



I'm reminded
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Amanda Judd

By travelling the world and competing in high-level international rhythmic gymnastics, Amanda learnt the value of hard work and the value of visualising success from a very young age. But it was the combination of losing the dream of becoming an Olympic competitor, and a growing disdain for industry that was solely profit oriented and didn't contribute to a fair, just, sustainable society, that led Amanda to become involved in community work.

Amanda became the first coordinator of the YouthWorX Charitable Trust, which provides a vehicle for connecting, empowering and supporting youth and those agencies working in the 'youth space' on the North Shore.

She describes herself as being *totally a North Shore beach-loving* person. One of three children, she was born and brought up in Birkenhead and, while she no longer lives on the Shore, Amanda says that she will always identify with the area.

Amanda's family love all things creative. Her father plays in three cover bands and, when he is not singing, works as a printer specialising in artisan letter press printing. Amanda's mother is an artist, doing mostly painting and pastel work. Amanda's own creative outlet was rhythmic gymnastics, learning to express herself using her body, with music and apparatus. She started competing when she was eight years old. She represented New Zealand in international competitions for nine years from 1996 to 2005, first as an individual gymnast and then in team competitions.

She credits her drive and initiative to the lessons learnt while she was training for competitions as a gymnast. By pushing herself to be the best that she could be, it became part of her mentality. *Success is definitely a mindset that's become really important in the work that I do. Potentially it can be to my detriment; I've burnt myself out before, from over working, so I have to be careful. But I choose to see it as a strength.*

During those years, one of Amanda's goals was to represent New Zealand at the Commonwealth Games. She qualified in 2002 for the Manchester Games, but then rhythmic gymnastics was removed as a sport so she didn't attend. The next Games were in 2006, and by that time, she was recovering from a knee injury, having had surgery which meant crutches for three months and a long recovery period. She found being injured very hard, psychologically.

Amanda returned to competition at the World Championship in 2005, where she was in the first group to represent New Zealand



New Zealand Rhythmic Gymnastics Group at the World Championships, 2005



NZ Youth delegation at United Nations Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen, 2009

since 1987. The team was from North Harbour Gymnastics club and practised at the North Shore Events Centre. Many of New Zealand's representative gymnasts have come from the North Harbour club. For a while the head coach was Diliana Georgieva, who is an ex-world champion from Bulgaria, and during the time that she was head coach New Zealand had its best results in rhythmic gymnastics.

Amanda had left school at the end of the Sixth Form (Year 12) and attended AUT to do a foundation year in fashion studies before beginning a degree. In 2005, while recovering from her knee injury, she decided that she wasn't going to continue with her fashion studies, and made training, gymnastics and finding work to pay for gymnastics her focus. Her performance at the World Championships in 2005 was the last time Amanda competed as a rhythmic gymnast. She says that it was an easy decision because, after her injury, she was physically disabled effectively, for a gymnast. The training required to keep herself at the top level was too hard. Amanda takes a very positive outlook on her experience as an athlete. *I believe my career in rhythmic gymnastics shaped me to be the dedicated, hard-working, global citizen that I am today.*

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The decision to stop left a huge hole in her life and so, in a spontaneous decision, she moved to Melbourne and lived there for two years. There she had what she calls an existential crisis as she realised that her life as a gymnast was over. *It was my everything and it wasn't there anymore. I was glaring out at the world then I thought, Wow, there's this whole world out there.* It was at that the time that Amanda began her *environmental awareness* journey. She became vegetarian because it was cheaper, but reading about how harmful it is for the planet to produce meat reinforced her decision. *At that point I was just like, 'I have to tell everyone about this, this is terrible.'*

Once back in Auckland, she spent a short time getting some work experience in the fashion business as a pattern-maker. On her last day, she was told that in future all the work would be done in China. *This was my first experience of the free trade effects on fashion; I was really angry about it, really angry.* She discovered that this was becoming the practice throughout the fashion design world. *I guess that was the first time that I felt a social injustice, really close to my heart. I thought, this is not fair. The university shouldn't train us in this stuff if they know that is going to be changing. They should be equipping us with the tools to be able to navigate a changing industry.*

Amanda then started working with non-profit organisations at Business Professional Services in Birkenhead. Her role was running training courses for the Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders Federation. She ran the courses for a year or so and looked after the Federation's membership base, recruiting new members. She also began to go along to the Pupuke Rotoract meetings on the Shore with a friend. *We got involved and active in giving back to our local and international communities, as well as*

supporting each other in our personal and professional development. The club had been organising an event called Lip Sync, a lip syncing competition to raise money for Youthline. I remember thinking to myself, This could be so much more than what it is. The idea of lip syncing is so fun. Let's take this further. My mate Cam and I sat down and we were like, 'Let's just blow this up to a whole other level and then we will pitch it back to the club and see what they say.'

She and Cam hired the Bruce Mason Centre in Takapuna and hoped to have a thousand people enter the competition. All the teams would arrive in costume and walk the red carpet with paparazzi. There would be a meal and a charity auction and a thermometer to say how much was raised. *We pitched it back to the Rotoract club and everyone thought we were crazy.* But they went ahead in 2008, had about 600 people competing and raised around \$7,500. The next year they held it at the Westlake Boys High School auditorium and again raised a lot of money, which was donated to Surf Life Saving New Zealand and a camp for disadvantaged youth. The next year, funds went to Duffy Books in Homes. In 2010, Amanda was the winner of the Takapuna Rotary Community Contribution Award.

Amanda was doing the Rotoract work while in full-time paid work, and the long hours led to stress and a feeling of burnout. Fortunately, she was forwarded an email about a really awesome job as coordinator for YouthWorX, based at the Mary Thomas Centre in Takapuna. She applied for it and got it, and *next thing I'm full on in community.*

YouthWorX originated under the auspices of North Shore Community and Social Services [NSCSS] when a youth liaison team began work to connect youth agencies. By 2008, YouthWorX Charitable Trust was established as a point of contact for all youth work on the Shore. The vision of the Trust was to be a conduit for supporting and growing a cohesive North Shore youth sector by connecting, empowering and supporting youth and agencies that work with youth. YouthWorX aimed to sit alongside young people





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Amanda speaking at the Inspiring Stories film-making workshop, 2011

and the people working with them, and included young people on their governance board. The vision statement was: *We support young people of the North Shore to be awesome and to share their awesomeness in our community!*

YouthWorX worked collaboratively with a range of organisations serving young people to strengthen and support the North Shore youth sector. Amanda recalls that there was a demand for a network, so she built one of more than 150 organisations and 200 people in the sector. Regular meetings, monthly e-updates, training workshops for sector development, collaboration and youth participation support all strengthened the network.

The founding principles of YouthWorX came from the 2002 Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa, which has six key principles. Healthy youth development depends on young people having positive connections with others in society, and is triggered when young people fully participate. Good information and effective research and evaluation supports good youth development. Together, the principles can help young people to gain a sense of contributing value to society, to feel connected to others and to society, to realise that they have choices about their future, and to feel positive and comfortable with their own identity. Amanda was excited by the strategy and used it as a guide

in her work. She summarises the principles in her own words: *You know when youth development happens, when it ignites and triggers something in a young person. When they are involved in making decisions that affect them—that's why you had youth councils, for example. Because if you do that, that will develop the people involved.*

Some of the initiatives that Amanda contributed to while working for YouthWorx included support and mentoring for the Shore Youth Council, and administration, mentoring and support for YouthFund. Working with the Shore community coordinators and Council staff, Amanda helped coordinate an annual youth conference known as 'Converge'. This was a programme for hundreds of Year 10 and 11 students from North Shore high schools, and included a full-day conference-style event for young people to workshop on how to have a voice and initiate change in their community.

With a group of young people she coordinated the development of 'Appleseed', a website and campaign *encouraging, resourcing and supporting young North Shore citizens to grow their own amazing story, and to positively get active in their own communities.* Then, through YouthworX, in partnership with Appleseed and the ReGeneration Trust (for which she was a founding trustee and co-chair), Amanda organised an inter-generational, cross-sector event, where young leaders and youth organisations were invited to showcase their thinking, their work, and their ideas.

In collaboration with PHAB, Amanda also co-ordinated an event for the annual Youth Week, to celebrate young people and contribute to a positive youth culture for the North Shore. She also organised an event called 'Vote Local', part of a series of nationwide workshops for young people to understand and explore local body

politics. I worked to organise the Auckland programme and content, and invite and entice as many young people as possible to get excited about local politics!

Then, in 2009, Amanda was a New Zealand youth delegate (NZYD) at the Copenhagen Climate Change conference. *The NZYD project was a platform for young people to have a voice in international climate change politics and join in with the global youth climate politics movement. My involvement with this project was to ensure that there was genuine youth participation, and that the project focused on outcomes and on a contribution to the growth of the young people it engaged with.* Since 2009, climate change events have also happened in Cancun, Durban, Lima and

Paris. NZYD has launched a sister organisation, the '2050 Alliance' which encourages young New Zealanders to enhance their advocacy and lobbying work in the area of climate change. That same year she was awarded a Civic Award by the then mayor of North Shore City, Andrew Williams, for her con-

tributions to community and the lives of young people.

While she was at YouthWorX, Amanda realised how much paper she was using in the office and began collecting it. Soon she had a cupboard full of boxes of paper. She took these home and, using her father's guillotine, turned them into re-usable one-sided notepads. Lovenotes was born! Today Lovenotes has grown into an independent social enterprise. *Lovenotes is doing its bit for environmental harmony, social justice, and people's happiness and well-being. I have had the most incredible life giving back: to communities of amazing people, our planet, and to my peers and myself. I have grown and developed so much through contributing, that I'm reminded again and again of why living by this kaupapa is at the heart of how I choose to be, and what I choose to do, every single day.*

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