

Susanne Ech: Leader of the revolution?

By Melissa Pretorius
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AT a time when most girls were wondering where Barbie's other shoe went, Susanne Ech was developing a passion for the misunderstood and the marginalised.

As a young girl she was adamant she would become an international human rights lawyer, aiming to change the world one perception at a time.

Instead the University of NSW honours graduate has chosen to be a social scientist, throwing aside her childhood dream, for now.

But she believes her unconventional line of work will help her achieve more than she could have imagined.

"You're starting with a grassroots approach as a social scientist. You're building things for the long term," she says. "Law is practising with what is already there."

These days, Susanne is a voice for many, an avid volunteer and community leader dedicated to empowering others.

Susanne tells me she has always looked to find the story behind the story, to bring light to the many different sides of an issue.

"I've always been into having a say," she recalls. "I wanted to have a voice on contemporary and public issues, because I think that my perspective is a bit different to everyone else."

As a little girl, Susanne moved from the big smoke to a small town, getting her first taste of the Hastings and rural life.

She quickly adapted, learning to love the area and getting involved in everything from competitive sports to the debating team.

“I guess I was always a bit of an all-rounder,” Susanne says. “We really got into sport, something we probably wouldn’t have done in the city.”

Her public speaking prowess soon became evident and the outspoken youngster gave speeches at various events including Anzac and Remembrance day ceremonies at the Kendall Services and Citizens Club.

Now the 21-year-old is focusing on strengthening youth presence in her hometown, and empowering young people to reach their potential.

She is part of Luminosity, a youth forum dedicated to finding ways to involve young people in the area.

“This place, for a long time, has been viewed as a retirement town,” she says. “Luminosity is building a strong voice for the youth and engaging future leaders. It’s about helping youth feel connected with their community.”

Among other things, Susanne is actively involved with the Zonta Club and is the deputy chairwoman of the Brolga Project, which helps find work for young people in the region.

The fire in her belly is evident as Susanne describes her strong views, ranging from women’s rights advocacy, to refugees and cultural tolerance.

“When I’m passionate about something, I feel like I should say something. “I’m very much against misinformation.

“There are all these people who adopt their views straight from the news, or from what they hear,” she adds. “I want to encourage a balanced view of things.”

She says her Lebanese background has given her a unique cultural perspective and the ability to empathise with others.

It has also opened her eyes to xenophobia and the need for more cultural understanding, not only nationwide but in the community.

“Really it’s about an act local, think global approach,” she says.

Through her line of work, she hopes to make a lasting difference and, if her present involvement is anything to go by, it seems this young leader already has.

“I’m not thinking I’m going to change the world. I’m going to take small steps by looking at what the community thinks about certain issues, and showing them the ways they can help to make a difference.”