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Full transcript of
an interview with:

Gaby Hummel

Conducted on:

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Interviewer:

Allison Murchie

Transcribed by:

Deborah Gard

For:

The **Don Dunstan Foundation**
20th Anniversary Oral History Project

1999–2019 celebrating 20 years of action for a fairer world



DON DUNSTAN FOUNDATION 20th Anniversary **ORAL HISTORY** PROJECT

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

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A series of dots, indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

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Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -

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This is the Don Dunstan Foundation 20th anniversary oral history project. Welcome Gaby, and thank you for agreeing to be part of this process. I'm delighted to have you here. Could I have your full name please?

Certainly, it's Gabrielle Louise Hummel.

And your date and place of birth.

29th August 1979, and I was born at Henley Beach.

I said off-tape that you were much too young to have known Don but you did actually have a wonderful opportunity to hear Don speak. Would you like to explain how that came about?

I did. I almost got little goose-bumps when you were reminding me. I was involved with Young Labor and the Labor Club at Adelaide Uni, although I was a student at Uni SA, but I did some subjects at Adelaide, so I could join there. We were invited to help support, really to volunteer to be ushers and helpers at a fantastic public speech that Don did in the mid to late '90s.

It wasn't that long before he died.

No, it might have been '97 or '98.

It was '98 I think, but I could be wrong on that, so we will need to check that date because it will probably come up several times in these interviews.¹

Yes, and it was probably the first major kind of Labor Party related event I had gone to aside from some sub-branch meetings and lots of meetings at pubs with Young Labor people.

That's how Young Labor people meet, isn't it?

Absolutely! I'm sure they still do. It was quite a thrill to get to go there.

And that was at the Entertainment Centre – is that right?

It was, and with a very big crowd. I wasn't expecting such a big crowd; I wasn't really sure what to expect to be honest but we all dutifully went along and wore T-shirts, and I remember the Labor Club had organised a bit of a fundraiser for T-shirts they were selling on the night. They'd put photos of Don on the front with the Levi slogan: Do you fit the legend?

How wonderful.

¹ The Whitlam Lecture (also known as 'We Intervene or We Sink'), an oration by Don Dunstan, was held at the Entertainment Centre on 21 April 1998.

It was. I didn't buy one and I didn't get to wear one. I wore a Young Labor T shirt, not that one.

So you didn't get one of those.

No.

That would be worth having, wouldn't it?

I reckon it would be. There are probably a few old friends and comrades who still have those in the top of their wardrobes! What I remember there is the size of the crowd. The proximity that we got because we were obviously there before and after, setting up and packing up – and just being completely astounded at this man who said everything so articulately – all these things that I knew I believed but I think at that very early stage in my development as a young adult - - -

You obviously considered yourself a leftie – did you at that stage? Or should I just call you a Young Labor person? Have you developed any further than that?

I think what I had the fortune of doing was meeting a bunch of people who were already identified in the left of the Labor Party. The introduction to those people and the way that they thought and spoke and behaved and their activism, I hooked myself on to that pretty early on. I could see that they were kindred spirits. I might say, from a family point of view, from a diehard Labor family, so much so that my great-great grandfather – my grandmother's grandfather – was a member of the Legislative Council for the Labor Party.

What was his name?

The Honourable John Carr.

C-A-R-R.

Yes.

So it's in your blood.

Definitely, and he was one of the founding fathers/members of the Waterside Workers' Hall at Port Adelaide, which is a nice little family connection. I still live in that part of the world – I live at Semaphore.

I've been to many functions at the Waterside Workers' Hall, so you've got a very solid history.

Definitely. I think there was always that kind of political awareness and discussion amongst the family – very proud unionists throughout my family and I think that influences – my great-great grandfather permeated every generation. Everyone was very proud to call themselves Labor and had either been members at one stage or were members, had volunteered, had handed out how to vote cards and all that sort of stuff, and were big fans of Don.

So you knew who Don was fairly early on by the sounds of it.

Yes, and in particular, my father who was born in Sweden, he came to Australia as a young man in his 20s and met Mum and never went home. He had come to Adelaide in the '70s and reflected a lot on what Adelaide was like then. He could have gone anywhere – he worked in the Northern Territory, he worked in Queensland and he spent a bit of time in Melbourne, but there was something for him I think about the kind of place that South Australia was in that era which he, and probably all of us would attribute to Don's leadership, and that kind of vision that appealed to Dad and then of course he met Mum as well, so that helped make him an Adelaide kind of – his destiny was Adelaide.

Do you remember anything about that event at the Entertainment Centre? For someone like myself who followed Don's career for perhaps 30 years, that was literally a gobsmacking moment. The man was dying of cancer; his mind was sharp; he was articulate – it summarised who Don was to us, and you had the wonderful experience of experiencing that as a student.

That's right, and I was thinking about that too almost for the first time whereas I didn't have – it wasn't a retrospective for me, it was sort of saying - - -

It was living.

That's right, and embodying all these values. I remember a slogan – I don't know if it was the name of the event or his kind of main phrase, which was we intervene or we sink.

That was the name of it, I think. I'm pretty sure; you can get copies of that speech and I'm pretty sure that was the title.

That phrase stuck with me. I suspect I kept the program or something like that on a pin-board for years after that.

That was a very solid introduction to Don. Other people I'll be speaking to have actually worked with Don but you've been impressed with him in exactly the same way, but from a different perspective. I should get a little bit of detail. What do you do now for work?

I'm a public servant with the South Australian Government. I work for the Department of Human Services and I've been in that department for the last eight years. At the moment I work in the disability reform area, so supporting a lot of the - - -

That's a tough one.

Yes, really challenging but valuable area - - -

Do you do project work or - - -?

Predominantly – I have managed services as well. At the moment I'm managing a communications and strategy area that is supporting a lot of reform associated with the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme], or helping people with disability into the scheme and working out what that means for service delivery.

This is the state version of getting people into NDIS, is it?

Effectively, our area has been supporting clients through transition and adapting to the new funding so that clients are getting their plans and funding for what they need. Behind that, services have to either change, go, adjust, and a lot of them are moving into the non-government sector.

All we hear is criticism. Let's hear what it's really like from your side, because the public criticism is quite nasty. Being a public servant myself I know that that is so far from the truth. How successful are you in the work that you're doing in that strategy?

It's not without its challenges. I think overwhelmingly it is successful. The main objective is to support clients to enter the scheme, so the role for the state government agencies is supporting all the folk who are receiving services from us through the planning process, through their discussions with the NDIS and making sure that their funding is matching their needs. Also I think the nice thing about the NDIS – it is an insurance model so that brings with it its own kind of paradigm, I suppose. The really nice thing about it is that it's set around people's goals, so it's not just saying, this is who you are today and this is what you're going to need for the rest of your life. It is saying this is who you are today, this is where you want to go, this is a support to get you there, then we'll have a look again, we'll re-adjust if we need to, so it's quite an iterative thing. I think the biggest challenge of it, thinking about the experience that clients have had, is that they've gone from being such passive kind of service recipients, really going cap in hand saying, what can you give me, and sometimes not getting much if anything, now they are consumers with a lot of power. They get the funding. Some people haven't got a great funding outcome and they have to appeal it and

there's all sorts of stress involved with that, but for people who are getting into the scheme and have got their plans matching their needs and where they want to go with their lives, they actually have increasing power over picking their providers, picking their carers, picking what they do. I think that of itself is a remarkable change and people need a lot of support to kind of get to it.

And another ALP person in Julia Gillard, is who we can thank for that scheme.

The architect, I know. It is really wonderful that it has endured. I feel like at times it's been kind of under threat but I think the community has got behind it so much. The community has said that this is really important. I think the stats are something like one in five Australians have a disability, so every family is going to have an experience somewhere.

And that has to be built into the program, that it is going to affect such a large percentage of the population.

That's right. So all the kind of funding and the actual - - -

Are the funding models reasonably secure or will that change from government to government, or is that actually established in the original set-up?

I believe it's established well enough to be safeguarded. The states and territories as they are coming into the scheme – at the moment only us in SA and New South Wales are in what they call full scheme, but all the other states and territories eventually will tip their disability funding into it. Then there is obviously the perpetual - - -

And use states like South Australia to get some models and ideas as to how to set it up.

Absolutely.

What got you into this area? Is that what you studied at uni, to work in those sorts of areas?

No, I didn't. I studied professional writing and communication. I sort of had some goals at the time – I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to be when I grew up! Something - - -

Well, you picked those subjects, so something in that area.

Yes, it was a great degree actually. It was a lovely little school at Uni SA at Magill. At that time I think I was only the third year of students going through this particular course. It was a classic Arts degree, I suppose, in the sense that it taught awesome critical thinking, reasoning, analysis – all those synthesising – comprehension – all those sorts of things.

And they'll take you anywhere.

That's what I thought. It was quite a flexible kind of set of skills to come out with. I had a general interest in written communication in particular and got to do fun things like media production, even website coding and things like that – stuff that I don't use now; you don't need to use now.

I'm not saying that you want to leave where you are now but it really opens the door for any sort of career that you want, and you're young enough to have several careers yet. This is a fairly good place to start at, isn't it?

It is. What it led me to, though, interestingly, and because of the involvement in the Labor Party through Young Labor and getting involved in the sub-branch was actually working for ministers, so that's where I've been in between.

Tell me about that.

I did the uni degree and worked as a ministerial advisor and later a chief of staff here and the ACT.

Who did you work for here?

I first worked for Jay Weatherill. Actually, I should take a step back – I first worked for Gay Thompson, the wonderful then member for Reynell, in her electorate office. Then I went in to work for Jay and ended up being there for four years. A cute little story – I like this about all Labor Party connections - - -

Well, they're all linked to Don.

Exactly, and all these people would have known him and worked with him as well. I was asked to work there for three months filling in for Steve Georganas, who was at the time taking the second – no his successful tilt at Hindmarsh. He was just going to take leave to go off and campaign – he'd been advisor to Jay for a couple of years. I was asked to go in for three months and I thought, how cool is this! Then I went, oh my God, what am I doing? I was asked to be involved with the Housing portfolio because while I was finishing my uni degree, and I'd also spent a bit of time in the Students' Association as well at Uni SA, I'd worked for Shelter SA and for a short period for Anglicare, so I had a bit of knowledge I suppose. I certainly was no expert but had a little bit of knowledge about social housing and tenancy issues and stuff like that. I thought, this is great, I know a little bit about that and I can get to know Jay better; there were fantastic staff in his office at the time like Skye Laris

and Grace Portolesi and Danny Bertossa. I went in and just learnt everything I could and then Steve won - - -

That was a foregone conclusion it would be Steve.

It was. He deserved it; goodness, he worked hard. So I got to stay and then, again, not really knowing where it would take me, but ended up staying for four years. In 2008 I decided to make the move to Canberra.

For work?

Yes. My then husband, my ex-husband had been offered a job in John Faulkner's office. This was just at the start of – well, Kevin O7 had happened the year before – it was just at the start of that Labor government and I was lucky enough to get a job in the ACT Government with Jon Stanhope who was the chief minister at the time. So four fantastic years with Jay, mostly in the housing area but also got some involvement with Aboriginal Affairs. I was fortunate enough to go on a fantastically eye-opening and moving trip to the APY Lands during that time and also dealt a little bit with some of his other – he was the minister for what is now human services essentially, so he had child protection in his portfolio, disability – they were the main ones, as well as having Aboriginal Affairs. Then I spent two years in Canberra and worked for Jon Stanhope up until the ACT election, which was later in 2008 and then moved in to be the chief of staff to Katy Gallagher who later became the chief minister. At that time she was the deputy and the treasurer – that was a good learning experience, working with Treasury officials. That was completely different to working in social services!

You've really covered all aspects, haven't you?

Yes, I wish I remembered more about the Treasury stuff. Every now and then in my current job I look at budgets, and things are gone. I used to know what this all meant.

Unless you're interested it's not going to stick.

I think that's right.

It's the range of portfolios – you've learnt heaps. You did two years in Canberra; why did you come back to Adelaide?

Mostly for personal reasons. My nan was nearing the end of her life so I wanted to spend some time with her and one of my dear friends also had a terminal illness, so I wanted to just sort of be closer to her, which was an absolute gift, I suppose, that that kind of all coincided. At the time I thought I needed to be back home; I needed to be with the family again. I

approached Grace Portolesi, who by then was a Member of Parliament – had she just been made a minister? Yes she had after the 2010 - - -

She was made a minister reasonably early in her career.

Yes, and she had a vacancy in her office. She was Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Youth, Volunteers.

What were you working at there – as an advisor or - - -?

I joined her office as an advisor in Aboriginal Affairs and then became her chief of staff. After, there was a little bit of change with her staffing and then after about a year – it was almost a year to the day, I think – it takes a lot of energy to be in these sorts of roles.

Let's be honest – it's exhausting.

It was exhausting and I think because I'd been through quite a few elections, and they are extra exhausting, the day-to-day was exhausting enough but there had been, as there is, lots of extra activity through those things and I think I needed to - - -

Did you have children at this stage?

No.

I was going to say you wouldn't have been able to have a family with that sort of workload.

I think it's very hard for people who do. I really admire it actually. I think it wouldn't have been compatible for me with that, so it was just a nice time to see what else was around.

Did you ever consider a political career for yourself, being exposed to a lot of very high-performing ministers who I would consider the good guys? They were exceptionally good role models with ethics and social conscience. Having worked for a group of people like that, were you ever tempted?

I could say, loosely. What I did often reflect on was how much of a sacrifice they made for their jobs. I was working for the ACT Government, which obviously didn't involve travel and that sort of thing to the extent that federal politicians have. I got to know people, advisors and - - -

You would have met a lot of people at that time.

Yes, and just observed that it is really all-consuming.

It is your life, basically.

Yes, and they need very good family support I think, to be able to take it on. I suppose for me I wouldn't ever think that it wasn't something – it is a worthwhile thing to do so if there was an opportunity to do it - - -

You're still young enough for further down the track, it's an option.

Yes, but there are no sort of hard aspirations or ambitions at all, in fact probably almost less so these days because I've been doing other things for so long now.

Really interesting things too.

Yes, and I kind of feel there is a lot of fulfilment out of those roles too. I remember Jay – and I guess I knew him the best; I'd worked with him for the longest – I remember he always had this – and actually Patrick Conlon was another minister at that time as well who used to say the same sort of thing, that they knew how powerful an opportunity their jobs and roles were and what a privilege it was to make a difference. You think about sitting in rooms with people like that, with any kind of public official in that sense, the way that people listen to them, the way that people – you've got public servants and the departments who take their ideas and try to make something of them and try to keep that momentum going. I think those two people probably did – they are the sort of the inspirational motivation kind of thing, even though their jobs are really hard and I'm sure there was a lot in their lives that we didn't see.

When Jay stepped down I think he summed it up well when he said to his daughters, 'You can have your daddy back.' That summed up his career in politics quite nicely, didn't it? He could not have done that without the support of a family.

That's right and his wife, Mel, is just an outstanding human being.

She's a legend herself, isn't she? You've actually answered the question probably, how did you get involved with the foundation? That background, clearly, would lead you to always being political in your work as well as your life. How did you get invited and when and how did all that come about?

That was directly to do with Jay and, coincidentally, David Pearson, who was an advisor to him at the time. The previous governance arrangements and structure of the foundation allowed for a nominee from the government. I think historically there were always representatives from Flinders and Adelaide unis – community members. Then there was this

category of a nominee from the government. I think over the years – I’m assuming Mike Rann did it before Jay was the premier, but the premier suggested someone to join.

So it’s the premier’s pick.

Exactly, and David happened to be an advisor at the time for Jay. He got in contact with me and said, ‘The person who was previously on there in this position is not able to continue and we thought you might like to do it.’ I thought, sure, it sounds fascinating, daunting. I did a little bit of research obviously and found out a little bit about the foundation and had a chat -
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Who was running it at that stage?

That was Donna Harden, and Bill Cossey was the chair.

Such a loss.

Such a loss and I’ve got to say, when I found out that he was the chair – he wouldn’t have known me from a bar of soap – but obviously his history and leadership in the public service, I remember there was a period of time where Jay had some responsibilities like public service reform and the late great Wayne Goss was like an advisor to that process, and they brought him down to do that. I wasn’t involved in that project or initiative or whatever, but someone who I heard people speak about in these sort of terms, like Bill is the guru. I guess he just had that kind of status and influence.

It was totally warranted.

Yes, absolutely, and reflected as a public servant, because I was a very new public servant at that time.

And it’s good to have good role models within the public service because as a former public servant myself, all you do is get criticism. Whatever the government policy is, you as the public servant wear it. Most public servants are just tough-working honest people and that never actually comes out.

Yes, so that really struck me as a great opportunity and I felt like it was a great honour to be asked to be involved in an organisation that was perpetuating Don’s legacy.

Did you have any idea what you would be doing? You said you did some research.

Really just about what the foundation was up to, what its activities were and what its purpose was. Not really, I kind of played it by ear. When I joined the committee there were – as it

turns out Sonia Waters was on the committee at that time, then had a bit of a hiatus, then came back. She was someone who I knew a little through work but I didn't really know anyone else. John Spoehr was on the committee at that time. Really I just listened and learned.

How often did they meet?

At that stage it was the same as it is now, once every two months for a one and a half or two hour meeting. Really it was just building a picture of the kinds of activities that the foundation was doing, understanding a bit about the structure with the relationship with the two unis, how staffing and funding and all that sort of thing worked. It was a small organisation at that stage in terms of staffing - - -

Where were they located then? Was it still in North Terrace when you joined?

Yes, just across the road [from the State Library].

It wouldn't have taken you long, I would imagine, to get your head around what it was all about. You'd done your research and you had a pretty good board of people to work with. Donna, from what I remember, was a fairly good CEO – very personable and approachable, so it would have been a good group of people to work with?

It definitely was, yes. I must say on a level a little intimidating. There were these very senior academics who knew a lot of stuff about everything.

Was Bill Cossey at all the meetings as well?

He was, he was chairing. I don't think there were any that I attended that he wasn't there for.

He could be quite difficult – just as you said, it was intimidating because of the personnel around the table. Did it take you very long before you were confident enough to put your contribution in?

It didn't take me long to sort of make a minor contribution about subject matters, areas I was familiar with. Some of the core kind of focus of activities hasn't changed a lot. I think we'll probably talk about David's vision and the way that the foundation sort of changed under his leadership. It was a small organisation that worked to its size, it worked to its scale. It rarely did anything bigger than it had capacity for, which was absolutely fine because it had a very strong, solid set of – you know, public-facing activities that would help promote issues around homelessness and other matters of social inclusion, mental health for example; issues around the environment; issues around Aboriginal Affairs.

That was a particular passion of Don's so that was always going to be a large part of it.

Yes – she'd [Donna Harden] started annual homelessness conferences and I think probably I guess was operating at a time where it was just coming off of what I observed both in Jay's office and then as a new public servant, a kind of once in a generation reinvestment in social inclusion from Mike Rann and then continued by Jay. It was picking up, I suppose, on a lot of the themes and the issues about the development of the society in our state that the government was leading at the time, which was a nice parallel. I suppose, getting back to your question, for me there were certain subject matter areas that I was familiar with, that I either had had involvement with - - -

What were the main areas that you feel you have been able to contribute in?

I think probably the homelessness and social housing space. To a lesser extent, Aboriginal Affairs, only in the sense that it's a personal area of interest for me and it's something that I've always wanted to help the foundation support. It hasn't necessarily been any leadership or any major contribution from me but really just reaffirming that I believe this is the core part of being able to keep seeing that vision through and working with community and keeping it evolving. Obviously the big public events like the Lowitja O'Donoghue Oration and some of those other things that attract attention in a different kind of way are hugely valuable but I think the foundation has always had this sort of nice kind of commitment to, and progressing of its own values around inclusion for Aboriginal people.

We were talking before we went on tape about when you started; roughly when do you think you started there?

I think it was 2013. I was just reflecting back on attending meetings. I had a baby in 2012 and I remember one night – they were late afternoon or early evening board meeting sessions – Billy was under one, not tiny, but under one – so it was some time in 2013. I was stuck. I had no-one to look after him and I thought, I don't really want to miss a meeting, that would be terrible, so I contacted Bill and Donna and said, 'Would you mind terribly much if I brought him. I can sit him in the corner and he can watch something, and eat, and I'll keep feeding him and he'll be quiet!' They said, 'Of course, bring him.' He was completely fine; he was a good little boy. I remember Bill feeling like, isn't this cute; a little Bill and having a little exchange about his lovely grandchildren and some funny kid stories.

I couldn't imagine that organisation not saying you could.

That's what I thought.

Do you have two children?

No, just the one.

So he would have attended several meetings.

Only one or two, but there was one when he was a little bit older that he remembers, because he asked if he could go again. I think he has completely forgotten about it now. When I would go to the meetings my mum and dad would stay with him on those nights. I remind him about it – I don't think he has an actual memory of it now but I remind him, you know that meeting I go to with so and so, and so and so.

How many people are in the meeting? On the board, how many have you got?

It has increased slightly. There's always a core of two reps from each uni. We've had recent changes from both unis so there are two brand new people from Adelaide and one brand new person from Flinders.

So there'll always be continual turnover.

There is. The community members – I remember when I started there were a couple more community members but then it shrunk back down again.

Who are the community members now?

We're all under a new restructure. I was reappointed as a community member when the new constitution came in. At the moment we have Sonia Waters and me, and I think that's it. There was a woman who was involved last year but had to stop her involvement. I apologise to anyone I've forgotten [Steph Page and Shane Webster]. There must be new people but I've forgotten - - -

You're allowed to forget temporarily! Will you keep on that position as long as you keep getting re-nominated by the government?

At this stage the government nomination isn't in play anymore, so - - -

You're there in your own right.

Exactly, you can be approached in your own right.

I think you need that long-term commitment for the continuation of the organisation, plus you obviously love it.

Yes, it's interesting when you look back on it because I've definitely loved it and I've definitely thought it's something to be proud of, to be associated with the foundation, and obviously being involved in that kind of body exposes us to everything – all the inner workings, all the strategies, all the day-to-day operations. I would be time-limited though by the terms of the new constitution.

What is in there?

I think it's three-year terms but no more than two renewals.

That's probably fair enough because that would still give you nearly ten years. That's just to stop someone getting entrenched, I think.

I think so, yes.

Then you can have a break and always come back.

Exactly. One thing that's been interesting over the last little while has been – just reflecting on I guess the skills mix on the committee as well, but everyone I've worked with from the universities has been fantastic and come from different kinds of disciplines, so that always adds a new vibe. We have been looking a little bit more – I guess just because of how busy the foundation has got, how much it's expanded, how much potential it has to really – I wouldn't say it's developing a new identity because I think everything it is doing is still very aligned to the core - - -

It's not likely to give up any of the current programs because they're core programs but to expand, how do you do that without perhaps letting go something? Is that something that you're looking at? I know they do want to expand – you could perhaps talk about what directions you're looking at going or what is the future; where are you planning to go?

We're actually at a very critical point of reassessing that both in terms of what are the resources and then where does the money come from?

Well, it's very limited money from my understanding.

It is, for the formal funding, for a lot of the funding that comes through the - - -

Fundraising.

Exactly, or through the collaborations – having sponsors or co-sponsors for the different initiatives. I have reflected on it too – we've recently set up a working group, or a sub-committee of the committee. Me and two other members – oh, Steph Page, the wonderful

Steph Page is the other community member; how could I forget Steph! – Deb King, who is a Flinders rep and myself have been working on a little bit of activity around a kind of corporate governance, I suppose, and reflecting on what the functions of the committee of management are in relation to the board of directors, in relation to David as the ED, and the day-to-day running of the foundation, picking up on exactly what you're asking about – the sort of future strategy and trying to bring all that together. Through those conversations we've been reflecting on the fact that the foundation has really always stayed true to its purpose and true to its values, but has really been re-energised by David and Cathie's leadership in a different sort of way. I'm not trying to criticise the past - - -

You're not taking that away – new leadership has new directions.

Yes, that's right and I think probably has seized on new ways of working that I just don't think existed - - -

Can you give me some examples of what you mean there?

I'm thinking particularly about the Zero Project which is focused around homelessness. That's one thing where I think - - -

Is that more of an issue of David's? Where did that come from?

Partly, but partly also from the associated community services sector – Anglicare in particular. Peter Sandeman from Anglicare has been a big proponent of this kind of model of addressing – it's looking at functional zero for homelessness and trying to link up the kind of rough sleeper response with the housing response and making sure that there are stable longer term housing opportunities.

That's a perfect example: it wasn't there when the foundation started but it's exactly what Don would have loved to be happening. So it's perfectly explained, you've stayed true to the values of what Don set the foundation up for and 20 years down the track we do it in a lot of different ways without necessarily dropping old programs. It will always continue the Lowitja Oration; it will always continue various aspects but some could cut back to make room for newer programs because you've got limited resources, both dollar and people-wise.

That's right, but if there are these kind of newer initiatives that - - -

Well, the Zero Project certainly gets some very good publicity, doesn't it?

It does and people tip in and different partners tip in towards supporting it as well. I think that kind of innovation probably – and the way that the non-government sector in particular

is recalibrating and then collaborating – I think a lot of these things are providing live demonstrations, or live experiments probably, of how you can do things differently. I think that's playing out under the banner of the Thinkers in Residence program but some of the new ways of approaching social capital, for want of a better expression, being able to actually have really engaging co-designed solutions to those wicked kind of social problems. I think that's right – it's all part of the same story, isn't it? It's just that we've got different techniques and different tools and we've got a lot of different ways of being able to do things because of technology, so that has aided - - -

It's quite a few years ago now when I went to one of the early Thinkers in Residence, talking about homeless accommodation. She was from New York [Rosanne Haggerty], and just the ideas she was throwing out – it just hadn't hit anybody that there were different ways of meeting a solution that were cost-effective. I think those Thinkers in Residence cover a whole range of things and I've always been impressed by what they've been able to do. I've got no idea where you find them all but they are absolute gems, aren't they? They come out and they also get a lot out of visiting Adelaide and learning about us. I think that these are the sorts of things that the foundation was set up for. What other areas have you been involved in? You've been in particular areas that you mentioned such as social inclusion, Aboriginal Affairs, but the actual program when it runs, like with the Zero Project, you come up with that as an organisation – how is it particularly run because you've got very, very limited staff?

In general, the staff really take it on. Our role in the committee is to endorse or otherwise- - -

You're the leadership team?

Yes. Zero is an interesting one because one of the Adelaide Uni representatives is an advisor too, and a mentor for that program. She is from the Housing Research unit, Debbie Faulkner, and has a lot of knowledge and a lot of connections, I suppose, in that research and evaluation and evidence side of things. For her, she's performing a dual role there. She is part of the academic bit but she's providing advice.

Right, so someone from the board or someone else can sponsor and run with the project and get support from the organisation.

It can happen that way, yes.

That sort of combination can happen, or do staff run it? How many staff are there? Do you know? I can probably get that from David.

Yes, you would be able to get it from David. I think there are about nine, which is probably about twice as many as there were when Donna was the ED. There were about four then.

Let's talk a little bit about David's leadership. He's very similar to you in a way – after uni he has been heavily involved in ALP politics, and I certainly will be talking about that to him. He brings a new energy and a different energy to what Donna had – no criticism of Donna because everybody operates in different ways. He seems to be taking the foundation in a different direction. Is that a fair comment?

Yes, I think so. David and I have been friends since uni. We crossed paths, being involved in student politics in particular. We've always had this kind of peer relationship, I suppose. When I have been in ministers' offices he has been as well - - -

I noticed on his resumé that he worked for a long time for Jay in significant roles.

Yes, he did. He definitely worked for Mike Rann for a period and Penny Wong for a period as well, so he covered a few - - -

All very senior people in the Party too, so he would have gained not just experience but contacts and hopefully he'll be using that.

Exactly. David came in not long after Cathie [King] came in as the chair, which was always going to change the dynamic anyway. Like I said, the committee has evolved whereby I'm left as the longest continuously serving member at the moment, so dealing with different people coming in and out and I think, as well, acknowledging that there were new things to do. I guess that's what I've seen as the energy that David has brought, is to say that we've got this kind of vehicle through the foundation. I do believe it is a fine balance that has to be maintained because there are people – and I was thinking back about what we were talking about before the interview started – there were people who knew Don personally who were friends with, a colleague of, a member of the sub-branch, or whatever; personal friends who are going to be looking to the foundation for perpetuating a memory, not in a nostalgic way but in a way that means something different to them because they have that personal connection.

Their view of Don's legacy is probably quite different to your view of Don's legacy because you didn't know Don, the person and you didn't work with him but you are carrying out his memory and his legacy in what you are contributing to the foundation and each of you will do that differently.

I think that's right but I think it's always something to be reminded of, especially as time moves on. There are going to be fewer people over time who have that immediate connection, so making sure that the foundation still looks to, dare I say, the true believers, like the people who would be expecting the foundation to be doing things in a certain sort of way in line with that in a respectful way with pursuing these new opportunities. I feel like

David has immense skills to be able to strike that balance. I think he is incredibly respectful of that history but there is tension in being able to really settle – you know, what are we doing that is the foundation’s core business, what are we doing that is using the foundation to lead in social - - -?

But your core values haven’t changed.

No, and they are at the front of our constitution, the strategic report and all that sort of stuff, and they will never change. We are legally bound in the sense that we’re morally bound to be able to see those through. I think that the new era for the foundation has really been developed over the last few years. I think we’ll do it well. I think there is so much commitment and so much good faith and so much opportunity there, but it does have to be calibrated in a certain way. That’s something I talk about and I know Cathie and people like that are very keen to – Cathie, obviously with her family connections² and understanding at a different level, is such a good source of a truth-check on things and has that fantastic ability to be able to say what she thinks –

She certainly does.

– which is really valued.

She is a good middle person that has the family history, the knowledge, the experience. I think she was a political junkie from when she was in her nappy up to having worked through with various people in the foundation, and has great ideas for the future. So you’ve got a really, really good balance of people working there. Have you got any personal ideas of direction you’d like to go in – like with Zero – something that is a passion of yours that you would like to throw in there and start developing?

It’s a really good question - - -

I’m sure you get asked that all the time.

I don’t know whether I do because if I look back on the contribution I’ve made, I felt like what has been really good about some of the stuff that has always happened, but particularly the stuff that’s happened over the last couple of years, is that they’ve kind of been ideas that have generated very organically from experts in the field, from people with lived experience, from I guess from a more bottom up kind of approach. I was thinking about that when you

² Cathie King is the daughter of the late Hon Len King AC QC, Attorney-General in the Dunstan Government. In mid-2012, the Don Dunstan Foundation received a generous bequest from the estate of Len King. The King family requested that a University scholarship be established in his name to support a University student in the commencement of studies in Law at The University of Adelaide or Flinders University. (Source: Don Dunstan Foundation).

were asking that earlier question about getting behind the project or suggesting things. I haven't ever taken that approach at all. I've kind of understood what the core areas of focus are and then understood that as opportunities have arisen that where they've aligned – and I can't think of one that hasn't. I can't think of one where the ED has come, whether it was Donna or David – have come and said, let's do blah, and we've all gone no!

And you've always been on board with everything.

Yes I think so. It's really probably just been more about that kind of critical reflection about is this a priority right now, or do we do this now and that later? There have been more of those sorts of conversations. What I have really liked is some of these ideas – like you were observing about the Thinker in Residence coming up with a new way of looking at, in that case, the housing response – that they kind of come up naturally, and I sort of like that.

That's good that nothing is forced; it just comes from the group.

Yes, then I think that has played out really effectively in being able to have that truly collaborative process to be able to get things done. It hasn't just been that someone has had a bright idea or that I've walked into a committee meeting and said, let's do blah, and then David's had to go shop it around and say, my board has asked me to do this; can you help? It's got to be the other way around. It's been people coming to him and saying, you're working on that, we're working on that, can we bring these things together? Then they come into play.

Maybe David and Cathie have set that atmosphere up to work that way – that it is a collaboration and ideas will just generate themselves.

Some people say that the foundation is a think-tank and I think probably - - -

It's way more than that, isn't it?

I always think so.

A think-tank just puts out papers.

And these days there's less and less of that.

Again, I was looking at the website recently – all of the papers and materials available are fantastic but they are not necessarily recent. There's a whole section on there – speeches made by Don, speeches made by Phillip Adams, and people like that, going back quite a few years. They are still important, still part of the project but more part of the history now rather than the living of what's

happening today. So I'll go to a homelessness conference and that won't necessarily result in a paper on there – it might, it might not.

That's true, and now the Thinker's Program is starting to build on that, I suppose, because now there are a number of reports about the Residencies, as they're called, like the visits and the activities and the ideas that are being generated.

And they have always been one of the cores, haven't they? And I think they will just continue in different ways.

Yes, I think so. I think that is probably one thing that I like about the dynamics that are in the foundation at the moment. We are definitely in a period – it's interesting doing it in this particular anniversary year as well because we are in a period of - - -

And maybe that's not coincidental, maybe that's part of - - -

No, the cycle – but looking at what the foundation needs and how it needs to be organised to thrive into the future; looking at that from a sustainable point of view because that is one of the big risks, that there are all sorts of new shiny ideas that do come up organically. We love that but at the same time we can't do them all. We can't stretch too thin and not have any kind of sustainability about the activities and that kind of bridging, I guess, the different kind of stakeholder groups behind the foundation. Like we were saying, the friends and the former colleagues who were there in the day, the people who are newer to Don and his legacy who are equally excited about it, but like you said, they come from a different perspective. I know some of the smaller events that have been run to commemorate, like in 2017, the six o'clock swill, and those sort of fun things that – I think it's good for us to pause and reflect that some younger people might have heard of Don or seen a photo of him in a safari suit, or that kind of pop-culture image - - -

That's all they have.

Yes, that's right, but then if you do something fun that plays on their awareness, it then brings them in to say, this is actually what he was on about. This is a) what he did and - - -

To go a little bit deeper. If the pink shorts or the six o'clock swill gets them into the meeting you've achieved something.

Exactly. I kind of really like that there's an opportunity to do that and I think, for me, keeping that balance there about the man, his legacy and his achievements combined with using the foundation that he set up as a platform to be able to do things in a new way that continues those core values is so exciting, but it's hard.

Well, you're not going to move on unless you change because you've been doing the same thing for 20 years. People will still come because of Don, but we're a dying generation. People that know Don will all be dead at some stage so you have to get into young people's minds, and not so young people, why the foundation still exists and who Don was, and I think you are doing that really, really well.

That's lovely to hear. Yes, I really feel like there is a strong commitment to doing that.

People your age and David's age are perpetuating that memory without having had a close link with Don. It is also not just Don; it's the progressive side, and sometimes I wonder if there is one anymore, the progressive side of the ALP. I mean, is there even a Labor Club at university anymore? For example, a lot of the people that I've interviewed over the years heard Don come to the ALP Club and talk when we had a Union Hall, those sorts of things. So we need to be able to get that message out on community involvement to the new generation coming up. It's a different world; it's a digital world and a completely different world to the world when I went to university, and even when you would have attended.

Definitely.

So I think the fact that you are looking at all of those options is really healthy for the future.

That's really good to hear and I think picking up on that digital world – using the power of social media as well has actually probably been a game-changer in being able to spread a message.

A recent example today: I can't remember what it was called, but it was about the Adelaide Fringe and the Dunstan Foundation's recommendations that - - -

Yes, the Social Change Guide.

Those sorts of things are just wonderful.

They really are.

And you can send out 1000 and it costs the same as sending out one. I think the digital world compared to the old typed letters that had to be posted out, and you had to pay a membership to get your newsletter and things like that, the opportunity that is there to go to a fast network is huge.

Yes, it's an interesting era.

I've become very aware of the time rapidly running out. Are there any closing comments you'd like to make about your involvement and particularly where you see yourself in the foundation?

I think that at this point I'm happy to continue to contribute. I feel like my contribution is valued. I think the work that we are going to be doing this year is going to be really key to setting the foundation up for the future, so I'm really wanting to contribute to that. I have been reflecting on both the length of time I've been involved and also, I think, to help the foundation in the best sort of way to have that sustainable future and be able to thrive, reflecting on who else might be a good contributor, and what else in terms of skills and stuff like that, the foundation might need at a committee level. I don't want to sound like a martyr or anything like that, because I'm not, but if that means that it makes more sense for the foundation to have a different set of people at that leadership level then I would happily hand it over to an incoming group, but feeling like at the moment there's a great opportunity for me to – and to sort of have that kind of history at that corporate level about where we have come from, the challenges we've been dealing with and what we've got at the moment and where we need to go, then I feel like that would be a really useful contribution for me to make. Then maybe if I could stay on for another three years I would do that but, like I said, I would be more than happy if a mix-up was what was needed at a point of time - - -

But also, it does take a couple of years to get your feet in an organisation. You're only meeting six times a year, so you need a couple of years to really get your head around it, get a feel for who the other people are and where you're going, so I wish you a very good future and contributions to the foundation.

Thank you. I think I will always stay a member and come to all of the events!

Of course. Thank you.