

Community Leadership PDF Resource

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Francesca Lejeune - Case study.

Francesca Lejeune is an active member of many programs that support children and young people within the wider community. She is actively involved in the Maternity Coalition Queensland, an organisation whose focus is to advocate for improvements in maternity care for women during pregnancy, birth and early parenting. She is one of the parents initially involved in the development of, and until recently a committee convenor, for Flipside Circus, a community based children's circus. She also manages the Kids Help Line Peer Skills program in Queensland.

Asked how she became so involved in community activities Francesca responds

"I was a young mother, I was connecting with other mums. That was a fantastic experience of becoming involved in a new mum's support group, which was set up by the Baby Health Clinic ...near where I lived, and that got me really interested in the idea of people connecting and really helping each other."

Francesca noted that one of the key features essential to successful leadership is that *"its about congruency, its being able to be able to be true to live according to what your values are."*

Asked whether strongly held values earmarked her for leadership Francesca responds *"Well, I think I have found my values as I've gone along, [and]... my values [have] guide[d] me [to]... make important life decisions."*

Francesca explains

"I have very strong values about being true to myself and about personal growth... whatever life stage you're at, whatever you're involved with, ... actually go into some psychological emotional social journey with that, and learn from whatever that situation presents to you, ...[it's] about connecting with people, ... about building relationships with people, and about accepting people."

Francesca uses the example of her own experience of linking into the Home Midwifery Association of Queensland when she says

" for me, it was great to actually find other people who shared ... values and ideas ... so you can ... network and share information and support each other."

It was through the process of being involved in the Home Midwifery Association support group, that Francesca, *"learnt a whole lot about midwifery and maternity issues"*.

Francesca describes two central principles which underpin her involvement in the various community based projects and which have developed from her work as a telephone counsellor and Peer Skills facilitator with Kids Help Line – *"being client centred and being empowering"*. For her the challenge lies in *"finding ways of working with people ...where what you do is congruent with those principles."*

Francesca notes that loyalty to a cause is essential to change and development. Her involvement with maternity reform lead her to realise:

"with this particular issue and all other issues, ... that, nothing's ever really going to change unless people really stick at it and maintain their loyalty and involvement....I mean, I used to see women at the International Women's Day, who were there with Children by Choice, older women, you know women in their 60's and 70's, and I thought this is really



interesting, what is it about these women ... this is something to do with... younger women ...but its an important issue to them, and [keeps] them maintaining their involvement with that issue. I thought that's what we need in this maternity reform, that even when people go past that stage of having babies, that they stay connected to that issue so they can make changes for other women that come through, and I think that [is] a really important thing."

As a leader, Francesca reflected that progress is sometimes slow, stating *"that's really frustrating when you see all these things that need to be done."* She states, only recently has she developed a valuable understanding. *"I guess it's that long term stuff. ... [though I may] want things to happen quickly, ... it'll happen when the timing is right you know. ... I just do what I can, when I can, and I'm also really keen."*

Francesca believes that working in coalition with others is important. She states

"[it] is really valuable, ...when different people from different groups get together and find common ground, ... In Australia last year, a group of midwifery and consumer groups got together and wrote an action plan called the National Maternity Action Plan, which is a blue print for maternity reform throughout the whole of Australia ... it was something that everybody who had been involved could get on board with and promote and support and its lead to a lot of renewed interest in the whole of Australia."

Of importance to Francesca are personal challenges and achievements as well as those bigger challenges facing the group. She recalls

"September ... 2002, really marked the first time that I'd ever got involved at a political level, and that was really exciting and it's been a really steep learning curve for me. And I guess that sort of illustrates for me that whatever I've been involved with, it's got to have something challenging and exciting, something that I could learn from. So for me [it has] been really interesting learning about all the political processes."

Francesca describes how critical it is to work with young people in ways that are empowering to them.

"I think ... it's really important for kids to get a real sense of achievement when they are growing up and to get a feeling they have some mastery over themselves, being able to do wonderful things and have that knowledge. ... [It's important to]... increase kids feeling that they can ...have some control in their own lives, that they have some connectedness to people in the community, and relationships, and that they can make differences. "

Finally, Francesca summarises her personal philosophy for leadership and community involvement

"its having a trust, and belief that what you are doing is important and valuable, and you're getting something out of it for yourself so you can keep doing that and you hope that you will make a difference and you just do what you do. ...its an incremental sort of thing. The idea like the hundredth monkey, ..., you might have ninety-nine monkeys and nothing happens, and then you get the hundredth monkey and change starts to happen."