

009: Clinical to leadership in Allied Health (Clare Brennan)...

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SPEAKERS

Outro, Intro, Clare Brennan, Donna Ballard

- I** Intro 00:14
Hi there. Thank you for joining us for six degrees of study an uneducational podcast. Today we have Clare Brennan from First Steps Counts, who is their transition manager. Clare has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Speech Pathology from the University of Sydney. 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 a six degrees podcast.
- D** Donna Ballard 00:38
Hello, Clare.
- C** Clare Brennan 00:39
Hi, Donna.
- D** Donna Ballard 00:39
Welcome to our podcast space.

C Clare Brennan 00:41
Thank you very much for inviting me.

D Donna Ballard 00:43
Thank you for being here. I guess for people who don't know Clare Brennan, just fill us in a little bit about where you're at, at the moment in your life, both where you're working, and a little bit about your personal life so we can know how you come to be in this area?

C Clare Brennan 00:57
Sure. Well, I'll start with my personal life, because I guess that is the preface to my professional life here in Taree. We moved to Taree, well we're living at Old Bar, but we moved to the area just over a year ago. Following my husband's work, he got a promotion to the area. So I have a four year old and a two year old. And we made the decision to move from Sydney to offer them a more relaxed lifestyle with access to country living and coastal living. Yeah. So I left my position in Sydney and came up here and found a fantastic opportunity to work for First Steps Count Incorporated, as the transition manager with the responsibility of delivering a child and community center to the children and community in Taree.

D Donna Ballard 01:47
Yeah, which you would really connect with when you have children in that age groups.

C Clare Brennan 01:50
100% Yes. And I've always worked with children in the pediatric health space. So you know, the the philosophy and the ethos behind what First Steps Count is trying to achieve really resonated with me. So I feel really honored to have the privilege to work for that organization.

D Donna Ballard 02:06
Yeah, very exciting future happening there with First Steps Count. Yes. So stepping us back a little bit. These podcasts are often about people's journey through study. And often we find it's not that typical journey from high school, straight to university straight out to getting a job. That's often the ideal. But I'm keen to hear how that happened for you, what was your path of study,

- C** Clare Brennan 02:29
I'm sorry to disappoint you, I took a really traditional pathway. You know, I went straight from school, I did a work experience in year 10, and had some exposure to the various allied health careers. And I really loved what the speech pathologist was doing. And that really hit home to me that that's what I wanted to pursue for my career. So I worked hard, and I got in.
- D** Donna Ballard 02:57
So work experience works, right?
- C** Clare Brennan 02:58
Work experience works. I mean, I really thought long and hard about what it was that I wanted to do for work experience. And I think that helped. But for a while there, I was looking at occupational therapy. But it was not until I actually saw a speech pathologist in action and spoke to her about the value of communication. And what that brings to people across the lifespan, that it really hit home that that's what I wanted to do for my career. So I'm sorry, I graduated from school. And then I went straight to university and studied full time for four years at Lidcombe.
- D** Donna Ballard 03:32
Lidcombe, right?
- C** Clare Brennan 03:33
Yeah, the Health Sciences Campus.
- D** Donna Ballard 03:36
Yeah.
- C** Clare Brennan 03:36
So I had to commute a pretty long distance to get to uni. And I'm not going to lie, that degree is like having a full time job. It is five days a week, with lots of practicals, you don't get very much of a break.

D Donna Ballard 03:50
No time for part time work?

C Clare Brennan 03:54
So I was working in the evenings, two nights a week, and then on Saturdays or Sundays, just depending what shifts I could get. And so it was hard. I'm not going to lie. It was a hard slog. But, you know, really a great opportunity. Obviously, I met so many people during my university days. And, you know, it's just what you have to do to get yourself through it, isn't it?

D Donna Ballard 04:18
Yeah. And as soon as you finished your studies, were you able to land yourself into a job?

C Clare Brennan 04:22
Not immediately.

D Donna Ballard 04:23
Yeah.

C Clare Brennan 04:23
It was a really competitive environment. I had decided that I wanted to work in the public sector. I didn't want to work in that private space. I think, as a new graduate. I'm not sure about other sectors, but certainly in the health sector, I really felt that the opportunities to work within a multidisciplinary team and with a group of people who obviously had more experience than me in the field, I was going to be able to learn a lot more in that environment and obviously be exposed to more professional opportunities and clinical opportunities. So I applied for loads of positions in Sydney, the competition is rife with new graduate opportunities. They're really competitive. So I didn't manage to do that. But what I did, which I have absolutely zero regrets about now is that I took a series of locum positions. So speech pathology is predominantly a female profession. And so very often maternity locums come up. And so I just jumped on the maternity locum bandwagon and did nine to 12 month contracts with various community health centers.

D Donna Ballard 05:33
All around Sydney still?

C Clare Brennan 05:35
So I started out in Fairfield in southwestern Sydney. And then I got a short term contract with Sydney Children's Hospital, which was an amazing experience to work for one of the biggest tertiary hospitals in New South Wales. And then my mum found an ad in the paper for a maternity locum in Inverell.

D Donna Ballard 05:54
Oh, wow.

C Clare Brennan 05:55
Yeah. And I applied for it thinking I'd have no chance, you know, I didn't have that much experience. But I was offered the position. And after a telephone interview was all really surreal. And I went there for a nine month contract and came home three and a half years later

D Donna Ballard 06:14
Wow.

C Clare Brennan 06:14
So the opportunities just opened up, I was working in a community health center with two other speech pathologists. And luckily for me, they just kept having babies. So I kept taking on their contracts. Until a point where they were both coming back. And I got a position in a disability organization up there, because I didn't want to come home. And then

D Donna Ballard 06:39
And that stage coming home was back to Sydney?

C Clare Brennan 06:42

Back to Sydney. Yes, yes. Anyway, I did eventually come home to Sydney, and got another little short term contract and then decided to go overseas and see the world and find myself I guess. And look, that was a good opportunity to because I decided to upskill in teaching English as a second language before I left. And so I worked over in Cambridge, teaching English to migrant students. And that was a fantastic stint in adult education. I really enjoyed that time. And when I came home, I realized that speech pathology actually wasn't what I wanted to do next. And through my contacts at Sydney children's, I managed to get work as a case manager in the brain injury team. And that was fantastic because it allowed me to use the skills that I had acquired from my time working as a speech pathologist, which I firmly believe are really transferable across multiple different areas. And I was able to support children and young people following traumatic or acquired injury to re engage in their previous activities in daily life and work within a highly skilled, multidisciplinary team of doctors, nurses, and allied health

D Donna Ballard 07:55
So rewarding.

C Clare Brennan 07:56
Was fantastic.

D Donna Ballard 07:57
Bringing back their independence.

C Clare Brennan 07:58
That's exactly right. And the resilience of children after they've sustained a level of injury is quite extraordinary. So that was a fantastic opportunity. But it also, what I realized is that I wanted to take some leadership positions. And I had an opportunity to act up as the coordinator of the team, which I did for a period of time, and then I actually secured that position permanently. And from there, there was a new opportunity to manage the entire rehab department alongside the clinical senior staff specialist.

D Donna Ballard 08:11
Wow.

- C** Clare Brennan 08:35
And I landed that position. So I was the manager of the pediatric rehab service at Sydney Children's Hospital.
- D** Donna Ballard 08:42
Wow.
- C** Clare Brennan 08:43
So I really didn't, I probably didn't envisage that my career would take that sideways lateral move, you know, it's still within the realm of health.
- D** Donna Ballard 08:52
Yeah.
- C** Clare Brennan 08:52
But, um, you know, I sort of dropped the clinical side of things and moved more into the leadership management side of things.
- D** Donna Ballard 08:58
Yeah, so to put some perspective on that, how long has that been, from that point? back to when you'd finished your degree?
- C** Clare Brennan 09:07
Well, so I graduated in 2003.
- D** Donna Ballard 09:10
Right.
- C** Clare Brennan 09:11
And what are we now 2020? So what's that? 17 years?

D Donna Ballard 09:15
Yeah. And it was from that role that you moved to here?

C Clare Brennan 09:18
That's right.

D Donna Ballard 09:18
Yeah. So I just wanted to ask when you were studying with speech pathology, do you get to do placements while you're studying? Did that bring you into that space?

C Clare Brennan 09:29
Yes.

D Donna Ballard 09:29
And those placements didn't then connect you with potential employers? Like That wasn't a natural path to take?

C Clare Brennan 09:38
No, because, I mean, unless you made a really clear network or relationship, but it's really when the positions become vacant, that they're able to advertise them and recruit to those organizations. Yeah. And a lot of the practicals are done on site. So the Health Sciences Campus has an on site clinic, right, which allows for really easy access to practicing clinical skills. And offering, you know, it's a student run clinic.

D Donna Ballard 10:03
Yeah, I guess I'm just thinking of this area in particular.

C Clare Brennan 10:06
Sure.

D Donna Ballard 10:06

There's just such a shortage of speech pathologists, anything in allied health there is such a crying need for.

C Clare Brennan 10:12
I know.

D Donna Ballard 10:13
Would you, I think probably see that now that you're here.

C Clare Brennan 10:16
I do.

D Donna Ballard 10:16
You know, anybody from Sydney could probably walk into a job here in speech pathology.

C Clare Brennan 10:20
If the jobs were here?

D Donna Ballard 10:21
Yeah.

C Clare Brennan 10:22
Yes. Yeah. I mean, I don't know what the lay of the land is specifically about opportunities for working in this area and the vacancies. But, you know, I would, I would go traveling around New South Wales promoting the benefits of working in real regional, New South Wales, I did a prac up in Tweed Heads when I was in third year. And, you know, just to experience a different lifestyle. And also, obviously, my experiences in Inverell, you know, really instilled in me a love of working in a small town. And I know there's something very special about working in a small community.

D Donna Ballard 11:05

It seems to be those connections that you made.

C Clare Brennan 11:07
Yes.

D Donna Ballard 11:07
And everyone knows someone.

C Clare Brennan 11:09
That's right.

D Donna Ballard 11:09
That's why our podcast is six degrees of separation. That's how it feels.

C Clare Brennan 11:13
Yeah, I'm sure it does.

D Donna Ballard 11:14
Yeah.

C Clare Brennan 11:14
And I think that the opportunities that it opens up when you're working in a smaller community for career, I mean, I never thought I would be sitting around recording a podcast, ever. So, you know, I really feel like if I could promote people moving from metropolitan areas to regional areas to work in that speech pathology, I mean, yes, there is a huge demand here, Donna.

D Donna Ballard 11:40
Yeah. And we can just see that starting to happen. Just in the last couple of years, there's a lot of people that are moving to the area, it's just seems to be this whole sea change thing. But just in this last 12 months, there's so many new people into the area, which is

really lovely.

C Clare Brennan 11:55
Absolutely.

D Donna Ballard 11:56
Yeah. So I guess, in your role now, with first steps count, you're the project manager.

C Clare Brennan 12:03
Transition Manager.

D Donna Ballard 12:04
Transition Manager. So tell us a bit about that. And how that relates, I guess, to your degree, or your, your maybe it's your qualification, since your degree that's showing that role.

C Clare Brennan 12:14
I think my work experience since my degree has helped me get to this point in my career. But I do think that speech pathologists learn and have inherent skills that are really applicable and transferable across a multitude of roles. And I had don't think I had fully appreciated that when I went into, you know, when you go into a Bachelor of speech pathology, the expectation is that you're going to be a speech pathologist, right. So I really didn't understand what the opportunities might be down the track. But the role, you know, it really requires good networking and relationship skills, excuse me, communication skills, leadership and facilitation skills, negotiation skills, and all of these things really link back to the training that I've had in in how to communicate with people. But I also think, you know, the opportunities that have come up in my career around team leadership and management have also helped me secure this position. So yeah.

D Donna Ballard 13:19
Yeah, very exciting role. There's amazing things happening. I guess, for those that have been following the first steps count journey for a little while. What stage are we now at?

- C** Clare Brennan 13:31
Yes. So obviously, we would have liked to commence construction by now. I think the project has been in 11 years in the planning. But, you know, 2020 has been an interesting ride for all of us. And unfortunately, there have been some unforeseen circumstances that have contributed to some delays in commencing construction of the building.
- D** Donna Ballard 13:52
It's no surprise in time, money.
- C** Clare Brennan 13:54
I know. And thank you for understanding. But we're really hopeful that construction can commence next year. But you know, my focus really has been about community engagement and discussing with service providers where we're up to and how we're going to make this work as a viable, integrated collaborative space to support children and young people.
- D** Donna Ballard 14:16
And it's such an important thing, I guess, for Taree University's campus future as well. We need those younger kids that are growing up in the right environment to be able to be prepared to get through school and have more options available.
- C** Clare Brennan 14:29
Absolutely. It really does start from that younger group, you know, as you say, you need people to be engaged in having a love of learning and engaged in attending school in order to have aspirations and hopes and dreams of attending a university.
- D** Donna Ballard 14:43
Yeah.
- C** Clare Brennan 14:43
And to have that option located here where they can still be close to family, close to culture, close to employment. I think that's going to be such a fantastic asset for this area.

- D** Donna Ballard 14:55
Yeah, we just can't wait to develop. Yes, lots of opportunities there. And just removing all those barriers and having to move away to study that's really held this area back I think. Or it's made people have to leave the area and they don't always return. So we're hoping we can just build up, build the area up by keeping the locals local.
- C** Clare Brennan 15:16
Yeah.
- D** Donna Ballard 15:17
And developing local businesses as we go.
- C** Clare Brennan 15:19
Brilliant.
- D** Donna Ballard 15:20
So thank you very much Clare for letting us know a bit about your past and your path through study and the exciting plans that you've got ahead of you. It's wonderful. Thanks for sharing.
- C** Clare Brennan 15:31
Thanks for having me.
- O** Outro 15:34
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