



PAY IT FORWARD

In what was deemed an historic step forward for gender equality, Kristine Bartlett fought and won pay equality for herself – and for her fellow aged-care workers. We talk to our 2017 NEXT Woman of the Year about the journey that led to her victorious fight for equal pay



Kristine Bartlett

A tear runs down Kristine Bartlett's cheek and her hands shake slightly as she reads, for the first time, a thank you note from fellow aged-care worker Marianne Bishop. "I thank you for your courage and hard work, and my life-changing pay rise," Marianne wrote. "You have worked tirelessly to try to achieve what no one else has been able to." Sitting in her Lower Hutt home, Kristine looks up, a little embarrassed by her tears. "It's an emotional thing."

It sure is. You've probably heard how Kristine achieved the largest victory for equal pay in New Zealand history, but you may not know it dominated her life for five years. It was 2012 when she and her union E tū (then called the Service & Food Workers Union) filed a case with the Employment Relations Authority (ERA), alleging that her low wages from employer TerraNova Homes and Care Ltd breached the 1972 Equal Pay Act.

With the financial, practical and moral support of E tū, Kristine's case went from the Employment Court right up to the Supreme Court. The legal argument was that, because aged-care workers are overwhelmingly women, Kristine's low wages were a product of illegal gender bias. In other words, although male and female aged-care workers are paid similar amounts, they earn less than people doing work with similar skills and responsibilities in male-dominated occupations. The idea wasn't just to raise Kristine's pay, but to get a judicial decision that would prompt a sector-wide pay hike, given caregivers' wages are effectively set by a government subsidy.

That's what happened. In May, the government announced the \$2.06 billion Care and Support Pay Equity Settlement. From July 1, more than 55,000 caregivers in aged residential care, home >>

'I TOLD THE GIRLS AT WORK, "I'M STANDING UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT BECAUSE WE STRUGGLE FROM WEEK TO WEEK"'

support, and disability services received a pay rise of between 15 and 50%, meaning up to an additional \$7.50 an hour for the most experienced and qualified. The average wage rose from \$16 per hour to between \$19 and \$23.50 per hour, rising to \$27 by 2021. What the Human Rights Commission dubbed an “historic step forward for gender equality” has led to new legislation. When the government began settlement talks, it also set up a joint working group to develop pay-equity principles. It accepted all 21 recommendations, and the subsequent Employment (Pay Equity and Equal Pay) Bill is now with a select committee.

RELUCTANT HERO

Since Kristine’s initial claim – and particularly since the settlement – unions have been leveraging her case to ask for pay raises for other low-paid, female-dominated groups. Those who have entered pay-equity talks – and/or filed pay-equity claims with the ERA – include education-support workers, mental-health workers, social workers, teacher aides, part-time high-school teachers, school-support staff, midwives, and early-childhood education teachers.

To these women, Kristine is a hero. She’s inspired them – and women more generally – to believe in the worth of their work, and stand up for themselves. Kristine’s case has also increased public awareness of the undervaluing of certain professions – and of New Zealand’s 12% gender pay gap – with a ripple effect expected in the private sector.

Kristine isn’t one for taking credit. Although she’s friendly and frank, she downplays her role and stresses it’s been a joint effort involving E tū staff, the legal team and other supporters. She initially said no to being nominated for NEXT Woman of the Year, and only changed her mind when E tū urged her to share its motto ‘Stand Tall’ – and her own message. “Stand up for what you know is right in your heart and never give up.” That’s what gave her the courage to file the initial claim and stay strong for five years.

By 2012, Kristine had been an aged-care worker at rest home TerraNova Riverleigh for 19 years. Starting on \$9.95, she’d

completed aged-care qualifications but was earning just \$14.46 per hour, very slightly above the minimum wage. One day Kristine, a union delegate, was asked by E tū staff whether she’d consider filing the aforementioned case. She didn’t hesitate for a second, despite nearing retirement age. “I told the girls at work, ‘I’m standing up for what’s right because we struggle from week to week, work so hard for so little, and we’re so undervalued.’”

Imagine going to work right after filing an ERA case against your employer. “It was horrible.” A groundswell of support helped her testify in 2013 at the Employment Court in Auckland. She expected to walk straight in, but to her shock was greeted by Labour and Green MPs, reporters and supporters. “All these caregivers were waving thank-you placards and singing. Knowing me, of course I got teary.”

Kristine was always confident they’d win the case, but never imagined her life would be in limbo so long. Her time and effort were all voluntary, although her union covered any expenses she incurred and reimbursed her wages if she had to take the occasional unpaid leave day. Kristine also points out the irony of TerraNova spending money on court appeals rather than on staff wages, but stresses that TerraNova’s owner and CEO have treated her with respect and allowed her time off.



In between rest-home shifts and looking through legal papers, she took a road trip to visit caregivers from Auckland to Invercargill.

“I talked about the importance of this case and of standing in solidarity.” Consequently, 4500 caregivers filed pay-equity claims (these were dropped after caregivers ratified the settlement).

HISTORIC DAY

The stories they told her echoed those from her workplace. “Girls working on no lunch. Struggling to feed their families. Getting behind in rent. Too poor to see the doctor.” She now has enough thank you cards and letters from fellow caregivers to fill several scrapbooks, and has answered dozens of phone calls. “They usually said ‘Thank you and good luck, we’re here for you’. That support is what’s kept me going.”

The government talks took a painfully-long 18 months before Prime Minister Bill English announced the aged-care settlement at parliament on April 18. At a nearby gathering in Thorndon, Kristine cheered arm in arm with union members, caregivers and other supporters as the news was relayed. “It was the happiest day of my life, aside from the births of my children.”

On May 2, after a shift at work, Kristine expected to watch from the sidelines as Health Minister Jonathan Coleman and other relevant parties signed the settlement. Instead, Coleman asked her to sit beside him and sign the document as a symbolic act. That day, she couldn’t stop smiling or tearing up. “My daughter cried tears of happiness. My son joked ‘Your shout, Mum!’” She’d be earning nearly \$10 an hour more. >>

* Kristine's journey towards her landmark victory

AUG 2012	AUG 2013	JAN 2014	OCT 2014	DEC 2014	OCT 2015	APRIL 18 2017	APRIL 20 2017	MAY 2 2017	JULY 1 2017	AUG 2017
Kristine, backed by her union, lodges a case with the Employment Relations Authority alleging her wages from her employer TerraNova Care and Homes Ltd are in breach of the Equal Pay Act 1972. The case is referred to the Employment Court.	The Employment Court agrees with Kristine and her union’s argument.	TerraNova appeals.	The Court of Appeal upholds the decision, and TerraNova appeals to the Supreme Court.	The Supreme Court declines TerraNova leave to appeal, and asks the Employment Court to stipulate Kristine’s pay rise and set the principles for the implementation of equal pay.	The government starts talks with unions over a pay-equity deal for aged-care, disability and home-support workers. It also sets up a joint working group involving unions and Business NZ to develop principles by which other pay-equity claims can be lodged with employers.	After 18 months of negotiations, the government announces its \$2.06 billion Care and Support Pay Equity Settlement, to be delivered over five years.	Having agreed to enshrine all 21 of the working group’s recommendations in law, the government releases its draft Employment (Pay Equity and Equal Pay) Bill.	The Care and Support Worker (Pay Equity) Settlement Act 2017 is signed.	The caregivers’ pay rise takes effect.	The Opposition, Kristine and unions slam the redrafted pay-equity bill after its first reading, saying it forces claimants to compare their pay with men in their own sectors rather than with similarly skilled workers in other male-dominated sectors. The bill is at select-committee stage.



Words Sarah Lang Photographs Nicola Edmonds Hair and makeup Kathryn Delaney

The settlement obligates employers to do everything practical to ensure care and support workers gain qualifications up to Level 4 of the National Certificate in Health, Disability, and Aged Support. Kristine is delighted by this, because it will lift care standards, pay rates, and morale. She's already seen the change in the energy of the "girls" at work who call her Mum and tell her she can't retire yet. Now 68, she's cut back her rest-home shifts to four days a week, but will keep working until she can't manage it.

Her advocacy has continued since the settlement. The woman once scared of public speaking has spoken at various events to caregivers, union members, healthcare professionals, and at a National Council of Women of New Zealand celebration marking Suffrage Day. She didn't know award-winning cartoonist Sharon Murdoch immortalised her alongside suffragette Kate Sheppard in a newspaper cartoon. "I never look myself up online."

She's decided to start turning down invitations and interviews – and not just because her colleagues have to cover her shifts. "It's time to refocus on myself, my job, and my family." Her eldest Steven is a

'THE ELDERLY HAVE FASCINATING, EYE-OPENING STORIES – AND HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE LOVED AND CARED FOR'

chef in Australia, Graham is a Wellington corrections officer, and her daughter Connie is living with her mum while retraining in business management. Three of Kristine's six grandchildren live nearby.

She often drives past the Taita state house where she grew up. When her mechanic father died aged 43, her mum Jennie became a solo mum-of-six, with the three youngest (including Kristine) still at home. Long before the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), the children looked after each other while Jennie worked various jobs.

Kristine didn't have career aspirations. "I just wanted babies." She had two sons with her first husband. It was an unhappy relationship, and he controlled the finances: "I had nowhere to go to and no money." One day, she was walking to the shops with the boys, looking distressed, when a man asked her if she was alright. He was a lawyer and helped her get the boys into temporary foster care. Kristine got a live-in hotel job, and visited her children on

SHE'S ALREADY SEEN THE CHANGE IN THE ENERGY OF THE 'GIRLS' AT WORK WHO CALL HER MUM

weekends. "It was really horrible." She met her second husband at the hotel, they got a place with her sons, and had Connie. They later split amicably, and Kristine was his caregiver before he died. She would marry and divorce a third time. "Why have all my marriages disintegrated? I realised I didn't want to be dictated to. To be honest, I've never felt cared for. I've always run around after people." She's happy being single.

Kristine never received child support, and only got the DPB for a month because she hated feeling beholden. At one point, she worked three part-time cleaning jobs. Other jobs included bar work, ordering stock at Woolworths, and office work, but she most enjoyed working closely with people. She was cleaning supervisor at a motel when she helped the owner turn it into a rest home – and decided to do a caregiving course. She found her calling. "The elderly have fascinating, eye-opening

Judges' comments



HON PAULA BENNETT

"Kristine's advocacy has fundamentally changed the lives of more than 50,000 women in the aged-care sector forever. She's proof that we can all make a difference when we stand up for what we believe is right and fair."



TONI STREET

"Kristine embodies everything a NEXT Woman of the Year should be. Her persistence has helped thousands of workers receive the pay rise they deserve, and this could have a flow-on effect for numerous other industries for years to come."



RACHAEL RUSSELL

"Kiwi women have a proud history of making change, and this year was no exception. Kristine shouldered the responsibility of taking on the very important fight for pay equality, and in doing so improved the lives of so many deserving women."



SARAH HENRY

"Kristine has not only won a victory for working women, but her brave battle has also highlighted the value we should place on the important work of caring for society's most vulnerable."

stories – and have the right to be loved and cared for. I treat them like my mother and father, with the utmost respect."

The job is physically strenuous. Once, hoisting a 100kg woman off the toilet, Kristine suffered a hernia which required a \$2000 private operation. "The job's emotionally demanding too. We're dealing with depression, dementia, loneliness. We're there to listen and earn their trust. If they're embarrassed about me cleaning up their faeces, I say 'Darling, don't worry, that happened to me the other night!'" (It didn't.) Aged-care workers also do tasks you might expect of nurses (like collecting faecal samples) and funeral directors (washing and dressing people for the last time).

Kristine, who wears a silver cross around her neck, believes in life after death. But her faith centres on believing there is good in this world. "I always believed something good would come out of my life. And something has." >>



**CATEGORY
WINNER:
ARTS &
CULTURE**

Carla van Zon

In June last year, Carla van Zon collapsed on the floor of a Western Union money-transfer branch in Montreal, during a trip scouting shows for the 2017 Auckland Arts Festival (AAF). She'd put the extreme tiredness down to a busy schedule and a lingering flu, put the swollen feet down to all the flying, and put the metallic taste down to something she'd eaten.

After collapsing, she was diagnosed in a Montreal hospital with chronic kidney disease (also called end-stage renal disease). Knowing little about it, she asked what she needed to do. The answer was life-long dialysis, unless she could get a kidney transplant. In dialysis, the cleansing fluid dialysate flows through a tube into your abdomen to filter waste products from your blood. Average life expectancy on dialysis is

anyway, but the plan was to enjoy Totaranui Orchard – her lifestyle block near Otaki – and travel for pleasure rather than work. Carla spent six years catching flights from Kapiti Coast Airport to Auckland to work four days from the AAF office, staying three nights with friends. Her regular overseas trips to scout talent weren't glamorous. In Europe, it was usually a country a day with many hours in transit, and no time for sightseeing.

Used to working flat-tack, she's finding it hard to adjust to doing little. Between the dialysis and debilitating tiredness, she can no longer manage her veggie garden at Totaranui, but is walking on the beach a lot. When NEXT visits she's finalising the latest arts event she's producing in an Otaki community hub. Outside, her husband

commissioned include playwright Hone Kouka, visual artist Lisa Reihana, composer Gareth Farr, and playwright Renee Liang (who wrote an opera for the 2017 AAF). Carla's ongoing legacy project Whānui saw the 2017 AAF co-produce five participatory arts projects where local artists worked with community groups, including the marae-led creation of a korowai (cloak) that incorporates 7500 tiny perspex houses. She's also led artist-development initiatives including the AAF's RAW, where artists present a work-in-progress to an audience.

During her stints at Creative New Zealand, and the NZ Arts Council, she oversaw the development of successful strategies to help New Zealand arts practitioners achieve international success, including touring Asia. Her legacy includes NZ at Edinburgh, where New Zealand arts practitioners participate in the various Edinburgh festivals. Fondly dubbed Aunty Carla, she's also mentored many arts-industry colleagues, including WOMAD programme director Emere Wano and CubaDupa artistic director Drew James.

One of her biggest contributions has been demystifying art, "switching on" people to art forms they never imagined they'd enjoy. She sees art as a communion between artist and audience, something that creates a sense of community. "You're seeing work that reflects your life, or helps you understand other people – and that they're not so different to you." ➤

five-10 years. "Yes, I was scared."

Back home, she found neither sister was a match for a kidney transplant, but a close friend was. A year later, her friend is – frustratingly – still awaiting final tests to determine if the operation can go ahead. It's unlikely she'll get a kidney from a deceased donor, as the 700-name waiting list is ranked by how long you've waited, and many of them share her blood type O. She's angry about New Zealand's underfunded, over-stretched, inefficient health system, but her iron will and laser-like focus is intact. "I'm determined to get the transplant and get to a friend's 70th in Italy next year."

SLOWING THE PACE

The 65-year-old did everything possible – including drastically changing her diet – to stay off dialysis, because she hates being hooked up to a machine for 20-30 minutes every four hours, and because life expectancy is best if you go from diagnosis to transplant, skipping dialysis.

"But the doctor told me in August I'd be dead by Christmas without peritoneal dialysis, so I'm doing it myself at home."

She began dialysis after hosting her fourth and final AAF in March as artistic director. She had planned to retire at 65

Gregg Fletcher is making cider from their apples. She brought him back from Washington, D.C. 35 years ago along with her Master of Arts; they decided against children. Ten years later, they moved to central Wellington when Carla joined the New Zealand International Arts Festival (now the NZ Festival). During 12 years there – half as executive director, half as artistic director – she brought the festival out of the red, and it won local economy and national tourism awards. Later, in Auckland, she oversaw the AAF's transition from a biennial to an annual event, and doubled attendance numbers, including drawing a younger demographic.

At both festivals, she increased box-office income; introduced greater diversity including work by women and Māori, Pasifika and Asian artists; and convinced many globally influential artists like Canadian playwright Robert Lepage to bring their work down under. The international and edgier shows have influenced many local artists.

OUR OWN STORIES

She's proudest of commissioning and presenting New Zealand work. "We need to tell our own stories." The numerous arts practitioners she's championed and



Judges' comments

"Festival director, mentor, talent scout, commissioner of the arts... Carla has poured her energy, heart and soul into bringing art to ordinary Kiwis and we are all the richer for it. She is nothing short of inspirational."