BGGSOGQ and NCWQ Joint Forum – Ruby Chang

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

When I received my first brief for today’s forum and saw who I would be speaking alongside with today, I admit I was terrified. How on earth could anything I say adequately lead into what these amazing women who had accomplished so much on such global scales would say? How could I possibly stand up here today and not completely humiliate myself?

It was only once panic fully set in that I realized how foolish I was being. Ever since I became involved in service at Grammar in 2008 as a grade 8 student, service was never about comparing myself with others, nor a competition to see who could join more clubs or raise more funds. Rather, it was an opportunity to be part of a global community, it was an opportunity to give back to this community and it was an opportunity to fully realize how fortunate I was.

As any current or former girls grammar student here would know, service clubs and societies covering almost any interest you can name are offered left, right and center. As a shy grade eight, overwhelmed with high school life, it was only after gentle prodding by my year 12 buddy, that I joined the society she was part of, Health Promoting Schools. In grade 9, I took it one step further, and as part of the service component of the duke of Edinburgh program, I volunteered at the school library every Tuesday morning, earning the nickname, Ruby Tuesday. There I would spend my hour or so covering books, shelving and other odds and ends whilst getting to know the library staff a lot better. Since those humble beginnings, my confidence and drive to contribute more grew and by the end of year twelve I was a member of the Second chance committee, Oaktree foundation and Save the Children Club.

My first real taste of service outside the gates of the school was in year 10 as part of the year 10 service program. For my 20 hours of commitment required, I volunteered at Sunnybank Private Hospital where I mainly assisted in paperwork in the head office. Although the tasks required of me may sound quite mundane, lots of photocopying, scanning, binding and filing, I have enjoyed the experience so much and have become such good friends with the staff who work there, that to this day I am still volunteering there. I have to admit that it is only on a fortnightly basis now, due to my university timetable, but it is always a pleasure to be there and to provide assistance of any kind. Year 10 also marked the first year that I volunteered at the Strawberry Sundae Stall at the exhibition as part of the Prince Charles Hospital Foundation. This opportunity was brought up by Mrs Stubbington as an option one could take for the year 10 service program. Although by the time this was suggested as an option I had already commenced my service at Sunnybank Private Hospital, I love the Ekka and I love the strawberry sundaes, so a chance to help make and sell the sundaes amongst all the excitement and crowds at the exhibition was an offer I couldn’t give up. On top of that the Prince Charles Hospital Foundation is a not for profit organization that promotes healthy lifestyles and supports pivotal medical research and the strawberry sundae stalls are one of their major fundraising events of the year. The fact that my six hours of volunteering may contribute, even in the smallest sense, to provide ‘seed’ funding, enabling medical researchers to develop their projects, is the least I
can do. This service activity is also one that I have continued to be a part of every year, even after leaving grammar.

In grade 11, I was fortunate enough to be directly involved in the running of the forty-hour famine and in grade 12 as service captain along with Priya and the ever helpful guidance of Mrs Stubbington, was given the opportunity of overseeing the year 8 and 9 fundraising program for their respective sponsor children, organizing various school wide service events such as the annual Pink Day and much much more. During my senior years at grammar, I experienced not just volunteering my time, but also personal skills. My quartet and I often played at events held by charitable organisations; including the annual Red Cross volunteer appreciation presentation, performing for fundraising events at the palliative care unit at the Wesley hospital and the thanksgiving service for organ donors at the University of Queensland for organ donors. Being at Grammar opened my eyes to the endless opportunities of service available to us.

Whether it is one day in a year, on a weekly basis, or whatever time commitment one is able to put forward, there are always people out there with open arms, grateful for any contribution you can provide. The types of organization you can provide service too is also endless. Depending on what values you may strongly believe in, or an interest in the work of a particular charity, it is impossible to not find a charity in line with your beliefs and attitudes. For me, my interests and attitudes towards healthcare have driven me towards my current studies and service commitments. I am currently in my second year of a Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery degree at the University of Queensland. With a relatively heavy study load, I don’t really get to do quite as much service as I used to or would like to, however, being at university presents you with a whole new plethora of service opportunities.

One particular organization that caught my eye, and which I am now a member of is TIME UQ, towards international medical equality. TIME’s mission is to empower and support students to make a sustainable difference in the realization of health equality at home and abroad. From this mission, TIME runs many projects directed at different aspects of health inequality. TIME’s international health project aims to make a difference to chilling statistics, such as the 7.6 million children under the age of five who die every year – nearly 900 every hour. To make matters worst, we know that most of these children could survive and thrive with access to simple, affordable interventions. TIME’s maternal health project contributes to improved maternal health as in poorer countries; the day a child born is all too often the day its mother dies. TIME’s indigenous health project is also one of its major focuses, and seeks to work with local communities to improve their long term health by building relationships, raising awareness and engaging in preventative health initiatives. TIME’s green med projects aims to make people aware of the disastrous health consequences that are likely to arise from environmental damage and climate change, as many of the major killers such as diarrhoeal diseases and malaria are highly climate-sensitive and are expected to worsen as the climate changes. Areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries – will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond.

From so many worth projects, I chose to mainly focus my time and energy on the maternal health project. As part of this project I’ve helped raise funds for Bidan Delima, a program
implemented by the Indonesian Midwives Association that aims to improve quality of service delivery, and I’ve also taken part in the Zonta birthing kit workshop. The workshop aims to reduce maternal and infant morbidity and mortality by providing a clean birthing environment via a simple kit: 1 square meter plastic sheet for the mother to lie on, a piece of soap, 2 gloves, 3 gauze squares, 3 cord ties/ 2 umbilical clamps and a sterile scalpel blade. Such simple things can be easily overlooked by fortunate people like you and me who live in a country where such things are a given.

In terms of my future aspirations, my long-term main goal right now is just to pass my medical degree. However, in terms of goals in the foreseeable future, my antipodeans aboard trip to Cambodia with Girls Grammar at the end of year 12 has also been a major source of inspiration. As part of the 3 week long program, which included sightseeing, hiking and a service component, I grew to love their culture and being so welcomed by the Cambodians was truly a privilege, so next year as part of my medical elective, I am hoping and planning to fulfill my four week requirement there. Medical electives give medical students the opportunity to experience the practice of medicine in its many forms, and there are virtually no limits to where each individual wants to take their training. Whilst most of the time I spend there will be observational, due to my insufficient medical training by that time, I believe spending that time in a third world hospital and seeing where my degree could potentially take me will be an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience.

I stand here now and I think back to how I have gotten to where I am today and I realise not only how lucky I am to be happy, healthy and have a life surrounded by family and friends, but I am also grateful for the opportunities that the girls grammar service program have provided me with. It wasn’t until I graduated from grammar that I fully understood how much the service program here had set me on my path and shaped how I have developed as a person. To leave you today, I would like to share a quote by Winston Churchill who once said, ‘We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give’.