

Q&A with Bronwyn Barnard, Senior Solicitor at Department of Conservation

Bronwyn talks about what excites her at the Department of Conservation, in the community, and away from work, and who has inspired her professionally.

This is the sixth in a series of Q&As with winners of the CLANZ Wigley + Company award for contribution to the community.

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● ***What attracted you to the legal profession?***

I was a secondary school teacher until my mid-30s, when I realised I wasn't getting a lot of enjoyment out of the antics of 4th form boys and I didn't want to end up being the grumpy old teacher in the corner of the staff room. I'd not long returned from living in Asia and I think I was also looking for something different. I was attracted to law as it seemed interesting and something that would open doors for me. I enjoyed the shift from being a teacher to being a student.

● ***What excites you about your work now?***

I've been at DOC for 14 years now, because I enjoy working in conservation. I also enjoy the variety of work I get here and the people I work with. I work in the commercial, legislative, treaty and post treaty settlement implementation areas. It's fascinating being involved in the development and drafting of law and also working with statutes that DOC administers, so I am able to get an in-depth view.

● ***Who has inspired you in the profession?***

I am inspired by people who use their legal skills for good in the world. Shirin Ibadi, the Iranian lawyer who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, is a most extraordinary and inspirational woman. She's worked in extremely difficult circumstances, promoting the interests of women and girls particularly, but human rights generally.



● ***Work / life balance – how do you achieve that?***

If a bill is going through the house or a Treaty settlement needs last minute work before it's being signed the next day, we have to put in long hours, but those times are the exception rather than the rule. Generally I'm able to maintain a good balance.

● ***How do you enjoy spending time away from work?***

I walk to and from work each day, I garden, I go swimming in the harbour (in a wet suit!), and I read and enjoy the theatre and music, especially jazz. Wellington is a great place to live in because there is so much here to enjoy. I also enjoy our lively, playful dog Rox.

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● ***What prompted you to get involved in community work?***

I saw some Somali people in the street one day, trying to work out how to get to Internal Affairs. I took them there, and it made me realise just how hard it is for migrants to get by when they are newly arrived here. I undertook the Migrant and Refugee Services training programme, which was well organised and very well taught, and I got involved from there.

● ***What community work has given you the greatest satisfaction?***

I taught a Somali woman about my age who had come here with her grandchildren to speak English. She had tended goats in Somali and couldn't write. I went to her home and took her and her family on outings to places like the supermarket and zoo. My husband also taught and we enjoyed getting to know the families and became very fond of the children.

The \$7,000 prize money I received from the Wigley & Co Award enabled the Refugee and Migrant Service to build up a database of all their teaching materials. It's really valuable and it's made a real difference for the service. They have lots of volunteers and with the database it's easy to see what's available and to source the help you need. It's a wonderful resource.

● ***What do you get out of it?***

Reciprocity – the pleasure of spending time with other people and being of some help to them. When you're teaching someone a language you get very tangible results. It's interesting too being with people who don't rely on the written word. Their memories are quite extraordinary, because they have to rely on them. It's very helpful when you're teaching vocabulary, which is learned by memory. It was also interesting to be involved with Somali women and see how assertive they could be. I admire that about them. I think having had to dodge bullets, survive the conditions in refugee camps and get here would make them pretty resilient.

● ***What's the best piece of work advice you ever received?***

Take small steps to build up your reasoning – don't rush to a conclusion.

● ***What advice would you give to young lawyers?***

Work hard but don't take yourself too seriously. And think the best of others.

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