

MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

EP3 SEG 2 COREY

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Welcome back. Tackling rampaging forwards and bursting through the defensive line is what first had Corey noticed in the tough world of rugby league. Now, he's using his high profile to inspire others to fulfil their potential too.

COREY: My name is Corey and this is my story. I've lived in St John's Park my whole life. Great place to go up and live. Yeah, this is St John's Park. This is street I grew up on. Been living here for 28 years now.

So this is my old primary school here, King Park Public School. This is where I went to primary school, my brother and sister many years ago now. I finished there in 1995, I think. South-west Sydney is an area made up of over 130 nationalities. These people came here, a lot of them via boat, they don't really have any skills and they had to start from scratch.

They've never been able to acquire any professional skill set so they've been stuck in that cycle of having to gain employment at places where they have to work in factories or have to mow lawns or they have to do things like that and it's a bit of the reality of the area but you're seeing 20, 30 years down the track their kids have gone on and gone to university and tried to attain tertiary qualifications to improve themselves because their parents actually see the value in that and they don't want their kids to face those same challenges that they've had to for so many years.

Played all my junior footy in the Bulldogs competition for the Chester Hills club and I was selected to play in the under 15s development squad and sort of progressed through the grades there and in 2001 when I was completing my HSC and I appeared in a grand final there for the team in front of 80,000 people which was a fantastic time.

COMMENTATOR: Gasnier away for Payne. Here's Corey Payne for his second try.

COREY: In the early 2000s I was given a really good opportunity to go play for the Dragons and spent four years there and was part of a finals series in my first year of first grade there.

COMMENTATOR: Ellis away. A charge. Who is it? Is it Danny Wick? It is the number 16 for the Dragons, Corey Payne.

COMMENTATOR: Craig Wing just outside the 10, he plays it quickly. Had them going backwards as a result. He gives it off to Corey Payne who will try and spin his way to the line and he does.

COREY: Had an opportunity to go play for Wests Tigers and again it was a really attractive offer because I was going to play alongside the likes of Benji Marshall, Robbie Farah, Todd Patton, Brett Hodgson and be coached by a fellow who I had a lot of respect for in Tim Sheens who had coached premierships teams when I was a youngster.

COMMENTATOR: They'll have a crack from dummy half and Payne has got over.

COREY: I was a massive Bulldogs fan as a kid and had always wanted to play for the Bulldogs. I was fortunate enough to be offered a contract there at the end of 2009 season and fortunate enough to live out a childhood dream and make my NRL debut for them in 2010.

My mother, she grew up in Chester Hill and funnily enough I ended up playing all my junior football in Chester Hill. Mum left high school before completing her final studies and became a hairdresser and went to tech and put herself through that and did her apprenticeship and owned her own hairdressing salon as a young lady and a bit of an entrepreneur herself. She bought a laundromat and she sort of operated those two businesses simultaneously. She was a go getter, I'd describe her as that, somebody who had a bit of drive and ambition to improve themselves.

And my father, you know, he ended up running a family-run business for the last 40-odd years and he sells fruit and vegetables in town and gets up every day and

goes out to Flemington markets and drives into town and does his bit there. In that itself I've learnt a tireless work ethic can really pay dividends.

Yeah, so this is my high school that I went to from 7 to 12, brother and sister also went here, Westfield Sports. You know, I was only thinking the other day of a fellow who taught me English in Year 11 and 12, John Turner, who - he wasn't a mentor but he was very supportive of, you know, my studies and probably seen a little bit of potential academically and he reminded me on various occasions the fact that studying for the HSC is as much about doing the homework and ticking the boxes and dotting the Is and crossing the Ts the same as you'd prepare to play football every year week. You have to do the training, you have to put the yards in because if you get to grand final day and you haven't done the work you're not going to be successful.

My parents always made it clear that football wasn't always going to be that lifelong career path that was, you know, going to set me up for the rest of my life. I think given the statistics, you know, 4.2 years is the average life span of an NRL footballer. As it turned out they're 100% correct because it's just not that pot of gold that's going to support you for the rest of your life.

I honestly didn't know what I wanted to do post high school. The fact that my parents wanted me to go to university was an important thing because they hadn't gone and my brother was the first in the family to go and I seen it as, you know, a great opportunity for myself. I was probably fortunate I got the marks required to get into a Bachelor of Commerce. What I see in that was more of a means to an end. As such I took majors in accounting and commercial law because I thought there would be a lot of need for an accountant and it's a good paying job and that's something that, you know, is a tangible outcome from going to university because that's what I actually thought university was about, getting a tangible outcome that could help you get a degree. The reality is there's so much more to life and there's so many more opportunities that I could pursue and part of that was going back and starting a Master of Commerce and focussing in on areas that are of interest to me.

If I cast my mind back about five years I wouldn't imagine anyone, let alone 500 to

600 people, coming along to listen to Corey Payne talking about going to university.

The Future Direction Network started off the back of an article that was published by Chris Bowen, who is the current Immigration Minister, back in 2009 and Chris, he published an article about his experiences growing up in western suburbs and attending St John's Park High School and going on and studying a Bachelor of Economics at the University of Sydney and the experiences he had there and he will tell the story sitting in a tutorial and a teacher asked each student where they were from and the student would put their hand up and say "I went to Kings College" and "I went to St Joseph's College" and I went to, you know, Barker or Riverview or whatever college, like whatever school it was and came to him and he put his hand up and "I said I went to St John's Park High and everyone looked at me and didn't know where that was and had no real clue as to where the area was" or if the school, you know, where the school - how the school rated, I guess.

Tonight's all about finding your way to university and trying to open up your minds to what's available.

He published that article in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' and, you know, I got in contact with Chris and I told him about my experiences growing up and having that same sort of discussion with a number of people, you know, but in my case the kids were from Cranebrook and Scots and a few different schools and no-one really knew where St John's Park was. And it was funny because that was a decade later and attitudes hadn't changed.

We formed the Future Direction Network and we had the Master of Management program and off the back of that it's just really grown and gained some fantastic momentum.

Ten years ago I would never have, you know, dreamed that any of this was possible. None of it at all. I didn't know half of it existed. I didn't know there was a NSW Young Australian of the Year, I didn't know what a Winston Churchill Fellowship was. I didn't know much about university. I didn't know what it could offer me or where it could take me. Help it take you past, help it take you further than just a degree, thank you.

COREY: What school did you go to?

GIRL: Good Samaritan.

COREY: Good Samaritan at Hoxton Park there?

GIRL: Yeah.

COREY: Yeah, yeah, first in the family to study?

GIRL: Yeah.

COREY: They're going to support you along the way in this degree so if it gets tough and it gets hard, you know, there's light at the end of the tunnel, there's people here to help you you've just got to ask.

COREY: Currently we're in the process of raising a scholarship fund and want to create a legacy, you know, a legacy of helping kids from disadvantaged backgrounds have the opportunity to go to university. It's one thing to go to scholarships, it's one thing to hand people money, it's another thing to create ambition and aspiration which we're currently trying to do with our programs and it's another thing to actually mentor them and provide them support to get through their studies.

We'd like to raise a significant amount of money and have a fund that acts in perpetuity that can provide ongoing scholarships for the rest of time. Helping yourself is one thing but when you help someone else and understand that you have helped them it's such a deeper, more rewarding feeling.

You know, Australia is a country where sport resonates, it's the social fabric, it connects people. Everyone knows who the local rugby league players are, everyone knows who the Parramatta Eels are or the Wests Tigers or the Dragons or the Bulldogs and that profile is a great platform to actually go out and do things in the community and really add value and hopefully create change and build capacity and

without doubt it's helped FDN with its mission and reach its goals. It's just created so much opportunity to talk to people and get people involved that can actually help raise the profile and get the message across to the many kids that need to be helped.

At the end of the day a university degree is going to get you employment, right, and it's probably going to get you a lot better employment than not having a degree. But there's so much more to it, right, there's so much more to sitting down with a bunch of bright people from all different backgrounds, who are all trying to achieve and learning about their perspective on the world.

You can go out and make money, you can go out and make money without a university degree but, you know, it's hard to become a top leader, it's hard to become a captain of industry, it's hard to become a person that has a real worldly rounded perspective of the world without having that exposure to many, many different backgrounds who are all very intelligent people and university is that place where you can do that, it fosters that sort of connection with the community.

My best memory or fondest experience at university is without doubt meeting the many, many different people who I have come across in the last decade.

My name is Corey and this is my story. I grew up in St John's Park in south-west Sydney. I started playing rugby league at the age of 9. Along with my friends, I started the Future Direction Network. I'm studying a Master of Commerce. I am first generation in my family to go to university and I'm very proud of that.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: After being recognised as NSW Young Australian of the Year and recently retiring from the NRL, Corey is studying for his Masters of Commerce degree and continuing to inspire the youth of south-west Sydney. To learn more about these and other stories, make sure you visit our website at modelsofachievement.com.au. See you next time.

END OF TRANSCRIPT