



Humans of Armadale





Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Noongar people past and present, the traditional owners and custodians of this land on which we gather.

It is a privilege to be standing here on Noongar Boodja (land) in this country we all live in and share.

Thank you

The City of Armadale acknowledges the contribution and input of the individuals, groups and organisations within the community, in the invaluable preparation of this Humans of Armadale Project. We hope you are inspired and touched by their stories.

Humans of Armadale aims to reflect **real local stories** that individuals can relate to, and be inspired by.

One of the aims of this project is to allow people to share their own story in the hopes it will make a positive impact on someone else.

Celebrating our unique stories, as well as our common interests, is an ongoing discovery that helps unite and educate us as we understand other's perspectives, experiences and journeys.

We hope you are inspired and touched by their stories, in their own words.



Who do we

Tholla Chan..... Page 6

It is dedicated to life, human consciousness and the People of Cambodia, New Zealand and Australia.

Tesfay Wereta..... Page 9

I want to encourage people to dream big and to work hard. Anything can be achieved if you put your mind to it. Take it from me.

Sydney Fillips..... Page 12

I want people to know that there is a way out of the mire if you find the right guidance and support. That's what we do at JAK Films - inspire, include and collaborate to share stories and teach the soft skills necessary to navigate life.

Steve Parry Page 15

Anybody who wants to be part of the community and do some volunteer work.

Savitha Dasgaonker..... Page 18

Any person who wants to make their dream of relocating in a different country where everything is different; language, culture, systems, and processes, but the only bond is humanity and acceptance.

Saravanan TK..... Page 21

Young generations and anyone with "Winners never quit, and quitters never win" attitude to achieve their dreams.

Matthew Zaffino..... Page 24

Everyone in a similar position as myself that can make a change.

Manveer Singh..... Page 26

Multicultural and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Luul Ibrahim..... Page 29

Leaders and ordering people who want to change the world, for the better. And those who have been through a lot, never give up there is always hope in humanity.

Lisa Lucille Watson..... Page 32

To anyone who has left their home to start in a new place and has struggled with achieving their dreams, it's never too late to start. To my home Africa, we may have left, but Africa has not left our hearts.

aim to inspire?

Kuda Ndlovu..... Page 35

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) youth, migrants, and creatives.

Kerri Colegate..... Page 38

Our group seeks to inspire and support other Aboriginal people with a disability to become eligible for an NDIS package, use their rights of choice of control in the design of their plans, and in the selection of service providers.

Keishae Johns..... Page 41

Single mothers or dads, because there's always light at the end of the tunnel.

Julie Fearn Pheasant..... Page 43

I have been a teacher of young people for over twenty five years. Finding their abilities and talent has given them their reason and path in life.

Jodie Clarke..... Page 46

The community in Armadale, people who attend the Champion Centre, my three children (two amazing sons and a daughter who had the first Noongar Naming ceremony from my husband's family in 70 years) and two grandchildren.

Irene Mutune..... Page 49

My two sons, the Kenyan community in Western Australia, and all Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) immigrants.

Geoff Stewart..... Page 52

Young generations and anyone who aspires to achieve their dreams and never give up.

Emma Hirschmann..... Page 56

Anyone who suffers with a mental illness or struggles with accepting themselves. I want to help end the stigma around mental health and let people see it as a positive rather than a negative.

Astit Olszowy..... Page 59

The multicultural community.

Anthony Pyle..... Page 62

I'd like to inspire people to take on grass roots community development. I've been passionate about being the change I want to see within my community and connecting people together in whatever aspect of life.



THOLLA CHAN

My inner compass

THOLLA CHAN

How do I tell my life story that might inspire people who will read it? The first thought which came to mind as I sat down to write was “My Inner Compass.” Therefore, I decided to make it the title.

I remember reading an article about the “Inner Whisper” as early as my second year of primary school. This had awakened in me a deep sense of curiosity. I started observing that “Still Small Voice” within. It has become the most important thing I have ever learned in my life. It has helped guide my life in the right direction especially when it comes to making important decisions. It has become my Inner Compass.

At 13 I refused to get married as my mother had wished because I knew within myself that I was going to have my own career as a high school teacher instead of marrying one who was twelve years older than me. I became a high school teacher at 19 years old - I was lucky enough to have won a Colombo Plan Scholarship to go overseas in 1974. Winning this scholarship saved my life from the horrors of the wars in my home country. For more than three years I had to endure the agony of not knowing what happened to my family and whether they were alive or dead due to the Communist Government closing all the borders. I received the first letter from home in September 1979. I could not believe what I was reading - everyone survived.

In March 1980 I was able to go to work in the refugee camps to try and rescue my family. It took me nearly two years to complete the rescue operations. While working in the danger zone where the fighting could flare up any time during the rescue operations, I had to pay attention to this Still Small Voice to stay safe. I managed to successfully help all my family members to cross the border safely against all odds with the help of so many kind-hearted people. It was an incredible miracle when the impossible became possible.

In 1988 I had a strong urge from within to migrate to Perth with my nuclear family. We had two little pre-school children. It just did not make any sense to me. However, I decided to follow the direction given by my INNER COMPASS. After having been here for the last thirty-three years, I feel that it was the right thing for us to move from New Zealand to Perth at that time, although I had to do it with a heavy heart. Fortunately, everything has worked out extremely well for all of us. In 1990, my parents and some other members of the family decided to join us here which made life a lot more pleasant. My parents loved living here because of the warmer climate.

In Perth, I have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of so many people in my capacity as a volunteer in the leadership role. I have helped set up two Centres for this particular migrant community. In my case, I find it to be true that one can help oneself by helping other people.

I am pleased to say that my commitment to community development comes from a sense of deep gratitude for all the good things which I received in my life especially the Colombo Plan Scholarship which has opened new doors to wonderful possibilities for me and my whole family.

I feel so blessed to have been able to “take time to do what makes my soul happy.” I do not have many regrets in life because I have my good intentions to do the right things for myself and others.

As a parent, I have allowed my children to sing their “own songs” so to speak. I was there to support and guide where necessary.

I am proud to be who I am today because I have the good fortune of becoming aware of the Inner Compass early on in life. I believe I have lived life to the full and I continue to live boldly thanks to this awakening. Anyone can live with more ease once they have developed trust in this inner knowingness. I believe that everyone has access to this Still Small Voice or Inner Compass. It is a matter of becoming aware of it and having the courage to follow its direction. The Inner Compass can help make life and living more interesting and things can flow a lot better like a river that finds its path naturally to the ocean.



A close-up portrait of a man with a dark beard and mustache, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a black turtleneck sweater and a gold chain with a cross pendant. The background is blurred, showing wooden slats. The name 'TESFAY WERETA' is written in white capital letters on a black rectangular background at the bottom left.

TESFAY WERETA

It's always important to dream, and to dream big

TESFAY WERETA

I've always wanted to be a businessman. I've always wanted to be my own boss.

My mother had a coffee-producing business and ran her own café in a small town called Maichew, in Tigray. She had a smaller pop-up shop down the road from the café that she let me run from the age of 9. My mother was well ahead of her time in that town, and one of the hardest working women, while being a single mother of 4. She was big on education but encouraged us to always do something extra on the side. I've always wanted to make her proud and fulfill her dream of being successful. I guess she was when I think about it. My mother passed away when I was 12. I was young, but her impact and drive shaped me.

I moved to Australia with my three siblings when I was young, and faced the challenges that came with it. I graduated in year 12 in Melbourne but I never had the desire to continue my studies. I knew I wanted to work and I knew I had two dreams – to be a pro soccer player or to be a businessman for coffee. I was pretty good at soccer, one of the best in my community and soccer team.

But you know how these things go, without opportunities, you don't always see hard work as a solution. I always think about where my soccer would have taken me if I moved to a different country.

I went back home in 2005 and met my wife who was from Perth. In less than a year, I knew she was my person and moved to Perth. After working in a factory, I knew I valued freedom. I was a taxi driver from 2008 to 2016, and I loved it. The flexibility catered to my desire to be a present and good father. Then Uber came into the market, and we all know how that impacted us, taxi drivers.

I'm a strong believer in empowering women. I decided to be a stay-at-home father for four beautiful children for about two years while my wife worked and studied her dream. While I was working full-time being a dad, I had time to reflect and plan my dream. We can dream but if we don't take steps to ensure that dream is a goal, it'll always just be a dream.

I opened my coffee truck Perth coffee express Burswood in 2018 with the support of my wife, and it was a dream come true. It really just takes hard work and commitment. I'm really passionate about coffee, it's a big part of my culture, and I had the chance to work every day making it. Two years later, I opened my first café, M & T café in Camillo, and again, it was a dream come true. I felt successful, and I was on the right track to my bigger goal.

Don't get me wrong; there are many ups and downs. When it was low, we struggled financially, and when you're a parent, you can't really take bold risks, but we pulled through and are still working hard every day.

I wouldn't have got here without the woman in my life. I think it's important as men that we celebrate the women in our lives. My inspiration and dream steamed from my mother, but my drive and commitment come from my wife, Maarenet. And without her, I wouldn't be here sharing my story.

I know where I started and how I got here. A young hardworking boy from a small town in Africa to a businessman in Perth, Australia. But even with success, we must always give. When you give, you'll always get it back – whether it's from kindness or gratitude. My mother supported the people around her, inspired them, and believed in community.

It's always important to dream and to dream big. I've never stopped dreaming since I was 9, and I'm thankful to be here now because of it.





SYDNEY PHILLIPS

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Can't give up

SYDNEY PHILLIPS

The nuns of St Mary's didn't quite know what to do with an inquisitive blue-eyed Ballardong boy, so they put me in the corner with some paper and a crayon.

I'd stare out the window for hours, absorbing the landscape of my ancestral boodja (country). In summer, the heat would shimmer across the oval, reflecting colourful abstract mirages off Lewis Rock. The old bush buildings to the west sat silently decaying as if waiting for the people to return. I watched the colours change with the seasons. From crackling tans and yellows to rich reds, greens, and browns, with tinges of blueish moss coating moisture-laden rocks. To this day, I paint abstract landscapes.

My memories of St Mary's aren't so bad. I made some really good friends there, wadjelas (whitefellas), and that's where my art started. Things only started going south when I went to high school.

The ugly face of racism and bullying came into play. I copped it from the Noongar, and I copped it from the wadjela because I was one of those 'half castes'. That said, I also enjoyed protection from both sides of the cultural coin from family and footy mates. I was no stranger to violence. For many young Noongar of that time, domestic violence was a part of life, but that didn't make it any easier.

Eventually, I retaliated, and of course, the other boy was sent back to class, and I was sent to the police station...we used to call it the 'White House'.

Not long after that I was picked up by 'the welfare' and driven to a youth work farm. I thought I was going to the beach. When I look back I find myself thankful for that time. I gained valuable practical skills and learned how to put in a full day's work. The only thing I resent is that I had a promising football career and the time spent away flushed my one dream, my one chance, down the toilet. Footy was my constant...no matter how much trouble my big mouth got me into, I always rocked up for footy, always there for the team.

After the 'home' I found shelter with my Nanna Fruits (RIP) down in Armadale. She was Nanna Fruits to a big Mob, she taught us to share, care, respect. I lived and breathed footy and art, with a considerable amount of partying in between. My cousins and I would follow our older brothers around, acting like big shots in the big city. I can't count how many times I was smacked in the mouth for being a smart-arse.

I survived my teenage years, moved up Bruce Rock way, started a family, played footy and painted, drew, carved, and sculptured on any surface available. Sitting painting with my daughters while my son crawled around was a happy time. I had family, footy, art, and work, life was good. And then it wasn't.

I got the call on Boxing Day. My youngest daughter was dead. Accidental drowning at Sandy Beach in Bassendean. I was inside out with grief and anger. All I wanted was answers and there were no answers. I hit the bottle in a big way. Not long afterward I lost my beautiful mother and several other family members, the grief kept piling on...I kept drinking. And I stopped painting. Stopped living.

The crux of the story is that I dragged myself back up. I did it for the sake of my children, my mother, and my culture. I got sober, I went to Sydney and studied a Diploma of Community Development, and came back to Armadale thinking I was going to change the world. I had every official door slammed in my face, maybe because everyone remembered the drunk me. My kids came back into my life, I found us a home and I started painting again...just a bit.

In 2016 I discovered I'm a direct descendant of John Septimus Roe (Australia's first Surveyor-General). A casual chat in a local art gallery led me to JAK Films and the production of a documentary about my story 'Finding Moort' (since previewed on the digital tower in Yagan Square), my art hangs at the Waterwheel Gallery, I'm Tenant Artist and Ambassador for Housing Choices Australia, I'm contracted to design coffee cups for Change Please, I've done a fair bit of public speaking, and I've even met Sally Morgan.

My goal is to pay it forward and instill positivity in the community. You're not alone. I'm here.





STEVE PARRY

Facing challenges with a positive attitude

STEVE PARRY

My name is Steve, and I'm a photographer. This story has two parts: my personal journey and how I get to use these skills to help others.

My journey started many years ago in high school when I was forced to choose between photography or art, much to my disgust at the time. In those days, we used black and white film. I can still remember being in the school darkroom and seeing my first image appear in a developer tray as if by magic.

My mum has always been an enthusiastic photographer and was so interested in hearing about this new experience that she soon had dad converting the laundry into a light sealed darkroom. And so began my lifelong passion for creating images.

I have always seen photography as a creative art form and enjoy pushing it to the limit. Well, my limit anyway. When I look back at some of those early images, they are incredibly amateurish, but enthusiasm was very high all the same.

All these years later, I am still here, creating images, using many cameras, rolls of film, and, more recently, memory cards. Now my work is done mainly for other people. Mark Twain made the comment that sums this up the best, "Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

This described my job when I was an in-house photographer for a large company where a colleague was heard to say that it was unfair that I got paid to come to work and do my hobby. Maybe he was right.

Now I'm working as a commercial photographer at Relive Imaging, and it isn't quite that simple. Sometimes it's stressful and challenging, but I've learned to face the challenges with a positive attitude, and the experience always makes it just a little easier next time.

The second part of this story is about being able to help other people. In the Armadale area, several community groups only exist because of a large body of volunteers that keep these groups functioning. The groups I have been involved with are run by key people who are absolutely amazing. They put hours into managing their teams, on top of their incredibly busy private lives, holding down regular jobs and raising families of their own. Yet, they still find the time to be the backbone of these outstanding community groups.

It has been an absolute pleasure to help support some of these groups by supplying photos or videos. This has helped them promote events and increase public awareness of issues where funding was required to continue. Even though I was helping them, I have still felt very humbled at times when these already busy people could find the time to work with me. The satisfaction that comes from helping others and volunteering in the community is truly rewarding, and I guarantee you will meet some of the most amazing people.





SAVITHA DASGAONKER

Successful relocation to the dreamland

SAVITHA DASGAONKER

August 15th is celebrated as Independence Day in India. The significance of this day doubled for me, as I took a flight from India to Perth on this day, exactly 8 years back. Life took a 360-degree turn as I boarded my first international flight, surging me to the much-awaited dream world.

Taking a leap of faith:

In India, I had a decent job and good support of my parents, sisters, in-laws, and relatives. I was the youngest amongst my siblings and had a happy-go-lucky attitude. I grew up playing cricket and other games with more boys than girls in the neighbourhood; I enjoyed going around the town on a bicycle and I preferred to open the lid of my soft drink bottle, with my bare teeth.

My childhood dream was to be an advocate in Criminal Law, and I passed martial arts level one to help me fight the goons in my profession. My parents were sure that I would practice law after passing LL.M (Master of Laws) in Crime and Torts, with Distinction. But I guess destiny had different plans. Once I decided to pursue my life and my dream in Australia, I started preparing for formalities. I didn't get through the requirements of the visa processing in the first attempt but did not give up.

And as they say, fortune favors the brave. As I look back, I can say that making a decision to move to Australia was definitely a brave decision, which changed the quality of life, not only for me but for my family too.

A mother's sacrifice is her child's reward:

I feel overwhelmed when I think of the challenging yet wonderful journey. Both my daughters were just 3 and 2 years respectively, when my husband and I left for Australia, leaving them in the good care of their granny. I wish we had video calls, Whatsapp, or other virtual platforms to see each other with the world between us. I had to spend almost a whole month without seeing my daughters, until we found a place to live in Armadale.

Taking the first daring step, without seeing the whole staircase:

I landed myself in Armadale with mixed feelings. I cringe as I recall the initial days of trying to find, not just my ground, but air and the sky too. In my mother's house as a teenager, I would get scared to stay alone, even for a few minutes. But here I was, being alone at home with my two babies, as my husband was off for his night duty. For a couple of months, after we landed here and trying to settle down, I had to depend on public transport. I remember one crazy horrific rainy night when it was almost dark and I accidentally got lost because I got down at the wrong bus stop. I forgot my way home and didn't know what to do.

Slowly, but steadily I got around to understand the systems and process, ways of working as well as culture and values that bound me to Armadale, Australia.

Back in India, I was associated with a renowned university taking care of the placements of the MBA students. I had the track record of achieving 100% placements consecutively for three/four years before I moved to another area of the business. I worked there for 9 years before moving to Armadale.

Finding a job and making my career in Armadale was difficult, but interesting. I am thankful to the telecom industry Giant, being my first organization for giving me the opportunity to be a part of them for 7 years. I decided to move on for an organisation that changes lives and works in a totally different field, and has a much more humanistic approach.





SARAVANAN TK

Coming to Australia was the best decision that I have made in my life

SARAVANAN TK

I decided to pursue my Masters in Professional Communication at Edith Cowan University and landed in Perth on Feb 15th, 2005.

With a strong academic background and work experience in engineering and information technology, I was looking for a part-time job in my area of expertise as an international postgraduate student. Still, I was not lucky enough to get one. There were many challenges, but I managed to overcome them and started part-time work in the hospitality industry and retail industries, where I started socialising with the growing multicultural society.

Coming to Australia was the best decision that I have made in my life, even though it was difficult to cope in the early days. I faced initial challenges from minor ones like adapting to Australian food (especially BBQ, sausages, bacon, and pies), filling in a Tax File Number form, while the major challenge was finding a part-time job to survive. With the part-time job, came the challenge of learning to balance work and study commitments.

Furthermore, I had to live on a budget to manage my expenses and adapt to life away from family. During my initial days in Perth, I did not know anyone. The first family I met was an Italian family whose house I was renting. They supported and guided me during my initial years, and now they are our close family friends and mentor.

Working while studying in Australia helped to complement my overall Australian experience. I got a taste of the local culture and the slang words. I never felt isolated as I had always kept myself occupied and had good friends to rely on.

My career path deviated from engineering to information technology to hospitality and retail, and currently, I'm working in the finance sector. During this, I got to know many wonderful people who are now part of my group of close friends.

I got married in 2006 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, and my wife joined me a year later. My wife and I are blessed with two beautiful girls born here in Perth, and now we live at our residence in Harrisdale. Tamil is our first language, and we continue to speak Tamil at home with our girls. We do not have our family with us in Perth, but we feel at home with good friends who mean a lot. We share a strong bond with friends from Italy, China, Malaysia, Iraq, and Australia, to name a few.

Though we faced many challenges, in the beginning, both my wife and I knew it will get better and it was just a matter of time to make it a success story.

We are now in a fortunate position to extend a helping hand to people in need here and back in India during the flood relief and COVID pandemic.

As an alumnus of Edith Cowan University, I was involved in mentoring International students. For the past few years, I am actively involved in various community activities and currently, I am part of a volunteer group managing a community language school.

The purpose of the school is to teach the Tamil language to school-aged children starting from age of 4. In a multicultural nation learning more than one language and knowing your own language boosts self-confidence and creates awareness in their mind. It also helps them to connect with their cultural identity in a better manner and it has a huge positive influence in defining the personality of an individual, and I am seeing it visually at Valluvan Tamil School.

Working within the community along with wonderful volunteers and volunteer teachers at Valluvan Tamil language school has motivated me to get involved with volunteers from the multicultural communities and I am now part of the Multicultural Advisory Group at the City of Armadale.

When I ask anyone about their interest in community involvement the most frequent reply I get is, "why should I engage?" and "what is the benefit?". My reply to them is "it's all about community ownership and it feels good by giving back to our community".

If I had not been in Perth, I doubt whether I would have become involved in community-based activities. I am in the first step of community service and realise how much I can do to help others and make my life a real success in this country.

At last, like every other Australian, I love Australian BBQ and pies.





MATTHEW ZAFFINO

Always see the glass half full

MATTHEW ZAFFINO

I would say for the past 27 years I have been a cancer survivor and warrior, when I was 16 years old, I was the 2nd person in Western Australia to survive the Stem Cell Transplant when it was experimental at that stage. Now in today's modern medicine, it has become a modern medicine breakthrough. Also, in my life for the past 20 years I have been battling with substance abuse in which now I have overcome and turned my life around, and still provide the support and caring nature of helping others and share my life experience on what I have done for myself.

When I was young through to my young adult years, people saw me as an inspiration of life and hope because I am always smiling and being happy, but it was within my heart I always followed my dream and that was to help others and learn how to reach to their dreams. I always followed the mythical story of "Pandora's Box", once you open the box you will release the emotional curses within yourself, but deep down there is one emotion that will bring you back, and that's "HOPE". Through that emotion, I began to break free from my curse of substance abuse, I was born to love again as I now love myself, both spiritually and unconditionally.

Through now in the present day, I still follow my dream and still help others, not just through the work I do, but also my everyday life whether it's walking on the streets meeting people, through hanging out with my friends sharing laughs over a coffee, to my family where we look after each other and always be there for one another.

Every day I wake and breathe in the fresh air, I look in the mirror, look at myself and smile, because I know today will be a good day for me and never look on the negative, "Always see the glass half full". By bringing in positive vibes to myself, I can share those vibes to other people that need cheering up, inspiring, motivating, or a simple smile to their face to let the light shine in.





MANVEER SINGH

Piara Waters is my village and my child is my community

MANVEER SINGH

My love affair with Piara Waters began almost 10 years ago when I chose the suburb to build my house. But I was concerned if I had made the right choice—it seemed like a deserted area with no schools, shopping centres, limited transports services, and roads far from ready. Fast forward 10 years, Piara Waters is more than just a family home; I have fully embraced what is now the fastest-growing suburbs in Perth. More importantly, I am in love with the great sense of community spirit.

Being born and brought up in Malaysia with North Indian heritage, having obtained my tertiary education from the UK, and married to an Indonesian, I have been exposed to different cultures and backgrounds. Hence, it was a bonus for me to have found out that the suburb I had selected represented such diversity. The sense of community spirit provides comfort for a migrant like me, and at the same time, allows me to mentor newcomers who are struggling to integrate. In this regard, it is only natural for me to get involved in building my community.

Amongst my pet projects is the local annual Harmony Day Festival, with which I have been involved in organising the last six years.

My motivation in getting involved is not just due to my belief in giving back to the community, but more because I want to develop and nurture relationships amongst members of my community by understanding concerns and sharing ideas. This has driven my passion towards the growth of local resident neighbourhood connections.

Language has also been a key factor for me to break through within the neighbourhood circles. I take pride that as a practicing Sikh donning a turban, I am able to speak a few Asian languages which in turn allows me to interact with the local CALD community easily.

I derive great joy from helping the CALD community to participate during each Harmony Day Festival, one that showcases the rich heritage of different communities. This has led the CALD community to build confidence with the wider neighbourhood, be proud of their heritage, and naturally set up language schools within the area to pass on the rich heritage to future generations.

This same passion has allowed like-minded residents to establish official resident groups, which carry out local community projects and to contribute to help develop the suburb to reach greater heights.

As the proverb says, "it takes a village to raise a child", an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to grow in a safe and healthy environment.

Piara Waters is my village and my child is my community.





LUUL IBRAHIM

We are all connected in one way or another

LUUL IBRAHIM

I believe that we are connected in one way or another and that we generally strive to be our best. But sometimes, one has to fall in order to regain its power. These powers are like the human equivalent of solar energy: they regenerate through our hardship and resilience.

I am a volunteer who was raised by a generation of volunteers. I'm a firm believer in education, working in early childhood education for over 7 years. I have completed a number of different qualifications and certificates over the years and am in the process of completing one more: my Bachelor of Education.

Our scars have stories and purposes, and different scars tell different stories. I've watched my friends go through drugs and alcohol, mental health and suicide, racism, and prejudice in the past.

On March 15, 2019, my own 3-year-old brother, Muad, was killed in the Christchurch Mosque Terrorist attacks. 50 other families lost someone they loved too, and for what? For being different.

Standing in the middle of a hallway, gathering for the family victims, waiting for bodies to return to their families, I realised that the government was not trained to deal with something like this.

There were so many organisations at that time, yet they have decided to hire more workers from states interpreters to social workers. Our communities – CaLD communities – were already contributing, yet remained unnoticed.

It makes me think: "What if something happened to us here – an earthquake or an attack. Who are the community leaders and why are they not noticed? Aren't they part of this society? I need to wake up do my part!"

I had no professional mentor and no experience in leadership. For 2 years, not one community leader ever thought about mentoring me or ever setting down with me and ask what I was trying to achieve?

So I woke up.

I taught myself. Join different organisations and local governments to learn. I founded the Somali Support Perth, a non-profit organisation that aims to build capacity and provide a network for the community. I am part of different community organisations.

I am also part of a network of survivors and victims of violent extremism and terrorism who are telling their stories to promote harmony and unity in Australia.

Why do we sing if our song doesn't mean anything?

I am proud to be an Australian, New Zealander,
Somali, African, Muslim woman.

We are one, but we are many.

And from all the lands on earth we come.

We'll share a dream and sing with one voice.

"I am, you are, we are Australian".

I am Luul Ibrahim, and this is my story.





LISA WATSON

Although it's taken me years to achieve my dream, I believe that my journey is only starting

LISA WATSON

My name is Lisa Lucille Watson. I am inspired to take a leap, and showcase and inform the community, to join me in my journey of finding myself as an adult and a creative. I came to Boorloo, Perth, with my family at the age of 15. I was originally born in Cape Town, South Africa, but when I was 6 years old, my parents decided to pack up our lives and fly over to Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Even though apartheid was finally "finished", this was our ticket for a different opportunity. When growing up in New Zealand, we lived in a little country town called Whakatane for 4 years and then moved to Auckland and lived there for 5 more years. When the opportunity arose, my Dad flew us over to Perth, Australia. As you can see, I have been moving around a lot, and I never really had any time to settle in any one place. Perth is the place in which I have lived the longest in my life.

It has been a struggle for the past 15 years I've been here. When you move countries most of the time you start from scratch, starting with nothing and having to build your life up all over again. I remember moving here and celebrating my 16th birthday with no friends, just with my family. My Mum, my Dad, and my brother. From that moment on, I knew things would be a little harder to handle than I was used to.

I studied at Kent Street Senior High School for a year and a half and knew that the opportunities for University were a slim chance, and that broke my heart. My passion for drama studies was my life, and I wanted nothing else. But when you have to start over in another country, your hopes and dreams get shattered because you have to make sacrifices to accommodate the more important things in life. I was at a dead end.

I gave up my passion and was told that I would have to give up this part of my life, and that was that. After that, I worked in the hospitality and retail industries until this year, all to keep food on the table. Throughout the 10 years since graduating from high school (with the top Arts Award for Drama Studies), I always craved to continue my dream of acting and becoming a performer. At 23, I decided to go on a self-love journey (cliché, I know) to achieve my dream and slowly hack at my dream. I now can say that I feel that diamond shining through.

In this year alone, I became a part of a CALD diversity lab with Performing Lines WA, which gave me a chance to continue living my dream.

I was chosen along with 12 other beautiful artists, and it was my dream starting to manifest. Although it's taken me years to achieve my dream, I believe that my journey is only starting. I look forward to continuing my journey as an artist, not just for myself but also for others on the same journey. Just remember that no matter what happens, pursue your dream. It doesn't have to be buried beneath the surface. There are ways to achieve your dreams even if a system doesn't agree with you and says no.

I thank the City of Armadale, my new home, for allowing me to share a snippet of my story, and I hope you can follow my journey to make dreams into goals and goals into reality. Follow @creative.discoverer to keep up with my journey.

I dedicate this story to my family. I wouldn't be here without you, no matter where we are and where we go we will always have each other. Even if it's been a struggle, we always know how to make the most out of life. My parents, for being brave enough to leave their country and travel to places and support their kids in their creative ventures. To my brother for being a light in my world and never giving up his dream and making this life an enjoyable one to live, keep shining. To my fiancé Kuda, for the encouragement to never stop chasing our dreams, you're that missing piece to my puzzle. I also dedicate this to anyone who has left their home to start in a new place and has struggled with achieving their dreams, it's never too late to start. To my home Africa, we may have left, but Africa has not left our hearts.





KUDA NDLOVU

I have always rooted for the underdog

KUDA NDLOVU

Hi, I'm Kuda, which is short for Kudakwashe... Yup, all those letters, and that's still only my second-hardest name to pronounce. I'm not going to lie; I love it. I love it now more than ever. Can you believe I learned just recently to not only love but appreciate how African I am? That's not because I never loved my African-ness, I always have, but it's different when you stumble upon a deeper connection with your roots.

I left home almost a decade ago now. Well... Over two decades ago if the home we're referring to is where I was born. Home, in this case, is Africa. See, I was born in Harare, Zimbabwe, and lived there for eight years before moving to Kenya and calling Nairobi home for a while. After four years, we moved to Kampala, Uganda, where I discovered my passion for rap. This was all before finally moving to Perth for university, or so my Dad believed.

He was technically right. That's what got me here, but it wasn't what I was most looking forward to. I was most excited about reconnecting with my older brother, the person who had introduced me to rap in the first place.

We were going to get back in the studio and become the artists who had first introduced themselves to the world on five rough songs back in the late 2000s. But sadly, it wasn't meant to be. "Reality" had taken hold of my brother, and he had "adulthood" to focus on, and I soon realised I did too.

I quickly learned that pursuing the music career I dreamed of would require 100% of my attention. Impossible for someone who needed to finish a university degree (Accounting & Marketing, Double Major) while working to support me. My dream never stopped being the priority during all of this, but I did need to re-prioritise and focus on more urgent matters while I lined up the ducks. I should probably explain... I didn't have a backup option. I couldn't put all my eggs into music without any safety nets because failing to turn up for university means I go back home and building it all up from the ground up. Better to secure my future before taking that risk.

During my degree, I continued to pursue music wherever possible. I even formed part of a rap group called RTT along with 3 other students. We made 'Afro-Aussie' music together for a couple of years, releasing a handful of songs and music videos on Youtube. The highlight of our time together will undoubtedly be the opportunities we got to perform as opening acts for touring artists Timaya, Stonebwoy, and even J Balvin in 2014. The time between opening for J Balvin over 5 years ago and his meteoric rise to where he is today serves as a reminder to be patient. To be diligent. To persevere.



That always applies, especially to my own story. Since RTT broke up, I have slowly begun forging my solo career. I felt like I made Afro-Aussie music for the longest time because I was part of an all-African rap group, but I couldn't be more wrong. That vibe was me. As a creative, I draw inspiration from different sources. Sometimes personal experience or simply living through others and giving the forgotten people, the "outsiders" a voice. My story is ever-changing, and my music will follow in the same fashion.

This is one of the reasons I wanted to share my story. I am proud to be a human of Armadale. I have always rooted for the underdog, and for a suburb that gets overlooked and looked down on, I stand tall and proud alongside all of the incredible Humans of Armadale. Follow **@officialkudamic** on Instagram to keep up with my journey.



YARNING GROUP

Yarning Group is another family for me

YARNING GROUP

KIA Yam Noonook!.....(hello, how are you?)
ALIWAH!....(listen to what we have to say). We are a group of Aboriginal people with disabilities who meet weekly to give each other support and engage in activities that collectively build our capacity. We have been meeting for two years and have recently moved our activities to the Champion Centre. KM Consultancy Services is an NDIS service provider that we utilise to provide culturally secure activities and social and emotional wellbeing support services.

This collaboration means that we have the best opportunity to make healthy choices, build our capacity, and have a voice. We participate in activities that allow us to focus on achieving our NDIS goals and healthy lifestyle decision-making. We regularly participate in art, music, language, and cultural activities as well as improving our daily living around domestic skills, attaining our drivers' license, and everyday daily skills such as budgeting and navigating social services.

Many of us have been able to find pathways to improve literacy and numeracy and to choose positive mental health and healthy lifestyle goals.

We wanted as a group to give you some snippets of our stories and what is important to us. We all hope that you enjoy hearing about our wishes, our journey, and our successes.

Here are some stories from our journal:

"I would love to move to my new home soon. I also want to move on from smoking cigarettes, to have a new healthy life where I could be safe, independent, and healthy. I could do this by thinking nothing is going to bring me down. I know that I will achieve this through the support of all my friends, families, and support workers."

"Over the last 12 months, I have lost weight, learned more about healthy eating so that I can manage my diabetes better. I know how important this is and want to be able to live independently so that I can cook for myself, have my own private space and be able to live a life that makes me happy. I also want to start finding my family, my family comes from Alice Springs."

"Yarning Group is another family for me. I sometimes connect with many other people to find out they are family. I also feel safe and welcome and know that if I need any information or guidance, someone is there to help. It is good that we sit together and yarn about anything, so many laughs true."

"I love listening to music. I love to hear some of our mob sing and play the guitar. This makes me smile. I also like that people have started to learn how to communicate with me, using all sorts of different resources."

We have decided as a group to use snippets our stories and turn them into a song. We decided to do this because many of us love music, and can play the guitar and sing. We hope that we can share with you all sometime soon.

Thank you for listening to our stories, this has been good that we can have our voice heard and share our journey and successes.





KEISHAE JOHNS

Be strong & stay positive

KEISHAE JOHNS

So, where to start? I'm a single mother of five with newborn twins. At first, I was really unsure how I would cope with twins. I thought, "how am I supposed to raise five kids by myself?" but with the help of my older kids and the ladies at the Champion Centre it has been somewhat a breeze. The ladies are always happy to have my twins for cuddles, even for an hour, and they encouraged me to get back into the kitchen at the Champion Centre and explore my hobbies. Sometimes you just need a hand or peaceful coffee, and that should be okay.

I'll be honest, some days I struggle to balance everything. It's important to have somewhere you can go to be comfortable. I'm grateful I have that at the Champion Centre. They've seen me in my PJs and when I need support, and they love how comfortable I am. My kids are always included in the programs and it lets me give back to the community and help with the food boxes which is rewarding.

My kids all have different dads, but I don't ever regret having my gorgeous babies. It's ridiculous how much stuff I've put up with through the years, and I know as a woman we deserve to be treated like queens, not just baby carry machines. We have our ambitions and goals. We deserve to accomplish them, it just takes a little

longer when you're a mother. We sacrifice a lot and it's always worth it. We need to have something for ourselves, and I environments like the Champion Centre let women do that. They encourage women to feel welcome and included, and from that, I've got my mojo back with cooking which is something I'm passionate about.

I don't know what I would do if I didn't have my support system. It's been hard, very hard. I remember the stress our family experienced with losing my brother and organising his wake, and how much the centre helped organise the wake at the centre. It's also been difficult with staying afloat with resources. They help me out with clothes sometimes, but I make sure I return anything I don't need to their pop-up shop for the community.

I tend to drop out of everything and give up, but the ladies at the centre continue to motivate me and provide me with the resources to finish my course at the centre. The best part is that my older kids get the opportunity I only wish I had as a kid. They're surrounded by people like Bree, the Program Lady, who picks up my kids if they need and uplifts my older three kids to support their attitude, outlook, self-confidence, and even their cooking skills. They're being raised by a community and will always have people around. Since having twins, I've had less time to do these things, but they don't miss out. They absolutely adore all the Champion Centre staff and volunteers and always leave as bubbly bundles of joy. It's important you have a support system, and my kids and I appreciate the centre for letting us have one.



JULIE FEARN-PHEASANT

We are all narratives, regardless of our labels.

JULIE FEARNIS-PHEASANT

I came to Armadale as an immigrant with family and lived here as a child, returning 24 years ago on my own. As a teacher and artist for over 40 years, art, education, and the creative process are essential to my identity and existence as a person. Similarly, I choose to work with images related to human existence.

My story is a deeply personal one; it spans many years of challenge, diversity, and labels. It is also interwoven with community, creativity, and stubborn will. I am literally covered in labels, but who isn't by my age?

Some of the labels relate to the 'physical persona'; a woman, a person with a disability, and a breast cancer survivor in 2007. The others relate to my passions; creativity, motherhood, community, and teaching. All these tags are positives, regardless of circumstance or scars one might have because of them.

I have assisted the City of Armadale to develop some of its visual arts initiatives, including the Minnowarra Art Awards and Outside the Frame, and have been a participant in the Armadale

Hills Open Studio Arts Trail for over four years. Together with other degrees, I have a Masters in Cross-Disciplinary Arts & Design, over ten solo exhibitions and numerous joint shows under my belt, am well-versed in illustration, painting, and many mixed media projects.

However, there is one achievement I keep quiet about. I was the first Australian to win dual gold medals at the International Abilympics, both in 1991, 1996. Abilympics (Olympics of Abilities) are vocational skills competitions designed for persons with disabilities to enable them to expose their unique talents.

I kept it quiet about the four gold medals as I was bothered about the labelling (and subtle segregation) it gave me and my work. I put my medals away in a drawer somewhere gathering dust. Embarrassed.

In a country that loves physical achievement and sports stars, in the 70s through to the 90s, my achievement was discounted by mainstream media. One bright spark asked; 'Does she look newsworthy?' I can only presume what that meant... An article was written in the local paper with a fitting title 'Secret Champ Comes Home'. By a friend.

The constant need to prove my worth and intelligence can be pretty exhausting. I had a previous experience where the two life designations when put together had either been detrimental or considered tokenism. I decided to acknowledge my creative being and almost deny the somatic self. Easier.



I have been a teacher of young people for over twenty-five years. I now work with a particularly young group of Armadale artists called the Leos, who have been with me for over 4 years. Each student is talented in their own right. Finding their abilities and talent has given them their reason and path in life. I feel an absolute pleasure to at least guide them through the beginning stages of their purpose.

Another group I belong to is kind of like a 'community tribe'. The Waterwheel Galleries where my work is exhibited has a creative group called the UFOs (Unfinished Objects) that now meet to support, nourish, and share. We set the world right once a week, recognising our developing ideas as catalysts for new beginnings and statements about how creativity keeps people together in times of disquiet or unease. Laughter ripples through the stone walls as needles, thread, and (when I'm there) paint becomes beautiful pieces of visual voices. They are family.

This year, I was chosen as the Armadale Arts Festival Artist. To be acknowledged by my peers, my community, and by the City, I have lived in for so many years, both as a child and now as an adult, means so much to me. I want to show others with 'life labels', be they disabilities, mental health concerns, or difficult circumstances, that labels are not necessarily negative but life essences. We can use our essences for creative pathways of identity expression. Art does that. I know deep in my centre that the arts can inspire and encourage and give people a reason to keep going and feel 'okay'. The arts are a way for us to express and visualise our world in ways that nothing else can do.

It's interesting considering yourself to be a Human Story as we are all narratives, regardless of our labels.



JODIE CLARKE

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Through a child's eyes I always thought to myself she is my hero

JODIE CLARKE

Through a Child's Eyes: I remember as if it was yesterday, a young child on the farm with my parents and my dad's family watching the night sky; eating, yarning. My brother and I running around with our cousins, when there was a boom and flames grew all the way up to the sky. It seemed mystical, fantastical even. I remember hearing a sound of awe. I'm not sure if it came from me or my brother, probably both of us, she inspired that in us. But looking at my mum, I wondered did she too make that sound? She had a smile on her face. Through a child's eyes, against the flames that reached the sky, stood my Grandmother, her Mother. With her hair out all over the place, frizzy, raging in the wind, the big flowing dresses she used to wear gusting about in the night squall, carrying a stick that seemed to come out of the ground and point to the sky. She looked mythical.

Through a Young Mother's Eyes: I would remember that night vividly and I would reflect on each of my children's births. My Sons, her Great Grandsons; I looked to the skies and I asked her to care and look after them to guide them through life. I often wondered what she would think of them. Their boldness, their fearlessness, would she get them out of trouble like she did me?

Through a Young Mother's Eyes, would she look at her Great Granddaughter and be honoured that she bears her name and carries herself with brashness and sassiness, as her Great Grandmother did? Would she take care of her and enlighten her in navigating the worlds and times she has walked this earth before? Would she look at her like she looked at me?

Through an Adult Female's Eyes: I remember that it was a wry smile on my Mother's face and I look to the sky and can still see the flames reaching up. I remember seeing a strong solid Aboriginal Woman who had connections with trauma, dealings with rigid and inflexible times and inherently became a product of her times, probably getting through life as best as she could. Through an Adult Woman's eyes, I see her. She is making a statement that she is here. She is here for her Daughter and her love and toughness is for all to see and be mindful of. She is a Fighter. Did she get that from her Matriarchs? Do we come from a long line of women that have fought to be who they are?

Through a Mature Woman's Eyes: I reflect as to how exceptionally fortunate that I have been in growing up with resilient and strong women in my family. My remarkable Daughter, my incredible Mother, my extraordinary Sisters, my adorable Nieces, my Grandmothers, and my Aunties. Our blood running through our veins has come from ancestors that have walked this earth with knowledge and insightfulness.

Through a Mature Woman's eyes, I am exceedingly lucky to have women that have come into my life that are not blood but family all the same. They have become a part of me. My Mother in Law and her wise Mother, my brother's graceful Wife, my husband's beautiful Sister and Sister in Law, my wonderful Nieces, and my magnificent Daughter in Law. They have taught me, educated me, and shown me their wisdom.

Through a Grandmother Eyes: I looked to the skies once again and asked for her to look after my Grandson, her Great-Great Grandson when he was born, to watch over him and guide him as he too has walked this earth before. Through a Grandmother's eyes revelling in the cheekiness of one day sitting quietly listening to my Granddaughter her Great-Great Granddaughter tell me her troubles her tribulations and whispering in her ear impertinently "don't you worry about what Mum and Dad say, Nanna will deal with them!" I remember those words just like it was yesterday.

Through the Eyes of Me: I hope that I can impart my knowledge and wisdom for my family, so they can remember, and maybe they can be sitting reflecting on their story one day and possibly see Me for who I am and see through their Eyes that I have made a difference and have done enough that they too can have a hero. Budawan.





IRENE MUTUNE

Black don't crack

IRENE MUTUNE

I never envisioned myself living in any other country other than my home country Kenya. Visiting? Yes, but not living. I grew up with my sister in what was considered a middle-class family, with all my basic physiological and safety needs being met by my Mum and Dad. I attended private primary school, proceeded to a good all-girls high school, and then joined one of Kenya's best universities for my undergraduate and Masters degrees.

I met my husband, Mbogo, in 2005 whilst I was studying on campus. We got married in 2012 in a Kikuyu traditional wedding ceremony as per our culture, and our sons, Maina and Mutune, were born in 2013 and 2016, respectively. We both held pretty decent jobs in Kenya for about 10 years; he was Program Director with a Non-Government Organisation, and I was Branch Operations Manager with a local bank.

Fast forward to July 2016, the NGO my husband worked for saw it 'prudent' to discontinue all its projects in Kenya. This meant that my husband was all of a sudden rendered jobless! Meaning we were only left with one income stream! We were forced to think on our feet quickly, and an opportunity to relocate to Perth, Australia, presented itself. We deliberated on it for several months and carefully referred to our pros and cons list. The pros list won hands down. Australia, here we come.

After meticulously planning for and using up almost all our savings, my husband travelled to Australia in August 2017, and the kids and I joined him in October 2018. Meeting after almost one year apart was exhilarating. I remember my youngest didn't quite know how to approach his dad as he was so little when he left him. My older son had to keep prompting him to call him dad and encouraged him to hug him as he seemed like a 'stranger'.

"Where do you guys live?" people would ask. "Armadale", I would say. Then they would sort of give you a look. You know the look..... that look that has both eyebrows raised and an ooh sound leaves their mouth (hahaha). I didn't ask and they didn't say anything else so I assumed all was well. I soon deciphered what the "look" meant, here's why; one day, my sons are outside playing on the sandpit right outside our house. I'm watching them from the kitchen window as I cook. Suddenly, our good, not-so-good neighbour starts screaming profanities at them!!! I'm confused! "Is that the nice man who helped me fix my son's scooter screaming at them like that?" I ask myself. Before I come back to my senses, my husband is outside grabbing both kids by the hand and guiding them inside the house. I quickly rush and escort them to our bedroom and lock the door behind telling them to stay put and watch cartoons on their devices.

I grabbed my phone and ran outside to my husband and towards my neighbour's door, hitting the record video button on my phone. His partner was now screaming as well. Racist comments flowed from their mouths.

We were being told to go back to our country. We were being called dogs! Who, us? Dogs? We were being told to join Jenny Craig. Who is Jenny Craig? It felt like an out-of-body experience. I was jolted back to reality when the man kicked in his fly screen door, and it warped. One of the other neighbours called the police. No arrests were made, and we were advised to take a Violence Restraining Order, but we didn't.

Traumatised cannot begin to explain the mixed emotions I felt. I felt helpless because I couldn't protect my kids. I could see the despair in my husband's eyes after the incident. We had to move houses. I wouldn't say I like remembering this neighbour nor incident. I couldn't tell you how he looks like, even if I met him on the street today. My brain's coping and healing mechanism perhaps? I choose to forget this outright racist experience, I choose to forget several other subtle racist comments and experiences as I keep my eye on the prize.

I want a brighter future for my two children and that is why we moved to Australia. I want their future generations to excel, prosper and have choice and control over their lives. Did I mention that I am a social worker and a current member of the Australian Association of Social Workers? Did I mention that I work for the Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities? I want to create a positive and meaningful impact in the community through children. They are our future after all. I further volunteer my skills to two multicultural community groups hoping to create a positive impact on CaLD communities.

The little, small milestones continue to empower me. They continue to give me resilience and hope. My journey still continues as I am not there yet. I can still see the light at the end of my tunnel. I continue to rise! My name is Irene Mutune and I am a Kenyan living in Perth, Western Australia.





GEOFFREY STEWART

Be truthful to yourself

GEOFFREY STEWART

I am a passionate AFL and basketball player, public speaker, and resident of the Armadale City Council since an early age, who dreams to inspire young generations to achieve their goals and never give up. I had the dream to become a public speaker, and today, I am proud to be able to be the voice of Australians with disabilities. Nowadays, I'm running my own program at Inspire Radio on Fridays mornings, and I have delivered multiple speeches about disabilities, sports, and my story.

From a young age, I started playing sports. I have played integrated state footy for Perth, WA, and shooting hoops for Perth's Integrated State Basketball teams. I feel like these experiences working as a team and guiding some of the younger players have given me the right skills to be an important team member and advocate in the community.

Some of the teams I had the opportunity to play with were the WA Basketball team for the Ivor Burge national championship. I have been selected to represent Western Australia eleven times from 2002 to 2021. I also had the opportunity and great honour to be the captain of the team on four different occasions.

I also represented WA in the integrated AFL State Football tournament twice and we won the B grade grand final in Launceston, Tasmania. I have also represented my state in indoor and outdoor cricket.

Some of my accomplishments include that I was the inaugural captain for the integrated football team, Willetton Blues, and in our third year I managed to captain our team to the finals, and then to the Grand Final which was a magnificent accolade for everyone involved,

Even though I am working towards my dreams and I have been representing Western Australia in multiple Ivor Burge Championships, the journey has not always been easy and it has included some ups and downs.

Living with disabilities is not an easy road and life had thrown some curveballs at me when I was in high school and through my professional life. I attended Roleystone District High School and Kelmscott Senior High School and I had worked in multiple roles at Kmart, Coles, and Biosphere West.

I started getting depression and anxiety and did not work again until 2013 where I started working with my Dad at Biosphere West collecting recyclable glass.

When I had a job, it makes me feel more part of society. It makes me feel proud to be part of a team and I felt like everybody else. My story and what I have felt is the reflection of thousands of people living with disabilities.

I think sports is a valuable resource as it builds confidence, community, and collaboration, but it needs to be transferred to other areas of life, such as employment. I believe it's the right way to create inclusiveness, and people living with disabilities can live the best life they can.

Sport is a terrific platform for people with disabilities and their families to explore different skills that can be transferred to employment pathways. It was through sports that I discovered my passion for teamwork, discipline, consistency, and hard work. Also, I found the importance of being passionate about what you do and the great outcome that you can achieve when you are surrounded by great mentors, the right organisation, and the community's support.

Sports have changed my life and the way I overcome adversity. It is helping me with my anxiety and depression, and I believe this is true for many people with disabilities. Through sports, I found my passion, and I started to build the career I want with the skills I have, but I wouldn't have done it without the help of the community around me.

In life and on the field, teamwork, inclusiveness, and the ability to recognise everyone's skills are crucial. That's why today I want to invite all of you to play as a team, there is an urgent need for people with disabilities to have access to more jobs and build more relationships around the community. That's the only way we can win this game and overcome all the challenges that we encounter.

I always wanted to work in the media, but I struggled to find the way towards my dream, and all that I had tried in the past has pointed to opposite directions, big disappointments, or closed doors where I was feeling even more frustrated and depressed. It was only until I joined 4lifeskills and the amazing support from my employment mentors, Trish and Luke, who have opened the door to new opportunities, thanks to the amazing and friendly staff at 4lifeskills. To me, they are not just disability support but family and friends who want to help people with disabilities, achieve their goals and live a more fulfilled life based on their interest and real passion.

One month ago, I dreamed of having a voice and speaking up. I remembered where I started to co-design my career with the help of my employment mentor, and I was asked what my dreams were and how I would look in the future. Today I'm happy to be here and highlight the importance of teamwork on the field and in life.

Today, I want to say how proud I am to be part of the professional staff at 4lifeskills who have given me the abundance of confidence to be who I am and to be an inclusive part of the community. I am proud to belong to an amazing, talented, diverse, and passionate community that's committed to improving the lives of others.

With the support of 4lifeskills, I had the opportunity to speak at various events and now have been offered a regular one-hour time slot on Inspire Radio to run my own show where I can discuss the importance of disability and mental health support.



EMMA ROSE HIRSCHMANN

Bipolar and I

EMMA ROSE HIRSCHMANN

My name is Emma Rose Hirschmann. I am 19 years old, and my human story is about living a life with mental illness. My life with Bipolar.

I grew up in beautiful Roleystone. However, I dreaded primary school from a young age. I was always a bigger girl and found myself to be the target for bullies, but I found a passion for music and was soon offered a scholarship to a specialist music high school.

The next few years, I finally started to feel connected and supported in my school and community and surrounded myself with a loving support network, but slowly things began to change.

After seeing a specialist, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and told that I would need to take medication immediately. I became a shell of my former self, withdrawing from friendships, family gatherings, and other social events until I was isolated in my room. I was no longer capable of attending school and left in year 10, at this point suicidal and living minute by minute.

My support network slowly faded, and friends whom I thought were always there for me left. Loneliness came to stay, and I wasn't prepared for it.

I soon realised I had just my mum and a handful of dedicated individuals by my side for this journey.

After all my trauma, I decided I wanted to turn my pain into passion and start doing what I love and enjoy. In early 2019 I reached out to the Songs of Hope Project, which is aimed at getting 10 WA musicians together and creating a collective album with songs based on our mental health journeys. From there, so many doors opened for me. I released my first single and auditioned for Telethon. I spoke at multiple mental health seminars and mental health aliases about my story and regularly performed live on Inspire Radio with my show, focusing on mental health. Singing live at functions promoting mental health and so much more. It's been fantastic to experience so much.

At the end of last year, my mental health started to deteriorate yet again, but this time it was different. I started experiencing manic highs and lows. These periods where I would feel on top of the world, almost invincible, but I would do stupid and irresponsible things like go out and spend all my money or drive very erratically. Then I would come crashing down and have depressing episodes. These highs and lows could last anywhere from hours to days. After seeing my doctor and specialist, I soon got a diagnosis of bipolar type 2.

To my great shock and honour, this year, I won Armadale Youth Citizen of the Year, which I was ecstatic about, especially after everything I had been through the past couple of months.

For the longest time, I had a victim complex and now, looking back on my childhood, I can see I had mental health issues from a young age. I've learned to let that go. I know that this is a lifelong battle I'm facing, with many twists and turns to come, but I'm blessed to have amazing support by my side for when it does.

My journey has made me realise everyone has their struggles, insecurities and reasons for lashing out, and I wish those people nothing but the best with their journeys. If you carry that victim complex, you will always be the victim.

We are all different, and that's something to be celebrated; never let anybody bring you down. Your diagnosis and mental illness don't define you, don't let it win. Look at it as a blessing rather than a curse. I know that mental illness makes me more sympathetic, loving, and passionate. It drives me to want to help others.

When it does win, and trust me, there will be times where it does, there is help, so much help. You are never alone.





ASTIT OLSZOWY

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Multicultural entertainer

ASTIT OLSZOWY

I met my husband in 1989 while I was in the early years of running my own business in the travel industry and courier business in Indonesia, and moved to Perth in 1991. I was a single mum with one child at that time. We didn't have a welfare system in Indonesia like here in Australia so I always had to work hard. The whole family accepted my husband's proposal of marriage, and before I knew it, my child was studying in Perth and I was soon to become a bride.

When I first came to Perth, I didn't have a community I automatically fit into. We didn't have Facebook so I couldn't contact people over social media. Not long after my marriage, I was introduced to the Indonesian community in Perth. It felt like home in a foreign country and we felt like we belonged and were accepted. We would share food and support each other with common struggles. It was our very own support group. We branched out to people outside of the Indonesian community and embraced and celebrated our culture with marches, dances, and cultural evenings. Protecting my culture and celebrating it has always been important to me. Soon after, the community appointed me as the secretary of their organisation. The days flew by and before I realised, I went from joining just to connect to my culture to being an active and busy community leader.

As a result, the community grew and we had more members and money to cover expenses.

After a year, my husband suggested I took a break, so I decided to branch out and further discover myself to grow. I studied to improve my English, took a French course, and joined a performance class. My passion to promote Indonesian culture and involvement in the Multicultural Community led to me creating a dance group called the Selendang Sutra Indonesian Dance Troupe (which translates as the "Silk Veil"). For some years we danced around the Perth area in places like events, Aged Care facilities, and Schools. One year we even danced at Toodyay Avon Descent. I'm grateful for my husband for how much he's involved with events emceeing and assisting with costumes. He made a living with his real estate and developer business, so I learned a lot from him when it came to marketing.

My dance coordinating continued as a ticketed Event Organiser for several years but in 2013, a wonderful woman from Darwin came into my life and asked, 'how long have you been doing this dance stuff for?' and could see I was working so hard to connect our community in Perth. She introduced me to grant writing and the benefits of being incorporated. This allowed us to create free events that engaged the community even further.

Everybody loved our performances, including community groups, different mayors, and our community. The Indonesian Community was recognised and it was nice to be seen.

"Perth Indonesian Community" became incorporated and what followed was truly amazing.

I'm blessed that God sent me this opportunity and gave me the people in my life, including my husband. I hope to encourage the younger generation to feel connected to their culture and to continue the efforts made to celebrate Indonesian communities.

It's important you do what you like and what you're passionate about. I love my culture and I love celebrating it through dance. It's important that you don't think about money; that always comes later. You get so much from being connected and supporting your community. It's so rewarding. You feel connected and you belong to something remarkable.





ANTHONY PYLE

I'll be honest, my strength lies in connecting people

ANTHONY PYLE

When I moved to Australia, I made the City of Armadale my home. For the last decade, I've found the City to be my stomping ground. From enjoying time having coffee in the mall or having dinner and catching a Friday night movie, I enjoy my time being a part of this community.

Reflecting on my place within the community, I've tried many different hats to see which one fits. I have volunteered, I've run in elections, and I've put on community events. Each offers different aspects of community connectedness.

I'll be honest, my strength lies in connecting people. I've had great success in running events throughout the year that inspire people to come together from many different organisations, walks of life, and backgrounds to get to know the people within their community.

I'm most proud of the work I have done working with people with disability and their families and friends. From my many years as a support worker in the community, connecting people to be more active and engaged with their local clubs and groups. I had then moved onto other roles, which allowed me to apply for grants to host

inclusive events throughout the City to connect all people. From International Day of People with Disability, we ran events in Jull Street Mall with music, market stalls, and plenty of fun to be had by all. These events allowed me to get not only to connect people within our community to their wider community, but I made stronger connections and friendships with new people myself. This event culminated in many like-minded people within the Armadale community, with local cafes, businesses, and people coming together to share an event that recognised how welcoming our community is.

I was also fortunate enough to run a similar event for Mental Health Week, which allowed us to come together again in the mall to bring games, music, services, and even a sausage sizzle to connect the community once again. Working closely with the City of Armadale's staff, it was amazing to activate these community spaces and watch as our community could be brought together with such ease.

It made me realise that I could share my passion for community connectedness and bring people together to do this time and time again.

In reflection, I think it was so important for these types of events to go forward, especially in the last year or so where we have had lockdowns and see people become more isolated within their homes. I have made more concerted efforts to attend as many of the City of Armadale's events as possible, to learn about new things and meet new people.

Through that, I have also made continued connections to people within our community and had opportunities to work with Neighbourhood Watch on some exciting programs. I've been involved with the Armadale Disability Reference Group for the last few years and am always excited for the next opportunity to open up.





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