

The voice of a. generation

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LYDIA FAIRHALL, PRACTICE COORDINATOR WITH LOCAL CHARITY SUNNYKIDS, HAS BEEN ON A JOURNEY; A JOURNEY TO DISCOVER A LITTLE MORE ABOUT HERSELF AND HER OWN HERITAGE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HELPING THOSE LESS FORTUNATE WHO STRUGGLE THROUGH EACH DAY. AS LAUREN O'CONNOR DISCOVERED, LYDIA HAS A GIVING HEART AND A GENEROUS SOUL.

LYDIA FAIRHALL

The tranquil residence of Lydia Fairhall and her family, perched on the heights of Eudlo in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, offers soaring views of the surrounding bushland. The property possesses a large communal vegetable patch and the communal living arrangements seem to suit Lydia's sense of extended family. Her family's newly acquired addition, eight-week-old Bumble Bee, a small, dark, fluffy puppy with teeth as sharp as needles, is happily developing his new habit of chewing feet and hands, as we sit outside with a cup of tea and "have a yarn up", as Lydia likes to tell it.

Lydia is the practice coordinator for SunnyKids, an organisation on the Sunshine Coast that strives to help families and young people facing difficult circumstances and situations. Starting off as a key worker for SunnyKids, Lydia now oversees the delivery of Najidah, which looks after domestic violence crisis accommodation, Head High, a youth suicide bereavement program, SCIPS (Supporting Children in Primary Schools) and the Indigenous Unit.

In recognition of her hard work, Lydia recently attended the Indigenous World Leaders Summit in New York. The summit was part of a much larger forum, the Indigenous World Leaders Forum, with only 10 Aboriginal people across Australia invited to attend. Interestingly, this was Lydia's first time overseas. I met with Lydia not long before her trip.

The Indigenous World Leaders Summit "taps into the whole globalisation, from below theory. So many other indigenous people from around the world coming together is a huge opportunity to hear about their problems on a global scale." One of the largest conventions to take place in the United States, Lydia is grateful for the chance she has been given to attend.

"The networking experience this summit is going to expose me to is going to be invaluable. Some of the people speaking are people I've been referencing in my writing for years, so even just the opportunity to be in their presence and to be around those minds will be incredible. Also being able to link what we do at SunnyKids on a global level and finding out what is and what isn't working where will hopefully mean me coming back with a whole new set of guiding principles that will invigorate us and help us to improve our own services."

The Indigenous unit at SunnyKids is a department Lydia holds close to her heart. "It's about cultural renewal as well," she explains. "It could be important for us to help someone find a house, but it could also be just as important to help someone find their cultural reconnection and identity, and help them to learn more about who they are. Hopefully they can use that as their platform of power and strength to face some of the challenges these people come across."

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For Lydia, finding her personal identity and connecting with her Aboriginal culture has been largely due to her music, which "has helped me to come to terms with it and helped me to understand it. I definitely write about indigenous and Aboriginal issues, maybe once or twice a week. My mum is Aboriginal and my dad isn't, and I went through a bit of a stage where I didn't know where to align myself or if I had a right to."

"There are people who have a longer, deeper connection, whereas mine has been very much fragmented, and that's because there is a stolen generation in my family. When I learnt more about that I realised I did have a right to make a claim because I felt it in my heart, and I feel a real empathy too."

Lydia's four-year-old son, Araluen, is certainly aware of social and community issues. Asked how she explains her job to him, Lydia says she explains it "as helping people who don't have anywhere to live, and I leave it at that".

"Araluen knows that this isn't what everyone has," Lydia says as she looks around and takes in the beautiful scenery and peacefulness of their home. "Being a working mum – it's a huge juggling act. It's very interesting, you know, because you want to keep it nice and cosy on the home front but at the same time keep up with everything that is progressing with work and SunnyKids."

"I'm really grateful that Araluen can actually, from a distance, be exposed to what it is to be human for a lot of people in this world, and that the materialistic things of this day and age aren't all what life is about – and that means so much more than having the latest fad toy."

Lydia has a Bachelor in Social Services, majoring in community development, which she completed at the University of the Sunshine Coast. It was pretty much set in stone that Lydia was going to go to India to work in international community aid, and then two things happened. Araluen was born. The other side was that, "I was starting to learn a lot more about what was happening here on a much more local level in Australia. Through that I started to feel and become more and more connected with my Aboriginal culture."

Describing the Sunshine Coast as, "... transient and quite beige at times", Lydia believes everyone can benefit from a summit such as the Indigenous World Leaders Summit. "Some people would think that there aren't even homeless people on the Sunshine Coast, and it can all be swept under the carpet too easily sometimes."

Let's anticipate that on Lydia's return, we can all share in the wealth of knowledge and experience of a global network that strives to overcome those difficulties others shouldn't have to face. ■