, what concentration and a busy hum as they worked steadily on their creations while others chose to observe! Irene made heart-shaped shortbread biscuits for Valentine's Day, Helen made a chocolate cake, all delicious and there were asparagus rolls and blueberries to add to the feast!

Hibiscus Coast (from Barbara McLean)

In January we met for an informal morning tea at one Member's beautiful home at Swann Beach. It was a brilliant day, we had a good catch up with all that had been going on in our lives over the holiday period and a photo call which is always fun. Some of us didn't manage to tear ourselves away until early afternoon. Our first meeting of the year was in February and we discussed our annual questionnaire (circulated prior to the meeting) which invites members to tell us how they think the group is going and share ideas for improvement. Everyone was happy with the leadership, the way the meetings are run and the direction of the group. The meeting ended with a round-robin discussion of what the group means to each of us individually and some interesting insights were shared.

East Auckland (from Jennifer Woodrooffe)

At our February meeting we discussed the programme for the coming year and high on the list was reconstruction. Women wanted to have more information about this very important surgical option and I am researching this topic for a future meeting. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to catch up as we hadn't been together since November so there was plenty of catching up to do!

West Auckland (from Marie Goudge)

Our Members enjoyed a good social meeting in February, exchanging holiday stories and news. The sharing time, which is a feature of all our meetings, was valuable. Some gave updates on personal progress through treatments while others shared family news and told of events and activities. Our group is particularly excited because one of our members is to have a baby in March. We are so happy to be a small part of our friend's journey through pregnancy. This gathering was for planning the year's activities so there was no guest speaker. There were many ideas for suitable speakers and activities and this get together signalled a positive start to the year.

North Shore (from Jenny Short)

Our first BCS meeting for the year was held at the Senior Citizens' Clubrooms in Takapuna and how wonderful it was to meet together again after the long Christmas/New Year break. We had no speaker, so used the time to share experiences and support each other. Once again I was reminded of how different our stories can be. We share a common problem but have to face it in a variety of ways, but the camaraderie of the group is obvious. Once a member, you feel you are surrounded by sympathetic friends who understand something of what you are experiencing. And our meetings are always very different, but very enjoyable. Well – that's how I feel. I hope you do too.

Would you like to know more about our Support Groups? Please call us on 0800 273 222 or visit our website



Breast Friends – News from our Support Groups

Auckland South (from Jill Mellow)

Aileen Magilsen, Justice of the Peace and Wedding Celebrant, was our guest speaker in March. She also belongs to Probus, the Lioness Club and League of Mothers. A very busy lady indeed! Aileen gave us a brief family history and then spoke about the process of becoming both a Justice of the Peace and a Wedding Celebrant. We listened to some stories about different types of weddings she has officiated at and the baby naming ceremonies which many people have now instead of Christenings. At the age of 76 Aileen is still enjoying all the activities she is involved in!

A special poem from Noline ...

Noline Johnson wrote this poem when she was 87 years old (she is now 88!) and kindly sent it to us for inclusion in our newsletter. Reading and writing stories has always been a big part of her life and we are delighted that she is sharing this wonderful poem with us!

Over the Years (June 2009, aged 87 years)

Over eighty years have gone by,
And that is when I begin to sigh,
As many memories come and go,
Of happy moments as well as low.

Being part of life's history has been great,
Although we cannot always choose our fate,
But we do have chances to make a choice,
As well as giving folk opinions by voice.

Depression years were not easy but good,
Because we helped one another as we should,
And learnt to make do with what we had,
And of many friendships we were glad.

We knew our manners and had respect,
As that is what people would always expect,
And with technology there has been progress,
But between countries problems are not less.

We have our ups and we have our downs,
We have our smiles and we have our frowns,
We can get hot and then get colder,
But we never get younger only get older.

Noline A.V. Johnson

Relay for Life 2011

These photos were taken at the Relay for Life North Shore, 5-6 March 2011.

Photos courtesy of Walt and Georgea Sharkey.



“Watch out ... Vi’s in town!” ... Violet Lawrence shares her story



I had several wigs fitted to suit my face and chose the ideal one, waka blonde (cano blonde) and I wear this wig with pride! Here’s the story ...

My hair was gradually falling out and I was becoming self-conscious. I decided to purchase a wig that would suit my colouring and facial features so my good friend Roslyne from Te Ha, who tautoko (supports) me, arrived to pick me up to purchase the wig! My chemo-brain was functioning well, giving directions and with Roslyne's driving skills we were in great shape. We ended up at another wig shop and even asked directions to the opposition but they couldn't help us, bugger!

We arrived at Wig Consultants to purchase this wig and we were introduced to Sarah who ushered me to a comfortable chair. The wigs were a challenge for me especially the brown coloured wig which made me look like an old woman! After ten attempts I said to Sarah that I always saw myself wearing a blond wig. So along came two blonde wigs! I tried one and looked okay so I tried on the other wig, closed my eyes and hoped for the best.

Lo and behold, the wig fit like a glove! I opened my eyes, Roslyne said I looked beautiful and there were smiles all around as Sarah rearranged my wig with ease. I looked beautiful! There were smiles and compliments from other consultants in the shop and staff members came to investigate, impressed by my \$400.00 purchase. Roslyne could not believe the transformation: a sick chemo woman (me) to a beauty queen. I am beautiful and proud of my youthful gorgeous wig.

Wearing the wig has given me a new lease on life, a wonderful transformation! People stare and then make encouraging compliments! What is a woman to do?

Two weeks later my husband and I caught a bus into the city and we had a picnic in Myers Park on Upper Queen Street... people eating food on benches, feeding the birds that scurried about and pecked away greedily at every morsel.

A pretty young woman was crocheting a light orange blanket, diligently working on her task, listening to an iPod while birds scrambled after whatever was thrown: a flurry of seagulls, sparrows and pigeons enjoyed day-old muffins. Teenagers swinging merrily on the swings, kids playing on the slides and jungle gym, priceless indeed!

My husband James took photographs of me sitting, standing, overlooking the city area, capturing the skyscrapers in the distance. Myers Park is a gift to the people in the area; we are so lucky to have this prime location for all to enjoy in this beautiful city.

I wear this wig every chance I can get but took it off temporarily at the workshop Look Good Feel Better. The beauticians pampered us and made us look beautiful! We kept the makeup kit, lavender bag for the neck and other treats. These ravishing, bald and beautiful women with makeup applied and wigs arranged on their heads looked so distinguished!

I have started playing Indoor Bowls and Table Tennis, walking and going to the gym, however I find the wig is too hot when I exercise so off it comes.

Chemotherapy sucks! Bald from head to toe, no hair in my nasal passages so I have a continual nasal drip. My nose becomes cracked, dry and painful ... and the ongoing waiting game while I wait for a reconstruction.

My hair has grown back silvery now and I have two more cycles of Herceptin before completing my treatments.

I am alive to tell my story.

Violet Lawrence

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