

## Caring with our Community – COVID-19

### *A Story from our Ambassador Kylie Kwong*

Soon after the lock-down occurred in NSW, like so many, I was at home trying to think of ways I could support whilst observing the restrictions. I made calls to check-in with colleagues within the local Kings Cross-Potts Point community in which I live, and to the South Eveleigh community, my place of work. After speaking with several key individuals in particular, who are in leadership roles of 'essential' community and health organisations, I felt both humbled and motivated, their innate sense of Care and compassion was palpable.

This engagement sparked an idea which I began implementing on the weekend of March 28th. Every Saturday for almost two months, I delighted in cooking simple, fresh, wholesome food for: Siobhan Bryson CEO and Mardi Giles, Partnerships & Events of WEAVE Youth & Community Services (Waterloo), Helen Silvia CEO of Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (Redfern), Ronni Kahn AO CEO of OzHarvest (Alexandria), Rob Caslick CEO of Two Good (Eveleigh), local Elder Aunty Ali Golding (Biripi Nation) and Jon Owen, CEO of Wayside Chapel (Kings Cross).

Every Friday my Uncle Jimmy who runs his family's 40 year old noodle factory, would drop-off 4 kilos of freshly made egg noodles to my door. I would source fresh quality organic produce from my local green grocer and I bought catering packs of organic tamari and organic brown rice vinegar. I only wanted to offer the very best for these selfless, extraordinary people who took so much Care of our community. My small apartment kitchen resembled a make-shift restaurant kitchen.

Each Saturday I spent the first half of the day boiling up the fresh Hokkien noodles, picking coriander, dill and mint, and preparing my organic tamari, ginger, coriander and spring onion vinaigrette. For variety, I would add in dishes by local chef, O Tama Carey of Lankan Filling Station; including her delicious potato curry and spicy eggplant with tamarind. Half of the recipients were vegetarian and the others not, so sometimes for the others I would add in a dish of 'Stir-fried Saskia Beer Chicken with Wayside Chapel Honey and Ginger'.

I have always described my cooking as simple in method and technique yet executed with the highest quality ingredients. I love sharing people's story's, especially those of my food producers. For a chef it's very important because it's about re-humanising the food chain. For me, when we know where our food comes from, when we know who grew the food and how they produced it, the flavour and overall eating experience is enormously enhanced.

Around 2.30pm I'd pack up seven individual bags-worth of this food, then would spend two hours in my car, delivering to their individual homes. The first 4 stops were in the inner-west, then I would head back to the eastern suburbs, with a drop-off in Surry Hills.



KK food preparation one Saturday

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# SOUTH EVELEIGH

I'd leave the food at a designated drop-off point, it all worked really well, there was no physical contact, just texting. Upon many occasions, I was very touched to find heart-felt written cards and simple beautiful gifts left on the doorsteps. Helen Silvia has a passion for gardening and now, upon my kitchen window-sill sit four exquisite plants she grew from scratch, re-potted and offered to me. Ronni Kahn AO, who was the guest speaker at our South Eveleigh International Women's Day event this year, left me a cookbook and a container of the most delectable, locally made labne, Greek yoghurt. Siobhan Bryson's home-grown limes have got to be the most juicy, bright green, delicious limes I've ever tasted. I use them regularly in my cooking and always think of Siobhan and all of the good work she does.



Helen Silvia on her front porch

On my Saturday April 25th delivery, to listen to radiating Elder, Aunty Ali proudly tell me, over her front gate (1.5metre distance in place!) about her 'Daddy', an Aboriginal-returned-digger who fought in WW1 in Gallipoli, was an absolute privilege.

Another exchange which became a regular event was meeting Mardi Giles' beautiful Greek mum. Roula would always be waiting on the verandah each Saturday afternoon, ready to offer me the most sweetest home-grown, freshly harvested cherry tomatoes, birds-eye chillies, round-leaf mint and rosemary. She would always say goodbye to me with her hand literally on her heart, whilst saying 'Thank you, me agapi'. 'Me agapi' means 'with Love' in Greek. Such simple, kind, authentic and generous thoughts and gestures which automatically promoted feelings of deep connection, at this time of extreme physical distancing.

After 20 years of running my own business I have a general understanding of what it is like to be the one 'leading' all the time, being the 'boss'. Even when you work within your teams in a collaborative way as all of the above do, at the end of the day, the buck still stops with you. I had 40 staff at Billy Kwong which I felt at times was a 'lot to hold', so many livelihoods one was responsible for. That said, I could not even begin to imagine what these specific seven leaders have to 'manage and carry' as they deal with intense, volatile, daily situations reflecting those most vulnerable in our society.

After listening to what they were (and still are) currently dealing with, with the pandemic, 24/7, as they and their extraordinary organisations stood at the coal face of such adversity, it suddenly struck me. Who was looking after them? How did they maintain their own mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health whilst dealing with everyone else's anxieties?

We must not forget that leaders and bosses are human too, and like all of us, need time and space to let their guard down, to be vulnerable, to have a good cry and release. They also need comfort, nurturing and to be Cared for. Giving energy to these leaders in the best way I know how, through cooking and offering food, was a small yet hopefully meaningful way, which indirectly supported the thousands they selflessly assisted and continue to help, each and every week.

As we gradually make it to the other side, we must not look at bouncing back, but rather, bouncing forward. We need to make Care our central mission. Like many of you, I feel so grateful to be a part of such a Caring and compassionate community such as South Eveleigh.

Looking forward to connecting with all of you very, very soon, thank you, KK

