



## The Santa Maria College Podcast

*Episode 7: Lucy Stronach (Class of 2013)*

**Jake:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Santa Maria College Podcast, where once a month we sit down with members of our community, who are creating, innovating, leading, and contributing to making the world a better place. From the College's history, to social justice, to entrepreneurship and innovation, we tap into a wide range of topics that affect our girls who are the leaders of tomorrow.

So come along with us for the ride as we pick the brains of those who have been pivotal in Santa Maria's growth and celebrate those who continue to be changemakers.

Welcome back everyone to another episode of the Santa Maria College podcast. So today I'm sitting down with Lucy Stronach, who graduated from the College in 2013. So, after finishing up at Santa Maria, Lucy headed to Murdoch University where she completed [00:01:00] a Bachelor of Criminology, Criminal Behaviour and Legal Studies.

She then went on to the University of Western Australia where she completed a dissertation as part of her Law & Society Honours. Lucy describes herself as a very strong advocate for social justice. She's dedicated her entire career to working with young people in different spaces internationally.

Lucy has worked with youth from very marginalised, diverse, and underrepresented backgrounds, from kids in prison, to homeless street children, to young victims of human trafficking, young sex workers and more. In 2021, she was announced as the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, consulting with young people in every state and territory across Australia, focusing on improving engagement with young people in rural communities.

And today, she's now a consultant at United Nations, working with the committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, conducting research on nuanced gender-based issues. Lucy, thank you for [00:02:00] hopping on board and chatting on the podcast. How have you been?

**Lucy:** Yeah, good thank you. And thank you for having me. Busy as per usual. A little bit jet lagged as I think we'll touch on in a bit, but yeah, good. Life has been treating me well.

**Jake:** That's good. Yeah, it's great to have you obviously on the podcast. I was really touched by like your Q&A session at the International Women's Day Assembly a few weeks ago.

So, I thought you'd make a great guest for the podcast, and obviously you have a really close relationship with the school, so it's always nice.

In today's episode, we're going to talk about Lucy's tertiary education and studies. Explore some of her key roles and career milestones post uni, discuss some of her volunteer work, reflect on her experience as an SMC student, and to finish off, address her plans for the future.

So, I wanted to go back in time and talk [00:03:00] about your first few years post school. As I previously stated, you studied a Bachelor of Criminology, Criminal Behaviour and Legal Studies, then went on to complete your Honours in Law & Society at UWA. Could you talk our listeners through this journey and what sort of inspired you to head down this pathway?

**Lucy:** Yeah, so while I was at Santa, I obviously got a good experience and indication of kind of social justice and what justice meant, and that became something really important to me that I wanted to continue on in my life.

And so, I really looked for sort of studies that would allow me to explore this idea of justice and how to help people coming from a place of privilege that I do and how I can use that privilege for good and how to use that to better society.

So, I stumbled upon Criminology and Counterterrorism Studies at Murdoch originally, and sort of switched up from doing law, which was my original [00:04:00] enrolment, and realised I think I could make more of a difference doing criminology, looking at criminal justice and social justice.

It was something I was just a lot more interested in as well, and knew that if I was more interested, I would probably work harder, get more involved, more opportunities would come up for me career-wise, which I think has paid off, I guess. So yeah, I'm very happy with the sort of decision I made and the path I've gone down.

It's a really interesting space to be working in.

**Jake:** So I read that you studied abroad. Obviously that would've been an amazing experience. How do you think that benefited you in your studies?

**Lucy:** Yeah, so I was really lucky to study abroad on a few occasions. I initially started off on an exchange program where I went to San Diego State University for a semester of studies over there, and that was absolutely incredible.

Massively beneficial to like the theoretical knowledge I was picking up, given that the context was the US and the US justice system, [00:05:00] but also the practical opportunities that I got while I was there. I was able to volunteer in kids prisons. I was able to go on ride alongs and join police officers on their shift work in San Diego and they're the kind of opportunities I wouldn't have gotten as a 19 year old back in Perth who was right at the start of the degree that I was doing.

So that was really fundamental to, you know, opening the door for a lot of other opportunities that came along and starting that almost like that snowball of things. And so, you know, after exchange I secured a few different scholarships to do short-term and long-term programs. I spent time on short-term programs in Thailand and Singapore working at the UN and working in like cultural leadership.

I was able to spend almost a year living in Sri Lanka where I worked for the Ministry of Defence and did a lot of like high level research. There were lots of different opportunities that came up, I guess from that initial exchange that I did and could [00:06:00] not recommend it enough to any young people or any young women that are considering tertiary studies and do want to kind of go onto that university pathway because there are so many ways to apply and get involved with study abroad experiences.

And they completely change your life. They change the learning that you get. Both, like theoretical and cultural. Being able to immerse yourself in a culture that is incredibly different to the one that we live in Perth.

I've spoken about this quite a lot in the past, but I think, you know, being in Perth and going to a school like Santa Maria, it's very privileged and sometimes we live in a bit of a bubble and being able to burst that bubble spend time overseas in places that don't have the same privilege we do is, I think almost a bit of a responsibility of everyone is to really immerse yourself in those environments and, you know, experience discomfort and challenge yourself a bit. And so obviously I was very lucky to have those opportunities, but I would strongly recommend scouting them out [00:07:00] because there are plenty available to young people and to people at university.

**Jake:** So, you know, your resume is quite remarkable, considering how young you are. You've had quite a few different roles over the years. You know, we could talk about them all day, but one that really stood out to me was that you were selected as the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations in 2021.

I mean, that's an incredible achievement. Could you walk our listeners through what this role actually entailed?

**Lucy:** Absolutely. I was really lucky to be selected as the 2021/ 22 youth rep because of Covid, things got extended a little bit and mucked around. But that, that role basically meant I got to represent the voices of all young Australians, or attempt to, it's a pretty hard job to do, attempt to represent the voices and the interests of young Australians to our policy makers, our legislators, and the UN itself on that international level. So that was, yeah, a really [00:08:00] cool journey. I had such an amazing experience doing that role and meeting a lot of phenomenal young people.

So, the actual role was primarily consultation. So, I spent about seven months on and off traveling around Australia to every state and territory that I could get to, pending covid restrictions. At the time, this was peak pandemic, so it was a little bit tricky to navigate, but I actually managed to get everywhere but Victoria and Tasmania, they were the only two places I couldn't get to.

So, we were quite impressed that we could pull off almost a full tour given the circumstances. So I spent, you know, between a week and four weeks in each state and territory, and basically met with thousands of young people through that time to talk about the issues that mattered to them, the areas of concern that they had, and primarily the solutions or the ideas for change that they wanted to present and that they wanted represented to, as I mentioned, policy makers,[00:09:00] on a national and international level.

So that was the kind of main job that I was doing. And then obviously comes the advocacy side of things. So actually, talking to MPs, talking to NGOs who have a vested interest in youth issues and youth affairs.

Speaking at the United Nations was naturally a big part of the role. I was able to do two virtual presentations/ speeches to the UN General Assembly. I did presentations to the commission for the status of women. So, lots of different UN forums and bodies that wanted to know more about young people, and especially know more about young people in Australia given how extensive our consultation process was.

**Jake:** So, you're still working with the United Nations today. I believe you're working with the current member of the committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Could you talk a little bit about this and how this sort of differs from your previous work?

**Lucy:** So, at the moment, I am [00:10:00] consulting for Natasha Stott Despoja. She's a former senator from South Australia, amazing, amazing leader, and woman, in the women's rights space. And she was elected to the committee a couple of years ago and needed a bit of support in that role and I'd just come out of my role as youth rep and was finishing up there and it sort of aligned quite perfectly because I just had that really amazing UN experience and could transition quite easily into this UN experience, I guess.

So very different. Less consultation, a lot more research, a lot of reading. So basically, my job is to review a selection of countries every four months that we get given. These are countries that have ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Big mouthful, but basically this committee enforces that UN convention. And so a whole bunch of countries have signed up, almost all of them but the US I'll [00:11:00] say, which is a shame. And so for all the committee, all the countries that have ratified the convention and said, yes, we agree that we will abide by kind of the rules and the guidance that you give on women's rights, they get investigated on a sort of cyclical basis every few years.

And so we get given, you know, a list of countries that we have to look at and we have to investigate and see, what positive progress have they made in the space of women's rights? Where have they maybe stagnated a little bit? Where do they need more work and where have they regressed or gone backwards and need a lot of improvement?

And naturally that will vary country to country. Most recently we had, you know, Iceland, who is number one in the world for gender equality, but then you also get countries like China that we just investigated and there's obviously some serious allegations that are presented to us regarding women's rights violations.

So, it differs a lot. The work is really diverse, but, a lot less consultation and sort of working with young people and [00:12:00] now representing women on a global level.

**Jake:** Have you seen any major changes or like breakthroughs since you've started work in this space?

**Lucy:** Yes, absolutely. I was definitely a bit of a UN cynic before I started working directly in this space and with these kinds of committees, I think, um, we probably don't have a great understanding of the UN and its function in Australia/ through our education system. Um, at least when I was at school, that was the case. And so it seems a bit of like this mysterious organisation that nobody really understands and we don't get what they do on a day-to-day basis and how they operate.

Um, and obviously everyone understands that the UN doesn't really have that hard power to use and it's all about soft power and influence and how we can convince countries to come on board with the key aims of the UN so it's less powerful in that sense. In contrast, I actually believe that this soft power is [00:13:00] really influential and has made a massive difference in the women's rights space. I've seen countries that have come for their sort of reporting process and they send a delegation to us in Geneva and they agree to the recommendations that we make in terms of changing their laws and

their legislation on women, directly affecting, you know, thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of women in the countries that they represent.

So, change does happen. I've seen it literally happen overnight via the advocacy efforts of this committee and obviously, you know, NGOs around the world, but this committee is really a vessel to channel that, so that's very exciting. You know, there was a report released a couple of months ago by the George Institute and the University of New South Wales, and it looked at CEDAW specifically and health related recommendations that were made by the committee. And over half of the recommendations that this committee has given over the last couple of decades have actually been implemented as laws [00:14:00] or policies or programs in the countries that they were recommended to, which is massive.

So, I think seeing the numbers like that really demonstrate the power of influence and the naming and shaming that is done by this UN committee and by other committees, and how important institutions like the UN actually are to push for women's rights, push for rights around the world and make things better and not go backwards in this space.

**Jake:** So, you've just started as a Program Manager at the Minderoo foundation a couple of months ago, which is pretty exciting. How is all of that going so far, and I guess, how did that role sort of come about for you?

**Lucy:** Yeah, so I am actually, I think in week five or week six, so very early days there, but I'm loving it so far. I think working for a philanthropic organisation or foundation is a very unique intersection between, like funding and support and resourcing, but also having that charity, [00:15:00] NGO, sort of grassroots feel to it where people are coming from a social justice background and working towards social justice, but you've actually got funding and resourcing, which is really hard to come by in this space. So, for me, it's really exciting to be working for a foundation, um, where I feel like I can make some really tangible, significant change in the space that I'm working in, which is youth justice.

So that's broadly my portfolio. Obviously, there's a lot of intersection with mental health, with family, domestic violence, with homelessness, with employment education. But primarily I am looking at youth justice and how we can, really create therapeutic interventions to justice that aren't focused on incarceration.

Um, specifically with what's happening at the moment, at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, our justice system is failing, our youth justice system is failing our community, our young people and something needs to change. So, at the moment, I am trying to figure out, you know, how do we change that?

So, it's a big challenge, but it's very [00:16:00] exciting. Um, and I really stumbled across it as I think most of the opportunities in my life, to be honest, I've kind of stumbled upon. Um, and a lot of it's just been through, through networks and through people I know, and opportunities have popped up.

So, I am the chair of a youth advisory group for a charity that operates outside of New South Wales and WA called the Sir David Martin Foundation.

We were at a donor lunch at Minderoo because they were sponsoring one of our programs or funding a program and I happened to sit next to the director of the building communities team and we got

chatting and she mentioned this role that was coming up and that was being advertised and now there I am, which is very cool.

**Jake:** So, you obviously, you do a lot of volunteering. Could you maybe talk a little bit about that and how you find it beneficial? Like, so how is volunteering, like how is the satisfaction from volunteering different to the satisfaction you get from say, like a paid job?

**Lucy:** Firstly, I think that the [00:17:00] satisfactions massively different. I'm not entirely sure what the psychology behind it is, but I much prefer volunteering my time than getting paid for it, weirdly. I think there's some like weird thing that if you're being paid, you're kind of like forced to be there, it's like you're contracted to be there, whereas with volunteering, you're, you're freely giving your time and you actively are wanting to do that, to better the community and better society.

So there's something in my brain that's like, this is better. This is more exciting. Don't ask me why. So I think I obviously get a lot of satisfaction out of my volunteering. That's why I do so much of it or have done so much of it. So at the moment I am, as I mentioned, the chair of the youth advisory group for the Sir David Mountain Foundation.

Um, I'm also on the advisory board of the UN Association of Australia and New South Wales. And recently just, was a program manager for the Hello Initiative, which looks at youth justice and programs for young people involved in the justice system. Previously, I've really spent the [00:18:00] last 10 years since I've been at uni volunteering almost consistently with at least one or two organizations in the social justice, criminal justice space.

I think not only do you get a lot of personal growth and satisfaction and joy from it, but it also, you know, looks really good on your CV and you're getting a lot of experience. I mean, I've used all my volunteering experiences to get me to the point where I am now and to get me to the roles that I'm in at the moment.

I consistently, like I said, volunteered throughout university and found opportunities to get involved even if it was like half a day a week or a couple of hours a week or a fortnight. There are so many organisations across WA across the world even that you can work for remotely. You can work for flexibly.

You can fit around your school or your uni schedules, because most of the time they're very under-resourced. They need people, they need smart, engaged, passionate, young people from diverse backgrounds. I think I've mentioned this before at Santa, you could be studying [00:19:00] accounting, marketing, criminology, law, really any field there is going to be an NGO or a charity or an organisation in your community that is looking for your skills and is looking for someone with experience in that background.

So I don't think just because I'm studying in social justice that that lends to volunteering. I think really like any field you decide to go into career-wise will have volunteer opportunities.

**Jake:** Do you have any sort of tips for volunteering? Like if people are wanting to volunteer but don't know where to start or who to approach, or maybe they're a little bit intimidated by it, like what would you say to them?

**Lucy:** I think it's just remembering that like everyone has to start somewhere and you don't have to have an insane CV or tons and tons of experience to volunteer. Like the, the purpose of volunteering is that you are giving back and I don't think many volunteer orgs are looking for 10 years plus experience from, you know, a 21 year old.

So it's being like [00:20:00] realistic that most organisations would just love to have you there contributing in some way. But also for me, I guess advice and tips as well is like using your networks. Just don't be intimidated by asking people in obviously a polite and respectful way to help you and to share information and to share contacts, because that's really the reason I am where I am is because of my networks and because calling upon people that might know someone in a certain organisation might have information about a certain area.

I've drawn upon those contacts and most people you know, who are sort of established in a field, they're more than willing to share that, especially if you show interest or passion in a certain area. I very rarely encounter people who shut you down for reaching out to them again, if you do it in the right way.

Um, but you know, engaging someone with curiosity and openness and an eager to assist, like an eagerness to assist and to learn. Um, I don't think we'll really ever be frowned upon or [00:21:00] discouraged, especially in this social justice space.

**Jake:** So we obviously have to circle back to the fact that you are a Santa Maria college alumni.

I mean, it is the reason we are here. You have a pretty close relationship with the school, I'd say. A lot of family members went here and work here. Generally speaking, what was your experience like at Santa Maria?

**Lucy:** I had a excellent time at Santa Maria. I loved going here. I loved the environment and I mean, the facilities themselves are absolutely incredible.

I'm so lucky to have gone to this school and, you know, the current students are so, so lucky to have these facilities and services available to them. I remember when I first started, you know, the renos were just starting and we were in like a basement and it was hideous.

It wasn't lovely. But then, you know, we got the beautiful new library and the staff room and all of the area there and I realized like how good these facilities are now and to have a schooling environment like that is really quite lucky. I [00:22:00] mean, I'm a very type A personality, and so, and you know, a little bit of undiagnosed ADHD in schooling, so for me it worked well I think the traditional schooling environment. I do believe, or I know that doesn't work for everyone and you know, it's been a while since I've been at Santa Maria and I think/ would hope, you know, we've adapted more to different learning styles and different behavioural styles that we see in young people across the board. But for me personally, it worked well and I merged well with the traditional school environment. So, like I said, had a great time, couldn't fault it.

**Jake:** Do you think Santa Maria heavily influenced you into the direction of social justice and advocacy?

**Lucy:** Yeah. Obviously one of the Mercy Values being justice, we learned about it a lot. We learned how to live just lives and, you know, understand ethics and morals and how we can contribute to



society and making it a better place. So fundamentally learning about that in school and [00:23:00] having opportunities to volunteer, doing volunteer hours throughout different years, definitely set me up for, I guess the place I'm at now and got my interest sparked in the social justice space.

**Jake:** Did you have any favourite subjects or teachers or sort of co-curriculars that have really stuck with you?

**Lucy:** Yes, loved drama and loved theatre, and performing and being creative. That was something that was really important to me, throughout school and doing musicals and getting involved in that way.

It's something I've been able to keep up as well, a little bit of my adult life, which is nice. So really, really loved drama, history was definitely a big favourite of mine and like, shout out to Mr. Morris for anyone who had the privilege of learning under him. He was a fantastic teacher. We had a lot of fun with him and he made history very interesting to learn about and, you know, applying some of those learnings of past mistakes we've made in history and how we can, you know, come together and improve as a society. All of that became quite relevant.

So definitely more [00:24:00] of a humanities girl myself, like more of the social sciences. You know, I studied like English, History, Religion, Drama, Japanese, so very humanities oriented, not a STEM girly at all, which is fine, it's just not my forte. I realized quite early on. I just loved really all the subjects I did. I think they were all fascinating and obviously I very much continued that same kind of line of academia now into my adult life.

**Jake:** And reflecting back on your experience, what do you think makes the College so special?

**Lucy:** Definitely the sense of community that you get here. I know for me, I'm still very good friends with the school group that I hung out with and we've all stayed really close post-school. Because I think we developed a really good community during those sort of formative years.

Similarly, I think the teaching staff are all like, fantastic. We have. Again, such good facilities here at this school and there is such an emphasis on that alumni network and coming back and [00:25:00] contributing to the College and I see a lot of, you know, former students who come back as teachers, my mum as an example.

And so, I think you wouldn't get that in a school unless there was something special about it. And it really does have like a lot of heart and soul to it and a lot of good people that work here, that teach here and that go to this school.

**Jake:** So, before we finish up, I wanted to talk a little bit about what you envision for your future.

Where do you see, I don't like when people ask me this question, but I like asking other people. Where do you see yourself in the next like 10 or so years? Like where do you imagine yourself to be and what do you think you'll be doing?

**Lucy:** Yeah, great question and I have literally no idea. I don't know if this will make anyone feel better at all, but I pretty much wing my entire life in terms of like strategic planning or five-year planning, I have none of that.



I like to take opportunities as they come and just see [00:26:00] what really life brings me. So, I don't have a set plan. You know, if I look at my future, I would at some point like to maybe go into politics. I think that's obviously a space where you can make a lot of change domestically and, you know, local, state, federal policy, impact a lot of lives in a positive way.

So, politics may be on the cards, but I do I have concerns around the political space at the moment, particularly for women. It's a pretty rough workplace to be in and until some serious reforms are made there, I don't think it's an environment I'd like to find myself in just now. So that's on the cards.

You know, if I could, I'd like to be the Secretary General of the UN, but that's probably a little bit further off, maybe one day. But yeah, I really don't have a set plan for where I'm going, and I think that's kind of what makes things exciting is that I just see where opportunities take me and see where life takes me day by day. [00:27:00]

**Jake:** Well, that brings us to the end of this episode. Lucy, thank you so much for appearing on our podcast. You know, I'm sure our listeners will find this chat so interesting and the work that you're doing is truly inspiring and I think you're a testament to the fact that following your passion still leads to a very fulfilling, rewarding, and enriching career.

To those listening, thank you for your continued support. If you head to **[www.santamaria.wa.edu.au/podcast](http://www.santamaria.wa.edu.au/podcast)**, you'll be able to find the full transcript to this episode, and more information on Lucy. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast and let us know what you think. Also, if you have any ideas for future episodes, please feel free to reach out to **[crd@santamaria.wa.edu.au](mailto:crd@santamaria.wa.edu.au)**

Thank you very much and we look forward to catching you next time. [00:28:00]