

MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

EP 8 SEG 1 GENNA

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Hi, I'm Annette Shun Wah, welcome to Models of Achievement. In this series we're exploring the successes and aspirations of extraordinary Australians who have discovered their own inspirational path through university study. These are personal stories from people of very diverse backgrounds, some current students and graduates revealing how education has changed their lives.

After completing school, some people don't have immediate plans to attend university but a trip to Africa proved to be a life-changing experience for Genna. Now the nursing student is busy with great plans for the people of a little village in Kenya.

GENNA: My name is Genna and this is my story. I was born in Sydney, Australia and I was raised in originally North Bondi and then later on I moved to Randwick and now I live with my mum and my three sisters.

I loved legal studies and biology and everything else was just something I had to do but they were definitely my favourites. Originally I didn't want to graduate from high school. I was thinking of dropping out in Grade 10. My sisters, three of them, are very academic and quite bright and I thought what's the point of me going to finish if I'm only going to get a low score. But my parents were very supportive of me and they said we don't care what your marks are as long as you stay and you mature, that's the most important thing. So Grade 11 and 12 were probably the best two years of my high school. Head peer support in Year 11, I was the treasurer of the SRC, I was prefect and in the last year I got an award, a prize which they made for me which is Person of the Year For Community Life and all my sisters used to get a lot of academic, chemistry and biology and English so I was quite happy that they made an award to acknowledge all the efforts that I did when I was in school.

From about Grade 7 and 8 I remember watching around Christmas time World Vision

ads and seeing African children and I used to be so confused. I looked around my bedroom and have all these amazing things and you see these children had nothing and that's something that's always stuck with me so I thought that's it, as soon as I graduate I want to do volunteering in Africa and I don't care where it is. So from about Grade 9, Grade 10, I started to save my money and I went to a travel agent, spoke to them and said I want to do volunteering. Originally I was meant to go to Ghana but there weren't enough volunteers so they actually placed me in Kenya and that's where I've been ever since.

Kenya, the poverty line, you know, about 50% of the population live on less than \$1 a day and for education and literacy, you know, if there's a choice majority of boys are chosen over girls and a lot of people don't actually get to graduate from high school. A lot of them drop out after Grade 8 so it's very different to what we have here in Australia.

Getting off the plane I was just so excited. I didn't have any expectations so then I guess I wouldn't be disappointed but I was willing to take whatever came my way and the people are so hospitable, they're the most amazing people I have ever met. No matter what you do they're so grateful. They're fun, full of life and, you see these people who have nothing and they're the happiest people you will ever meet. And so when I came back my attitude completely changed because you don't need all these materialistic items to make you happy and that's a lesson that's stuck with me.

So I teach the students from Grade 1 to Grade 8 English, maths, science, PDHPE and art and we were completing a building that had already started of two classrooms. A lot of the houses are made out of mud, it's just earth, no pavements, they do have a road but full of pot holes, rubbish everywhere, they live with their animals. It's very basic. No running water, no electricity. Cold bucket showers, squat toilets, transport they've got buses which are called mutatus which are supposed to fit 14 people but they squeeze about 30 people in there. So it's a bit rough but I love it.

When I was still on the volunteering program on my first trip I called Mum, I'm like

"Mum, please, can I stay for another month" and Mum said, "No, I can't afford it, come home, save up and go back" and that's exactly what I did. I went back July 2010 and stayed till December.

I mean once you realise what it's like in other countries of the world who don't have the same facilities as we do, I can't help but feel it's my responsibility to do something about it because I'm aware of it. And I guess some people say it's a calling in life and that's what I believe it is, you know.

You'd walk with the kids to the school and walk them back home and by the end of those two weeks you make such a big impact because there's one thing to donate money and items but it's something else to donate your time.

The main reason why I became so attached to Karunga because there was a kindergarten classroom that was made out of cardboard and wood. It had no windows, it was so small, there were 18 students, the floors were uneven, the desks and chairs were falling apart so I thought what could I do to help? So I sent an email back home saying please I only need \$2,000 to build a new classroom, I ended up raking in \$15,000. We put in windows, a water tank, a teacher's office, we put in some swings for the kids and we've put in new toilets as well and we've surrounded it with a fence which is colourful and we've also got the alphabet and numbers so it's educational as well.

The children in the kindy, they're my inspiration. I've got photos of them in my house, in my room and when you realise how something so small can change someone's life, if there's any opportunity a way that I can do it I will.

This is one of the maths teachers just explaining to the students about equations and simple adding. This is one of the builders, Peter, they've started the water tank. And this is the first class photo 2013 Granma Jenny's Training Centre students.

A friend put a link on my Facebook wall saying "Gen, I think you'd be interested in this."

So I clicked on it and it was called Project Inspire: 5 Minutes to Change the World and you had to have an idea to empower women and the prize would be US\$25,000. So I decided to create a training centre and that was inspired by a woman who I had met in the village who is a single parent and has 8 children and she's illiterate and uneducated. So that was my role model. So I entered my idea, I worked on it with my builders from Australia in Kenya, got the quotes, had architectural designs made and I was selected as top 10 out of 450 entries from 53 countries and I was the youngest contestant of 18 at the time. I said to them after my speech I said, "Regardless of what happens today I'm still going to raise the money myself and make sure it happens."

Something I was worried about was that maybe the men might be disheartened by the idea because we're trying to empower women but I was actually told this is something they've been wanting to happen, however they don't have the funds for it. So the men are just as supportive as the women.

We're trying to do a fundraiser which will purchase the first year of supplies such as equipment, materials, staff salaries, anything that is necessary for the first year to get the training centre up and running.

I thought if I'm going to be preaching to other women that they should go out and do something with their lives I should follow my own saying and so I decided I'll do nursing and then I could do aid work and help rural villages across Africa who don't have the same health access as we do and health care.

The best thing about the university subjects is you're taught across the board but you can be specific in where you would like to work and paediatrics and maybe midwifery is where I'd like to specialise in. So we have a community subject and that teaches you about the vulnerable populations and that's exactly the field where I'd want to be working. I'd want to be out there in the community with people who are really suffering and give immunisations and help with like food aid and do whatever I can to help those who are struggling to live. After I graduate next year I'm going to go back to Kenya for a

few years and with that I'm going to do some work in one of the hospitals, get some experience and then that's going to help me design my medical centre that I'd like to build and put in Karunga as well.

I think the most important thing for any student once graduating is to take time to travel if you can. This way you can explore the world and see what life is like for other people. You eliminate that little bubble that you've been brought up in and you can see how people live, what conditions, what environments people are brought up in and then from that you discover yourself a lot more.

My name is Genna and this is my story. I volunteered on a teaching and building program in Kenya. I opened up a charity to build a school in Karunga. I decided to go to university and study nursing. I hope my nursing degree can help those in Africa in need. I'm not personally just trying to change the world just the world of a few people.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Genna will graduate with a Bachelor of Nursing and plans to return to work with the people of Kenya as soon as her studies are completed.

END OF TRANSCRIPT