



ELIZABETH WITT

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”



BIBA BELL



LISA ROWE



IRIS'S FAMOUS SCONES



CHRIS TURNER

SELFLESSLY DEVOTED ...

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BIBA BELL CATCHES UP WITH FOUR DEDICATED SUNSHINE COAST CHARITY WORKERS TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS OF RUNNING A FOUNDATION AND JUGGLING FAMILY WHILE SUPPORTING THE SUNSHINE COAST'S MOST NEEDY, AND DISCOVERS AN EVEN GREATER APPRECIATION FOR THE SELFLESS WORKERS THAT RUN ON HEART AND SOUL.

It's so easy to get swept away in the hustle and bustle of everyday responsibilities, with barely a chance to appreciate the breathtaking scenery on the Sunshine Coast, especially at this time of year.

With a coastline and climate envied across the nation, it's difficult to think about desperation and despair. The reality is however, more confronting than pristine beaches and balmy evenings.

Through sickness, violence, substance abuse or homelessness, some people don't have the simple luxuries that too many of us often take for granted.

But there is hope. And there is help, thanks to a dedicated few.

Cue the devoted charity workers. Karen von Homeyer from the Sunshine Coast Hear and Say Centre; Chris Turner from SunnyKids (formerly Nadjidah); Lisa Rowe from The Sunshine Coast Health Foundation and 17-year-old student Elizabeth Witt from Immanuel Lutheran College.

Lisa, Karen and Chris all work tirelessly to provide a service for the less fortunate on the Sunshine Coast but they're all quick to point out the long hours are fuelled by passion, and the reward is not overtime, but the people they help to communicate, overcome illness, or find a path to safety and success.

Although the government provides some funding (just 15 percent), charities rely heavily on public support and

dedicated volunteers. But I'm curious to know if they've felt the pinch thanks to a weakened economy. Have generous people stopped giving?

Karen realises corporates are struggling as well and concedes they need more for their buck to validate their involvement. But they remain full of confidence in the local community.

"It just makes you rethink a bit, but it's the private sector who've come to the table ... there are more five to 10 thousand dollar anonymous donations than corporate donations."

Big corporations may have tightened their charitable belts, but the tough times aren't all bad. Community spirit and local support is at an all-time high.

"There's a strong commitment to the community – more sausage sizzles to raise smaller amounts," Chris says.

"People are now looking in their own backyard ... schools, local businesses, families ..." Lisa says.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is trying to find the resources to keep up with demand. At SunnyKids, Chris has seen a significant increase in the rate of homelessness and people seeking refuge, which puts a strain on already stretched workers.

"We've gone from four paid staff to 10 volunteers. It means longer hours ... more stress ... it's not good for their own well-being," Chris says.

With a brake on corporate donations and over-worked teams, Chris says there'll have to be a lot of philanthropy and sponsoring to get through the next three years.

It's wonderful that the world is becoming more charitable, or perhaps it's simply a growing trend? Nevertheless, greater awareness for issues has seen the birth of nearly every day or week, or at least every month, dedicated to some sort or cause (there's even a day to celebrate volunteers internationally on December 5). I wonder if it's difficult for local organisations to compete?

Lisa says it can be a challenge getting your voice heard over other organisations but to get the job done, there's a lot of emotional passion involved.

"You really need to push people's buttons," she says.

Karen adds, "You need to be bigger and louder to get the job out there."

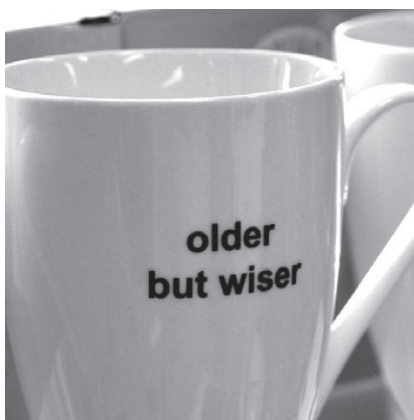
It's no secret that the media plays a huge role in boosting public profile, but like any business, savvy marketing is key. And while famous sportspeople and celebrity ambassadors add glamour to a foundation, local community leaders are just as encouraging.

"Draw cards are hard but it just means you have to be more convincing. Community leaders get out there and encourage people to hold events," Lisa says.

And with events an essential source of revenue, there is no shortage of them all year round. And people love to be entertained. Take, for example, Dancing With The



CHRIS TURPIN



FIONA CHRISTIE

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KAREN VON HOMEYER



LISA ROWE

Stars on the Sunshine Coast, featuring a host of local celebs such as Channel Seven’s Yvonne Sampson. The Sunshine Coast Hear and Say Centre is the beneficiary.

“You have to give the community something for their money,” Elizabeth says.

Elizabeth says students at Immanuel Lutheran College try to come up with new ideas all the time. Cake stalls and variety nights raise money for a myriad of organisations, at home and overseas. This year in conjunction with Interact and Rotary, they’ve raised money for Down Syndrome children in Burma.

But Chris says it’s more than just campaigning for financial and hands-on support.

“It’s about building relationships and partnerships with the community.”

A thought echoed throughout the group. “The whole agenda is about engaging public issues,” he adds.

But a successful business is a multi-faceted operation and charities are no exception. Promoting education and raising awareness are just as important as fundraisers.

SunnyKids temporarily accommodates the homeless, but also offers a range of services including programs aimed at getting people back on their feet – getting a job, managing responsibilities and breaking a pattern that’s been handed down through generations.

The incidence of homelessness and domestic violence has escalated and tough economic times have only the condensed the problem. Chris says 10 to 15 families are turned away every month because there’s simply no room. SunnyKids also provides a safe-haven for victims of abuse, sometimes from interstate.

“There are horror stories every day,” Chris says. Understandably, police and security guards are often involved. There are times when it’s scary – we’ve had threats and organised crime stoke the place out.”

For safety reasons, some identities need to be kept secret. As such, the location of SunnyKids isn’t advertised.

But there are plenty of positives as well.

“Eighty five percent of people from the refuge don’t return to the home they left. Some work hard to break the cycle, others struggle to get set up and end up coming back,” Chris adds.

A lot of us may think donations get consumed in administrative costs, but the group is quick to point out that’s a fable – only a minor portion goes to running costs. Charity workers are grossly unappreciated when it comes to hours and pay.

“About 80 cents in the dollar goes to the child, the rest goes to running costs,” Karen says.

Lisa says The Sunshine Coast Health Foundation is fortunate to have a car park scheme. Staff and visitors now have to pay for parking, with all proceeds directly benefiting patients.

“Every dollar from that goes to the hospital. It’s a small price to pay to help a sick child or cancer sufferer.”

Chris admits there are challenges.

“People sense the government should be doing something so they’re reluctant to help but that doesn’t address any needs. People want to know how the dollar helps homeless kids – it costs \$27 to house a child for a night – that covers a bed and clinical needs.”

Charity work is far from a normal job. There’s no such thing as nine to five. With families of their own, time management and multi-tasking skills are essential. But driven by passion and rewarded with smiles, it’s more about dedication and commitment than being overworked and underpaid.

Karen agrees, “You wouldn’t be in it if you couldn’t handle the demand. There are some events where the whole family is involved – but that’s the passion you bring to make it work.”

Lisa says there’s guilt and gratitude.

“Sometimes you’re feeling like whinging about the hours but then you look around and the volunteers are still

there. You have to be aware that people do things for the love of a cause.”

Karen adds, “You have to find a balance so you don’t perspective.”

Chris, who once scheduled time for his children in a diary, says sometimes it can be all too consuming but it’s about setting boundaries and quality of time.

“Finding a balance with your own family is paramount. How can you run your own charity for kids when you don’t have enough time for your own? You have to make sure you have that time.”

So next time you think ‘there’s always someone worse off’, take the time to appreciate not only what we have, but the wonderful people who selflessly devote their time to others that aren’t able to enjoy life’s simple pleasures – things that we all too often take for granted. ■

i HOW TO COOK

Profile magazine’s guests enjoyed freshly baked scones and a refreshing selection of teas. There’s a whole lot more on offer than that though; How to Cook doubles as a home-wares shop, boasting the very best in culinary necessities including plenty of fine knife sets for the keenest chef. But wait there’s more! The ‘Kitchen and Food Emporium’ offers a range of homemade goodies and mouth-watering treats, and gourmet wannabe’s can take cooking lessons on site.

If you think you need to brush up on a few skills, learn some new ones, or just have a good old cuppa (in fine china mind you) head down to How To Cook in Cotton Tree.

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