**Kon Karapanagiotidis OAM – Alumni Profile Interview**

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre began back on the 8th of June 2001. It began as a TAFE class project. It was established in a space of 8 weeks with a group of students learning to become welfare workers and the idea at the time was to teach young people that even as a student you could change the world – that you don’t need a piece of paper, you don’t need years of experience out there – you just need passion and an idea and a willingness to have a go.

The greatest career highlight for me has been two things. One, personally it has been spending the last 20 years fighting for what I am passionate about and doing the best I possibly can - and not compromising my integrity and my principles and actually standing up for what I believe in – so I thin k it’s that I am most proud of – it’s not a piece of paper or any position that I have – it’s actually being true to myself.

The second would be the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre – in 10 years – the 7000 people it has assisted and the difference it has made to thousands of people. To be part of that – that would be the second highlight of my career.

What keeps me motivated after 10 years is that working with asylum seekers you get to see the best and worst of people. You see the worst of our government and our leaders and you get to see the best in the compassion of the community and the best of extraordinary people. And what keeps me going is perspective. What keeps me going is remembering what life is actually about. Life is precious. It’s important to take a stand on something you care about. I am working with people with whom it’s life and death for them. And what keeps me going is my passion for human rights, my compassion for humanity, my desire to actually make a difference and understanding what a rare gift and opportunity it actually is – to have the privilege and opportunity to spend my life doing something that I love. And that’s what keeps me going.

I think what I actually took away from my study at La Trobe it is really my passion and love for education. I grew up in a family where both parents were so poor that neither of them got to even finish primary school. And my first experience of higher education - I was the first in my family to go to university and to get that education. And I think that that was the greatest experience – having that opportunity – the pride that it bought to my family and knowing that from here my career would begin – that doors would open and opportunities would begin for me.

The best advice I could give to people just starting out would be to follow your heart – follow your passion and don’t compromise. The world is full of people – and this sounds like a cliché but it’s so damn true – they’ll tell you what your cant do and very few people will nurture and encourage you with what you can do. Your potential is limitless. You can be anything and do anything. And there wont be many people who will tell you that in life, and there wont be many people who will back you, but those who do - they’re the ones to listen to, but more than anything- listen to yourself . What do you want your legacy to be? What do you want your footprint on humanity to be in this world? You want it to be something beautiful, don’t you? So that’s what I say to people.