

Spotlight on Australian Pro Bono Centre Board: Leanne Collingburn, Director



Leanne was appointed to the Australian Pro Bono Centre Board on 8 February 2017. She is Special Counsel, National Pro Bono Executive, & Co-Chair of the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group at Norton Rose Fulbright Australia and a key driver of the firm's broader Corporate Social Responsibility program. Leanne has practised as a lawyer in commercial legal practice since 2007, and from 2014 her practice has focused on creating and encouraging positive social change and impact for vulnerable peoples through access to justice, education and employment opportunities.

and from games, Leanne's mother invested in a "trusty Nimbus" people mover, Leanne laughs at the memory of it. Her family still reside in her childhood home, which she shared with her two sisters. During netball season the house was bustling and buzzing with a few extra girls and along with laughing at the latest 90s movie taped from commercial TV and listening to loud music, Leanne would learn the Dreaming stories from the area. Leanne notes the privilege was all hers and she holds the friendships and memories of this time close to her heart. Leanne's family still live in the house she grew up in, on the beach and overlooking the

I'm greeted by Leanne at the Norton Rose Fulbright Sydney office. Based in Brisbane, Leanne has been up since 3:30 am to commute to Sydney for back-to-back meetings. I'm the last meeting of the day, but her energy feels limitless. I had contacted her earlier in the day regarding an issue of high priority – in between her chaotic schedule, she rectified the issue with a swift execution that made a chef on a chopping block look slow. I suspect we get a grand meeting room as she's a regular visitor to the Sydney office – our room overlooks Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. I order my usual iced mocha, a trend I started with Phillip Cornwell at Allens. Growing up in Angourie/Yamba, Leanne has always had a strong connection to the Indigenous community. Her mother was heavily involved in netball, and noticed the passion and affection the young Yaegl girls had for the sport. In fact, to get the girls to

Yuraygir National Park. In fact, her father recently battled severe bushfires right to the back yard because he was "too stubborn to leave" the house he has built over the last 37 years. It is evident that the strength of her parents is why Leanne is the way she is and has succeeded in her personal and professional life. There is no white saviour complex with Leanne and her family. Instead, a humble desire for equality.

Leanne is a fierce advocate for Indigenous rights, but she applies a "know your place" mentality – she refuses to stand in front of Indigenous people in the space, and instead, will choose to stand beside or behind us. This is a true ally; Leanne is not gammon! Recalling her time as a junior solicitor, she notes the importance of having strong mentors and leaders. Leanne reveals that a former partner made the habit of using the terms "we" and "us" instead of "I" when discussing strategy with clients and sharing success. Leanne reflects on the positive impact this approach had on her as a young lawyer and tries to emulate it both in her work and private life. Discussing personalities, I mention my personality type, INFJ. "Me too!" exclaims Leanne, "it's why we get along so well" she smiles. It's true, in working with Leanne over the phone/email/in person, she has been an informal mentor.

In terms of strong leaders, Leanne refers to Nelson Mandela, noting he is an INFJ and someone she deeply admires. She received his "Long Walk to Freedom" for her 21st birthday and read it cover to cover lying on the sands of Spooky Beach in Angourie. Less than two years later she was fortunate enough to attend a humanitarian conference in London to hear him speak first-hand and to exchange a nod and a smile. A moment she will cherish forever.

In her work and personal life, Leanne highlights the importance of chipping away at negative perceptions and says that the win is in the persuasion. Although, law was not the first career she had in mind for herself. Leanne thought she would be a historian and first studied a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in history. But she realised as much as she loved history, an

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impact could be made with a career in law. Leanne has also embraced travelling and has even met the Queen – a story you must ask her about. In her explorations of the world, Leanne also lived in Calgary, Canada and through an interesting series of events (where morality won out) she was privileged to work closely with some of the local First Nations groups.

How did she come to be on the Australian Pro Bono Centre Board? Robert Reed of Minter Ellison invited her to join on his retirement from the board. She tells me she took a while to decide whether or not to join the board, noting her concerns that, on top of a busy

workload, it would take more time away from her family (her husband Alastair and now three children). With her husband's support though, Leanne decided that joining the board was a really good opportunity, and she refers to the incredible people that sit on the board alongside her and the learnings she takes from them.

An avid fan and participant of sustainable living, Leanne relaxes with her family on weekends by tending to what sounds like her own fruit and vegetable store in her backyard, complete with chickens and her 13 year old Labrador.

Reflecting on a life-changing event late last year, Leanne spoke about the importance of kindness.

"*You never really know what someone is going through*" she laments, and refers to the story of a school mum saying how lovely Leanne looked on a particularly difficult day and how this small kind gesture helped her through that day. Our meeting goes overtime and Leanne has to board her flight. I give the typical top tier firm view one last glimpse, give Leanne a hug and reflect on the story of kindness. To me, that's what Leanne embodies - kindness - and the Centre is all the richer in having her on our board. ■



Leanne enjoying time with her family