

PROFILE:

SUE LUNDBERG - CHILDREN'S COURT MAGISTRATE*

Sue Lundberg is not the sort of person you would necessarily be glad to meet. Which is not to suggest that she is unpleasant or harsh - it's just that in her official capacity she has the awesome power to deprive some people of their liberty.

Mrs Lundberg, formerly the commissioner of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, is now a special magistrate in the Children's Court, a job with enormous responsibility.

"People need to know about the juvenile justice system," she said. "Children are told to respect the law, but how can they do that unless they know about the law and its penalties? Schools should be teaching students about the law to make sure they understand their responsibilities and what happens if they do the wrong thing.

"Some children start off with a little petty crime and think it a joke. But it's not - it can lead to very serious things. For example, how many know that a conviction as a child can lead to being denied the chance to join the army or the air-force as an adult?"

Mrs Lundberg became one of the court's 14 special magistrates but the only full-time magistrate in July, handling cases from shoplifting to armed robbery with violence, seeing the misery, trying to help sort out the problems and put young offenders back on the right road.

When she's not in court, Mrs Lundberg uses some of her time to talk to young people about her job and the law so they can learn how the system works. This includes understanding the role of police, welfare officers, court officials and the people who, like herself, judge the cases and hand down the sentences.

The opportunity to see and hear Mrs Lundberg should also help students appreciate that their ambitions can be achieved and success can be realised, given the right attitude and application.

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Before she went to the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Mrs Lundberg worked for the Aboriginal Development Commission, Aboriginal Employment and Training in the CES and the old Department for Community Welfare in the north-west. This followed several jobs in the Eastern States and three years in the Royal Australian Army Corp which she joined at 18. She also spent time living and studying with Indian people in the United States.

As a child she had the sort of upbringing which has severely damaged others. She was separated from her mother when she was three and sent from Meekatharra to Sister Kate's (now Manguri) in Perth, where association with Aboriginal people outside the home was discouraged.

It was a time of mixed emotions, some happiness, some torment, many discoveries about racism in society. Expectations held by the authorities for young Sue were limited, but she had other ideas.

Sue Lundberg didn't re-establish contact with her family until she was an adult with her own children. It was a traumatic reunion because for much of her childhood she believed she was an orphan.

"I don't think you ever really accept that you don't have a family," she said. "Our needs were taken care of as children, but no one looked after our needs inside. Many times we felt something was wrong, something missing."

Mrs Lundberg did not discover what was missing until she met her mother 30 years after the two were separated. It was an experience which helped Sue Lundberg establish her place as an Aboriginal woman in society.

"You must know what's right and what's wrong. You must stay honest to yourself, to your family and to your wider Aboriginal family in the community," she said. "If you do that then no one will be able to say anything against you and be believed. And if and when you get to an important position, never forget who you are and who put you there. Make sure you know your true motives.

"Seeking self benefit by working for Aboriginal people in Aboriginal affairs is wrong. If that's your idea, go off and run a shop. Never lose sight of your Aboriginal heritage.

"I know that with my own background, Aboriginality and work history I will be a good, firm magistrate and will work hard to achieve that goal."

GETTING AHEAD: THE ROLE FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN - Extracts from a speech given by Mrs Lundberg at the National Aboriginal Women's Conference in Alice Springs, September 1988:

Aboriginal women have always been managers in the traditional sense as gatherers of food, caregivers to children and, in fact, managing the extended family.

To begin, you should take the time to sit down and find out exactly what has been tried, put in place and requested by the women in your area or region.

Programs covering all aspects of our daily lives are managed by Government departments, authorities, Aboriginal organisations and resource agencies and the amount that finally filters down to people is minimal.

Aboriginal affairs is an industry, and new agencies, Aboriginal organisations and consultants are established regularly. Aboriginal people, without realising it, are becoming pawns in a wider game of chess and, in fact, are fighting each other for a piece of the great financial cake.

INFIGHTING

Very few Aboriginal organisations are self managing and most depend totally on departments and agencies for their funding. Personalities in departments add to the infighting for funds. Hence the comment that "welfare days are back."

The Aboriginal family, especially in its large extended role, thankfully is not disappearing. Rather it is getting stronger. This reflects the feeling that family is very important and that the spiritual well-being is just as important as the material aspects of our daily lives.

Religion is playing a part in Aboriginal people's lives whether through traditional beliefs or the Christian doctrines learned from white people.

The white population needs to look at the total Aboriginal affairs picture, not just the drunks up the road, but the positive steps being taken. Aboriginal people want to help themselves get ahead, but Aboriginal people working in Aboriginal affairs suffer enormously because they often have no real influence in policy and decision making. This is not always understood by the broader Aboriginal community.

HONESTY

Aboriginal affairs can only benefit by a more honest, less self-interested approach by all those who work in it. What I and other Aboriginal women have been saying to younger Aboriginals is:

- Be ambitious
- Cultivate contacts
- Never stop learning
- Change departments and employers if you see an opportunity.

But through this, always remember the people who put you on top, the staff you worked with, contacts and family.

It must also be said that women, unlike men, have the most difficult time in getting ahead because we have children, we are the caregivers and we have always been put in second place.

So it is up to us to foster younger women, set good standards and never be too busy to listen. Remember, someone once listened to what we had to say. Above all stay honest and true to Aboriginal people.

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