

Elizabeth Briggs – Memorial Service – Rotary Work, by Marie-louise Lees

Rebecca asked me to speak to you today about Elizabeth's work in Rotary. I have only been a Rotarian since November 2012 and so I will attempt to do justice to Elizabeth's Rotary service that preceded my involvement by more than 20 years.

Elizabeth joined the Rotary club of Kapunda in 1991. She was their first female club member and one of the first female Rotarians in the state, which presented many challenges to her. Dean Rohrlach, long time member of RC Kapunda said that Elizabeth made an outstanding contribution to the club during her time as a member. She served as Club President and was awarded a Paul Harris Fellow in 2006 for her service to the club. This was the first of 5 Paul Harris Fellows awarded to Elizabeth. In January 2007 Elizabeth became a member of the Rotary Club of Gawler after she and Trevor moved to Lyndoch. During her time at Gawler she was a member of the Vocational, Membership and International Committees. She also presented monthly to the club a Rotary Information presentation. Elizabeth spent hours preparing this presentation to educate her fellow Rotarians about Rotary's work in all areas of Rotary focus. She served on the Board for 9 years and for all but one year was Director for International Service. This shows Elizabeth's true passions in Rotary which were The Rotary Foundation, especially the End Polio campaign, Interplast, which funds surgeons to perform surgery and training outside of Australia and Operation Cleft, which repairs cleft palates in Bangladesh. Elizabeth organised many club fundraisers to benefit the polio campaign, most famously the annual Chinese Dinner. Elizabeth would take any opportunity to raise additional funds for Rotary charities, as an example of this she and her committee catered for my 50th birthday party to raise funds for Operation Cleft and from this 16 children in Bangladesh had their cleft palates repaired.

Elizabeth's Rotary service reached well beyond the limits of her club, with service at a District level for many years. I asked some Past District Governors to tell me about Elizabeth's service.

Past District Governor Ed King spoke to me about his interactions with Elizabeth. He said, “I first crossed paths with Elizabeth when I joined the GSE sub-committee back in when I joined it in 2004-05. She immediately struck me as being incredibly passionate about the program. At the time she was also serving on the Polio sub-committee, a passion that continued to this year. At various times her role alternated between Chair & foot-soldier! But always at the forefront. She also served with distinction on both the District 9500 Foundation Committee as well as the District 9500 Grants Sub-committee. In both roles she was an active contributor. Elizabeth became a Level One Rotary Foundation Bequest Society member in 2015. In the mid-2000s Elizabeth helped The Rotary Club of Box Hill publicise their Club project Operation Cleft. This led her into a more direct involvement in and championing of Interplast. The above seems quite inadequate when talking about such a special person as Elizabeth.”

Past District Governor Marie Dorrington added some of her interactions with Elizabeth in Interplast. “Elizabeth became the Interplast District Coordinator in 2010-11 and continued through to her illness. Elizabeth was very committed to the work of Interplast and spoke about it at many clubs over the years and set up many Interplast showcases. She attended the annual Interplast training for Interplast District Co-ordinators whenever she could, sometimes at her own cost. However, it was her work for Interplast with the RC Gawler which was truly outstanding, encouraging the Club to be able to sponsor the South Australian VTT team to Bhutan.... She found the paperwork for the global grant challenging as did the Interplast personnel, but with her customary determination was successful. Interplast Australia and New Zealand pay tribute to such a committed Rotarian and Interplast District Co-ordinator and are honoured to have shared some of her journey with her.”

I would like to talk more about the Gawler Bhutan VTT project. Fundraising for this project started with the Shea Oak Log Farm fair in 2013. The club had the money to fund our contribution to the project which was to send an Interplast team of volunteer surgeons, surgical nurses, physiotherapist and hand therapist to Bhutan to undertake surgery and training of local health personnel. The trip was to be part of a long term Interplast project

to build surgical capability in Bhutan. It was the first time that a Rotary Foundation Global Grant had been used to fund such a trip and as Marie mentioned the paperwork was a challenge. The Rotary Foundation is rigorous in ensuring that the Foundation's funds are spent wisely. A requirement is also that a club in the country benefitting from the project is involved. Bhutan has only one club, the Rotary Club of Thimphu. Dealing with them also presented some challenges, but Elizabeth persevered. On being notified of Elizabeth's passing, Tsewang Rinzing, President of RC of Thimphu sent the following message "I am really sorry to hear this sad news. May her soul Rest In Peace. We will all pray for her". With all the paperwork finally in place the visit took place in October 2017. Elizabeth and I met with the team just before they left. Excitingly it was a totally South Australian team. After 4 years of work, the successful visit took place over a two week period. Thomas Loporto from Interplast has asked for his condolences to be passed to Elizabeth's family and said, "[Her support was instrumental in delivering the October 2017 program to Bhutan.](#)"

I would like to conclude by speaking about Elizabeth's enormous impact on me. As I mentioned at the start, I joined Rotary in 2012. My first 6 months were bewildering, I could not grasp how it worked. A key thing Elizabeth did played a large role in remedying this. She held what is called a 'fireside chat'. A gathering of a small group of Rotarians at her home. Here she shared with us her knowledge of Rotary and encouraged us to ask questions. In this setting I felt free to express the confusion I was feeling. Her deep knowledge and passion for Rotary helped to resolve my confusion. I could see the power and purpose of Rotary. Elizabeth was a very strong and determined person. She told me how there were many times that she was disillusioned about her treatment as a woman in Rotary, but that the bigger purpose was more than worth it, so she stuck with it. As club President in 2017/18 Elizabeth was my mentor and sounding board, even after her illness forced her to withdraw from active service. She was very supportive of the changes I wished to make to the operation of the club, which were unpopular with some members, and this gave me the strength to carry them out. When I visited Elizabeth during her illness I always stayed too long because the wisdom she shared with me was so valuable. To me Elizabeth was the embodiment of a Rotarian, service above self. The last time I saw her,

which was shortly before her death, she embodied this. She asked me to start the process of arranging for an Interplast project to take place in her memory. With help from the new District Interplast Co-ordinator, Peter Schaefer, Grants Co-ordinator Ed King and Interplast Board Member, Marie Dorrington and the Rotary Club of Gawler arrangements are being made to for The Elizabeth Briggs Memorial Project which will happen in 2019.

Rotary will miss her.

I will miss her.