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5 MINUTES WITH A FUNDRAISER – KAYLEEN JOHNSTON

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Kayleen with Bravehearts' lovable lion cub Ditto, the star of Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Show, an interactive show that teaches children essential personal safety skills and knowledge using age-appropriate language, song, and dance.

Kayleen Johnston is the National Education Funding Manager at Bravehearts and the recipient of the **F&P** and [BePartnerReady.com™ scholarship](#).

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Actually, I wanted to be a vet, most likely fuelled by my admiration of Dr Harry. Almost every pet I had growing up was a stray or a give-away. I had budgies, cockatiels, a pigeon, guinea pigs and even a mouse at one stage. Mum was not happy with the mouse! In my teenage years I had horses too. I was certain being a vet was what I wanted, and I found a veterinary practice that allowed me to do some work experience when I was 14. I was able to watch two operations and I nearly passed out during the second one. I realised then that this was probably not going to be my chosen career path. After that, I dabbled with the idea of law, teaching and aged care too. Any career that I thought was a great way to help people.

How did you get into the not-for-profit sector?

I've always found myself drawn to helping. Possessing a strong social conscience, I was always going to work in a field that supports the most vulnerable. When I felt ready to work in the space of child sexual assault, Bravehearts was the perfect fit. My family founded Bravehearts after I disclosed at seven years old that I was being sexually assaulted. The support systems that are available today simply weren't available 23 years ago. In fact, it was illegal for my parents to state publicly that their child was a victim of child sexual abuse. Bravehearts was integral in amending this law. Counselling wasn't available for children of

my age through Medicare and there weren't organisations to turn to then like there are now. Bravehearts was the first organisation dedicated to supporting survivors of child sexual assault, and improving how the country responds to, and prevents this crime.

Tell us about the work you do

Currently, I work within the education department of Bravehearts. Bravehearts has developed and run a range of leading education programs for children suitable for prep right through to high school. My role is to find financial support for these programs through funding, partnerships, and sponsorships. This funding ensures that Bravehearts is able to continue to deliver this important messaging into schools across the country, and extend the reach of our education teams.

I'm really passionate about it. One in five children will be sexually harmed in some way before the age of 18. Educating children needs to start young, but it doesn't have to be scary, and it shouldn't be a hard conversation to have. That's why these education programs are so important. They are educational, non-confrontational and they work!

How has COVID-19 affected your work/cause and what has been your response?

Like everyone, we have been significantly impacted. Our education teams are unable to run incursion programs into schools, and our face-to-face counselling of course all moved to telephone and online. There have been some positives, however. With relation to education, we have been able to use this opportunity to adapt and refine our online programs for students in years 3-6. We have seen some great results with this program (Cyber Echo) which focuses on online safety. Our counselling teams have received some great results too with our younger clients using the online program to attend their sessions. This delivery method incorporates a messenger-style option, so they can type responses to their counsellor, allowing them to use emojis and such to help express themselves. It's a service delivery method that will be continued along with our face-to face counselling post COVID-19. It's a space younger clients are familiar with, and talking to them in their language makes them feel more comfortable and allows them to open up a little more.

Who or what inspires you?

So many people honestly, but generally I admire people who stand up for injustice and fight for positive change. Everyday people who make a difference. My parents for example. Sounds cliché I know, but my Mum and Dad are amazing. Dad isn't a public figure like Mum, but he was the first person I told, and he believed me right away. My Dad is my personal hero. Mum has done so much in the public space to bring this issue to the forefront and I admire her so much for that.

I also admire people who have overcome tremendous hurdles yet remain positive about life, and make the most of it! Individuals who use their stories to inspire others to achieve their own personal goals. For me, Turia Pitt is the perfect example of this, I think she is incredible.

What's the best piece of career advice you've ever received?

I don't know if this is specifically career advice, but these three things have always stuck with me:

1. Don't rest on your laurels.
2. Always be open and willing to learn more.
3. Treat the cleaner with the same respect as the CEO.

It's been a tough one, but what has been the highlight of your year so far?

This is a tough question. I think the highlight of the year for me has been the strengthening sense of community that we have formed at Bravehearts due to this pandemic. It seems strange, although we are all physically separated, we have all banded together and are truly looking out for each other and our broader Bravehearts' community. It's been really wonderful to find new ways to connect with each other, and a great reminder of what a wonderful team we all are.