

INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ has been established to increase the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector. Every month we profile a different woman working in a different part of the industry. If you would like to be profiled, or would like to nominate someone to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Paige](#).

We'd like to introduce Olga Joensuu as our next Woman of Focus. Olga is a member of WIN Canterbury.



OLGA JOENSUU
PROJECT ENGINEER



1. What company or organisation do you work for and what is your role there?

I am a Project Engineer with Brian Perry Civil (BPC), which is part of the Fletcher Construction Company.

2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?

After completing my engineering qualifications in Finland, where I grew up, I initially worked in tunnelling. I completed my Masters Degree in Scotland, so I would also have a qualification in English that was understood better internationally.

I am a bit of an adventurous person, and that brought me to New Zealand in 2014, where I began work on the Mackays to Peka Peka SH1 project north of Wellington. After two years in the structures team I moved down to Christchurch to learn the ropes in geotechnical engineering. The project I was working on there was closing out when the 7.8 magnitude quake hit Kaikoura, damaging 194kms of road, 190kms of rail tracks and 20 tunnels.

I knew I wanted to be involved in the rebuild as it was such a massive undertaking and engineering heaven for me. I sent an email asking about a role on a Thursday. The next day I received a reply confirming my accommodation and I started on the Monday.

After working for three years on the North Canterbury Transport Infrastructure Rebuild (NCTIR), I returned to BPC in 2020 for my next challenge. New Zealand is my home now.

3. Tell us about a project you are currently working on and why it interests you?

I love building my experience by taking on new challenges. Having no previous experience working over water, the rebuild of the old Town Wharf in Bluff is very appealing. I'm Project Engineer for the project, which involves the partial demolition of the existing deck and stringers from the wharf, which is in very poor condition. My team will be driving in 37 new piles and installing permanent staging as we go. It's an innovative approach as we'll be

using the same design we usually use for our temporary staging for pile installation, but for this job it has been designed to be the permanent structure. Our approach means the client can complete the six-month project within their budget.

4. What's the hardest job you've ever done and why?

Kaikoura (NCITR) - leading a team I hadn't met, using a construction technique that was new to me.

Our first project was completing 201 bored piles at Ohau Point, with half of them needing to be completed in just a few months. While the project brought many challenges, including poor ground conditions, extreme weather events, tight site conditions and limited access to materials, I led the team to successfully complete the project on time.

At first I doubted my ability to take this big challenge on, but even with various setbacks along the way I proved that I was able to do it. Women can often doubt whether we're up to new roles, but I've found that you need to believe in yourself and to put yourself forward, don't wait until you're asked.

I learned a huge amount on this project. I was able to develop my leadership skills and deliver on all the projects I was responsible for. I was promoted from Site Engineer to Project Engineer and I was proud to be honoured at the 2018 Z People Awards, run by Civil Contractors New Zealand, as runner-up in the Emerging Leader Award.

5. Can you think of one example where your "diversity" has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?

There were very few women working on NCTIR at the start, but everyone was accepting of me. I grew up with four brothers and two sisters, so I know how to look after myself and get on with people.

I was leading men with far more experience than me. I realised that the more I was willing to ask questions and demonstrate a willingness to learn from my team and to benefit from their experience, the more comfortable they were with me giving them direction.

I've found that to be a great leader in any construction field, everything revolves around good communication and team involvement on the works planning. I actively encouraged my team to communicate openly by brainstorming, sharing their opinions and delivering feedback.

My advice to anyone going into a leadership role is to understand your team members, listen to them, respect their experience and work together – be humble, don't go in telling people what to do. You should never underestimate what willpower, the right attitude and a good team can do.

I firmly believe that anyone in our industry who believes in themselves and has the confidence to do whatever she sets her mind to, can achieve great things.

To learn more about opportunities for a career with Brian Perry Civil click [here](#) or, you can connect with Olga on [LinkedIn](#).

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