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# Community Innovations Showcase

Presentations by

**Denis Ginnivan, Elise Magrath,  
Anita McCurdy and Madeline Price**

Hosted by

**Brett de Hoedt**

Communities in Control Conference  
Melbourne, Monday, May 20, 2019

Video and audio versions of this speech are available at  
[www.communitiesincontrol.com.au](http://www.communitiesincontrol.com.au)

## About the presentation:

Who builds stronger communities? The community!  
Sometimes, the best advice you can get is from your peers:  
someone who's been there, done that, and knows what works.  
Hear the unique and interesting ways your peers are helping to  
build stronger communities

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## Brett de Hoedt

If you're wondering who the hell I am, my name is Brett de Hoedt and I'm about to facilitate for you a Community Innovation Showcase. Can I please ask you to welcome our four panellists - though they've done nothing to justify it so far - as they make their way to the stage? Come forth, panellists.

Welcome to Communities in Control 2019, the first Communities in Control Conference of the Morrisonian era (accept it, folks, the election has been run). How was your weekend, lefties?

I've been a part of the Communities in Control conferences since day one. It's a great honour and a pleasure and a privilege, and I usually take this opportunity to wax lyrical about how much Communities in Control means to me, means to conference goers, and means to the community. I thought that this year, given the results of last weekend's election, I'd just wax Morrisonian and simply say, "*How good is this conference?*" – and, furthermore, "*Go Sharks.*" I have no idea what any of that means, I'm just pleased to be out of the Canberra bubble. Am I right? Am I right?

That word 'innovation' - good lord, I lived most of my childhood *and* my 20s and my 30s without ever hearing it, but now it's thrown around like so much confetti. And what does it mean to us in the community sector? And by us, I mean you (I'm a yuppie consultant).

What does innovation mean? Is it all open plan offices and Slack chats? For me, it's adopting high technology (fun fact, I'm appearing before you via hologram). Yes, I'm a contemporary person. But does it mean breaking down those silos, which used just to store grain but now mean so much more? Can we identify underserved audiences? Can we measure and evaluate? I don't know - but these people do, because they're all innovators in their own way, shape or form, and that's why we're going to hear from them.

You'll hear a little bit from each of them each, just a teaser, and then we'll take questions from me (and the floor, of course). As always, my hot tip for the Communities in Control Conference is get your hands high in the air early because once it starts, it's like a tsunami of curiosity (also

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note that no one at Communities in Control actually asks a question, they're really only interested in making a comment. This ain't my first rodeo). We're going to meet Elise, we're going to meet Anita, we're going to meet Madeline, but first of all Denis Ginnivan, who had a terrific weekend because he is part of Voices for Indi, who won their seat.

Denis is part of the resistance that believes in a participatory democracy. Yes, of course, he'll be crushed, but before the inevitable happens we've got him on stage. He's a man who's devoted his working life and beyond-working-life to rural and regional communities. Are there any rural and or regional folk in the room? Make some noise! Welcome to our metropolis! Denis was in at the very start of Voices for Indi in 2012. He's worked in agricultural economics facilitation, mediation, social work, and rural financial counselling as well (that's a big thing). He also wants to have the beautiful town of Yackandandah to be powered exclusively by renewable energy. Is this right?

### **Denis Ginnivan**

It is right.

### **Brett de Hoedt**

Oh, you're living the dream. Denis also wants you to know that Voices for Indi is more than just deciding who the hell represents that part of the world. Right now, of course, it's Helen Haines. As you probably already know this is the first time in Australian political history where one independent member of parliament has handed over to another independent member of parliament. And if it's one thing they've got folks, it's merch - have a look at that merch in the back there.

Denis, I'll ask you to take to the lectern and share with us some of your wisdom and your innovations. Please make him very welcome, Denis Ginnivan.

### **Denis Ginnivan**

Thanks very much, Brett. I don't know what to say.

### **Brett de Hoedt**

“We won”?

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## Denis Ginnivan

I want to start off with a bit of a summary of what Voices for Indi is, and what the campaign is. They're separate entities, but they're related.

Voices for Indi started in 2012. Its kickoff was related to the theme that we've been speaking about today - getting angry, but then getting organised. Back then in 2012, a lot of people were starting to feel quite strongly about the way they were being represented by the federal member at the time. Mind you, it's easy to get angry at someone for not doing what it is you think they should be doing; the other side of the coin was that I realised I'd been asleep at my own democratic wheel. I hadn't done what I should have been doing to step up. And for a number of people, that was the issue.

Voices for Indi formed in 2012. It gathered around the issues of "How can we improve community participation, and democracy, and civic engagement? How can we bring up a good idea from the grassroots up, rather than the party down?" I'll abbreviate the process, but one of the key things that we decided to do was run kitchen table conversations (it doesn't have to be in a kitchen - it can be in a pub (though in that case you'd have to start pretty early in the evening) or anywhere else you can get ten to twelve people together to start talking about your representation, your community, and what you want to do about your community into the future. We captured and documented all the comments from about 550 people and put that into a report. Coming up to the 2013 election we gave a copy of that report to each candidate. We discovered that the then federal member didn't think that as very important - she claimed that she already knew what everyone in Indi thought.

We decided to stand an independent candidate for the federal election in 2013. And Cathy McGowan, who many of you I'm sure will be aware of, was elected and has been an independent federal member for the last six years. Cathy has made a substantial contribution not only in representing our community, but also in the national public debate.

We've done other things like bringing speakers to the region to encourage people to get involved in democratic processes. Last year we ran a

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workshop called Getting Elected to Represent Your Community - which we thought was a pretty good by-line - as opposed to getting elected to represent your own career. We wanted anyone standing for parliament to have a sense of accountability and responsibility. We wanted them to see what it is the job is, that they're a servant of the people. That's not say that the community wants to dominate, but rather that we need to step up to make sure that that there's a healthy interaction - an, agreement between the community and its representative so that what they take to Canberra is what the community is saying to them, to your representative.

We had about 80 people attend that workshop, quite a few people who were aspiring to become a politician or were supporting somebody else to stand for offices. We had a wide range of speakers around a whole lot of topics like ethics, marketing, campaigning – a whole gamut of the elements that are involved in standing for parliament. One of them, for example, was about the politician's partner. What does it mean to a spouse, to a partner, to have politics break into your world?

After six years, Cathy announced late last year that she was retiring—well, we'd known that could happen. What Voices for Indi did was run a process to find a replacement – a candidate who would take over and carry the idea of community representative politics into the next election. And the long and short was that Helen Haines was selected as our candidate. We've just run the campaign, and on Saturday night we had a celebration party called Indi Counts - and it does count. I'm still recovering from the party. It was a great night.

The threads that I wanted to draw out of all this - I hope you're picking them up, and perhaps we can do more in the questions – are innovation and community, and how those two words can intercept. We've done that through the democratic political representation and engagement side of it, but then we ran a campaign. It's been going on since February, and finished on the weekend. We had 750 volunteers signed up for this campaign. All of them had to sign up with their name and address or postcode, which we put into a database. But before they did that, we told them “We'll only let you sign once you've read the value statement that you're signing up for.”



That meant that anyone who signed up, and anyone who was walking around Indi in an orange t-shirt, had already committed to a set of values about how we were going to run the campaign and what it was to hold true to that. You had confidence in the strangers you were working with, because you knew that they'd done the same thing. There was a potential for accountability, too, although actually we didn't have to pull anybody into line through the campaign -it was a well-behaved and focused and positive and optimistic campaign, despite the challenges, and despite the fact that Helen, as the new candidate, wasn't as well-known as Cathy had been. And as we said earlier, it's the first time in Australian history that there have been two independent candidates elected back-to-back.

These are some of the threads where innovation and community come together. One thing, as a matter of fact, was that we cut about 800 cockatoos - these little guys - out of pre-used corflutes, repurposed and repainted in campaign colours. The cockatoo evokes the idea of a whole lot of people getting together - what I call squawking and talking - in a collective, in a rural setting. If you didn't want to have a sign on your house, or if you didn't want to have a difficult conversation about who you were supporting, then you could just hang one of these on your mailbox, on your fence, in a tree, or wherever. It became evocative of a whole lot more than just a piece of corflute with orange paint on it. It became a badge of who you were in this campaign. So now they're all over the place - I don't know how we're going to clear them off landscape up of them, actually, but it was such a lot of fun mucking around with that sort of stuff. Orange socks, orange jewellery, orange scarves - I can see a little bit of orange in the room over here - it was a good-spirited campaign, but orange and colour were a big part of it.

We had funny-looking vehicles running around that in a way disarmed the intensity of politics, because it meant that people didn't have to be all, "Oh, it's the bloody left and it's the bloody right, and they hate each other's guts". It was more like goodwill, a celebration of democracy. We tried to have that Michelle Obama phrase as our campaign theme – "When they go low, we go high". What that phrase did was evoke that idea that we were going to be above the usual style of politics. We were



going to be on our best behaviour, to make democracy fun, to get people involved, and to have them enjoy it. Thank you very much.

### **Brett de Hoedt**

What a shame that you didn't have time to talk about Voices for Indi's phase two purpose, which is taking control of the local water supply. No orange cockatoo on your letterbox, no showers for you.

Now Elise Magrath joins us from Cootamundra. Who knows where Cootamundra is? New South Wales, on the Riverina. Who knows an oft-quoted fun fact about Cootamundra? It's the birthplace of Sir Donald Bradman. It's also renowned for its Wattle Festival and, more recently, for its passionate embrace of the arts, thanks to Elise Magrath, who is the cultural development officer of the Arts Centre in Cootamundra. We're about to watch a video highlighting one very exciting project which brings together people with disabilities and without disabilities, under the guise of arts but in fact for something far greater: the value of relationships. Please make Elise Magrath very welcome.

### **Elise Magrath**

[Video]

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's really hard to follow on after all those beautiful young people. It's a great pleasure to join you today from Cootamundra and to talk about the creative arts and how empowering it can be. But the call to action for the panellists is "What are the transferrable lessons?" I know many of you work at the grassroots and work in communities, and not always on arts projects. One of the key things I think about as a cultural development officer is the power of a long-term vision. For each and every one of us, our community may not see that vision yet, but before we can take the steps to reach that vision you have to hold it in your mind's eye.

A little bit of context information about Cootamundra, to give you a sense of why that project was so valuable. We are a community of 5,500 people in a rural town. Of the participants you saw on the video, approximately 50% live with disability, identify with disability, and 50% come from fairly mainstream settings. We are still a town that has segregated

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settings, so there still is a day program and a special school. There's a phrase in inclusion education, "We need to learn together to learn to live together." If I can say anything about this project that's transferrable, it's about relationships and about relationships in community.

A very inspiring arts worker from Victoria called Jade Lillie has a project called The Relationship is the Project, and I think she's spot on. Good relationships (and earlier today we had a number of speakers who spoke to us about that) are fundamental to our sense of belonging. A number of the young people that we worked with were different in some way. When you're different in some way, especially in a regional town, you're at risk of being marginalised and of not feeling a sense of belonging. One of the great experiences for me, as a program manager with this project, was working through the project over that whole 18-month period, where the arts team Murmuration Arts came back and worked with us and developed the depth of the relationship over time. It definitely affected the levels of trust and connectedness within the group.

The universal theme really is empowerment. Capacity-building projects in community are liberating for individuals. The skills that they learn, whether it's through a creative arts process or another facilitated community engagement program, stay with them and go with them into the world. The theme of today is getting angry and getting organised and capacity-building is a great way of sowing the future seeds of the kind of vision for our community that we want to see.

Here I must pay tribute to Sarah-Vyne Vassallo. Something you may not know about Denis Moriarty is that he's actually a Churchill fellow. Luckily, Sarah-Vyne Vassallo, who is the artistic director for Murmuration, is also a Churchill fellow. She'd had a period of her time overseas to look at arts and disability dance, and we were so fortunate to have our skills come to our rural country town and to have her inclusive team come and work with us. In terms of skill development, the one negative thing I'll say about regional towns is we find it difficult to sustain permanent infrastructure in the long term, but project work is definitely a way in. Even if you live in a town of 500 people, you can bring a group of resources together for a temporary period of time and do



a capacity-building project, and then the legacy will be magnified from that event.

The other thing to realise is that the Arts Centre itself is a multipurpose project. It came out of a decade-long volunteer project. We are the ultimate community that said to its council, “We want an arts centre.” So a group of volunteers spent a decade renovating that Arts Centre. It's a multipurpose centre. It has a visual arts studio, a 120-seat theatre, film infrastructure, and a sprung floor for dance. The great thing about this project is it actually activated our space in all those ways. We had visual arts, we had music, we had dance, and theatre, and music, and we used our exhibition space as well. It really dovetailed nicely. It tied in with the resources we had, it brought amazing skills to town, and it activated the skills within our own young people.

If you're working on project work, I'd also like to stress the power of legacy, the power of documenting your project really well. I honestly think that a big reason I'm here today talking to you is the power of that video. Those young people can speak so much more eloquently than I can about what they got out of this project. And the other thing I feel very passionately about is mentorship. This is a new generation of young people. During that project we mentored three young people - three emerging young artists. And I'm really proud to say mentee one is now employed at a regional arts centre, mentee two has now upped his capacities to be involved with more community theatre work, and the third mentee, who was very unconfident and didn't have a lot of belief in herself, is a young lady living with disability who now has open employment in a full-time job in our community. Those outcomes are a great legacy to take out of this project.

I'm looking forward to some questions, because I think relationships are a really powerful tool. If we want to build the communities of the future, authentic face-to-face relationships are where we're going to do a lot of that great work. Thank you.

### Brett de Hoedt

How good is Elise? Right, I'm going to keep using that material – that's



quality, A-list stuff. Now we move on. Anita McCurdy, who will be presenting right here, manages the program called Education First Youth Foyer for Berry Street. I've had the pleasure of working with some of your colleagues here in Richmond. I've worked with 900-plus non profits over 20 years. I'm not just saying this because you're on stage. I haven't met a more devoted, passionate and pragmatic group of top-level managers at any organisation. I've met many of the young people with whom you worked, in the Y-Change program in particular. They are essentially seeding the next generation of leaders, not just to take a place in the economy but to change the goddamn system. I love your slogan, "We Never Give Up." That's pretty fundamental, isn't it? I love that.

Anita, on a more personal note, you have been described to me as a powerhouse social worker. You know that old joke - how many social workers does it take to change a lightbulb? One, but the lightbulb has got to want to change. Well, with Anita, the light bulb changes whether it bloody well wants to or not. And that assessment of your skills has been confirmed just this week. I know this will make you a bit uncomfortable, but the College of Social Work has declared Anita Australia's number one ranked social worker for 2019. Round of applause, please folks.

Not really, no. Do you really think they're ranking social workers? Don't be so manipulable. That's not even a word. Actually, you know it's not a bad idea, I've got to talk to this new government about that. Ladies and gentlemen, to talk about this idea that puts roofs over young people's heads and stability underneath them, please make Anita very welcome.

### **Anita McCurdy**

I was actually half excited at the thought that anyone could get recognised for something like that.

As we all know, I've been around for over 20 years in the youth sector in Shepparton. So all those that work with the adolescents, and the naughty teenagers, and the ones that aren't going to get anywhere, hi to you all, and it's very difficult work at times.

We've got a partnership in Shepparton. We're the third Education First Youth Foyer. It was funded in Victoria. We started in 2016, and I was

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hired, and recruited the team, before the building was ready. It was a very interesting time. What the building entails is 40 bedrooms for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. That's where our partnership comes in. Berry Street is the support part, Beyond Housing is the tenancy and maintenance for the building, thank goodness, because as you could imagine in 40 units after two years a lot of maintenance happens along the way. I don't have to worry about that, but I do have to worry about the Education First part, which is that the young people are attending school. and that's our number one part.

Yes, it's an absolutely amazing job, a dream job, after 20 years of working in the out-of-home-care sector, and in refuge, where all we focused on was problems. It was problem this, problem that, they've come from this, they've come from that, and it was very taxing on our teams and very taxing on us (working for not much money, either: I just thought I'd pop that in). The building there is actually in Shepparton's CBD. The Brotherhood of St Laurence had opened another two with Launch Housing in the city, and we were the first regional agency to come aboard, which was pretty amazing. Great timing, too, because Shepparton already had things happening at the grassroots, with lots of initiatives in the youth sector and in the business sector.

The Committee for Greater Shepparton had been formed a few years before we came along. Youth was on their agenda, and it was about redefining what they could do for young people as well. Our sector was pretty much fragmented then (and it still is). Shepparton has lots of initiatives, because we're pretty high up there with our stats.

Unemployment, youth unemployment, low education rates, and teenage pregnancies, you name it, we're up there, we're on a par with Broadmeadows all the way. Basically, what's happened with this program is that we've been able to do a Certificate of Developing Independence. When the young people come in, forty of them, they have a self-contained room. And, touch wood, we've made the program about focusing on what their talents are, and their aspirations. The language we use is not around their deficits or their problems.



Yes, we have barriers, and we have some issues that we attend to if they arise, but it's actually about looking at them, working with them, listening to them, and valuing them as they are, in a bedroom that basically looks like a motel room. Place is a very important part of our model, because if you're in a place that looks great and you feel valued then you will look after that place. I've worked in refuge, and anyone that's worked in refuge will know that it's very difficult to respect a place that doesn't get much funding to get better with it. So this has been awesome.

In the Developing Independence Certificate we have six areas that have been researched to show that if we work with young people on this, this will help build their aspirations. Also, more importantly, the research shows that if they succeed and link to community and build social capital, they will succeed in their transition to adulthood, which I often refer to as adulting. We've had 120 young people come through the program over the two and a half - nearly three - years it's been running, and of those over 80 have graduated with their Certificate of Developing Independence, which is our link to GOTAFE.

It's really important with the Education First model that you are near a TAFE. They don't have to actually have their main full-time study or part-time study there, because they're linked into everywhere else as well, but one of the mandatories is they do this certificate. And during the certificate, they're very connected to the community. That's probably what we're talking about today, the innovation of getting community on board. This has been a vehicle to help us do that, because we don't have many tools in the youth sector to try to connect with community. You can talk and talk and talk, but to have something that's actually tangible and in front of us all the time is an awesome way of doing it. So there are some graduations there. We're also on Instagram and Facebook, so I'll shamelessly ask you to follow us, which would be great.

Education First obviously is the number one part of the program. The other one is employment, where we've got people coming in for industry nights. Because we're a bit of a hub, too, people come in and have their AGMs there, and the young people will cater for whatever's happening, so they've always got opportunities to link. The industry nights are great,



because that's led to mentoring as well with young people, getting them involved as well. Health and wellbeing is another area that's really important: we've got a basketball team, and at the moment we have a netball team as well. These young people wouldn't otherwise be linked into any of this stuff. The Development Independence Certificate has really helped that.

Civic participation is a huge element. This area is really important for Shepparton, because we do have lots of opportunities as well to help link the young people into those things. Young people who a month ago couldn't find anywhere to live are out volunteering to do different things. It's been amazing, and it's great to watch how much they enjoy that type of stuff. Social connections are a really important thing, especially with their family, and we're building some more resources around social connections to support whether or not they return to their family or whether they're actually just linking with the family. The community helps with that as well, through our mentoring program, to try and help them connect, so when they transition out they've got a fairly big social capital as well.

Housing and living is an obvious one. There's a young person out there who's cooked her first cake. I know that sounds really minimal, but to young people, that's huge. It was a very exciting day for her when she actually cooked something and it worked. The basic little things are really important for us to celebrate. Even though it seems minimal to others, it's really important for them. Our focus now is basically mentoring. This morning they were talking about how to focus on those positives and to actually build on things that you're doing well.

That's what our thing will be this year, to get businesses and mentoring a bit more tangible, and strengthening those connections so that we can keep them if any of us leave because, of course, teams change all the time and we don't want to lose the momentum that we have going. We're in the newspaper all the time. We were averaging once every two weeks for a little while, and I think we're nearly back up there again.



I think that's it. But follow us, if you want to, on Insta or Facebook. Thanks, everyone.

### Brett de Hoedt

How good is Anita? Right, okay. Madeline, prepare to take the lectern. There's something to be investigated here about how a small, excited, and suitably skilled bunch of volunteers working for nothing can often outperform paid professionals charged with the same task. I see that again and again and again.

Madeline Price is the founder and national director of the One Woman Project, which is 99% volunteer driven. It has a rather large mission - it promotes gender equality. Are you there yet, Madeline? Not quite. Well, any moment now!

They work across the country, and, indeed, somewhat internationally, too. They do a range of things – school-based workshops tackling the issue of gender equality, awareness campaigns, and the Brisbane Feminist Festival.

Are there Queenslanders here in the room? Make yourself known. By the way look, based on Saturday's election result, and inspired by Bob Hawke's response to Tiananmen Square, I am willing to offer you asylum here in Victoria. It seems the least I can do.

Anyway, the Brisbane Feminist Festival is another way to spruik the message, although this year there was an exciting development. They're moving to Townsville thanks to a corporate sponsorship with Adani, and it's going to be Adani New Feminists (For Coal) Festival. Keynote speakers Matthew Canavan and George Christenson, very exciting stuff. We've got be pragmatic, people, and Madeline is nothing if not. Ladies and gentlemen, please make Madeline very welcome.

### Madeline Price

When you said small team, I thought you were referencing the five-foot stature that I have right here. Can everyone see me?

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**Brett de Hoedt**  
She's there, honestly.

**Madeline Price**  
I could be a hologram as well, who knows?

Before I begin, I too would also like to start by acknowledging that we meet on stolen land where sovereignty was never seeded, and I would like to pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, some of whom might be in the room amongst us. Because my passion is gender equality and I work in that field, I'd also like to pay specific attention and respect to the unique challenges faced by First Nations women, trans, and non-binary individuals within contemporary Australian society.

I'm going to start today with a little bit of a story, and I would like to preface it by saying that I'm going to be talking about family, domestic, and sexual violence. And if at any time you do need to leave, you're more than welcome to, and if you need further resources after this point feel free to get in touch with me or with the relevant parties in your state.

Each year we visit thousands upon thousands of students to talk about issues of global gender and equality, and a significant portion of that is through our Rural Roadtrips initiative. Over the past few years we've engaged with about 7,500 young people through our Rural Roadtrips. At the end of last year I attended one of them. I grew up in a rural Queensland community. Does anyone know where Imbil is? Well, has anyone heard of Gympie? Yes, there we go. Gympie is quite well known, and about half an hour outside of Gympie is Imbil, and I grew up community on a beef cattle farm in this rural Queensland community, and so I'm very passionate about engaging with rural young people.

At the end of last year I was at a school - a couple of hours west of Toowoomba, for anyone who knows Queensland - and I'd just finished a workshop talking about gender roles and stereotypes and consent and healthy relationships and leadership and all of the things you can fit into a couple of hours with a group of students. At the end of this workshop this young girl came up to me with tears in her eyes. Before I could comfort her, she wrapped me with her tiny arms in a massive hug and said,

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“Thank you. Thank you for talking to me about issues of gender and equality. Thank you for talking to my peers about issues of gender and equality.” Then she told me her story.

She'd experienced sexual violence in her own community, and she'd done the really incredibly brave thing of taking it to the local authorities and seeing it through the court system. Through the whole of that year's long process, no one until that moment had ever spoken to her about the concept of retraumatisation. Of how a sight or a smell or a sound could bring back the memories of the violence that she had endured. No one had ever spoken to her about revictimization. About the fact that the chance of her experiencing this type of violence was heightened in the future. No one had ever spoken to her about managing strategies for when, at the local store, she saw her perpetrator or her perpetrator's family. Or what to do and how to speak to her friends and her family about those triggers, those sights and smells and sounds that could make her relive the experiences. And no one, until that moment, had ever spoken to her or her peers about consent or healthy relationships or the entrenched gender roles and stereotypes that underpin absolutely everything we see within this space.

She was 13. She'd been through the court system, she'd experienced sexual violence, but she still didn't really understand what it all meant and how it impacted her. Now I grew up in a rural community, as I've mentioned, and I've seen firsthand the entrenched gender roles and stereotypes that we have in rural, regional and remote Australia (and, of course, in our metropolitan counterparts). I've seen the increased statistics and the heightened possibilities of violence for women, trans and non-binary individuals within our rural, regional and remote communities, compared to their metropolitan counterparts. I've also seen the distinct divide in the education and extracurricular opportunities available for our rural communities as opposed to our metropolitan communities, particularly around issues of social justice, gender-based violence, gender justice, and climate change. Anything under the spectrum.

What wasn't surprising, for me, was her story. We've been to a ton of rural communities where we'd had the exact same stories coming from



the young people within them. What was a little bit surprising was that afterwards she came up to me and said, “It was easier to talk to you, because you’re young.” Now, granted, I turned 26 this year, so at this point last year I was a good decade and a bit older than her, but that simple statement, “It was easier to talk to you because you are young,” was one that really stuck with me. I’ve heard it before, but usually not from students. Usually I hear it from teachers, who say that the sole reason to contact us to talk about issues of gender roles and stereotypes, or leadership, or violence, or whatever it happens to be, is because they want their young people to hear it from fellow young people. Or I hear it from principals who have got us in to talk at their school leadership conferences to demonstrate the power and passion of young leaders in skills and experience. On occasion, though, I do hear it from students who say that the sole reason they bothered to listen that day was because someone who looked like them was facilitating the discussion.

Now in the light of that, all of you in the room, I want you to raise your hand if you work with young people either as beneficiaries or supporters, if they’re part of your organisations, if you do anything with young people in your community organisations. Awesome, there are a fair few of us in the room, fantastic. Now I want you to raise your hand if your organisation works with young people **and** you yourself or anyone on your senior leadership team is under the age of 30. Yeah, a couple of people. Anyone under the age of 20? I promise this will be over soon. Now I want you to raise your hand if you work with young people and you actively use your resources, your time, your energy, your money, and your people power recruiting paid staff and volunteers under the age of 20. A couple of people, that’s fantastic. Everyone else who works with young people, however, we’re going to have a chat.

I work in an organisation that is, fun fact, 100% volunteer led and 100% youth led. We have 40 young people who run absolutely everything that we do, from our Rural Roadtrips to our other education programs in schools, to the Brisbane Feminist Festival, to our other events, our campaigns, our corporate engagement. Everything that we do is run by young people because we believe in young people leading people. If we’re going to have a program that’s designed to educate young people



about global gender and equality, they shouldn't just have a seat at the decision-making table, they should be building up the skills and experience and knowledge to be leading their fellow peers.

A really good example is our current national director of people in culture (head of our HR), a fantastic young woman called Linden. She started with the organisation a few years ago as a high school intern, moved into managing our high school intern program, and at the ripe old age of 22 took over as head of HR for the entire organisation. She manages the recruitment and the professional development and the welfare of our 40 plus team members across our national and international locations. In the organisation, our youngest volunteer is part of our high school ambassador program and clocks in at the ripe old age of 12, because no other organisation would give her an opportunity to volunteer. Our oldest volunteer is going to hit 31 this year, so aging out of the organisation very quickly. And the purpose behind this is that we want young people leading other young people.

I get to talk about young people a lot, and I get to read a lot of research about engaging young people in organisations, or in communities, or in groups, or just in society, and I came across a really interesting study from the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. In 2015 they released a report that basically said, "Young people are volunteering in these spaces, and we've got half a million young people in Australia between 15 and 24 who are currently engaged in their local communities. And 55.6 per cent of young people aged 12 to 24 volunteer in an informal or formal capacity each week." Hidden amongst that, though, was this tiny nugget of wisdom about why young people don't volunteer.

Young people don't volunteer with organisations that are boring or poorly organised. Boring and poorly organised... look around the room, do any of us look boring and poorly organised? I hope not. But it really got me thinking. For young people, what does 'boring and poorly organised' actually look like? I did some digging and had some conversations. I had to, because we ourselves have never had any problems recruiting young people to participate in a youth-led movement. They keep flying to us, and we keep finding little places to put them and build their skills. But



it's true - when it comes to the purpose-driven not-for profit social enterprise sector, the perception of the wider community is that we're boring and poorly organised.

For young people, 'boring and poorly organised' means allocating roles without set responsibilities or a predetermined position description. 'Boring and poorly organised' means roles that are said to require years upon years of experience in a skill set that could actually be learnt by or taught to anybody. 'Boring and poorly organised' means roles that have no social impact, where they can't see the tangible impact of what they're doing. 'Boring and poorly organised' are roles in organisations that don't provide training or up-skilling opportunities or peer-to-peer mentoring for their young people, that don't provide reward and recognition for everyone involved in the journey. They're roles with little to no flexibility in organisations that say they're striving to promote diversity but are really stuck in our old ways.

At the One Woman Project for instance, we pride ourselves on the fact that 80% of our roles can be done remotely, and they are done remotely. Not only does that allow us to reach diverse young people across a broader geographic location, it also gives those opportunities to those who might have chronic illness or disability or mental health concerns, or those who might be from a low socioeconomic background and can't afford the travel costs to participate in in-person meetings in their local capital city, or culturally and linguistically diverse young people who are more subject to community and family responsibilities preventing them from engaging in after-hours meetings. That flexibility has literally changed the group of young people we work with and the access we can have to them.

Now, when you first heard the words 'boring and poorly organised,' did a couple of organisational names spring to mind? Did you think and you're like "Oh yeah, I know exactly which organisations those young people are thinking about". But have you ever thought that they might be thinking about *your* organisation? That the roles or responsibilities that you're portraying on your website are what's preventing young people from participating, or that the lack of flexibility may be pushing away a



diverse young person who's really passionate, can't make it to that particular location at that exact time, but could participate in an equally valuable way?

If you're one of those organisations that immediately thought "I know which organisations are boring and poorly organised - *but it's not me*", and are now suddenly reflecting "Ooh, it might be me, oops", I set you this challenge (particularly if you're an organisation that engages with young people as supporters and beneficiaries and as community members). Take one single step when you go back to the workplace on Wednesday to make yourselves not boring and poorly organised, and watch as the flood of young people come in. I'm passionate about young people because our future is our young people and I can't wait to see what they create. Thanks.

### Brett de Hoedt

How good is Madeline? There is nothing older people like more than being told that they're underperforming by someone younger than them. I don't fall into that trap. I'm in the middle ground, late 30s. What's funny about that?

ENDS

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