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Julie Anne Genter

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In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

A transport system that is empowering for women and girls to participate in their community and get around, as much as anyone else. It is not just women and girls, but children, the elderly, people with disabilities – it is a transport system accessible to all.

How does the experience for women and girls in New Zealand influence your work?

New Zealand has a very car-centric transport system that has excluded people and created many towns and cities that are not as sustainable and accessible as they could be. My work is focused on reversing that and creating more people-friendly streets.

How have you used your platform to promote more inclusive transport systems?

I got involved in politics when I realized it wasn't technical solutions and research that we lacked, it was political leadership. I could finally see a political party providing that leadership with the Greens in Aotearoa New Zealand. In opposition politics, my work has been about campaigning for positive solutions. As Minister for Women and Associate Minister for Transport, I had this amazing opportunity to influence policy and funding more directly. It is here where we can make the biggest practical differences and have a role in showing that things can be done differently while inspiring people to believe that it is a choice they can make politically.

My work is not about shaming people or telling them they should be cycling or taking public transport over driving, rather that central and local government should be providing them with better choices and options to get around and better neighbourhoods that are more accessible.

My choice to move around by bike, with my children, or in normal clothes has been inspiring for some people. I know that some people will see it as a challenge. I simply want to provide a positive example but in a way that is inspiring and empowering. Choosing to cycle to the hospital for the birth of both my children wasn't planned, it was just the best choice at the time, and the overwhelmingly positive response has been surprising and heartwarming.

Have you had an 'enough is enough' moment?

It was more growing up in a place that was incredibly car-dependent. From a very young age I felt this was not right, and when I visited other cities I saw things could be different. The awareness of the need for a specific feminist awareness came later, because I was someone who grew up thinking feminism has already been achieved. It was in my twenties and thirties when I realized that it had not, that I had an opportunity to work to create more opportunities for equality for women, especially women of color and with disabilities, who face many more barriers.





How do you stay motivated?

I try to remember that it's the work we do that is important, not necessarily the outcome. As much as I want to see the outcome, the most important thing is speaking up. If you can find enjoyment and fulfillment in that, it is less frustrating. I like the Buddhist approach written about by Thích Nhất Hạnh: When you have compassion and care for yourself and your community you have compassion for others and the work you do. Even though we are not at the place we want to get to, we need to focus on the steps, enjoy it, be present.

What advice would you give your younger self if you could?

Pay more attention to your relationships and don't worry so much about what other people say. Like many women, I am my own harshest critic and when people are not happy with something, I take it on board a little too much. In this space it is easy to be derailed by criticism. It is important to be aware of other people's feelings, but not take it too much to heart. Have faith in your voice and stay true to yourself.

And for others who want to be part of a feminist reshaping of the transport system?

Keep going. It is important work. Sometimes because the work can be more technical or about infrastructure it is not seen as as important as a direct campaign for human rights, but equitable and inclusive access to transport is a human right.