



# 008: Life Long Learning (Bree Katsamangos)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

study, tafe, university, degree, applied, bachelor, guess, teach, home, job, manage, path, bit, listened, life, graduate certificate, remotely, locally, work, newcastle

## SPEAKERS

Outro, Intro, Donna, Bree Katsamangos

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-  **Intro** 00:15  
Hi there, thank you for joining us for six degrees of study an uneducational podcast. Today we have Bree Katsamangos, Program Manager of Mission Australia who grew up in Taree, and gained an Honours Degree in Social Science and a Graduate Certificate in Social Impact. We want to show you how it's highly likely there's only six degrees of separation between you, the career and the life you want. This is the Six Degrees podcast.
  
  -  **Donna** 00:39  
Welcome, Bree.
  
  -  **Bree Katsamangos** 00:40  
Thank you very much.
  
  -  **Donna** 00:41  
And I just want to say I love how you said, "Yeah, I can do a podcast. I'm a learning tart".

**B** Bree Katsamangos 00:48  
I am.

**D** Donna 00:49  
I'm sure there's a couple of qualifications that we heard at the beginning. There's more to it than that. But we will get to that as we go through our conversation. So just for people listening out there, let us know a little bit about you know, where you are personally in life and where you are workwise in life.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 01:04  
Okay. Yes. So I am a local, I think over 30 years makes you a local doesn't it. So I grew up in Taree, and I'm a graduate of Manning Gardens and Wingham High School. So yeah, so it started out strong. And now I work as the program manager for Mission Australia, and I manage a few programs communities for children, which is a program designed to support vulnerable children and families. And I also manage some community development programs in Newcastle. And as part of that, I also run a collective impact initiative called Midcoast For Kids.

**D** Donna 01:44  
Wow, that's a heavy workload.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 01:46  
Keeps me busy.

**D** Donna 01:47  
So the Newcastle bit that means you'd have to travel to Newcastle a bit, or is this done remotely? or?

**B** Bree Katsamangos 01:52  
Yeah, well, both to so I used to travel down to Newcastle sort of fortnightly and then with COVID restrictions that got a little harder, but at the same time, everything picked up with zoom, and all of these other technologies, so we manage things remotely for the most part, yes.

**D** Donna 02:09  
Okay, so let's fill in those gaps a bit from from Wingham High to Mission Australia now.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 02:14  
Yeah.

**D** Donna 02:15  
What was your journey through study like? I guess everyone thinks it's a typical thing, you know, you find out at school what you want to do, you go and do the degree then you land in your job? And was your path like that?

**B** Bree Katsamangos 02:26  
It was that well, it started out that way. So yes, I did. I finished up at Wingham High School, had an idea that I wanted to move into the human services field. And I applied to Southern Cross University in Coffs Harbour, and I was successful in getting a place there. And so I relocated to Coffs Harbour for three years. And I completed a Bachelor of Social Science, but I ended up having some big existential questions, and I felt I needed to stay on and do an honors component. So I did that. But I came home for a portion of that, and did that remotely. So yeah, it was a very typical experience to begin with.

**D** Donna 03:09  
And how many years of study was that?

**B** Bree Katsamangos 03:11  
So that was about four and a half to complete that component. And, yeah, it was, I really enjoyed that experience of going away to university and the new challenges and the social life that that brings. But I think it was at that time, too, that universities were starting to move into that external study space as well, because even though I was on campus, some of the units I wanted to do, were only delivered online. So that was when I first started learning in that particular way. And I have to say things have advanced a lot since that time.

**D** Donna 03:50

Did you land in Coffs Harbour just on your own? Did you go with someone from school or you just like branching out and dumping yourself in in the town and settling in?

**B** Bree Katsamangos 03:58

I was very lucky because my best friend applied for a Bachelor of Business and got it. And so we actually got to go together, along with another friend of mine who applied for the same degree. So I had a little buffer, which was nice. Because I think I was a bit of a I was quite naive, I think for my age and quite innocent. So I really valued having a couple of friends to go along with.

**D** Donna 04:23

That helps a lot.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 04:23

It does but at the same time, university just thrust you where you need to be. And so I still had to learn to adapt and navigate my way in a new world. So yeah.

**D** Donna 04:34

Once you've completed the degree, yeah, When did that start, I guess impacting on your life. Were you able to then immediately get a job? I didn't with that qualification.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 04:43

I did. Yeah.

**D** Donna 04:44

This is like the dream. The dream progression.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 04:50

No, I actually applied for a job with the Manning Uniting Church locally as the children and youth worker. So I literally went out of you University and straight into the first job that I applied for. So, yeah, which was, which was great. And, and so I spent around two years in that role, and that really taught me some of the fundamentals of working in the

human services field. Yeah. Back home again.

D

Donna 05:16

Yeah. And have you stayed home ever since? Have you ventured away?

B

Bree Katsamangos 05:20

So No, I haven't. Um, I met my husband. So that's always a bit of a stopper, isn't it?

D

Donna 05:26

This is becoming a common thread in all of these conversations we have. Somewhere along the line, you meet that person that.

B

Bree Katsamangos 05:34

Yeah, so I'm very, I guess I am very typical. So yeah, no, I was, I think after that, two years with the church, and then I actually started looking for work outside the area, and was considering applying for a few roles in Queensland, but, but as I said, I've met my husband, and that sort of kept things local. And so I've just sort of roled from one job to the next. And studying externally, from one course to the next, as well, just living locally.

D

Donna 06:02

Yeah, so you've taken on extra study while you're working?

B

Bree Katsamangos 06:05

Yeah, absolutely. So I have done that through universities, but also through our local TAFE. And also through our community colleges. So I guess, you know, there are a lot of learning opportunities locally, and it's really just about taking them up when they present. So I think one of the ones I did was a certificate IV in training and assessment, which I did through the local TAFE. And, and that immediately led to work as well. I was working for council at the time in a youth development role. But the TAFE asked me to come over and teach units in case management. So I was able to tack that on. And then the Community College caught wind of that as well. And then they brought me over to start teaching ethics in aged care. So yeah, every time I find that I do study, some door opens, or there is some opportunity that presents as a direct result of it.

- D** Donna 07:00  
Yeah. And it just typically shows that whole life long learning process, you know, you think you've done your studies, and you're finished. But, you know, even now, I'm thinking now I could probably do something else. You know, it's just that lovely area of interest that keeps your brain going, I guess. Are you studying at the moment?
- B** Bree Katsamangos 07:18  
No, I'm every and every time I it's always a struggle for me to not study.
- D** Donna 07:25  
Hence why you are the learning type.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 07:26  
Yeah, really? But yeah, no, I actually went on to do a, a diploma of management through the TAFE as well. And that was something that led immediately to employment in management as well. So and that was, again, done through the TAFE combination of that face to face and online components. And yeah, and then it was like only recently, probably, less than 12 months ago, I would have finished the Graduate Certificate of social impact through the University of New South Wales.
- D** Donna 07:58  
Wow.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 07:59  
But that's a, that's challenging, because, you know, it's, it's good when you leave school, to be able to go straight into university, because typically, you don't have families and other life commitments like work to juggle. As you progress, it becomes a real, a real juggle, and probably doing that one was a fine example of that just having two small children and working full time and then trying to manage that load, too.
- D** Donna 08:24  
It's kind of where you need more than two arms, you know, this whole capacity to carry everything the ball just gets bigger as life goes along. That's for sure.

B Bree Katsamangos 08:33  
Yeah.

D Donna 08:35  
So if you hadn't completed that degree, it sounds like that was never on your radar. You were always going to study if you hadn't have done that degree. Where do you think you would be?

B Bree Katsamangos 08:45  
Well, I had to think about this question. And I thought I haven't probably given a great deal of thought even to that, because I probably was quite clear early on that that was the path that I wanted to take.

D Donna 08:56  
I just wanted to ask is that because others in your family had already studied? Is that why it was a clear path? And it was a no brainer for you to go to uni?

B Bree Katsamangos 09:04  
Yeah, well, it's interesting, because, my mother is a very strong feminist, I would say, and she had five girls and to her mind, she needed to equip them for the world. She looked at things like divorce statistics and said statistically, 50% of you will be divorced, and you are going to be able to stand on your own two feet. And for her that really meant encouraging us towards tertiary education. So and I don't know, so I think it was ingrained in us to some extent.

D Donna 09:33  
Had your mum studied?

B Bree Katsamangos 09:35  
My mother has been a nurse for 45 years. So so she did her training early on, but um, but you know, she was a nurse in charge of theater at the Mayo for 20 years and definitely, definitely a career woman. Yes, yes. So, yes, but that was something I suppose she ingrained and I don't think I really questioned that too much, but it's worked out really

well.

**D** Donna 09:56  
And have your sisters followed in your footsteps?

**B** Bree Katsamangos 09:58  
Yes, I've got a psychologist and A journalist and another one who's got bachelor of legal and justice and works in child protection. So yeah, we've all gone down that professional path.

**D** Donna 10:07  
All listened to your mum.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 10:09  
Pretty well.

**D** Donna 10:12  
So this next question is, you know, right now, what do you wish someone had told you? I guess when you are much younger? Is there some kind of pearl of wisdom that would have changed anything in your life or you sound like you've listened to the cues that have been given to you anyway.

**B** Bree Katsamangos 10:26  
yeah, I think they were cues that I've been given and you know, and if I were to go in a different direction, you know, I probably have a little secret dream at the back of my mind, which one day I'll entertain and having my own coffee shop and bookstore. But I sort of think even if I had gone down that path, learning would have been a part of that journey anyway, to make that a success. So I still think one way or another, I would have sought out a path of education. If it wasn't in that traditional straight out of school way. It just would have come later. But no, what was the question again?

**D** Donna 10:59  
You know, what pearls of wisdom for back when you were young to guide your future?



B

Bree Katsamangos 11:03

No, I don't think I think I would have wanted anybody to really give me a pearl of wisdom, per se. But what what I would say is that if you're entertaining, the idea of doing University, be it remotely or any other way is that it does require a level of discipline of tenacity and gumption to get through. And I think that be it, you go out straight out of school, or at any other time, you will find there are times when you sit up till two o'clock in the morning to get a deadline.

D

Donna 11:35

I was just going to mention when you were saying that, yeah, skills you need, I think Time management is one of the absolute critical things.

B

Bree Katsamangos 11:41

Yeah. And, and you know, and it's when you've got children, it's your study day starts at 9pm, you know, after they've gone to bed, when you would like to go to bed, you just have to suck it up and get through. But I think that that holds you in really good stead later down the track when you go into a work environment. And there are demands placed on you that you think are impossible, that you can actually draw on that and go now I've done this before, I know I couldn't do it. And you can approach those things with some degree of confidence, even if they are a challenge. So university does doesn't teach you the theory, it actually teaches you the skills you need to survive in the work that's going to come.

D

Donna 12:19

That self belief, there's really a lot of uni is, is getting it through on your own. Yeah, you're relying on yourself to do it. There's nobody really there to help you do it all along. So it is it does build that self belief, I think and that confidence that you can do what's required.

B

Bree Katsamangos 12:33

Yep. And you know, and teaches you to manage anxiety and stress and all those emotional intelligence things that you need, which are I think underrated in a work environment sometimes, and but to me, they're the things that are critical for success, not the right attitude, you can learn the skills. So, yeah,

D Donna 12:52  
So much of it comes to personality, doesn't it? And just being able to mix with other people, which I guess, university helps with that as well.

B Bree Katsamangos 12:58  
That's it.

D Donna 13:00  
Something I'd like to know. I guess I know, you were keen to leave the area. But if the Taree Universities campus was around at the time you were leaving school, would that have been on your radar as a place to go to? Or would you have still been eager to get away and jump out of town anyway?

B Bree Katsamangos 13:16  
No, I was very much focused on finding the learning opportunity that met my needs. So if it was here, or it could be facilitated here, I would have been completely open to that. And, you know, and I think, you know, study, particularly if you're doing it externally, it can be an isolating thing. And if you're struggling and you don't have relationships with people that you can draw on, it just makes it harder doesn't mean you can't get through you absolutely can. But if there are supports around you, if there's a learning environment that's accessible to you, it just makes it that much easier.

D Donna 13:51  
Yeah, I like what you're saying about studying at nine o'clock at night, we planned to be open to midnight like people can come in with a swipe cards.

B Bree Katsamangos 13:57  
Oh, that's so good.

D Donna 13:58  
You're actually allowed to leave home and go right I'm out of here and not feel too guilty about going and having your own time to do what you need to do. So it's really good.

- B** Bree Katsamangos 14:07  
Because yeah, I used to, you know, just to sometimes get out of that same room, or to avoid that procrastination distraction that you have at home I used to go to coffee shops, I used to go and sit on park benches or just go to the libraries and set up shop for the day and almost treated it like a nine to five job in order to get things done.
- D** Donna 14:27  
Creates that discipline like I've got to be here at nine o'clock is my commitment.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 14:31  
And you know, in itself there is some way to go that is set up for that purpose that's just gold.
- D** Donna 14:37  
And we're planning you know, someone will actually check in and go Bree you we're going to come in tonight at nine o'clock is still good for that.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 14:42  
Oh, I don't know about it.
- D** Donna 14:48  
You would be allowed to say no.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 14:51  
So no, that's ideal. And I guess other things that have been challenges for people who are studying is often you are poor.
- D** Donna 14:59  
Absolutely.
- B** Bree Katsamangos 15:00

As a student you know, to have access to somewhere that offers Wi Fi or printing services or that type of thing is, is again, it's small, but it's big. So it's just one or two barriers that are removed. Yeah.



Donna 15:15

We really want to be about accessibility and inspirational an inspirational place to come to where you feel like you're achieving something.



Bree Katsamangos 15:21

Yeah, that's good.



Donna 15:22

Yeah. So thank you very much, Bree.



Bree Katsamangos 15:24

No worries.



Donna 15:25

I'm very pleased that you came along for part of our six degrees podcast and real insight into how your past has been. Thank you.



Bree Katsamangos 15:33

Thank you.



Outro 15:34

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