



Looking forward with Zonta

by Jacqui Hensel

New Zonta Blackall Range Group President Ann Koenig has taken the helm at a tricky time, with life as we know it in a state of flux. But her calm and steady hand is just what Zonta needs.

Like everything else at the moment, the fundraising sector of our community has been affected by the restrictions in place due to COVID-19. In the case of the Blackall Range Zonta Club, new President Ann Koenig is feeling her way through the crisis.

It helps that Ann has a wealth of experience in Zonta. She was a Charter Member of the Club back in 1997 and has held every Board position, as well as a previous stint as President.

A safe, warm and welcoming pair of hands will be reassuring for other club members, as well as the community who support Zonta and their many projects.

"Despite the difficult times, I am feeling re-energised about Zonta. I have been in the club for a long time and I want to make the club such a warm and happy place that people want to come along and join. I think if we are cohesive as a group, we will achieve so much," Ann says with enthusiasm.

"My husband and I had a property out at Dulacca before we moved to the coast in 1997, where I worked in nursing as the Director of Nursing - Community Health Services.

"I was always in community nursing and that is where I became aware of the heart-breaking lives of some women and that is what drew me to Zonta. I wanted to help women and I have always been a women's advocate," Ann says.

"The things I saw and some of the situations for women in this country really opened my eyes. I had a fairly sheltered upbringing. I was loved and cared for all my life. But that wasn't true for all women.

"When I began going into people's homes as a nurse there were so many other issues going on, not just medical. There were issues with education, drugs and alcohol, domestic and family violence, poverty, health and hygiene.

"It touched something in me that I wanted to do something to help. My time with Zonta has shown me that the problem is world-wide and with COVID-19 it has only become worse," explains Ann.

"The Zonta manifesto is to bring about a world where no women live in fear, they have equal access to resources and are represented in decision-making positions – equal to men. We advocate for equality, education, an end to child marriage, and gender-based violence.

"Zonta is a forum for us to raise women up. Research has shown that raising up one woman can raise not just her immediate family, but whole villages.

"Zonta International projects are focused for the next two years on reducing violence against women in Jordan; in Madagascar, there is a project focused on creating opportunities for excluded children, especially girls to an education, and in PNG and Timor Leste they are delivering a Survivor-Centred Response to gender-based violence. The projects will also have a focus on Adolescent Girls' Health and Protection in Peru.

Ann goes on to explain how Zonta works within our local community to support and foster women all over the world. "As well as fundraising for the nominated projects, we make up birthing kits which are sent off to third world countries where they are needed.

"In Australia we focus on fundraising for organisations such as those involved in research to prevent ovarian cancer, as that is a major illness of women in this country. And locally we support women's and family refuges on the coast. We are proudly supporting the Tiny House project in Maleny that focuses on reducing homelessness for women.

"We also award a scholarship each year to a local woman to help her further her tertiary studies. It may help with travel costs or other costs related to research and further education," Ann says proudly.

"At the moment, so much is up in the air. I know it will be a difficult time to be fundraising. We hope our community stays with us over this time and continues to support us and Zonta's projects.

"We hope to remain visible and we are exploring some online options. However, it would be a difficult task to run our Dusk on the Deck, which is held every year on International Women's Day - March 8. We were so lucky to have held it this year just before COVID-19 shut down everything," Ann says with relief.

Zonta is not the only group to benefit from Ann's enthusiasm and energy. She is also secretary for the Maleny Community Centre, a member of the Welcome to Maleny Refugee Advocacy Group and was a member of the Blackall Range Care Group Committee for many years.

"Working in community groups means you get to meet a lot of people. Volunteering gives me so much satisfaction. I always get out more than I put in," Ann laughs, the enjoyment evident on her face.

In future Ann would like to travel again and see her family.

"I am looking forward to travelling again when it is safe to go. Many of the overseas countries I have been to have been very affected by the virus. I have travelled quite extensively in Australia too.

"I like going to new countries. I enjoy going on tours with a planned itinerary. You meet lots of different people which is lovely, and you don't have to worry about anything, it's all taken care of.

"Otherwise I am looking forward to seeing those members of my family who live in the southern states.

Zonta Blackall Range Group meets on the first Monday of each month.

Contact Zonta for further details via email (secretary@zontablackallrange.org.au).

