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THE SWITCH

From modelling to literacy help

Having modelled in Australia and overseas, Kim Kelly cut her teeth in business when she bought out the modelling agency she worked for when it went belly up. She has since set up the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF).

An independent national charity, ALNF works to raise language, literacy and numeracy standards. It also raises funds to establish and facilitate innovative projects and provide professional assistance to individuals, families and communities. Kelly, who founded the business with friend Mary-Ruth Mendel in 1999, oversees day-to-day management and promotes the work of the foundation. It's a long way from her days in Paris on the catwalk and weekly fashion television stints on *Good Morning Sydney*.

She jokes that it was too much food and, like Megan Gale, being too "European-looking" for the Aussie market that saw her eventually owning the agency rather than working in it.

After leaving school to study graphic design, Kelly went on to Paris to live and continue studying the discipline. It was when she returned to Sydney to model and run the agency that she set up a private speech pathology practice, before launching the Sydney Literacy Centre.

"We were lucky and got off to a great start when a television news program went to air with a story about our success with the literacy centre," she recalls. "Calls came in from all over Australia with parents telling us about their kids' problems at school, horrific workplace accidents, parents giving kids

incorrect dosages of medication, and lack of job prospects because they just couldn't read well enough ... so we turned a profitable business into a charity. It's been hard work but the best thing we ever did."

With no formal training except in design, Kelly says it was a "good nose" for business and experience running the modelling agency that gave her the background knowledge to "promote and sell" the business.

"You really need to be on the ball when it comes to reading contracts, have good organisational skills ... and, most importantly, good people skills," she advises. "Working with indigenous Australians, refugees, disadvantaged youth, teachers, schools and universities in a job where every day is different, doing work I love, is tremendously fulfilling."

"I could be meeting with the CEO of a bank in the morning, or helping to design a poster, then later in that day be unpacking boxes of literacy supplies to be shipped off to kids in need ... here, everybody chips in."

The toughest gig now for Kelly is having to explain why the foundation exists.

"So many individuals believe it is solely up to the government to solve educational outcomes in Australia," she says. "We just don't seem to value education."

Now, Kelly says the only reason she would go back on the catwalk would be to generate awareness for her literacy work.

Yvonne Nicolas

Know someone who's made 'the switch'? Contact yvonnenicolas@bigpond.com



THEN

NOW

SALARY In the 1970s, early 1980s, about \$75 an hour.

HOURS Long, crazy hours modelling, while running a model agency was demanding - and sometimes like "babysitting a bunch of kids".

WORK-LIFE BALANCE Lots of socialising ... and in retrospect, not at all balanced.

SALARY Virtually nothing for the past five years - but now it's not about the money.

HOURS A normal week's work.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE With a husband, four children and good organisational skills, the life balance is good - most of the time.

MISS "The wheeling and dealing contra and freebies - and all those lovely things that make girls happy!" Kelly says.



LINK
alnf.org

New focus ... (top) Kim Kelly, with Dorothy the Dinosaur and Makuyuk and Kathy Gothadjaka, now works to improve literacy and numeracy; striking a pose in her modelling days (above).

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