



Glennys Adams

For Glennys, life has been a rich and extraordinary journey of personal growth, and achievement. She has contributed to the delivery of mental health promotion and community development on the North Shore. Inspired by others' work, she embraced the 'community house philosophy' of community empowerment and self-determination; that is, asking the community what it needs and then letting the community, with appropriate support, deliver on those needs. She believes this is the formula to ensure the sustainable well-being of a community.

Glennys, known to her family and friends as Glen, grew up in Mount Eden. Her parents built a home there during the war years. After a few years, the house had to be sold due to her mother contracting tuberculosis (TB) at 23 years of age and being hospitalised for five years. As an only child, Glen learned to be very independent. She describes herself as being quite shy when she was young and not very outgoing; she thought it best never to make a fuss. However, her childhood had many pleasures, including a *neighbourhood full of other children to play with. The children would go off as a group* to the nearby Mayfair and Capitol cinemas, Potters Park, and Sunday school. To shop or go into town, they would (in the company of an adult) catch the tram to Karangahape Road or to Queen Street. Glen used to play in the children's playground on the roof of The Farmers Trading Company department store. She loved to read and to lose herself in books; she still does.

Glen was just ten months old when her mother entered hospital and spent time in 'shelters' for tuberculosis sufferers at Greenlane

Hospital. Glen recalls, *they had these sort of isolation wards and they had openings to the sun because of the belief that it would kill some of the germs, I think. In those days the treatment was mainly rest, although Mum did have one of the first thoracoplasty procedures, where they remove the ribs from the back, deflate the lung and remove the tubercular cavities.* Glen could not visit her mother in the shelters because children were particularly susceptible to TB and she would be cared for by good neighbours and friends when her grandmother, who had become her caregiver, made visits to the hospital.

Meanwhile, Glen's father was in the army, ready and *busting for active war service*, but he kept being held back because of his wife's life-threatening illness. *Mother was always at death's door; she was incredibly ill and they kept waiting basically for her to die. He was never able to go on overseas service, which he came to resent.* Glen will always be grateful that she avoided being placed in a children's home as her grandmother (her mother's mother) living in Mount



Members of the North Shore Community Health Network (from left) Margaret Rooke, Liz Anstey, Tricia Clarkson and Glennys Adams outside their new premises, Raeburn House, October 1986

Eden, took her in, along with her uncle's child (her cousin), who was slightly older and abandoned by her own mother; *With my grandmother being incredibly busy, I sometimes was looked after by the people in the street...and everyone sort of mucked in and knew each other. And my grandmother often did things for other people; she had chooks, she'd give people eggs and there were a lot of neighbourly connections. I think I got my sense of fighting injustices from her.*

Glen has always admired her mother; she recognised her as being *an incredibly gutsy woman. She wouldn't give into anything, even with just part of one lung remaining.* Glen was six years old when her mother finally recovered and re-joined the family in the Mount Eden house. The family stayed awhile with Glen's grandmother before they eventually rehoused and picked up their

life together again. Her parents went on to celebrate sixty years of marriage, both living into their eighties.

Glen's first school was Edendale Primary, then Balmoral Intermediate and moving on to Auckland Girls Grammar, which she loved. Many of the teachers were young, academic, and career focused and this appealed to Glen. Looking back, she realises that these women were her role models. Rua Gardner was the head mistress; she was a feminist. *There was an implicit understanding that girls can do anything.* At school she played basketball, she achieved a silver medal for gymnastics, and she enjoyed performing in theatre productions. This interest in theatre has continued throughout her life. For instance, she was for some years involved in an older women's theatre group on the North Shore, which created and performed shows around aging positively.

Glen's first career choice was to become a nurse, but she was headstrong and made the decision to leave school early, a decision she later regretted. She initially found work at a bank where she had the opportunity to broaden her world-view. It was at the bank that she met her husband to be, Grant. After just one year at the bank, Glen went into nurse training at Auckland Hospital for three years. She lived in the nurses' home, which she enjoyed. *I had all these 'sisters' around me, it was fantastic! I am still friends with some; there's a core group of us that meet up regularly.*

It was the early 1960s. She and Grant had become secretly engaged during her nursing training; the hospital preferred their trainees to be single. The couple married and built a house in Birkenhead. They soon had their first two children, both girls, followed by their son five years later. *I had these two girls 21 months apart and I was just about going up the wall because I was craving something for myself; to be a mother at home was just not cutting it. I was in the Plunket rooms, I saw an advertisement for Playcentre and I had never heard of Playcentre. So I thought I'll go down and see what it's like. So I went with the children and who should be there but Dorothy Butler; she was a very good woman. She later had the Dorothy Butler Book Shop and she was a bit of a mover and shaker in all sorts of ways on the North Shore.*

Glen took to Playcentre like a duck to water. She recognised that her participation in this movement was an opportunity for her engagement, and personal and professional development. Playcentre was (and still is) known to be a forward thinking organisation. It has links for continuing education to develop and empower the families involved. Glen *soaked it all up*. All three of Glen's children went through Playcentre.

Glen undertook supervisor training; she became the education officer, and later the secretary, of the North Shore Playcentre

Association. It represented 21 centres on the Shore. In 1974, she also became the Playcentre representative at the very newly formed North Shore Community and Social Services (NSCSS). She attended many of its network meetings and recognised that something exciting was happening, although at first she was somewhat bewildered by all of the community groups she came in contact with and the breadth of them. At the time a large number of great community initiatives were taking place on the North Shore. She felt less knowledgeable on community development compared to some of the community workers she was meeting and getting to know. Nevertheless, Glen was in her thirties, she had the experience of Playcentre and early childhood education behind her; she was ready to launch into something new.

She was appointed as a preschool advisor to develop crèche facilities at the newly established Birkdale Community House as part of the Birkdale, Beach Haven Community Project (BBCP), led by Dr John Raeburn. In subsequent years, Glen went on to be part of the development of Highbury Community House, and later

became coordinator of the BBCP. This work built upon the earlier work of Ann Hartley and John Raeburn. Glen remembers being very impressed with John Raeburn's philosophy and empowerment principles. *It was about people doing things for themselves, not some overhead person telling you what to do. NOT top down, but based on a needs assessment.*

Fred Seymour was a PhD student at the time and undertook the initial needs survey in the communities of Birkdale and Beach Haven. *He was asking people what they wanted. This was really revolutionary at the time.* It was very exciting work for Glen. *You'd see women who were coming in quite shy and diffident, and blooming and going on to lead some of the groups themselves. They did meditation and all sorts of things really. Anything that people*

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really showed an interest in, you could find somebody who was able to run it. And what was good about it was that there was sort of a feedback loop so that you evaluated what the outcomes were and whether they were meeting the needs and so forth.

In the early 1970s there was a massive policy change in the mental health field spearheaded by a well-known psychiatrist, the late Fraser McDonald. People who were institutionalised or those who, previously, would have been institutionalised, were instead kept within the community. Mental health centres were opened in communities all over Auckland and anyone needing help could approach the centres. Glen was approached by Floris de Groot, the manager of Pentlands, which was the North Shore mental health centre based in Devonport, to see if their clients would be able to use community houses facilities and services, such as the ones being offered in Birkdale and Beach Haven. *There were some attempts to integrate the clients into existing services, but the houses were ultimately not regarded as suitable for the client's needs.* Glen was asked to take on a coordination role through the Pentlands Centre; she did so in 1981. This was a new phase in Glen's career, and a steep learning curve, as she became a community mental health worker working alongside volunteers from the community.

However, she soon found the work to be frustrating, mostly by the top-down services model imposed on clients by the mental health centres. This soon led to the notion that the same self-empowerment model used in the community houses might successfully be implemented to provide support services for certain mental health clients, as well as for those in the community experiencing stressful life events. *That is, the development of a truly community-based centre working alongside people in the community.*

Over time, Glen and the two other coordinators, Trish Clarkson and Margaret Rooke, found a way to entirely reframe

their working model and service. They moved away from Pentlands, initially to a Baptist Church building in Northcote called Eban House and later, around 1986, to Raeburn House in Shakespeare Road, Milford, where they firmly established their client-led and empowerment model. Glen recalls how successful the new approach was. *We mixed the volunteers and the so called 'clients' into the groups and I can remember somebody coming to the Christmas party one year and saying, 'Which are the clients?'* Eventually, the reins were wrestled from the control of the Pentlands Centre and Raeburn House took on its own community-based committee and self-determination. *It was revolutionary work at the time!*

The new facility was renamed Raeburn House, out of respect for John Raeburn who mentored the workers, and whose philosophy and approach the team had adopted. *Many people came to use the services offered. Among these was an older women's network established for women who were depressed and needed encouragement around empowerment and addressing their own needs.*

While salaries were paid for by the Auckland Hospital Board, the service was largely enabled through fundraising efforts, charitable trusts, cake stalls and the like. Glen recalls that Takapuna City Council provided support by allocating a staff member's time to the Raeburn House committee. Ann Hartley, who was then mayor of Birkenhead, was also always very supportive of the work of Raeburn House.

During this time, Glen was also a member of the local allocation committee of the Community Organisations Grants Scheme (COGS). This organisation, with members appointed by the Government, identifies community groups and organisations around New Zealand eligible for funding through the scheme and makes allocations accordingly.

Glen's next challenge, in 1987, was to develop a foundation course at the Auckland Institute of Technology (AIT) (today

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known as AUT), the first of its kind in the Health Faculty. *It was an employment training scheme, to assist students who had fallen through the cracks or for students who wanted to do something in health but didn't yet know what.*

After this, Glen moved away from tertiary education to a community development advisor role at North Shore City Council; she later regretted the move. Her role, under the direction of the late Ewen Derrick and working alongside several other community advisors, was to assess community needs and develop and implement projects within a community development framework. The workers were meant to be a conjugate between community needs and the Council. *The model of work was good, but, however, apart from Mayor Ann Hartley and a few others, there was very little understanding of the theory of community development among the councillor body and [generally] within Council. It was still a foreign concept, and there was a great deal of in-fighting and fighting for the community development cause.* However, during this time, the community development advisors were instrumental in supporting a number of community initiatives.

In 1992, Glen decided to take a break from community work. She bought and managed a small café on Waiheke Island for two years; she and Grant already had a cottage on the island. Then, in 1996, a job with the newly established North Health, under the Regional Health Authority, attracted Glen back to community development work. The role had the title 'Locality Manager for the North Shore and Rodney'. It was a research, consulting, networking position, assessing the health service needs of residents. *The job was a fizzer. The North Health structure was so new and they did not have the development structures, or budgets, and were not ready for the needs identified by health service users in the community.*

Gradually, those involved in the community consultation work left because they weren't getting anywhere. North Health eventually transitioned into the district health boards structure. At this point, Glen took on a couple of contract jobs, one for Dunedin

University researching the eating habits of New Zealanders. Glen also re-engaged with her academic education, achieving a BA, a celebrant's certificate, and a postgraduate Diploma in Community Studies. In 2007, she completed her master's, for which she studied oral history tapes on psychiatric health. The title and theme of her thesis was, *Hearing Voices, The Gendered Nature of Mental Health Practices In New Zealand in the 1920s to the 1940s.* Her thesis was presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a MA in Women's Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North.

Glen and Grant returned to Waiheke 15 years ago to live there permanently. Glen belongs to the Probus Club on the island, and is a volunteer for the local community theatre and the Waiheke hospice. She is particularly interested in writing the life stories of people in the care of the hospice. She also plays mah jongg.

Glennys is about to finish writing a book, a work of 'fiction', based on the genealogy of her family. *The story is loosely based on my maternal side. As a feminist, some years ago, I became interested in finding out more about my female forbears. Unfortunately, many of those who could answer my questions were no longer alive so I was reliant on the family stories I had picked up in childhood and beyond. After attending a writing course with Joan Rosier-Jones, the idea came to put in writing what I had gleaned and to include research findings of the particular periods of history I was writing about.*

Glen does not consider herself to be retired. She is still actively learning and is involved with her community. Looking back on her life, she feels most proud of the opportunities she has had for personal development, which she says is very much ongoing.

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