



Fay Freeman

If you want to know about the health of sports organisations in New Zealand today, you needn't go any further than asking Fay Freeman. Since the 1960s she has immersed herself in sports administration, umpiring, management and organisational review. Her work has received national acclaim. But alongside this, Fay has also contributed in many ways to community development on the North Shore, through her work with two city councils, and her voluntary support and involvement with a number of community organisations.

Fay has always lived on the North Shore. The original family home was on an eight-acre property in Archers Road, Glenfield, which in the 1940s and 50s was mostly fields with very few houses. *It was a rustic way of life.* There was a big vegetable garden and fruit trees on the property, with plenty of chooks and ducks, sheep and cows. *There was always food on the table, but there wasn't much spare money about.* With ten children in the family, it meant sharing what you had, including beds, and the one bathroom. There were never enough shoes to go round and Fay remembers the *icy walk during winter across the wooden bridge from Archers Road onto Wairau Road on the way to Milford School. Nevertheless, I never thought of us as poor.*

She says of her parents, *Dad was broad thinking, quite political, a pacifist, aligned to Communist principles at one point. He was entrepreneurial and worked a variety of jobs. There was always good conversation, and the National Geographic to test the mind. Mum was a very gentle person, a devoted mother and home maker, never*

fazed about anything. Both my parents loved their children; that was their life. Fay was the one in the family who helped her mother with the domestic work; the six boys in the family didn't do that in those days. *Dad loved music. The boys were involved with North Shore Brass Band. The boys also stripped down motorbikes in the lounge and raced them on the dirt track out back. Bikers from miles around came on Sundays to 'plough the dirt.'*

Home life was very active and boisterous, Fay and her siblings had the freedom to explore and do their own thing. Occasionally they would go to Milford beach and sometimes to a movie at the Bridgeway Cinema at Northcote Point. But entertainment, play and activity was usually self-generated as there were no public facilities in the area. *The neighbouring brickworks was where the children use to play moulding clay offcuts into shapes.*

By the time she was 12 years of age, Fay was pursuing her own interests and getting herself to places on the Shore, on her own. There was marching practice and competitions, weekly netball



*Left:
Fay as umpire of
the Silver Ferns,
1988*

*Right:
Fay in uniform as a
marching girl, 1950*



practice and games at Takapuna Grammar, and roller skating at the Browns Bay stake rink and the Green Door in Barry's Point Road. *I was a free spirit and I've never been a person that can be contained really. All those things I did on my own initiative. All without my parent's involvement really. I was fit and that is my lifestyle. I was always on the go. I could never stay still.* Fay also loved athletics and has been a runner all her life; she still does a half marathon annually.

At Westlake Girls High School, Fay achieved school certificate, the only child in her family to do so. However, her parents didn't think that academia offered any value and that *you should use your skills*. Fay realises now that she identified strongly as working class and going to university was not something she felt she could

aspire to. The prevailing message in her family, and from society was that going to university was above her 'station' in life. She did however go to night classes to become more proficient in shorthand and typing.

It was 1962. Fay worked as a general clerk for the Auckland Chamber of Commerce until she married and became a 'stay at home mum'. Fay had three children of her own and, much later, was stepmother to two other children (today she is also a grandmother and step-grandmother to seven children). After having a family, Fay worked for a period with Anchor Farm Products, and continued to follow her sporting interests in netball. She played and umpired at North Harbour Netball, and was the administrator/manager of the association for six years. But her involvement didn't stop there.

By the mid-1980s she was ranked the number one netball umpire in New Zealand. Her first tour as sole umpire with a national squad was to England in 1988 with the Silver Ferns, under coach Lois Muir.

The world championship in 1987 was the last time that any umpire could umpire a team from their own country. In 1989, the new policy of the International Netball Federation was that umpires would be neutral and have no country representation. Fay umpired the New Zealand under-21s and the New Zealand Young Internationals team, as well as encouraging the Oceania Netball Federation to upskill umpires in Pacific nations with national netball teams, such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji. She also became President of the New Zealand Netball Umpires Association.

Fay and her husband, Don, became involved in softball on the North Shore. She became secretary of North Harbour Softball, while Don was president. With Don, she voluntarily administered the Rosedale touch module, and wrote a regular sports column for the *North Shore Times Advertiser* newspaper.

She was manager of the New Zealand White Sox team and undertook several tours including a World Championship and an Olympic qualifying event. After Don's death, Fay became secretary of the Northcote Softball Club, a position she still holds today. Fay was acting CEO of Softball New Zealand during 2013, and is currently chairperson of North Harbour Softball.

In 1983, Fay was employed by Takapuna City Council as a community advisor. She had been asked to apply for the position by a city councillor and, to her surprise, without any direct experience of community development or service provision, she was employed. *The local community had lobbied for quite some time to get a community development worker, so to say they were alarmed when I was appointed is an understatement. I came from a sports background which is not at all what they had in mind for this role. Nevertheless, I came with an open mind and a willingness to grasp the issues and work closely with the community groups, and over*



time gained their respect. I am the kind of person that always thinks I can. I never think I can't. This is one example in taking on this role. In this role Fay engaged with some exciting learning around social change, and learnt how to achieve tangible outcomes. This sometimes meant taking an extreme position on issues in order to achieve the desired result.

Alongside all the responsibilities she had as community advisor, Fay also found time to volunteer her support to various community groups. One of these was the North Shore Council of Community and Social Services (NSCSS). Fay first attended network meetings, where she got to know Elsie Tillet and John Osborne, and offered her support to the organisation. Fay was appointed NSCSS chairperson and filled the role from 1986 to 1987. It was at this time that Fay assisted in the recruitment of a first ever Executive Officer for NSCSS, Catherine McClintock. Takapuna City Council provided funding for the role. Fay says of her time with NSCSS that it was memorable for several reasons, *for the intellectual stimulation it provided in exploring community needs and the ever elusive answers to the difficulties faced by our community. It is memorable also for the understanding and knowledge gained of the work undertaken by numerous volunteers to support and develop their communities in the true community development spirit.*¹

As community advisor, Fay supported the establishment of the North Shore Women's Refuge, and was a founding trustee. A very popular recycling centre was established in Sunnybrae Road, which enabled factory offcuts to be assembled in one place where they were then recycled for use by scouts, guides, art groups, schools and preschool centres. Development of the Rose Arts Centre in Belmont was completed, and youth support services, provided by the Te Hou Ora Trust in Glenfield, were supported.

Fay also established two central services that NSCSS, now Auckland North Community and Development, has continued to provide to the present day. The first of these was the monthly newsletter 'Community Connections', which was distributed to member organisations. The original aim was to communicate to NSCSS members what was happening across the North Shore in areas of service delivery and community development. It promoted community events, forums and published community notices, and became a vehicle for community groups and social services on the Shore to tell their stories.

The second service was a professional development, capability training programme called 'Five Good Ideas'. This initiative came out of the capability project funded by the Tindall Foundation.

One of the learnings was that many organisations face the same, or similar, issues. Discussions took place with the Tindall Foundation about the possibility of funding a training programme which NSCSS could deliver to community workers across the North Shore. The Tindall Foundation was already thinking how it could support such an

initiative. It realised that community groups which were applying for funds to the Tindall Foundation to deliver programmes and services did not have sound governance practices, nor did they know how to create a strategic plan.

The Foundation was inspired by the work of the Tamarack Institute in Canada, which already had a capability training programme. The name 'Five Good Ideas' was borrowed from the Institute. Fay did her homework on the concept of providing community groups, in particular managers and boards of trustees, with a series of 'short sharp seminars' presented by people trained in areas of not for profit management. The Tindall Foundation provided the funding for this, enabling hundreds of community

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groups to benefit from this new initiative. Five Good Ideas is today in its eighth year.

Following the amalgamation of local authorities in 1989, Fay was appointed as Leisure Services Manager. Her team oversaw the operation of 3 swimming pools in the Takapuna ward, 4 recreation centres, 20 community centres, 16 community halls and 458 rental units for the elderly. Her team also organised special events, holiday programmes and activities in community centres and at the swimming pools. Fay's community development team also administered council grants to community groups in the Takapuna ward. In the six years she held this position she developed a recreation plan, with recommendations for the future use of facilities owned by Takapuna Council.

By now, with all her life experience, Fay also found the confidence to consider furthering her academic education. So, in 1992, she decided to study sociology through Massey University. She then switched to management studies and graduated with a Bachelor of Business Studies.

Fay went on to complete a post graduate diploma in administration and disputes resolution, and graduated in 2006 with a Master of Management in Dispute Resolution. She wrote her thesis on disputes resolution in sports, as practised in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1996, Fay was head-hunted by Manukau City Council to manage the process of restructuring its community services and recreation facilities. This included libraries, city swimming pools, leisure centres, Citizen Advice Bureaus (CABs), community halls and housing for the elderly. It was huge job and eventually took its toll. Fay felt it was time for a change. From 2006 to 2010 she was deputy chairperson for the Takapuna Community Board, where she led the development of a community plan for the ward.

In 2001, Fay established her own consultancy in the areas of community sector research, community consultation, project management, strategic planning, conducting feasibility studies and

organisational reviews, and dispute resolution. Today she works throughout New Zealand.

She has worked with Sport New Zealand, the New Zealand Recreation Association, Auckland Council, and the Whangarei and Far North District Councils, as well as many other organisations. Her consultancy work spans many areas of sport; bowls, cricket, rugby, rugby league, football, squash, snow sports, softball, netball, and golf.

In 2006, Fay was awarded an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to netball and sport. In 2014, Fay was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Sport NZ Awards. She is also a life member of Netball New Zealand, a Life Member of North Harbour Netball and a Life Member of North Harbour Softball.

When thinking about challenges facing the not for profit community sector today Fay says, *There's a constant challenge for community organisations, because funding is always going to be an issue. I think that there's some back-end services that could be shared across organisations. I like the direction that government is going in with collaboration, especially for smaller organisations.*

¹ North Shore Council of Community and Social Services Inc., *The History 1974 – 2014*, published 2014

