

## GETTING BUSINESS DONE IN DOWN

**YOUNG Mums are busy and organised, but New Zealander Gabrielle Burns takes the concept of 'busy and organised' to a new level.**

Based in Newcastle, Co Down Gabrielle and husband James have three of a family aged 17, 14 and 12. They also both run international businesses and are currently in the final stages of building their dream home overlooking the Mountains of Mourne close to Tollymore Forest Park. And somewhere in life Gabrielle finds the time and energy to volunteer to help at some of the major Ulster New Zealand Trust events at The Ballance House.

But how did a native of Invercargill, pop 55,000, the most southerly city in New Zealand come to live in Northern Ireland since 2006? "Well Northern Ireland was not part of 'the plan' when my girlfriend and I came to London to see Europe on the usual Kiwi adventure," explained Gabrielle.

### **SOUTHLANDERS DOWN SOUTH**

*Gabrielle Burns (née Reekie) enjoying the New Zealand embassy's opening reception in Dublin during 2018 with two famous sporting heroes also from her native Southland region of South Island, NZ.*

*Justin Marshall, left, All Black captain in 1997, who played halfback 1995 - 2005, and Legend Jeff Wilson, who was both a rugby All Black and cricket Black Cap in the 90s.*



Having been through boarding school I was a pretty independent individual and ready for adventure. So after graduating in education and marketing from Otago Uni in Dunedin it was OE time. Time to see the world and gain some Overseas Experience. "We certainly had a great life in London combining work with travel and all sorts of adventures. During this time I met a young chap from Co Down, who had a very cute accent. Long story short he got very lucky and married me!" quipped Gabrielle.

"James and I lived and worked in London and Amsterdam for several years, which was tremendous fun and great experience. Working for huge brand names like Nike and Roche was a massive added bonus. "Then around 2006 with two of our three children in tow we made the decision to leave London. It was not the place we wished to bring up a family and whilst we could have headed to New Zealand we chose Newcastle in Northern Ireland.

"A determining factor was that my father-in-law was very unwell and, of course, James wanted home to support him. We had also recently finished building a house there, which initially we had intended to sell, but as it turned out then became our family home. "Thus the decision was made, and it has proved an excellent one for both of us and our now three teenagers.

"We live and work in a lovely place where our kids have benefited from growing up in what feels like a very safe town, with the added bonus of excellent schools. We are quite 'outdoorsie' and enjoy the Mournes, swimming in the sea in the summer and of course trekking Tollymore Forest Park.

"I've found people really friendly here and I particularly love the creative and humorous way people think, which probably comes from thousands of years of storytelling. It's amusing and very endearing" affirmed Gabrielle. "But gosh I do miss New Zealand and think of family, especially my Dad and brother, plus some really good friends who are like my sisters, every day. Yet through James we have a strong family network here, though there are cultural differences. And I mean differences, not faults."



*A taste of home when Newcastle, Co Down based Kiwi entrepreneur Gabrielle Burns headed to Dublin for the opening of New Zealand's new embassy to the Irish Republic.*

"In New Zealand sport is practically a religion with males and females all taking part be it sailing, tennis, rugby, hockey, football or netball. Everyone seems to have a sport. Women's events getting lots of media coverage. "In Northern Ireland the culture means that sport seems less important, although I think that may be changing. Still ladies sporting events get less coverage and a lot of folks instead seem to put their efforts into organisations, such as UNZT's The Ballance House or their place of worship. "Though I must say our eldest, Amelia, has really taken to the sporting scene here and is on the NI Under-19 netball squad. A role that has let her mix with players from all across the country and take part in international matches overseas. A brilliant opportunity."

Asked about her career Gabrielle revealed that while James heads a telecoms consultancy operating UK wide and indeed further afield she is managing director of Bohill Health [www.bohillhealth.com](http://www.bohillhealth.com). This is a niche recruitment agency placing specialist staff with clients in London, New York and Germany. Using her experience and vast network Gabrielle connects medical consultants with leading companies. "In addition, having managed to accumulate such a large and strong network of business colleagues, a few years ago I set up 'Kiwi Launchpad' which is aimed at helping young Kiwis find employment in the UK and Irish Republic. Though 2020 was not a great year business wise for Bohill Health due to Covid we survived and will thrive again."

"Thankfully the telecom sector is still very strong and James has been very busy, spending less time travelling and more time working from home which has been great for us as a family. But for both of us and family the big focus amidst all the pandemic worries has been the construction of our dream home a few minutes walk from our current house. We are over halfway through the build, which is in a magical location. The design is very unusual for Northern Ireland, as it is based around five 'pods' which will force us into more indoor-outdoor living.

"When you are from Invercargill, travelling anywhere means either a long drive or a flight. This has probably skewed my idea of what long distance actually is and the fact that France is so close to NI means we certainly have enjoyed some great continental holidays to places across France, Spain and Italy. Likewise it also means meeting clients or friends in Dublin, London, Amsterdam or Paris to me feels like just around the corner."

As regards volunteering at The Ballance House with the Ulster New Zealand Trust this Mum and entrepreneur is time short so tries to help out, when possible, at key events. "So The Ballance House gives me a link with home and a chance to catch up with other Kiwis and NI families linked to my amazing homeland - the land of the long white cloud."

***"John Ballance was a great New Zealand reformer and Prime Minister, who helped promote our wonderful national attitude to equality. That men and women, Maori and Pakeha alike, should have a vote and every opportunity to progress."***

*Thanks to Gabrielle Burns and Rodney Magowan for submitting this interview.*

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