

Anti-Poverty Awards for Young Victorians- Adrian Pyle - October 15, 2006

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John Lennon has a lot to answer for. At pivotal dates throughout the year his “So this is Christmas” plays on endless loop inside my head. It is a musical conscience... conscience because the next line asks “So this is Christmas ...and what have you done?”

John, what do you mean?..... Is there accusation in the question “What-HAVE-you-done!” or am I guilty of inaction “What have YOU done?” International Anti-Poverty Sunday is one of those pivotal dates. The song plays in my head. What have you done? What have you done? And in the midst of *Make Poverty History* campaigns and Millennium Development Goals what has our little faith community – stuck smack bang in the middle of a mass of self-sufficiency, of Canterbury – done?

The fundamental difficulty with self-sufficiency is not so much that people don't give of themselves, (although that might be a consequence of it). The fundamental difficulty is that that people don't “take” or more specifically they see themselves as on a mission to ‘rise above’ vulnerability. If we reach the magic goal of self-sufficiency, we don't have to immerse ourselves in the issues and dilemmas of our community. We don't have to share our problems with the world. We don't have to seek solutions in society. And as a consequence of all that we certainly don't have to have society bringing its problems to us. We lose the capacity to share.

By accident of birth my faith tradition is Christianity. Its stories have moved from oral to written, been translated across languages, been interpreted and reinterpreted, been used selectively and opportunistically. Yet, for all of this, the stories of a young bloke named Yeshua still flicker with an inextinguishable flame, a heavy bias towards life! And one of the ways this Yeshua fanned the flame, it seems to me, is to invite people into connection, collaboration, community. Rich or poor, beggar or tax collector we need “the other,” we need to take and give. We need to share.

If this little faith community values that message, then it needs to share it, humbly and carefully with the World. And over three years of Anti-Poverty Awards I think our emphasis on this message has grown markedly. That is, we are looking to recognise and support young people who say “This is not about me giving the World ‘an answer’ to poverty. This is about me being willing to dedicate my life to walking humbly with fellow humanity, to taking on board its wisdom and being able to share my wisdom when it is suitably ripe and I know it is ready for sharing.”

So what have we done? We have attempted to inspire you, your friends and families and this community with the “sharing stories” of seventeen young people over the last three years. Last year, some of you may remember, I was

very clear about that word “inspire.” It does not mean putting a person on a pedestal: – the self sufficient hero hoisted above to world to dictate “how ‘it’ is done.” It means “in-breathing of spirit” – catching some of the quiet, determined passion of these young people so that we might work with, in and through them to understand our world, grow with it, love it and create life. That inextinguishable flame burns brightly in these six young people ...a little bit of Yeshua alive in the World today. That’s worth sharing.

The Anti-Poverty Awards for Young Victorians works on the premise of making a major award of about \$3500 to one applicant and several smaller encouragement awards. The intention is that the awards be used in developing capacity for the ongoing struggle against poverty. A review panel consisting of Lorraine Duff, Demi Baerenthaler, Bill Ford, Alex Sangster, Megan Dunn, Tam Nguyen, Margaret Ray, Kim Jones and myself have undertaken the wonderful but complex job of selecting award recipients. I thank them for their commitment to the cause.

I thank Margaret and Melynda for the administrative work they do that is so essential for the conduct of the awards.

I thank Helen and Bruce Mason for the Mason Statuette, which is presented to the major award recipient. As I mention each year she is a statuette from the Soul Journeys Maasai Tribe Collection. Standing on a base of local timber expertly turned by our own Mr George Ray, she is an inspiring figure. She represents the inspiration of local young people as they collaborate with all the tribes of the World.

I thank Michele O’Neil for agreeing to deliver the Will Thomas Oration this year. Michele, we are grateful that you are here with us at this small but, we hope, very meaningful event and we’ll look forward to hearing from you a little later in the afternoon. For those of you who are here for the first time this year, there is a brief biography of Will Thomas on the back of your programs. What the biography doesn’t mention is Will’s tireless efforts to fight poverty himself, particularly through his support of emergency relief in Broadmeadows. What the biography does give you a glimpse of is the extraordinary humility of this man and I am absolutely convinced that it was that humility, his love of humanity... that directed and motivated Will’s efforts in fighting poverty. You can therefore see that it is imminently appropriate to recognise Will in this oration.

Lastly, but by no means in the least, I want to thank the ANZ for their ongoing commitment to this shared initiative. Indeed they have grown in that commitment every year and are seeing the fruits of that in the feedback and stories and participation of award recipients in local bank branch life. I want to thank local CEO Ian Walker and his representatives, Balwyn branch manager Loraine Duff and Malvern branch manager Demi Baerenthaler for keeping the faith.

Let’s turn now to the first presentation for the afternoon and it is a presentation from 2005 overall award recipient Ms Kim Jones. If you were here

last year you might remember that Kim wasn't ...wasn't here, that is. In fact she was climbing to the Mt Everest base camp to support an orphanage in Nepal. She used her Anti-Poverty Award to develop her skills in art based therapy in a new and different cultural context, specifically with Liberian refugees in Ghana. Kim is here to take up that story. So would you please welcome Kim Jones.

Kim

And now it is time to meet our finalists.

The first finalist is Mr Matthew Gould. Matthew's voluntary work and community engagement have only been a recent additions to a decade of heavy involvement in the performing arts with various companies across Melbourne. In just two years of voluntary work, Matthew has progressively increased his skills and shaped his vision on effective means of combating poverty, namely through education and awareness.

In 2004 Matthew started voluntary work with the Sudanese-Australian Integrated Learning Program (SAIL). SAIL provides free English support & community services to the Sudanese refugee community in Melbourne. Matthew began as an English tutor, but in 2005 he took on the role of Saturday Coordinator for Dandenong SAIL.

In 2006 Matthew also started voluntary work with the Oaktree Foundation within the Oaktree Interactive team. Matthew has taken a leading role in writing, piloting, and running many interactive workshops in both primary and secondary schools, exposing students to the issues that cause entrenched poverty in society. In 2007 he will be part of a program that engages new University of Melbourne students during Orientation Week.

Please welcome Matthew Gould.

Taking your various commitments into consideration, what sort of work do you see yourself doing in the future?

What are the beliefs that are driving you in fighting poverty?

Thank you Matthew.

Next we welcome Ms Katia Rotar. For the past four years Katia has been highly committed to volunteer work that engages young people in being active and outspoken on issues of social and environmental justice. Katia is a founding member of the Ampersand Network, which aims to increase the proportion of young people volunteering in our community. She also spent three Months in Brazil – working with young Afro-Brazilians in fringe communities using dance and theatre to help them grow in their understanding of their African backgrounds and their rights as Brazilian citizens. She also worked to bring two of the young people she worked with to

Australia to perform with Indigenous groups in Sydney and in a Latin dance festival in Melbourne (and gave them the chance to travel home via Africa and further explore their African backgrounds)

Next year Katia will continue her focus on youth empowerment when she seeks to live and work as a volunteer in a rural community in South Africa for a year, on a health education program. Katia will work with fellow young South African volunteers and together they will be trained as Peer Educators and mentors, raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and adolescent sexual health among local youth.

Katia says that in a developing community where 55% of the population is under 22 years old, and the HIV infection rate is approaching 24%, communicating life-saving information in a manner that is relevant and youth-friendly is the key to empowering young people to take control of their own lives, which in turn, is absolutely central to the alleviation of poverty on an local and global scale.

Please welcome Katia Rotar:

How is the program you'll be working on in South Africa related to the work you've been doing here in Australia over the past few years?

You've been involved with Student Partnerships Worldwide here in Australia for more than a year now, so you must know the SPW's work pretty well – what aspect of the volunteer program are you most excited about?

Our third finalist for 2006 is Ms Megan Jackson. Meg has had the opportunity to spend time in places of extreme poverty and grapple with the response we must make as an international community. In India she worked specifically on the contentious laws of sexual assault, presenting her research and proposed Bill to a meeting of State Ministers on behalf of the Lawyers Collective. On her first visit to South Africa she volunteered at a cluster foster home in KwaZuluNatal, caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and violence. Meg has volunteered for the Oaktree Foundation since its inception and is currently its International Communications Coordinator and a board member.

This year Meg is directing a new initiative called Global Emerging Leaders. Global Emerging Leaders' which will focus on providing leadership training for young people that is characterised by vision and action.

A qualified lawyer, Meg is undertaking her LLM under the supervision of former Federal Human Rights Commissioner Brian Burdekin and will be travelling to Mongolia and Fiji later this year and in 2007 to conduct research on National Human Rights Institutions.

Please welcome Meg Jackson:

Why is an initiative like Global Emerging Leaders important?

What does Global Emerging Leaders hope to achieve in 2007?

We now come to the third annual Will Thomas Oration and the delivery of that by Ms Michele O'Neil.

Thank you Michele.

Now it's back to meeting our finalists. Our fourth finalist is Ms Anne Adams. Anne's anti-poverty work started in earnest after a trip to Tanzania. She made that trip after seeing an advertisement calling for volunteers in *The Big Issue*. Since that trip Anne has helped to establish Volunteer Africa, an international charity that sends volunteers to Tanzania for an experience of development. Anne is the Australian Country Coordinator.

After a second trip to Tanzania and gaining further understanding of the health care system, Anne was inspired to fundraise and she built two dispensaries that each give access to primary healthcare to 10,000 people. Last year she decided to formalise her fundraising and founded Health Australia and Tanzania (HAT). HAT's purpose is to fundraise for development projects that improve the health outcomes for people in rural Tanzania. HAT is currently working in the Singida region of Tanzania,

partnering with a local NGO that implements the projects HAT funds. In HAT's first year it has raised \$21,000 and has approximately 90 members.

Please welcome Anne Adams:

A strong link with Tanzania for your work Anne. Why that country?

What projects is HAT currently working on?

Our fifth finalist is Ms Anita George. Anita has been employed as a lawyer with the Human Rights and Civil Law Section of Victoria Legal Aid for over 2 years. As a human rights lawyer, she practices in several areas of law, specifically mental health law, anti-discrimination, and immigration law working with a significant case-load and with many disadvantaged and marginalized people within the community.

She spent the past 10 months organising an event known as 'ASID'- Asylum Seeker Independence Day - a benefit gig that was held at the East Brunswick Club on Sunday 3 September 2006 to raise funds and awareness in relation to asylum seekers in the community who lodge a protection visa after more than 45 days of arriving in Australia and are consequently placed on a Bridging Visa E with no work rights, access to Medicare or Centrelink benefits. She also works as a professional musician and will be performing at two Make Poverty History gigs in Hobart and the North West of Tasmania as part of Anti-Poverty Week this week.

Please welcome Anita George.

What specifically inspired you to organise the ASID benefit gig and what, in your experience, have been some of the repercussions for asylum seekers in the community on a Bridging Visa E being denied work rights?

How can your work as a musician contribute to the eradication of poverty?

Our sixth finalist for 2006 is Mr Keirnan Fowler. In January 2007, Keirnan will travel to Uganda as a volunteer for Student Partnership Worldwide. Keirnan will be participating in an environmental education program, which is run in a rural Ugandan village.

The 5-month program addresses issues such as sustainable agriculture, soil erosion and deforestation, and will be coordinated in conjunction with Ugandan volunteers.

Keirnan has recently completed study in Environmental Engineering and Science at the University of Melbourne. He hopes to be able to use knowledge gained from his studies, on his placement in Uganda. He also has many years experience working with young people as a director of a local youth group and through running youth camps.

Keirnan embarks on this journey with the hope that it will broaden his perspectives of other cultures and issues such as poverty and resource use, to enable him to be a more informed and passionate citizen of the global community.

Unfortunately Keirnan is unable to join with us this afternoon but we are delighted that his Mother has been able to join us and represent him this afternoon. Let's just show our appreciation for Keirnan's story and our encouragement for the journey on which he is about to embark.

As we've heard Anita George is both lawyer and musician and we're going to call on that second talent this afternoon for our reflective music space. As we hear from Anita, and as I say each year, I invite you to think about what you have heard today, think about what inspired you and think about how we can spread the inspiration around ...so the concept of Poverty might one day be history.

Please welcome once again, Anita George.

Well what remains to be done is to announce first the encouragement awards and the the recipient of the overall award and to do that I'd like to ask Lorraine Duff from the ANZ Bank to come forward. Ladies and Gentlemen, please make her welcome.