



Kerry Burridge

for passionate PARENTS

Kerry Burridge has shone a light on an unsung hero: Leanne Rouse, the woman voted New Zealand's Best Mum. "She's a wonderful woman," says Kerry, "warm, loving and supportive, with a delightful family." Kerry is the founder of the web-based business Kiwi Families, an organisation 'for passionate parents', which is dedicated to bringing information on parenting to New Zealanders.

Kerry was inspired to run the New Zealand's Best Mum competition after hearing of similar awards in other countries. Also, she wanted to see some good news about New Zealand family life in the media. "There seemed to be a lot of negative coverage about child abuse and anti-smacking. The proportion of parents acting badly is tiny, but gets a lot of coverage. There are thousands of people out there doing great things every day and we wanted to focus on that and celebrate it."

The response to the competition was huge, with over 400 nominations and hundreds of voters. The winner, Leanne Rouse, is mother to 4 biological children, 2 foster children, and has been a mum to over 20 exchange students in total. She received \$5,000 from Kiwibank, a year's free gym membership at Contours, a day's free gardening or cleaning from Green Acres, plus prizes from NZ Post, Elizabeth Arden and Rodney Wayne. Kerry says that Leanne definitely embodies everything they were looking for in New Zealand's Best Mum.

Kiwi Families has been under construction for 15 months, but was officially launched in October 2006. A huge amount of groundwork was involved in building a team and content before it was ready for the public eye. The inspiration for Kiwi Families came when Kerry, herself a mother of three, saw a need. When her daughter, Abby, was 6, she was diagnosed as having a mild form of dyspraxia. Kerry spent hours scouring the internet for information but came away feeling frustrated. The information she did find was fragmented, often American and of dubious quality. She said to her partner, Ian, "Wouldn't it be great as a parent if you could just find everything you need in one place, and it was relevant to New Zealand?" And now you can.

Kiwi Families is a totally comprehensive site devoted to parenting. Their aim is to bring everything parents need into one place. "We have highly informative articles from experts and a forum where parents

can contact other parents." It covers all stages of parenting from conception to the first job or tertiary study. While Kerry realises that parenting is a lifelong role, she thought it best to put in an end point: when most children leave home.

One topical area of concern today is, of course, discipline and boundary setting. Both of these are covered on the website, including articles from one of the Kiwi Families' panel of experts, Diane Levy. As far as the controversial anti-smacking bill is concerned, the organisation remains completely neutral. "We haven't covered that yet," says Kerry, "but generally for us we must be unbiased and balanced; putting both sides forward on any issue and leaving it to parents to form their own viewpoint. Our site is for any parent in any situation. It's not appropriate for us to push a certain view."

Kerry feels that men in New Zealand are often treated differently from women with regard to children. "Ian is a house-dad, and we have found that house-dads are not as accepted socially, which is sad." I asked Kerry to comment on the situation at one New Zealand market, where men are asked to sign a form stating that if they find a lost child they will not take them anywhere for help, but will find a woman to do so. "That's dreadful," says Kerry. "The whole 'stranger danger' thing sometimes gets taken too far. Most men and women are normal, friendly, kind-hearted people."


Kerry is certainly a person who appreciates the value of a family. Having been widowed at 33, she was unsure if she would have a family of her own. "If you can imagine, in your mid-30s the biological clock is ticking. It's pretty unlikely you'll meet another life partner, but I was incredibly lucky to meet Ian and have 3 delightful children."

Kiwi Families is bringing hope and help to thousands of Kiwis. It has also been a great business move for Kerry, who talks about her various ventures as being a series of different 'business models'. The first model she spoke of was as a consultant both nationally

and internationally. She was earning great money and the job was mentally stimulating. "But at the end of the day, you don't build up an asset; it's just you, which I didn't think was very smart." Kerry then bought a small maintenance construction company in Tauranga. She built the company up from 7 employees to 28 and achieved a multi-million dollar turnover. However, the company had high overheads, big premises, lots of staff to pay, and franchise fees. The profit margin was small.

Now with Kiwi Families, which is totally web-based, Kerry has built something that she is much happier with. She started from scratch, using home-based contractors, and has found the web-based business model to be her favourite.

So after having become a highly respected and trusted organisation and winning two government grants totaling \$100,000 in six short months, what has made Kiwi Families such a success? According to Kerry it's nothing earth shattering, just good old-fashioned hard work. "Tenacity," she says. "I have a Pollyanna-type attitude; if I get knocked down, I just bounce back up again!"

Next up for Kiwi Families? Well, they've applauded a terrific NZ mum, now it's Dad's turn. Plans for a Father of the Year award are underway. "We can't release the details yet, but we're definitely doing it. We wouldn't want Dad to be neglected!" 

By Monique Richards

Kerry's advice for business start up

- Vision
- Clarity of thought
- Tenacity
- Follow through with your decisions