*Bernice Lindegren 1928-2013*

Bernice Lindegren was a kindergarten teacher who entered the Wellington diploma course in 1946 and taught in Wellington and Australia until 1950. Her next association with kindergarten was in 1969 when she becomes involved in kindergarten committee work. This led to representation on the Wellington Free Kindergarten council and then its executive. From 1971 to 1975 Lindegren was president of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association. In 1974 when NZFKU established its first Wellington office Lindegren was appointed to the position of secretary treasurer - later upgraded to executive officer. During these years Lindegren became the towering figure of NZFKU politics, and the significant voice and presence on the political front of kindergarten until her retirement in 1990. She attended every conference from 1969 to 1990 and organised every conference from 1975 to 1990.[[1]](#endnote-1) As a Life Member from 1991, Lindegren was still a frequent attendee at conferences, often holding the organisation to account during difficult times. She regretted past unsuccessful attempts to streamline NZFKU structures, and with others, such as president Brian Elliott (1985-87), believed the organisation would have been in a stronger position to deal with the changes in government policy in the 1990s if proposals for large regional associations had been succeeded.

Lindegren brought experience from many levels of the kindergarten movement’s operations. This was an era when NZFKU presidents were serving shorter terms and did not always have experience on the political front. Lindegren worked with eight different presidents. She knew the detail of the organisation’s history, policies and operations and knew all the key people across government circles and education organisations. It is evident from perusing the old Department of Education’s NZFKU files, that Lindegren was present at every meeting and crafted every letter, submission and complaint. She represented NZFKU on the many working parties, negotiations, courses, conferences and committees throughout these years including the Before Five funding working party in 1989. Lindegren was well versed in the protocols of government and policy negotiation. She was a stickler that these were managed appropriately and endeavoured to ensure that good form shaped political relationships. When a new KTA president addressed her first formal communication to NZFKU, with the greeting ‘Dear Friends’, Lindegren’s response was one of reprimand. When an NZFKU executive member spoke abruptly out of turn in a meeting with the Director General of Education Lindegren immediately sent an apology on behalf of NZFKU. Lindegren was protective of the ‘senior status’ of the kindergarten, and would not let perceived slights pass unchallenged. After a 1984 Lopdell Centre National In-service Course on early childhood policy that now included a wide range of participants, Lindegren felt sufficiently aggrieved to complain to the Minister of Education that ‘none of those present … were in fact closely involved with the main providers of early childhood care and education… and were free to theorise and idealise without thought of the consequences.’[[2]](#endnote-2) The Minister’s response emphasised the importance of individuals and groups to work in ‘concert rather than isolation.’[[3]](#endnote-3)

Lindegren held her position during the years of heightened advocacy and protest from KTA. While not overly sympathetic to the stridency of kindergarten teachers she also worked productively with KTA to negotiate a raft of improved staffing policies. KTA president Lynne Bruce recalled that during some of the difficult times there was also some ‘amazing support from the Kindergarten Union’. Bruce attributed it to the relationship between the staff in charge of KTA and NZFKU in the 1970s. ‘Bernice and Ros [Noonan] had what I would call a healthy respect for the skills and knowledge each other had. This was never publicly declared but behind the scenes they worked effectively together.[[4]](#endnote-4) From 1983 Lindegren administered the National Appointments and Appeals Scheme that had been hard fought for by KTA. Her signature was on every NZFKU kindergarten diploma issued until the last students graduated from the two-year qualification in 1990. An obituary from NZFKU concluded, ‘Bernice was well regarded by colleagues and officials, and respected within the early childhood education sector. Bernice will be remembered for her integrity and tenacity, and her influence in shaping the direction of kindergarten and government policy for early childhood education.’[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. ‘Mrs Bernice Lindegren, honoured with Life Membership’, 1991, NZFKU. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. B. Lindegren letter to Hon. R. Marshall, Minister of Education, 23 May 1985, NZFKU. Miscellaneous correspondence 1980-1985, APEP W2462 7749 Box 1402, Archives NZ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hon. R. Marshall to B. Lindegren 14 June 1985, NZFKU Miscellaneous correspondence 1980-1985, APEP W2462 7749 Box 1402, Archives NZ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Interview with Lynne Bruce by Helen May 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Annual Report 2012-1013, NZK, p.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)