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And the Winner is...
The 2012 Joan Kirner Social Justice Award

Communities in Control Conference
Melbourne, 29 May, 2012

Presentation by

Carol Schwartz AM
Chair, Trawalla Foundation and Our Community

Carol Schwartz:

I think I have the most honoured position in the conference now. I'm so thrilled to be up here with Joan Kirner, who I have to tell you has just been absolutely surrounded by people the entire time she's been here. She's just an honoured statesperson. She's acknowledged as that person by everybody. And Joan, it's fantastic to have you up here with us.

And of course Joan needs very little introduction to those of us who care about community, equality and social justice.

Selfless, ceaseless, clever, compassionate, Joan is the embodiment of everything that this new award is about, which is of course why we named the award after her.

The Joan Kirner Social Justice Award is designed to identify those people who are pushing the social justice agenda in Australia.

The award recognises those people and groups who are working to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots in a way that ensures that everyone, and every community, has the confidence and power to shape their own future. I think those of us who were lucky enough to hear Damian Ogden know that that's really possible but it does take a lot of work.

The inaugural award was announced at the Communities in Control conference last year and we launched it in January 2012.

A new recipient will be selected annually and it is an initiative of Our Community, and I'm really pleased and honoured to say that it's supported and funded by the Trawalla Foundation, which my family is involved with.

Entries are open to both individuals and groups and teams.

Now, we discussed what the key factors for success should be for this award and what we decided upon were respect, inclusion and collaboration: *Nothing about us without us.*

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People working for social justice must ensure that the process of change is actually owned by those affected by the change, and I think we've heard a lot about that this conference.

We received a remarkable number and quality of entries this year, inspiring reading and a real antidote, I guess, to some of the cynicism that's been floating around.

Now, we hoped that Prime Minister Julia Gillard would be with us today in person to present the award, but unfortunately Parliament is sitting and we know about the issues with the hung Parliament so she couldn't be with us in person. But she has sent us a pre-recorded message. So I'm really pleased that she did find time to do that.

So if I can hit the go button on the Prime Minister's message, that would be great.

Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia:

It's a great honour to share this message with the Communities in Control conference.

This is the largest conference of its kind in Australia, spreading and sharing the message that a community empowered is a community that will thrive.

I'd like to pay tribute to Denis Moriarty from Our Community and Father Joe Caddy from CatholicCare for bringing those principles to the fore through this conference, now celebrating its 10-year anniversary.

You've described this decade as a time of fellowship, friendship, wisdom and inspiration and I know each of you will carry those qualities in your hearts wherever you go, making a difference, changing lives and never, ever thinking that it's someone else's job.

I know that sentiment was on the mind of Carol Schwartz and Carol's family foundation, the Trawalla Foundation, when she initiated the Joan Kirner Award.

I'm very proud to call Joan Kirner a friend, indeed a dear friend. Not only that, she is a great Australian who has spent her life fighting for social justice and the ability of communities to determine their own future.

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So this accolade is very appropriately named. And this year, as the communities hit by the 2009 bushfires start to see the green shoots of recovery, it's very appropriately awarded as well.

It goes to a group that abundantly fulfilled the ideals of this conference, a group that has worked tirelessly to help those doing it tough get the help and support they need.

It is my great pleasure to announce that the winner of the 2012 Joan Kirner Social Justice Award is the Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal Team.

Congratulations and please enjoy the rest of this very special and timely conference.

Carol Schwartz:

That was great. I'd like to invite Margaret and her colleagues to come up and receive the award.

Let me tell you a little bit more about why they won this. As their entry told us, the town of Maryborough in central Victoria has a disproportionately high rate of generational unemployment, with all the economic, social and cultural disadvantage that comes with that.

There are lots of jobs in Maryborough but it seems that no-one wants to fill them. But the Maryborough Project is working to change all of that and is having remarkable success.

I'd now like to invite Margaret to tell us a little bit more of that. Thank you, Margaret.

Margaret:

Prime Minister in absentia, the Honourable Joan Kirner, Carol Schwartz and honoured guests, it's my very great pleasure to accept this award today. We're very, very excited at Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal to be the inaugural recipient of this award. We're very nervous but very excited as well.

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I have a few people to thank today. First of all, Prime Minister Julia Gillard for acknowledging and congratulating us on this award. We really appreciate her taking time out of what's obviously a busy schedule.

I'd like to thank our past Premier, the Honourable Joan Kirner, for being the namesake of this award. Joan has ensured that social justice will remain something to aspire to and be celebrated.

As a small team of three, we're incredibly honoured to have received an award bearing Joan's name, for she has set the benchmark in shaping the social justice agenda, not only in this state but across Australia as well. So Joan, thank you.

I'd like to thank Our Community and the Trawalla Foundation, particularly Carol, you and your family, for making this award possible. We really very much appreciate that.

I'd like to thank our CEO, Mark Johnson, here behind me, and our past Mayor at Central Goldfields Shire, who have worked tirelessly, not only to get Maryborough on the map and make a difference for our very disadvantaged community, but they've advocated for programs like Neighbourhood Renewal, for which I'm the place manager.

Programs like that are beginning to make a real difference in our community. So to mark our past Mayor and council members, I'd like to thank them very much.

I'd like to thank the previous state government for initiating Neighbourhood Renewal throughout the state. If not for them, me and my team wouldn't have been able to do the work that we've done around this program.

I'd like to acknowledge the current state government for continuing the funding for Neighbourhood Renewal. We often see changes in funding with changes of government, but our current state government have very kindly agreed to continue funding. For that we thank them very much.

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The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, for having the insight and courage to remove a bit of red tape so that we could make this program happen on the ground in Maryborough.

I'd like to thank Nan Walker from Social Solutions. I'm sure many of you are aware of Nan Walker running Understanding Poverty programs. Getting Ahead, this program that we've won the award for, is part of the Understanding Poverty suite of programs. Nan has worked with us to raise awareness of Dr Ruby Payne's insights into the issues presented by economic and social disadvantage in our community.

I'd like to thank the participants in our Getting Ahead program for their faith that Maryborough Neighbourhood would do what we said we'd do. Their faith is untiring and we're very honoured.

I'm delighted to introduce you to two of our Getting Ahead participants, Kaz Hughes and Rosemary Edwards, who participated in our first Getting Ahead program. Kaz will have a few words to say in a minute.

And mostly, I'd like to thank my colleagues, Matt Broad and Liz Dorset, who's unable to be with us today. They actually deliver the program on the ground and they've just done an amazing job of levelling the playing field for residents in our community, and giving people a fair go.

As Carol said, this program is about providing people with the tools to make a change in their own life. I think your conference has very ably pointed that out, that all we've done is give people the tools in their toolbox to take control over their own life. And they've taken those and done some amazing things.

Out of the 15 participants in our first program, eight have found employment and seven have gone on to accredited training or education. So that's a pretty good average by anyone's standards so we're pretty pleased with our little program in Maryborough.

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To Matt and Liz who deliver the program, I'd like to thank them most sincerely for their commitment, not only to Neighbourhood Renewal but to Getting Ahead as an initiative that does help level that playing field.

Thank you very much and I'd like to bring Kaz forward. I think she's got a few words to say too.

Thank you.

Kaz Hughes:

A little over 18 months ago I'd just moved back to Maryborough with my three children. I had absolutely no idea what I was going to do. I had my first experience on Newstart which wasn't a pleasant one.

I had to do some volunteer work and I was lucky enough to be able to do it with Neighbourhood Renewal. Through them I was lucky enough to be accepted into the Getting Ahead program.

It was confronting. It was challenging. We didn't always like some of the things we heard. But it gave us some really good building blocks and the tools that we needed to apply in our everyday lives, not just in work, but in our personal and professional lives.

It built up confidence. It built up a good rapport with the rest of the class as well, and let us know that we weren't alone.

It showed us what our strengths were, areas that we needed to develop more in. For me, unfortunately, it was family and social, external family. It was really good to be able to work on those areas, to have them defined and to give you some direction of where to go. Since then, my family is better. I don't fight with my 18-year-old daughter half as much. These techniques are great.

I've now gone back to study. I'm doing Certificate III in Community Services this year.

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And I'm still able to apply the techniques that I've learnt in Getting Ahead, both in my study and in my day-to-day life. Without the help of the Neighbourhood Renewal team and the facilitators who are there even now for us every time we have a hiccup or have a problem, they're always there for us. I can't thank them enough for that. It's changed my life.

Thank you.

Carol Schwartz:

Well done Kaz. It was great.

It's our very great pleasure both on behalf of Trawalla and Our Community to present this inaugural Joan Kirner Social Justice Award to you. Congratulations.

Congratulations again to Margaret and the team. It's really fantastic. And thank you very much for making the trip out here today. It was really wonderful to have you all here.

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