



I was a youth worker till my hair turned white, and then I became an aged worker.

Joan Lardner-Rivlin

Whether it is social work or community development, for over 50 years, Joan Lardner-Rivlin has dedicated herself to making a difference in people's lives. It's about people helping people. Joan describes her role in community development to that of spinning plates. My job was to set things up with local input. Like Chinese spinning plates. *You'd set the plate spinning, you'd leave it spinning and every so often you'd go back and check that it was still spinning.*

Growing up in apartheid South Africa, Joan learnt first-hand from her father the importance of serving people. As the district surgeon in a small village, Joan accompanied her father as he made many house calls, and was impressed with his holistic approach to health and well-being. I used to say *'Why are you taking so long? You were only supposed to give an injection.'* And he would say *that the patient was part of a family, and you don't just treat the patient. You've got to think of the whole family.*

By the 1950s, Joan decided that social work was the area she'd like to be working in. She left South Africa to study in England at the London School of Economics and Political Studies (LSE). Her first job was as a social worker at a school in South London. After eight years in the United Kingdom, she returned to Johannesburg to work as a detached social worker for the Johannesburg City Council. Her office was in a park, and she worked with youth and at-risk youth. However, it was her opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa that guided Joan's next move to Northern

Rhodesia, (now Zambia). There, she worked as a social worker for a mining company, and then for the Ndola Council in all aspects of community development except health, in an African township. She was one of only two European women in this township; the other was a nurse. Joan married, had three children, and continued to work. *I loved my work. They became like my family. I carried my babies on my back, wrapped in a towel, as the African women did.*

With the event of Zambian independence in 1964, and the need for local people to be trained in public service and leadership, Joan and her family made their next move to Hong Kong, where her husband had been based previously before the Second World War. It was there that Joan worked for the Hong Kong Council of Social Services as the Division Officer for the Division of Children and Youth. The Council worked alongside government departments and voluntary agencies, *We all sat at the same table, discussing policies pertaining to young people and families, and dividing the responsibilities for carrying them out.*



Joan and Derrick Lardner, Zambia circa 1967

Joan liaised with over 80 organisations in Hong Kong that worked with Hong Kong youth. With her support and guidance, member agencies set up recreational programmes, a mobile kindergarten, and established a Hong Kong branch of PHAB, a support network for physically handicapped and able bodied youth.

PHAB had started in the United Kingdom in the 1950s. In 1970, the British Council sent a representative to Hong Kong to encourage the establishment of a Hong Kong branch of PHAB. It took about six months to get it established with the help of several philanthropic groups and officially became the Hong Kong PHAB Association in 1972. Those approached included institutions for disabled children and youth, medical personnel, and philanthropists. PHAB set up its own networks from there. The vision was ‘Opportunity not pity’ and its mission was to enable disabled children and youth who lived in apartments to overcome their isolation, come out into the world, and participate in activities with others. Joan found that in Hong Kong philanthropy was a given, *I took it for granted. The Chinese there, if they’ve got it—they share it. All I had to do was ask.* Joan was to go on and establish PHAB here in New Zealand in the late 1970s but on that occasion it took her three years to establish the programme.

Joan had two close friends, from the United Kingdom who also lived in Hong Kong, and worked for the Hong Kong Foundation of the Blind. They had decided to return home to New Zealand to live. They stayed in touch with Joan by letter, and she enjoyed hearing their stories of life in New Zealand. So in 1971, with her own children coming up to school age, she and her husband decided to make a move to New Zealand themselves. They brought everything they had out by boat including a Volkswagen, mattresses and an Italian fridge and washing machine—which they later found out could not be repaired here, as New Zealand only sold the Fisher and Paykel brand. Life in Auckland was very quiet compared to the overpopulated and busy life they were used to in

Hong Kong. Joan recalls how empty Queen St was, and how strange some of the Kiwi culture appeared to be. *I thought, Where are all the people? We were invited out for dinner, and the lady said bring a plate. I thought if she's that desperate for plates, I'd better bring some cutlery too! Then on the hills, there were white dots everywhere. Sheep, sheep, sheep, everywhere. It was all quite exciting, says Joan.*

Joan and her family settled in Beach Haven on the North Shore, where she still lives today. Joan took a great interest in the needs of communities on the North Shore. *For me, the North Shore was like a Garden of Eden for promoting community development, because all the boroughs and councils didn't employ anyone to work in the community. A couple of them had recreational officers, but that was about it.*

Joan first worked as a social worker for National Women's Hospital, working with teen mums. But she found it hard, as the practice in the early 1970s was to encourage single mothers to put their children up for adoption. Joan looked for other work, and decided she'd like to get involved with community development again. In her interview for a position as a community advisor with the Auckland Regional Authority, Joan was asked if she had been involved in organising recreational programmes for youth. After she said yes, they then asked how many youths were involved and were taken aback when she replied—*about one million*. As a community advisor Joan liaised with many Borough Councils, Auckland wide.

At the same time, Citizen's Advice Bureaus (CAB) were being established throughout Auckland by the local authorities of each borough. CABs were a British initiative that started at the end of



the Second World War. Joan was asked to take a film she had from the British Council, which illustrated the concept behind CABs. Joan addressed many groups including Lions, Rotary, and city mayors. The central idea of the CAB was that it would be a community resource, a place of information and referral. The first CABs were run by trained social workers employed by council. Psychometric testing was introduced to ensure that the 'appropriate' people were engaged as CAB workers. Psychologists administered the tests, but it was soon realised that community volunteers would be more suitable for running the bureaus; and so... *Off went the PF16s!* However, the idea of training volunteers was initially considered an oxymoron and Joan received resistance to the notion from volunteers, who said, 'We are volunteers and don't need training.' The emphasis today is very much on training.

The first CAB in Auckland was in Ponsonby, and was set up by Peter Harwood, a community advisor for Auckland City. On the Shore, the first CAB was in Birkenhead, and set up by Joan and a group of community volunteers. It was made possible with a grant of \$200 from the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Joan got all her neighbours involved as volunteer CAB workers. Other branches soon followed in Glenfield, Brown's Bay, and Takapuna. Funding was always a concern, until the early 1980s when the mayor of Birkenhead, Ann Hartley, put forward a proposal that Birkenhead give the CAB a three-year contract. *I always acknowledge Ann because she really believed in the CAB, in what they were doing. Because she could see that it was local people helping local people.* Other councils across Auckland followed suit, and soon there were CABs established in Auckland Central, South Auckland, and the Waitakeres.

Joan had realised there was a need for a council of social services on the North Shore. Community meetings could be organised and

hosted by the council on a regular basis. Such a council could be a voice for the NGO community, and organise forums for addressing a wide range of issues of concern. There was already a council for central Auckland only, with others in Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

Together with Bill Morrison, from the Department of Internal Affairs, and Jim Court, from Anglican Social Services, Joan organised the first community network meeting on the Shore. The subject of the community meeting was 'Crime and Punishment' and it was led by Pam Ringwood, a lecturer in Law at Auckland

University. The meeting was packed. Yvonne Chapman-Taylor, of the Federation of University Women, moved that a council of social services on the North Shore be established. The motion was

accepted, and in 1974 the North Shore Council of Social Services was created as an incorporated society. A steering committee was established to help set it up. In its first year, the North Shore Council attracted 26 member agencies, from across the North Shore.

The New Zealand Council of Social Services was established in 1975, to be a national umbrella group. Today, the council is known as Community Networks Aotearoa, and local councils have rebranded to reflect their individual roles in their local communities. The North Shore Council of Social Services, later became known as the North Shore Community and Social Services (NSCSS), then in 2014, at its 40th Annual general meeting, NSCSS re-branded and became known as Auckland North Community and Development (ANCAD). Today there are over 140 community groups and social service agencies that are members of ANCAD. Services stretch beyond the traditional boundaries of the North Shore and ANCAD now works with not-for-profit groups in Rodney, the Hibiscus Coast, Waiheke Island,

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Citizens Advice Bureau

Te Pou Whakawhirinaki o Aotearoa

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and Great Barrier Island. As one of the largest former councils of social services in Auckland, ANCAD also supports in many different ways, the capability building of its sister organisations in the east, south and central Auckland.

From the early 1970s, Joan had built up many contacts with community development workers on the Shore. Joan considered one person in particular, Dr. John Raeburn, a psychologist at Auckland Medical School, *as a guru of community development. He was our guru, still is actually. And that's why it was my idea to call Raeburn House after him.* Joan was on the executive committee of the original Raeburn community house, established in Milford, by the North Shore Hospital. Glennys Adams was a community advisor for North Shore City Council; she worked with the local community to find the property and to create the vision for Raeburn House.

Getting things established, such as CABs, the Council of Social Services, and PHAB here in New Zealand, was quite a challenge; because, as Joan reflects, *People were not receptive to new ideas.* She recalls turning up to community meetings and people saying, 'Why was she coming to them with all her fancy ideas from other countries?' Joan recalls a time she put forward a proposal to the Birkenhead CAB which was rejected by the chair. Five years later the idea was implemented. When she enquired why it hadn't been accepted originally, Joan was told, *I was before my time.*

Joan worked as a community advisor for the Auckland Regional Authority for twenty-five years. Other achievements in that time included supporting the establishment of community houses, community coordinators, Northbridge retirement village in Northcote, and setting up a radio programme called *Radio Shalom* for the Jewish community on Access Radio, a not-for-profit radio station for the community, which she hosted for 25 years.

Joan is a life member of the YWCA, ANCAD, New Zealand CAB, and PHAB. In 2007, Joan was awarded the Queen's Service Medal (QSM) for her contribution to community development. *It was a pleasant surprise. I got to go to Government House, and meet a famous rugby player.*

Today, Joan still offers her knowledge and insight into many organisations in a voluntary capacity with Northcote CAB, community houses and trusts, as secretary of the Auckland District Council of Social Services. She says that her original networks from her days as a community advisor still remain strong. She has also been a volunteer community coordinator for the Office of Senior Citizens, on the board of Age Concern Auckland, and the Senior Advisory Panel for Auckland Council. *I was a youth worker till my hair turned white, and then I became an aged worker.*

In her time Joan has seen community development shift and change, become more defined, organisations struggle, and organisations grow. But her emphasis has always been on retaining the ethos of neighbourhoods as places where people care for one another; and seeing small seeds of inspiration come to fruition. Joan sums this up by saying, *Communities are drivers, and they don't all speak with one voice. They include stroppy people, but the idea is to form cohesive groups working for social change. Results in community development don't happen overnight, they take time.*

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