



Learning from the World and Making a Difference

New South Wales | Susanna Matters

A primary school teacher, UNICEF Ambassador, award winning charity director, Leader of Girl Guides and member of the Board of Girl Guides NSW ACT - Susanna Matters exemplifies the spirit of Girl Guiding in Australia – empowerment through opportunity and education.

After experiencing first-hand the friendships of the Guide movement (her mother got her involved as a young girl in Hong Kong), at the age of 18 Susanna became a leader of young Guides. “I had some great positive relationships with the parents” says Susanna “which gave me considerable confidence in the role”.

Her experience as a Unit Leader in Northern Sydney led her into teaching.

“I came to teaching with 6 years of experience of working with primary age children and this experience was respected. Following the girls through Guiding and

watching them grow was key to my decision to go into primary teaching.”

Whilst her experiences in the unit prepared her well for the teaching career that she has today, Susanna credits the experiences internationally, within the broader movement as the main gifts of Guiding to her development.

Her springboard was a conference at one of the Girl Guide World Centres, Sangam in India where today, Guides from across the world are provided with opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of the world.



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“I went to an advocacy seminar at Sangam and met a group of amazing and motivated women from across the world. This really led me to understand that Guiding is the best way for girls and young women to engage with global issues, and to develop their leadership skills.”

“My first Sangam seminar was the first time that I realised that Girl Guides is actually a very influential worldwide movement”.

In 2010 Susanna went to the Commission for the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York where she was able to speak to key government officials from around the world and with her colleagues from the international movement of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, lobby for the International Day of the Girl Child. “The average person in the street doesn’t understand how important Guiding is in the international policy arena – we are a major stakeholder.

We are the biggest Non-Government Organisation representing girls in the world!”

For Susanna this was a “touch stone” moment in her ongoing commitment to empowering women and girls. It was the introduction to the idea that there is a direct correlation between empowerment of girls and the eradication of global poverty.

Susanna has found the main contribution of Guiding to her life has been the training and skills that she received on advocacy and the introduction to some of the major issues facing specifically relevant to girls around the globe. “The policy work and training on the Millennium Development Goals is a major gift that I received from Guiding” she said. “I now know how to communicate these complex ideas and messages at the grass roots level”

It can be hard work, but Susanna takes it in her stride – “during challenging times you just have to step back and realize that you are just one piece of the jigsaw puzzle.”

In 2013, Susanna Matters was announced as the Women’s Weekly’s “Women of the Future”. She was awarded \$20,000.00 for her charity Good for Girls, which assists young women in Kenya to reach their educational potential by providing some of the fundamentals in life, that we take for granted in Australia – sanitary pads.

Talking about the charity that she founded, Susanna says “currently girls in Kenya miss up to 25% of their schooling because they do not have access to suitable sanitary



products. The work that *Good for Girls* has done has improved the performance of girls at school because of an increase in attendance rates.”

The charity started when Susanna went to Kenya as a volunteer teacher. She realised that there was a simple and practical solution to improve the educational outcomes of girls in Kenya. She says “*Goods for Girls* is not doing extraordinary work – it is just doing practical work – taking the right course of action. No girl should have to go without sanitary products.”

For Susanna, all the activities that she does – for her local community or across the world – come back to living the Guiding Promise and Law. “It is everything that I do – integrity, honesty and courage – you are striving for the best collective outcome. All the values of Guides I am able to put into practice. “

“What is so lovely about Guides is that the focus is on helping young women shine and find their talent – I have been given some amazing experiences at such a young age

because Guiding is all about believing in the potential of youth to affect positive change,” says Susanna.



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