|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Speak Up - Kōrerotia  Women’s empowerment  15 September 2021 | |
| Female | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Nau mai ki te hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”. Today we’re talking about women’s empowerment. We’re going to be thinking about what is women’s empowerment, what are the benefits of women’s empowerment, how might we empower women to get there and these sorts of questions as we kind of go through. Ata mārie, e wāhine mā. It would be great to hear from you: What is it that you bring to this kōrero? What is your background in this space and why are you keen to take part today? Fiona, perhaps we’ll start with you. |
| Fiona | Kia ora everyone, Fiona is my name. I am an Irish woman living in New Zealand and oh, what do I bring to this kōrero? Well, in my work now, I work as a Clifton Strengths coach and one of my beliefs around coaching and using Clifton Strengths is that I deeply believe that everyone has what they need within them and I love asking the questions or bringing in some information that help people see that.   And for me, that’s one aspect of empowerment and I guess as a woman, throughout my life, I have navigated a whole heap of personal and professional change and have kind of stepped into a little bit of my own power, I guess of how I’ve navigated that and I just kind of feel like I want to share some of what I’ve learned to some of my experience and that I’m still learning with others because I feel that when we have those conversations, we can all do better and we all kind of lift each other up. So yeah, that’s a little bit about where I come from. |
| Sally | Fantastic. You mentioned there Clifton Strengths, perhaps you could just tell us a wee bit about that for people who might not be familiar with it. |
| Fiona | Yeah, sure. So Clifton Strengths is a… it’s kind of an assessment tool that you can do a survey and it spits out these results that show… that give you, out of 34 possible themes of talent, it ranks those in order for you and it’s about identifying what your inherent talents… your natural ways of thinking, of executing tasks, of relating to others and influencing others. So it’s about helping you identify what comes naturally to you and what’s authentic to you so that when you learn that, then you can really leverage that because just like we’re diverse culturally, we’re also diverse in how we do things and how we think. So if we can learn about that then we can, yeah, be more authentic and feel more confident and be more empowered about who we are. |
| Sally | Fantastic, what a great platform. And you actually mentioned, when you sent through your bio, quite a few other things. You mentioned also “A business owner, Deehan Leadership Collaborative; a conversation starter - that’s a cool one; a mother and a woman doing her best”. So quite a few other hats that you bring to this kōrero. |
| Fiona | Yeah, yeah, multiple hats. I love starting conversations about stuff that a lot of people don’t want to talk about but I think needs to be talked about. |
| Sally | Cool thank you. Jane, how about you? |
| Jane | Kia ora, ko Jane tōku ingoa, nō England, Ireland, East Europe ōku tūpuna. Kei te noho au ki Aotearoa. I’m Jane. I - as you can hear - am not from here. I moved here in 2006 from the UK and I guess my history around empowerment, I worked in young people’s sexual health services in the UK for about five years so particularly around contraceptive and termination services. So that conversation for me, that kōrero around young women in particular having access to health and what that looked like was really important and I had an amazing boss, my first boss was really amazing. Particularly because I was working with young people who were basically getting pregnant at ten, you know that conversation around having access to a really positive health experience for them was really important for us to start that pathway for them because it often wasn’t very positive. So that was a really important, blew-my-mind entrance into working around women’s empowerment.  And then I moved here and started working for a family and sexual violence NGO here and the whole conversation around empowerment was really different because empowerment in that sector means lots of different things. We worked from an empowerment model but a new model that’s slowly being taken up by health and social sector around what empowerment means. So giving women the tools to take control of the situation that was often crazy but also understanding that services who were involved in those women’s lives, needed to actually act and support and help when often women weren’t in a position to be empowered yet.  So trying to explain that to health who were still catching up on the old empowerment model, to kind of have this new way of thinking was really challenging. It’s like well yeah, got to keep up with what works and what doesn’t work. Particularly with women who were in really dangerous, scary situations. So expecting women to be empowered within four seconds of working with someone, we discovered and have discovered in this country, isn’t helpful.  So that was a completely new way for me to work and then I have my own business that I started about eight years ago and then I’ve moved into business coaching space last year with my business partner. A whole new conversation around empowerment, in particular stuff around money and being paid well and working in a framework that some white dude set up years ago and being able to say “I don’t want to work like that” has been a whole new space, interesting conversation and also being a mum to a four-year-old girl has also been an interesting time. I get really passionate about working with women, I love being around women, I love talking to women, I love supporting women, I love hearing women’s stories. So the opportunity to do this was like yes! |
| Sally | That’s great. Okay and finally we’ve got Danette. |
| Danette | Tēnā tātou katoa. He mihi tēnei ki a koutou e whakarongo mai ana. He mihi hoki ki a koe, Sally, mō tōu karanga mai ki a mātou e pāna i tēnei kaupapa. He mihi au ki a kōrua, ko Fiona rāua ko Jane, pai ki te whakarongo, ki te kōrero ki a kōrua anō.  Ko wai au? Kei te taha o tōku nei matua, he uri ahau o Ngāi Tuhoe, Ngā Rauru hoki. Ki te taha o tōku nei whaea, nō Kōtirana me Airani ōku tūpuna. I whānau mai au i Ahuriri engari i tipu ake au ki Te Wai Pounamu, ki kōnei. E noho ana ahau ki Ōtautahi ināianei. Ko Makaia Salatiru-Tiatia tāku hoa rangatira. Ko ono māua tamariki. Ko Danette Abraham-Tiatia tāku ingoa. No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.  Kia ora, thank you Sally for your invitation to kōrero around this kaupapa of empowering women or women’s empowerment and just a mihi to Fiona and Jane as well, nice to be able to kōrero with you both about this too and just really appreciate the opportunity and the time.  Just thinking about what brings me here, reflecting on this and basically my life experience has been about finding spaces of empowerment. As a young woman I knew that there was places of disempowerment and places of empowerment and I had to search for those places of empowerment in my own growing up. I remember distinctly situations where I was kind of told oh you can’t do that because, you know, you’re not a male or that whole idea that as a woman or as a female that I couldn’t do things.  So I remember feeling very disgruntled about those times and letting it be known as well, I think. Going on into my early adult years I started volunteering for a youth organisation that I’m still a part of 30-plus years later, Te Ora Hou. We work predominantly but not exclusively with Māori, it’s a kaupapa Māori organisation. I become a volunteer youth worker as a 19-year-old and really loved being around the young women to be able to just have some input into their lives and help enhance whoever they were and whatever they were doing and wherever they were going.  So I’ve had the privilege of working with, hanging out with lots of young women who are now just beautiful wāhine that have gone from strength to strength and it’s just been such a privilege to watch that and to see them grow and some of them are still in my life 30-odd years later. Of course that’s not the case with everybody, everybody has their own journey and everyone does the best that they can with it, really.  Part of my experiences of being a wahine is just trying to figure out what that means in the world for me as a wahine but as a wahine Māori as well because that’s an extra added layer on being a wahine. I’ve surrounded myself with wāhine all my life and just sitting with each other and just watching what that means to us and how we grow that and being inspired and just wanting the best for us as women and you know, learning how to rephrase or change our language around ourselves as individuals but also around ourselves as women. You know, I’ve learnt that the hard way over the years but I continue to up my game in terms of how I seek to celebrate women and what we do in the world. But I get totally inspired by the women that I’m around at the moment, watching them just come into their own, feeling like I’m coming into my own still, watching what women can do really. So yeah, kia ora. |
| Sally | Tēnā koe. It’s really interesting that all three of you are business owners coming to this particular kōrero. OK, so you’ve all sort of touched on what does women’s empowerment mean to you which is fantastic because that’s really kind of set the scene for us. But just one question before we kind of get into our first break. If we’re talking about women’s empowerment, does that assume that women are coming from a position of disempowerment? |
| Fiona | I was thinking about this question last night and the definition of empowered is having knowledge, confidence, means and ability to do things or make decisions for oneself. I think empowerment or being empowered… I think there’s almost a scale. I think it’s very difficult to say you’re empowered, you’re disempowered. In some countries more than others, in some situations more than others. I don’t think it’s as simple as a black and white, just like so many other things in the world it is not an either/or in my opinion. In my life and in my experience I’ve had a lot of privilege, I’ve had a lot of opportunities to have the means and ability, knowledge and confidence to do things. But sometimes having the opportunities doesn’t always mean that I have the confidence to actually take them and be empowered.  A lot of disempowerment in my life, some of it has come from external situations but some of it has come from within because of the emotional and mental and mindset barriers that have come as a result of external things. So I don’t think to talk about women’s empowerment means they are disempowered, it just means we’re at different stages and I think that’s part of that conversation. |
| Jane | I read a really amazing article about intersectional feminism - we’re getting in there straight away; like, let’s get in there! - and the woman who wrote it talked about, it’s not a race like this is not a who wins the most empowered or the most privileged. But obviously if you’ve got a face like mine there’s going to be lots of entry points, I suppose, or things open, conversations had, than if you don’t look like me. But I think also that I’ve learnt through coaching, we all have whatever it is in us anyway and I think often it’s about giving ourselves permission to get it wrong or try it or fail, whatever that means.  And in particular for me, because health is such a really deeply passionate thing for women, for me and having access to health is that I think it’s that thing of you can be frightened of something and be the most educated, well-positioned woman in the world and yet you’ll still not want to go and see somebody because if you’ve got a lump on your body that you’re worried about and I think being empowered is who you’re around to allow you to do that. Does that make sense?  So it’s like that, if you’ve got, for example, a really amazing doctor that you found that’s allowed you, whoever you are, to feel safe and able to have those discussion, you’re so much more likely to feel empowered into you know, giving yourself permission to have those scary conversations. Whereas if you’re not, or you’ve never had access to that, you’re less likely to be. So like Fi said, it is a bit of a spectrum but I think we all have the answers inside of us, it’s being around those people to support us to let them out. |
| Sally | It’s great that you’ve both touched on the fact that empowerment comes both from within and from those external supports, I think that’s a really key point, that it’s that duality. |
| Danette | When we talk of women’s empowerment, does this mean women are coming from a place of disempowerment? I did put some thought to this question and I’ve got a couple of whakaaro, or thoughts, on this. And one is that I think you can be empowered in any situation, whether you’re in an oppressed situation or have… or freedom. Little things, little choices can help you to be empowered or feel empowered. So no matter where you are, there’s always a choice that can make you be empowered or feel empowered. It doesn’t always change the situation but somewhere there there’s always freedom of choice to have empowerment.  The second part of that I think is circumstances. I think there are certain circumstances and systems around us that do disempower, that do take away the ability to make, in certain situations, some decisions. Whether it be back in the day where women weren’t allowed to vote, there was a system there that disempowered women. Whether women were allowed to take on moko kauae, if they wanted to be a part of the women’s movement - that’s a disempowerment and those were real situations especially for wāhine Māori, whether Māori women were allowed to breastfeed in public, that’s disempowering.  In there somewhere, there is always a place of empowerment, whether it’s in your thoughts processes, to be able to address those things, that’s empowerment. So definitely I think there’s systems that seek to disempower and that they do disempower, they take away rights and privileges. They take away even just the basic ability to be able to make decisions for yourself.  From a historical point of view here in Aotearoa, colonialism has had lots of systems put in place where it has disempowered wāhine Māori, whether through legislation or social norms, this is something that has affected wahine Māori empowerment. However, within that disempowerment there has always been choices for wāhine Māori and you’ve seen that through our history. You’ve seen it through the Dame Whina Coopers, you’ve seen it through the Donna Awateres, you’ve seen it through all the women that have found empowerment because of that disempowerment. So there’s always a voice, there’s always something you can do. So it’s a bit of a dual thing, disempowerment can sometimes lead to empowerment. |
| Sally | Just before we get into our first song, my final question is do you consider yourselves empowered and if so, what is it that has led to that sense of feeling empowered yourselves? |
| Danette | The short answer is yes I do feel empowered and I think some of that empowerment comes from a sense of knowing who I am, where I come from, what my whakapapa is, what my strengths are, who I was created to be. So everything that I am is geared towards being my unique self out there in the world. I feel like I’ve still got so much to learn - I’m in my 50s now and I’m still learning and there’s still so much growth - and sometimes it feels tiring and I wish it would just stop and I’d be fine and everything would be all good but that’s just not the case. Which is kind of cool, too, because it just means you don’t have to stay where you are, there’s always something to learn, there’s always something to grow in.  But I think we do hold onto habits and sometimes they’re good habits, sometimes they’re not so good habits, but all of those sorts of things sort of reflect in your own self-empowerment. So yeah, I think I’m empowered and I have to remind myself of that sometimes. Sometimes I don’t feel like I’m empowering myself or anybody else but then there are times when I feel like I am doing something. But it can be, you know, a bit tiresome sometimes and it’s OK not to feel like you’re on top of it as well.  As others have touched on too, a part of being empowered is sometimes having the people around you that can kind of be your cheerleaders or be on your side or get you or understand you and give you permission almost. Not that we always need someone else’s permission but those people that are standing on the side-lines going yeah, I believe in you and I know you’ve got this and that can be really empowering because when you’re feeling like when you might be pushing it up hill, that somebody believes in you and that’s sometimes all you need to take that next step.  I have a friend who we talk often on the phone and she’s always sort of giving me that lift and freely telling me that she believes in me and that she sees things in me that sometimes I don’t see or don’t recognise or don’t remember and it’s just really helped me at times when I’ve felt like I can’t do something or I’m too scared to or whatever. So yeah, always having someone there to help you is helpful and encouraging. |
| Jane | I guess I’ve had a lot of female bosses in my time, I’ve been actually really lucky to… I can’t even think, have I… I think I have worked for men but I think mostly the women who I have worked for have been really positive. I remember my first boss, I used to work for the health service so everybody was obviously in ties and suits and she used to come in and she’d be in her cool trainers and her jeans and she’d be like, it doesn’t matter what is going on here, it’s what matters of what comes out of your mouth and the fight that you’re going to take on and that was my first boss and it was like whoa!  I’ve had good and bad experiences of bosses but the stuff that shined through has been those women who have just said, “You’ve got this, like you’ve totally got this and you’ve also got the support of us behind you”. Because I work now mostly for myself, I really miss having that team of strong women around me to go, “It’s alright Jane, you completely messed up in that meeting but it’s fine, it’s totally fine, we’ve got you”. There’s nothing else like it, that first experience for me was a really positive experience. So I think that’s where mine has come from.  And also the ability to find humour in that stuff. I was always like the clown at school and whenever I got into a mess I just used to try and laugh my way out of it, you know, the youngest in the family type situation. I do feel empowered and I had a really interesting conversation the other day with somebody who said hey, who’s still having those ‘manel’ conversations where they can. So you know, you see a panel and there’s usually nine men on it and one woman and usually it’s me who goes hey, have you looked at… and I said you know what, I’m not because I’m exhausted and then I feel guilty because I am a Pākehā and that’s part of my role is to take up that fight.  But I just said I’m exhausted and I’m sick of it and I’m over it and I’ve put it over there for a little bit while I regain some energy. So sometimes it’s like that thing of god, have I still got that in me and then I find it from somewhere because something annoys me and I go no, actually this is part of the role that I’ve taken and I need to keep doing that. So yes and sometimes it’s tired. |
| Fiona | I would say yes I am empowered. It doesn’t mean I always feel like it but I know that I have within me the knowledge. I think we all believe that so much does come internally. So I always know that I have what I need within me, just sometimes I have the capacity to draw on it more than others and sometimes just like you were saying there, Jane, I decide, actually I just need to have a day where I’m not so empowered and have a bit of a sleep or a cry or whatever is needed.  But when I look back on my life I would say I’ve always appeared to be empowered and but that empowerment has probably come from different places. You know, growing up as the eldest of six kids and probably having some traumatic experiences in my childhood, my empowerment came from being a survivor and I am independent and I can do whatever I need to do and I can be good in school and I can be good at sport and I can get the good girl thing. So it looked like empowerment but actually it was probably just my way of surviving and getting praise and you know, that kind of thing.  And then in the last kind of ten years or so I would say that’s shifted, that’s turned because with emigrating, with becoming a mum, with doing some big deep work on myself, I’ve shifted that to a really genuine place of my empowered starting to come more from a place of worth and I still struggle with that at times but it’s more about empowerment of thriving not surviving anymore, that’s been an interesting shift for me.  And in my day-to-day life as a mother to a five-year-old girl, having this conversation with my husband around you know, some of the things that influence women that I saw my mother dealing with. That’s kind of part of that too but I guess when I think about the women in my life, now when I look back, goodness I pushed against my mother so hard being the eldest. But I look at her now and I just think she’s the most courageous women, you know, the things that she has done for us and for herself now, I’m just amazed by her.  You talked about bosses, Jane, and a woman I had as a manager here in New Zealand, she was the first person that ever… she wanted me to have her job, she was that kind of leader and you could see the people that just moved through her team, off they went, off into the big wide world to start their own businesses or to go off into big senior leadership positions and because this woman, you know, she saw the potential, she nurtured it, she empowered them and moved them. And those two women and a few more I’ve met since but they’re two that have really influenced my life. |
| Danette | If I could just jump in there again, let’s talk about what empowerment is and what it isn’t. I think that as women, we’re always trying to line ourselves up to something. We’re always trying to reach something and that if we don’t get there then we don’t feel empowered and so we speak like that. We say that if we’re not there, if I feel exhausted or if we don’t have the energy to go into that battle or have that conversation or do whatever, then somehow we are no longer powerful. Somewhere there we need to change our thought processes around this and what it is.  I think I have a little bit of an issue with the whole perfectionism thing is that we always sort of think that we need to be perfect or be there. The reality is that when you’re there, you’re not there again. So we’re always kind of falling short and with the whole perfectionism thing is that we have to be there and we have to be there all the time and even when we’re there, we feel like we’re lacking.  I think we need to readjust our thinking on what empowerment is because just sometimes, you’re just going to get up and you’re going to be tired, you’re not going to be able to have the energy to do this or that and there is going to be someone who is going to push your boundaries and they’re going to question your mana and there are going to be those who do not like you and the ones that are going to transgress yourself tapu and your mana, meaning your essence. But you are who you are and that doesn’t change anything in this moment.  So the whole thought that we are one day empowered and the next day not empowered, we just need to readjust our thinking and understand that we’re just going to have times when we don’t have energy and have the tools around us to be able to do things that we need to but it doesn’t mean that we’re disempowered in that moment. |
| Fiona | I really like that. There’s a poem called ‘Our Deepest Fear’ by Maryanne Williamson and at the end it talks about ‘playing big’ and ‘playing small’ and I was having this conversation with someone that you know, I’m playing small at the moment because they’re choosing to not take the big risks or whatever that is and actually I was like no, that doesn’t mean you’re not empowered. Like what you’re saying is that I am empowered, the empowerment is about the choice. That I’m empowered to make the choice about how I am going to be and what I am going to do, that’s where the empowered bit is, isn’t it. |
| Jane | And it’s not a competition. I read this thing the other day and it was like women are taught from a young age that we’re in competition with each other and the prize is a man and I was like… I was like, “What?!” And then I sat and thought about it and I was like it’s so true! It’s like, regardless of your sexual orientation or wherever you are, we’re in complete competition with each other.  I started a women’s group here in Queenstown, we get people to write down their small wins and you see women go, “Well I can’t write ‘I brushed my teeth’ because she’s wrote she made a website today” and I’m like what? Like this is not a competition, like dude, whatever you get done today is fine. But we are, we’re taught. |
| Danette | I know there’s been times in my life when I have felt less than or threatened by someone else’s success and I’ve had to catch myself and just go you know what, they’re just being the best people that they can be and I need to stay in my lane and be the best person that I can be because that’s where I’m going to get the most out of it. I’m not going to get the most out of feeling small against someone else and I learned that lesson a few years ago now in terms of worrying about what other people might thing.  Because as Fi, you mentioned a few moments ago, because we have this veneer or this persona that we can cope with things and I’ve had that in my life as well. I have themes in my top five in my Clifton Strengths finds that kind of allude to that strength as well and I can be quite strong. But it doesn’t mean that I didn’t have those times when I was self-doubting or feeling small or questioning myself or even comparing myself to someone else.  I had a series of lessons where I had to challenge some quite strong people and during that time I was riddled with oh my gosh, what does this mean, what will people think – just all this self-doubt and just amongst all of that I had a series of moments where I thought, you know no matter what I do, people are going to have an opinion. So I just have to understand that in this moment I am who I am and nothing can change that at this moment. Doing what I’m doing, thinking through my processes and doing the best that I can with what’s going on for me, taking it step by step and doing what I can in that moment and I still have to do that. Not to the same degree but that was a real defining moment for me and I was able to shake off that thought of what other people might think of me or what their opinion might have been of me. |
| Fiona | And back to our internal/external thing that we talked about earlier, that’s the battle, right. What we know internally and then what is being forced on us, I guess those messages from when we were little girls to all the way now up through social media, even in work places, women competing each other in corporate world because… well there’s only a certain amount of spaces for women at this top table. But actually, there isn’t you know. But because we’re competing against each other, you know it makes it easier to not put women at the table because we’re competing instead of us uniting and competing together and that’s kind of how I see it. Is that if we can empower more women from the inside out then we can come together and as a group smash it all but not while fighting each other. |
| Danette | And I have to put in there too that Māori and Pasifika women are in the lower echelons in regards to the kōrero about women and what might that mean in terms of our health statistics, we’re lower paid. There was even an article on the resuscitation rates of Māori and Pasifika babies, we were amongst the lowers resuscitation rates. This is all compared to other ethnicities and those stats are atrocious. I know this is a little bit of another kaupapa but what does that mean in terms of banding together and empowering and supporting each other as wāhine or whakamana or the whakamana of the wāhine around us.  I think there’s something else too, I think when there is a role for women, there seems to be this decided attitude that you need to lead like a man would and I think we need to dispel the theory that you have to lead like a man but the both of you have already given me different examples of your experience too, about women bosses who have empowered you.  There’s times when there’s a woman at the top and she’s on her own and she’s fighting to keep her place and she’s expected to lead like a man rather than as a wahine would. So I think we need to think about what that means in terms of empowerment as well. |
| Sally | OK we might pause it there. We will have our song Bjork, ‘Human Behaviour’. |
|  | **MUSIC BY BJORK – HUMAN BEHAVIOUR** |
| Sally | This is “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” and today we’re talking about women’s empowerment with Fiona Deehan, Jane Guy and Danette Abraham-Tiatia. I’d like to think now about how do we empower women. Jane you’ve already talked a lot about mentors and having inspiring women role models in your life. But how else might we look to empower women? |
| Jane | As a UK-born, now citizen of New Zealand - woohoo, you’re never letting me go! - for me, it’s about educating myself about where I am now, learning about the history of this country, you know, what’s currently going on, what has gone on before and my part in that moving forward. So I’ve gone through a whole heap, a whole heap of feelings and emotions about becoming a citizen - guilt, shame, joy, excitement. The place where I got to and I’m still getting to is I can’t undo the past of where I came from and what happened here but I can educate and immerse myself in the future moving forward.  I think for me, really deeply looking at where I’ve come from and where I’m going to is part of that kōrero for me and also the women that I work with. Danette, like you said, you know, you never ever stop learning and I love that. Some people are scared of that but I actually… I’m like, bring it, open the door and there’s like 17,000 other doors that you have to open and for me that’s like oh my god, I want to live to be 150 because I still want to keep opening doors and finding out information. I’m not a true learner, I say to my partner I don’t want to learn French, I just want to know how to speak French and like that’s how much brain works.  But when I actually sit and immerse myself in history and the future I get really excited. So I get really excited about what could be. So empowerment and how I can be part of that is learning and uncovering where I come from and where I’m going to. Going onto what you talked about before, both of you, about that self-awareness for me is a part of that process and once you become self-aware, it’s like… you see something that you can’t unsee, it’s the same thing. Once you start uncovering self-awareness you’re like oh god, there it is. But it’s really exciting because it just allows you to understand what triggers you, why you did something or why did I respond like that. That for me is part of that empowerment, is to learn about who I am and what part I play in that, what’s my responsibility and what’s my role. |
| Fiona | You could ask this question in certain settings and people will give you this tick list of things, you know well we do this now and this, this, this and this. But I guess for me, you know, there’s that real recognition that everyone is different and I think the starting point is knowing where I’m at and always being aware of where I’m at and what I bring and what I don’t bring and where my gaps are and what I can still learn and then for whoever the people that I’m talking to, the women that I’m talking to is where are they at and like them feeling valued and heard wherever it is they’re at. Because everyone is just at such a different stage.  I always find there’s common themes come up particularly when, you know, when I’m in the coaching side of things and I’m doing the vast majority of women it comes up around expectations that they have on themselves that are unrealistic but other people don’t have them on them at all, confidence related to that. So there’s common themes come up but I just… I do think the first thing if we’re going to talk about empowering people is giving people a chance to talk about where they’re at right now and understanding that so that they just feel heard and then you can kind of figure out what the ways forward are and the small steps are forward.  I volunteer for LifeLine as well and obviously it’s not just women I speak with when I take those calls, it’s a range of people, but the most valuable thing that we learn, that we’re taught to do in those situations, is just helping someone feel heard. That can be one of the most empowering things for people if they feel disempowered is just feeling heard and feeling understood and feeling valued, wherever it is they’re at, without being measured and without being judged. And from there, maybe it is something like helping people see what they are awesomely good at and sometimes that is something like Clifton Strengths coaching. Or we do that with LifeLine as well, it’s a strengths-based approach - and Jane, you’ll be familiar with that kind of stuff from previous work - you know, it’s just around well what are the skills and resources that you do have regardless of that bigger context? What is one thing that you can do right now that will help your situation? |
| Danette | I have drawn on my own life learnings, what it looks like to be empowered and what it feels like to be disempowered. I think the things that I’ve practiced over the years with women around me, young women, I have really continued with my daughter and I’ve done things that not everyone does and that’s fine. But I’ve done things like I’ve restricted what sort of movies she’s watched in terms of how women are portrayed - whether they’re the helpless little princess that gets saved by the prince - until she’s old enough now for me to be able to talk her through those things and how the world perceives her and how she needs to perceive herself and what empowerment she has as a girl growing into a woman in this world.  And she’s like this little mana kotiro, I tell you, she’s like this little social justice warrior and she kind of gets some of those things. She’s got a real emotional intelligence about her and she’s you know, eight years old. So she’s able to see things that aren’t tika or that aren’t right. So she’s able to decipher some of these things for herself now. I started teaching her from a really young age about what it means and what she can do for herself as a young woman and teaching her brother who lives with us about what it means for her to be a young woman and notwithstanding we’re also talking with him being a young man as well, growing up into manhood.  Just picking up on something that Fi mentioned, in terms of thinking about what your uniqueness is and Fi talks about this, around the Clifton Strengths finders, is what is your unique and unfair advantage. For me, I think it’s a little bit more than that, it’s just your natural way of being and how do we celebrate that within ourselves and within others. And I’m just learning so much about how other women feel empowered, whether it’s putting makeup on or wear red lipstick or wearing that certain something and it can be all that and for me it’s also how do you celebrate the healthy, life-giving things and helping other people understand what their uniquenesses are and continuing to celebrate those things.  My favourite whakataukī or Māori proverb, is “Kei kai ki āku ringa” and simply that just means there is food at the end of my fingertips and I always believe that everybody has got something to give. You don’t need a degree to be able to do something and whatever that is that you’re good at and how do we celebrate that and for me that’s empowering because I know that I… in the past, I have waited for people to tell me what I’m good at, to give me that validation and I think if we can learn to identify those things in ourselves and in each other and encourage those things then that’s a part of empowering each other.  And also just thinking about how we challenge the status quo, maybe those spaces where there is no space for women to grow. How do we empower those spaces whether it’s in the systems that we work within or whether it’s in society, it can be in lots of different spaces but there are small challenges and there are big challenges. |
| Sally | Just to pick up on something you said there Danette as well, the small challenges and the big challenges, I think there’s also the small empowerments and the big empowerments, if we can put it like that - putting on your makeup, it might be a small empowerment but it might have quite big repercussions on how you feel in yourself and that kind of feeling of self-worth can then lead to some of those bigger empowerments down the line. |
| Danette | Yes I agree. |
| Sally | In terms of how do we empower women, thinking maybe some of these bigger empowerments, things like financial capability, education, training. Any other thing you’ve got in terms of adding to that? Those sort of bigger things that we might be needing to do on a societal level, to empower women. |
| Jane | I think, for me, like the money conversation is ginormous and I only really got into it a couple of years ago and then got really excited about it. One, in terms of charging what you’re worth and that whole conversation, about how you do that. But also, you know, saying things like, “I want to be a millionaire, I want to work with this many women, I want to earn an amount of money” and saying it over and over and over and kind of waiting for the silence, the uncomfortable silence.  I really like and relish the uncomfortable silence now because I know, being somebody who is online - I was a blogger, I was an influencer whatever that means - having those conversations and people… you can hear the, “Did she really just say that, like did she really just talk about money, oh god, oh god! and having it with other women who get really also excited about going yes, because the power of this thing that isn’t real that we base so much of our lives on. But the freedom that it allows us when we have it to do things with for me is a really, really exciting conversation and concept. I’m still unpacking it and unpicking it all the time but I think when women say you know, I made this thing and I sold it and I made this money and now I’ve bought myself this course or gone and got a councillor or a therapist or a coach or a whatever and I did that myself by using my hands, for me is just unbelievable. The power in it is so unbelievable. And I know for me I’ve always worried about money and worried about having somebody to look after me because those were the relationships I was in, I always had a partner who earnt more than me and who “looked after me”, who paid for things and did the thing and then all of a sudden I was on my own years ago and I was like shit, what do I do and then I had to learn about how to look after myself, for me was the most empowering thing in the world. It was like oh, I’ve got to do this right now because I have to pay for that bill or I have to go to the supermarket or I have to buy a new pair of shoes or whatever.  So for me, I get really excited about women who also get excited about that conversation about money and what it can do and what it is and the weirdness of it. |
| Sally | Fantastic. Well we might have our next song then and Danette, you choose ‘Strength, Courage and Wisdom’ by India Arie. |
|  | **MUSIC BY INDIA ARIE – STRENGTH, COURAGE AND WISDOM** |
| Sally | This is “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” and today we’re talking about women’s empowerment. In this final segment I’d like to think about what are some of the barriers to enabling women to feel this sense of empowerment that we’ve talked about. There are lots of them, we’ve talked about how women’s empowerment is both internal and external, maybe not explicit but the idea that it can be both in your own private sphere and also in that public sphere as well. So there are a whole load of barriers - internal, external, private and public spheres. But any thoughts you’ve got on that and suggestions on what we need to be doing to enable women despite these barriers. |
| Fiona | The first thing that comes into my head is, like, expectations and ‘shoulds’, those things are in all of those areas with personal, professional, in our homes, in our work. There are so many ‘shoulds’ and expectations around what a woman should be, what a good wife should be, what a good partner should be, what a good mother should be and a lot of those things are just continuously reinforced by things like media, social media, magazines. Those expectations are huge barriers in themselves because so many of us just get caught up in those shoulds because we think they’re the rules, right.  I remember reading a book not too long ago called *The Code of the Extraordinary Mind*, Vishen Lakhiani is his name, and in one part he talks about the ‘brules’, the ‘bullshit rules’ that exist around so many things and I think those shoulds, those expectations, so many of those are ‘brules’. But often we are just raised with those around us and they become our norm, they become those rules that we think are pretty much law you know, that we can’t just go outside of those.  How do we get over those? I think it’s collective curiosity and more women like this - and men actually, because we need men having these conversations, too, as our allies - to ask questions, to challenge these ‘brules’. As a colleague of Dan’s and I does, when there’s a difficult conversation or comment, we have a colleague that says, “Let’s just stay with that for a moment” and I just love where that goes. It’s not a raaaa challenge, it’s a “Let’s just talk about this”. And I do that sometimes with my husband and we get to have conversations that maybe we wouldn’t be having if we were still in Ireland because we would have all of the different supports around us around managing our family.  So actually us being here means we’re having conversations about how we’re doing things a little bit differently and how we’re raising our daughter. It’s not that either of us is right or wrong, it’s just that’s how we were raised and what we saw. So how do we be consciously and collectively curious about these ‘brules’ and these expectations because I think expectations are the source and the root of so much disappointment and shame both within ourselves personally and with others because we often haven’t even voiced what those expectations are. It’s when we say them that we go oh, wow and if we can shift from should to choose, there’s huge power in that as well. |
| Jane | I was also going to say about that, Fi, about being a mum and the expectations of what that’s supposed to look like. I’ve always been really honest about the fact that I hated the baby stage, I hated it, and the more I said it, the more women would come in the back door saying, “So did I, oh my god and you’ve allowed me to say that”. I interviewed a woman, Minna Dubin who is the *New York Times* writer who wrote an article about mum rage. It kind of came out a few years ago about this monster that lived in her throat and I read it and was like oh my god that’s me and I’ve never read about that before and it’s not just me and I messaged her and said you’ve just spoken to the thing that lives in my body and I don’t know when it’s going to pop out.  And the more I then talked about it to other women, more women said oh my god I have that rage in me and it’s only appeared since having kids and I’ve never heard anybody else talk about it and I’ve never wanted to share it because I’m too scared of what people will think. That you know, I’m a bad person and I show it in front of my kids and what that means and for me, that allowing women to… whether you’ve got kids or not, it doesn’t matter, it’s just those parts of us that we don’t share because we’re not supposed to be angry or rage. Just let it out.  I think we talk a lot about oh men don’t show emotion but I also think women don’t. Women show certain sides of them that they’re supposed to like you know, we’re tearful and we’re allowed to cry in front of each other but actually we don’t ever show the real rage that’s in us and I remember it happened to me one night and I was like, “Who is that, like who is that?” and I spent the whole afternoon crying about it because I was like I’ve never seen this part of me before, I don’t know who it is.  Honestly, a life-changing part of my life and it doesn’t pop up as much any more but it’s still there. |
| Danette | That’s for sharing that, Jane. I remember one day I was at this park and listening to this child just letting it go, screaming, arms going, legs going, voice going and I thought wow, wouldn’t it be cool to be able to do that as an adult. But as an adult, we have these certain expectations that you don’t do those things or you don’t let your emotions out and I thought man, that kid must be having a ball letting all that emotion out and as you get older and as you alluded to Jane, as a woman, you don’t do that. No, you don’t get to that level of depth or of what’s going on for you emotionally because I feel like sometimes we have to keep it at a certain level so that everybody else is OK because we’re looking after everyone else, we’re managing everybody else’s expectations. So some of the barriers are that and not giving space to things, not giving space to the conversations and I struggle with it myself. I’m quite a private person so it can be challenging.  We can’t be everything for everyone so who are the ones that we can connect with and understand even their experiences and trauma because there’s lots of trauma around being a woman sometimes. Who we have to be, who we need to be, who we weren’t, who we’re not. |
| Jane | I was just going to say when you talked about the playground incident. We were in Margaret Mahy playground and my then two-and-a-half/ three-year-old, like, just let rip and I’m very much of the parenting style of let them go for it, get it out. We’ve had to learn that it’s alright and it’s not about us and she can work out what she’s doing, she doesn’t need me to swoop in and sort things out for her, I want her to completely learn how to self-soothe.  The kids didn’t even notice, the adults… you could feel everyone go argh… the tension in that playground! and it was quite busy. The adults could not cope. I’m learning as an adult how to self-soothe because I never was taught it as a kid. Somebody always swooped in and sorted everything out for me because back then in the ‘80s, that’s how you did it, you shut it down and you didn’t talk about it and let’s stop crying and getting angry.  So I’m like, I want her to be able, as an adult, to self-soothe so that somebody else doesn’t have to come in and she doesn’t look for that from somebody else. She can do that for herself, that to me is empowerment for her. |
| Fiona | I feel like the theme across what we’re all saying now is we’ve named some of the barriers. Some of the potential solutions is around the theme there is vulnerability and courage and I’m a big old Brene fan, if anyone has heard of Brene Brown, but that whole idea of not vulnerability being weakness but vulnerability being that willingness to be open, to let this space, to sit in the discomfort, to not seek the solution, to just sit in empathy and openness and hear what’s going on for people and navigate beside them together, that kind of collective vulnerability and courage rather than that competition and saying it’s hard and sharing our own experiences at the levels we’re comfortable with. Because vulnerability is not disclosure, it’s not exposing it all but it’s about finding again that… on that spectrum of what you’re willing to share and contribute and be open and learn about and say you don’t know about or… and courage being the other side of that because it’s not being fearless, courage is saying yeah I’m afraid but I’m going to do something anyway or I’m going to say something anyway or I’m going to say nothing, actually, anyway and listen. I feel like that’s the theme in what we’re all saying. |
| Danette | I think it’s how you do you. I often have people say to me oh I wish I could do that or whatever it is and often it’s speaking up about something and they will go oh I wish I could do that and I often say well you can do that, you just need to do it the way you do it, you don’t have to do it like I do. |
| Sally | That seems like the perfect place to finish up actually, Fi, you’ve summed everything up so beautifully there, thank you for that. I’d like to say tēnā kotou, thank you all so much for your time, particularly because we’ve actually recorded this in August 2021 during the second nationwide COVID-19 lockdown. So it’s been a challenge for all of us in terms of finding the time and dealing with kiddies and dogs barking and birds singing and all those sorts of background noises that the listeners may have heard. But I guess it’s a kind of real world representation of what we’ve actually been talking about which is trying to juggle all these different hats and all these different personas which is what women do all the time. So in that sense it’s actually been quite a cool real world reflection of our kōrero today. Thank you so much all of you - and mana wāhine! |
| Jane | Thanks Sally, |
| Fiona | Thanks Sally, thank you. |
| Danette | Kia ora. |