



Media Information

Speech by Simone McMahon, 24 March 2007

My service to the community and the impact on my life of serving others the values which underly my life.

When we think of our values, we think of what is important to us in our lives (e.g., security, independence, wisdom, success, kindness, pleasure). Each of us holds numerous values with varying degrees of importance. A particular value may be very important to one person, but unimportant to another.

Values are beliefs. They are beliefs which are tied inextricably to emotion, not to objective, cold ideas. They refer to the desirable goals people strive to attain.

I truly believe that as Australians we all have the responsibility towards making Australia a better place for others. We are fortunate enough to live in one of the luckiest counties in the world. Australia is the country of opportunity a place where anything is possible. I began my community service work nearly 15 years ago at the age of about 10

The reason I began my community service work was no different to what motivates most, the desire to do something worthwhile, not for monetary reward but because we believe in it, to follow a vision and most importantly to make a difference.

Everyone has the ability to make a difference in our society, however small or large the difference is irrelevant, what matters is that you have taken the initiative to make a difference to your community and to do good for others, something which gives you a unique experience.

It is becoming increasingly important for young people to consider how they can contribute to our community and how volunteering can be integrated within their way of life. It is the young people of today who lay the foundations for a better tomorrow.

Often it is people's life circumstances which provide opportunities to pursue or express some values more easily than others.

In 1993 I received the most precious gift – The Gift of Life. I received this wonderful gift from someone I knew nothing about, someone I had never seen, never met, did not even know their name – a total stranger. Yet, what I do know is, that this person cared enough about others to become an organ donor and that decision, saved not only my life, but many others. I would not be standing here today if it was not for that special donor.

Organ and tissue donors are ordinary people who give an extraordinary gift to enhance the life, health and well being of others.

Organ donation is a serious issue in our society which affects many Australians. Over 2000 Australians are currently on the transplant waiting list, 20% of those will die before a suitable organ becomes available.

Since my transplant, I have embarked on a mission to promote the importance of organ and tissue donation and to increase awareness in the community

My aim has always been to promote positive outcomes on transplantation because I personally know the feeling of utter despair one faces hooked up to a machine to survive and being deprived of a normal life.

Serving the community empowers individuals and enriches society by promoting a more democratic caring, cooperative and informed society, therefore adding to a country's social, economic and political capital. We can be thankful that alongside cruelty and indifference, individual human beings are capable of caring. Through serving the community people join together and show their care in concrete ways. In becoming involved, they learn from doing.

In times of rapid social and economic change a sense of tolerance, security and purpose is promoted as people link programs and communities together. Whatever the future brings, we can be confident that a significant number of people will want to serve the community in some way, giving their time initiating new services, enhancing and expanding existing services, advocating for necessary change, responding to emergencies and preserving the environment.

However people choose to serve the community, their personal contributions are helping others connect with people and resources and when the human family stays connected serious social problems within our society are diminished. Those individuals who choose to serve the community look beyond their own familiar circumstances to connect or reconnect with others. They teach people how to connect or reconnect to the social resources that should be available to everyone. Without the help of such people, the cost of solving our social problems in our society would be astronomical.

Serving the community provides an avenue through which we can extend relationships beyond our immediate families and friends. It brings together people with different experiences and views, but united in a common cause.

Power is a word from which we may shy away but people occupying positions of authority in relation to community service possess considerable power. We are not talking about personal power, but the power to make a difference, to bring about systemic reform. Such values can be incorporated within the structure of every organisation – we can begin in our own backyards.

Each of us can play a part no matter how small, at what level or in what interest area we work. It is our combined effort which will work wonders.

Ultimately, we the people are the ones who make choices about our future. If we are successful in building a better society for the future, then perhaps today's serious social problems will be remembered simply as growing pains of our past.

Now is as good of a time as any to broaden the influence of human values by working together, widening our vision and through our combined efforts, promoting tolerance, justice and cooperation at local, national and world levels.

We can all play a part.

We all have various values instilled in us by our upbringing and our life's experiences; we have many different belief systems; we have many different ethnic, racial and religious traditions; but the values which most of us share are those of safety and happiness for our loved ones and ourselves. If these personal values became the criteria by which we evaluate our Human well-being and became the primary focus of Human activity, putting aside short-term self-centered gains, as well as re-thinking old fears, there might be a happier future for all of Humankind.