

[Music]

Female: I just always remember running up to the windows, pressing my nose against the glass and watching the planes come in.

Male: My mum, she's a very loving natured person so you know when she's serious it means something.

Male: Wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself.

Female: That's pretty much when my whole life changed.

[Music]

Female: What we do day-to-day for each of us is our own contribution to the world, regardless of your occupation. But can each of us find something that we are truly passionate about, that we can be proud of, and that can make us excited to get up every Monday morning? In this series we chat to people who are out there doing just that, doing what they describe as exactly what they love to do.

Respondent: I got lost in a lot of kind of ways in that time as well, as a teenager. You know, as a young man you get probably caught having too much fun and not worrying about school, etcetera. Worrying about what's happening on the weekends instead of what was happening during the week.

Interviewer: Indi is a proud family man. He's one of 76 first cousins. He thrives on being a strong leader in his community, and draws strength from the powerful women in his life, but it wasn't always like that for him. He talks to us about his teenage years, losing his confidence before gaining his qualifications, and the various, as he calls them, lollipop moments he's had along the way.

Respondent: So my name is Indi Clarke and I'm the manager of the Koorie Youth Council. I'm a proud Muthi Muthi man on my father's side with close ties to the Yorta Yorta Nations, Wemba Wemba and also on my mother's side, I'm a Lardil man as well."

Interviewer: Hi, Indi, thanks for taking the time to meet with us. I've read a lot about your story and I've really been looking forward to our conversation. You seem to be an incredibly positive person. Would you agree?

Respondent: I love to project off positive vibes. There's only one way we can react to two situations, and it's either positive or negative. The more we react positively, the more it ripples out. And the other thing is, I'm passionate. I love what I do and I love who I do it for.

Interviewer: So can you tell me a little bit more about what it is that you do?

Respondent: It's a unique organisation that pretty much is youth led. It's governed by 15 deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and for me, that was just kind of the pinnacle of my career, jumping on there and just being a part of the services that they provide, the gatherings that they hold. I was fortunate last year to get the job as deputy manager, and since then I've become manager.

Interviewer: It's obvious that you love your work. What makes you passionate about it?

Respondent: So for me, the Koorie Youth Council at the moment is my dream job because exactly that, our core business is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. And not only is that our core business, we're led by them. So we're given their views, their aspirations and what they want to see in the community, and what they want to see the government do, so when we go out and we advocate for their rights, it's not our voices, it's their voices. So not only do we represent them, but we facilitate their voice. And for me, you don't get many jobs like that. And it's truly one of the most rewarding careers I've ever chosen.

Interviewer: So you're providing a voice for young Aboriginal people in the places that they are perhaps under represented. That sounds like a huge role.

Respondent: It's a massive role. It comes with a lot of responsibility, but like I said, it's great to know that the community stands behind you, and like I said, when we've got those 15 deadly young people together, they kind of give us the passion that we need to work forward, but also the direction that they want us going in. you know you've got the community standing by you and you know that if you ever do fall back, there's someone there always to take the step forward with you.

Interviewer: That's really powerful work, Indi. So now to you as a person. Do you think it's fair to say that you haven't always been the energetic, empowered and successful Indi that we see today?

Respondent: Yeah, so for me, my father did pass away when I was quite young, and was quite a special man for my community. It was a really tough time in our lives. We lost my Nan and my Dad in the space of 16 months. So for my whole father's family it was a really tough time, and grieving, it's a different kind of process for different people, and they deal with it in different ways. For me I was so young, I don't think I really understood it until my later years in life.

Interviewer: I'm really sorry to hear that. That's really tough. So in prep for this conversation, I read that you were only six at the time, and that's obviously had a huge impact on your life. Do you think it's only later in life, and reflecting back, that you really understand that impact?

Respondent: Yeah, so for me, I got lost in a lot of ways in that time as well as a teenager. As a young man you get probably caught having too much fun and not worrying about school, etcetera. Worrying about what's happening on the weekend instead of what was happening during the week. So I did that, and had a bit too much fun. But I always had kind of strong people around me that would always pull me back and say maybe it's time we jumped back on the right path. And I'll never forget my Godmother and Mother did that to me when I was a teenager. I remember sitting down, and it was kind of, my Godmother is a very stern woman, but a very loving woman. When she needs to be stern, she is. My Mum, she's a very loving nature person, so you know when she's serious, it means something. So it was kind of Indi, come here, sit down, we need to have a talk. And I'll never forget that day, because for me, that's the lollipop moment in my life that kind of went, Indi, you're better than what you're doing. Time to get back to where you want to be. And consisted of exactly them kind of words. Indi, what are you doing now?

Interviewer: So they sound like some pretty powerful women, and it sounds like you got a bit of a talking to. I'm guessing this is a moment of personal reflection and planning for the future.

Respondent: My Father was all about Aboriginal education as well. So that was a bit of pressure on me, and throughout the time that I did drop out of school, that was always kind of burning in the back of my mind, that he wouldn't want you to be doing this. At least finish your TAFE. At least go back to school and finish that. So for me, after we had that conversation, it was about taking myself back to TAFE, and just at least getting my VCAL, which was Victorian Certified Applied Learning, and doing it to the best of my ability. And like I said, I was fortunate enough to put my head down and do my job there, and was fortunate enough to get a job straight out of VCAL, then to lead on to another job. And now to be where I am today.

Interviewer: So from going back and completing your VCAL to where you are today, what's the difference between say the early teenage Indi and after high school Indi?

Respondent: I re-found my confidence, I think. I've been normally a pretty passionate and confident guy, but for a while there I kind of got stuck in this kind of shy, hidden Indi Clark, which is not who I am. I'm normally that fun, bubbly kind of bright character, and for me, it was through that traineeship and through that course, it was unconsciously tapping into the confidence levels that I had in my skills, but in myself. And I feel like that's what TAFE courses do for you. TAFE provides you with a course, but they also provide somebody that will walk the journey with you. And that's the way of the future, I think. It's about walking the journey with the young people, walking the journey with people in general, because it's exactly that. If you do take a step, there's someone there to take a step forward with you. And for me, there was times where I'd forget to do my bookwork. The TAFE teacher would be right there on my case. Indi, you know you can do it, so let's do it. And then we'd take the step forward together.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you had a lot of support around you, and encouragement to keep on going. Did you ever doubt yourself and think I can't do this?

Respondent: Yeah, a couple times. That was probably because I was having too much fun. I think it was more yeah, just as a young man, there's so many things happening around you when you're 16, 17, 18 year old stages. Having too much fun, peer pressures. I felt like that was probably the one thing that burdened me whilst I was in TAFE, where I did start to question whether it was for me. But I stuck with it, and I'm thankful that I did, because I'm now where I am today. And I wouldn't be if it wasn't for what happened then.

Interviewer: Good on you for sticking with it. I think for most of us, they're the moments when we look back and feel most proud of ourselves. So you did your Year 11 and 12 equivalent, and did a traineeship in retail, where you gained your Certificate II and III, and eventually worked up to become supervisor. But that obviously wasn't the end of the line for you.

Respondent: Throughout Optus, I started not really enjoying what I was doing, was quite unhealthy at the time. Came to some kind of dark days in my own life, in mental wellbeing, and really wanted to change my lifestyle and change the way I was doing things. My father was heavily involved in Aboriginal education, growing up. So I always had a really keen interest for education and passion for it, which got lost in my teenage years. But I remember at a young age, I wanted to be a teacher, at one point. Also a police officer, and also an accountant at one stage as well. So you know, toss and turn, but in the end I've really understood that I just want to work for my community and give back to my people. I started reading newspapers and started thinking about maybe it is time to start looking outside and start doing what I really enjoy. But it kind of came out of a dark time. I seen a job at the time for a corporate services trainee. I thought they were doing some good things, I just wanted to be involved. I thought let's go for that, if I get my foot in the door, we'll see where the rest takes me. Went for the job, and fortunately got it.

Interviewer: So to go from being a supervisor to being a trainee, that's pretty bold move. People aren't always willing to take a sideways, or even backwards step, because of a bigger picture or purpose. Can you tell me a little bit more about that decision?

Respondent: My old C.E.O. says something like, sometimes you have to take a step back to take a step forward. And for me, necessarily, it was just about getting my foot in the door at this organisation that was doing really good things at the time for the community, and I felt like, as long as I get my foot in the door, I will start there, and we'll see what happens. And the rest is kind of history, because it's worked out well so far.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like it has. And so we've heard about the early teenage years of Indi, and now the Indi we have in front of us today. So what's next for you? Do you see any major shifts? Or do you feel like yep, this is it for me?

Respondent: I think this might be a lifetime job for me. I don't know about at the Youth Council, because it's a young people's organisation. So in a couple of years' time, I'll be past the youth bracket, and it will be time to pass it on to someone else who's young and energetic and ready for the role. But for me, it will be about exactly that, continuing to do something that gives back to not only the Aboriginal community, but communities themselves. Very much love this type of work, and it's definitely where my passion lies.

Interviewer: And so looking back, would you say that you've succeeded in finding your passion? And do you ever look back at those teenage years and have any regrets?

Respondent: I feel like everything happens for a reason. So would I change anything? No. Did I do some stupid things? Yes. But for me, it's about learning from those consequences, and not mistakes, but learning from those learnings. And for me, it's Indi, keep doing what you do, and remember who you are. My Mum there, she's been my rock for everything. She's always told me that you can be whatever you want to be. You truly are your own kind of judge, in a sense, but your own person, and you can walk your own unique path. For me, it was really about just doing that.

Interviewer: That's certainly a big story, and one that I think is very familiar to a lot of young people. So thanks so much for joining us today, Indi, and for chatting with us, and good luck with whatever comes next. We have no doubt that you'll pour your heart and soul into it.

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