

Kristy Schirmer

“Put people first, build your community and have fun”

Kristy is a passionate public health professional who established Thorndon junior parkrun, the first and only junior parkrun event in South Australia. Junior parkrun is a series of two kilometre runs for children held in areas of open space around the UK, Ireland and Australia.

EARLY LIFE/CAREER

Kristy grew up in Cambrai on a sheep and cereal farm alongside her older brother and sister and enjoyed life on the farm and the rich experiences of growing up in a small rural community. She attended the small local area school until year 9 when she moved to Faith Lutheran in Tanunda for her senior school years.

Kristy enjoyed everything at school but had no clear future directions until she found Health Promotion as an option in a High School Careers Booklet. This had an immediate appeal as it linked community development, health and prevention with social sciences in a multi-disciplinary approach.

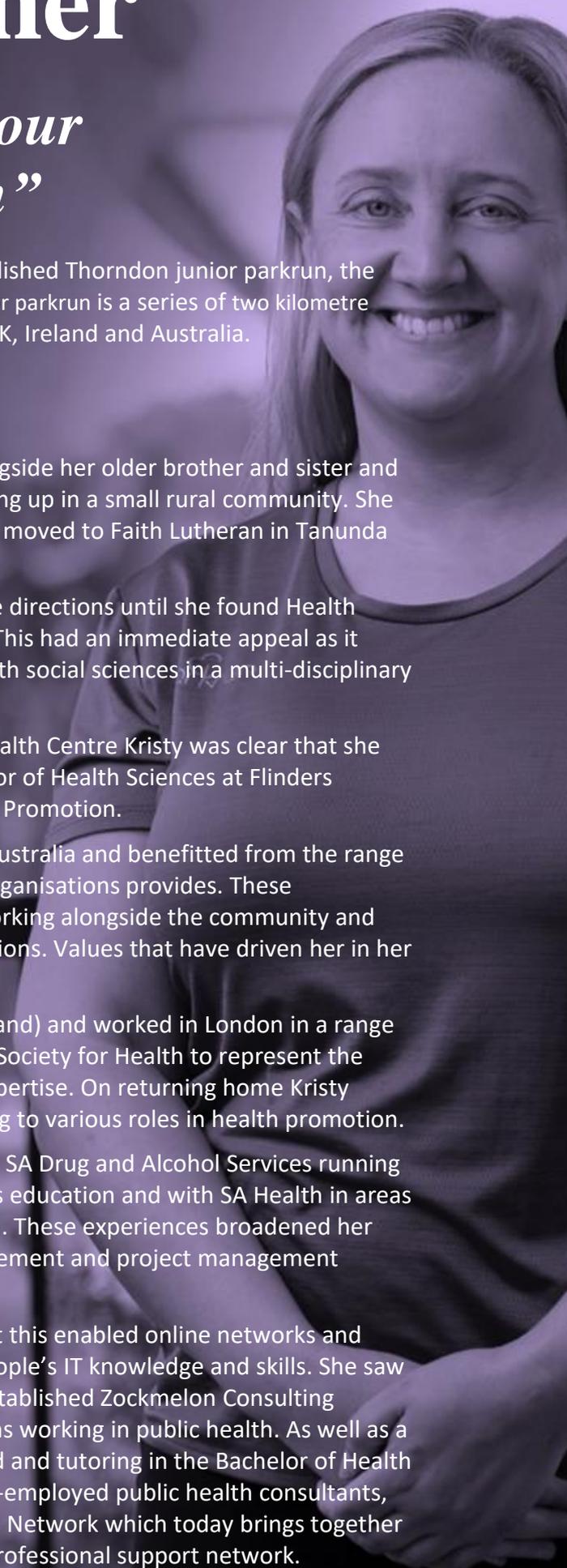
After work experience at the Port Adelaide Community Health Centre Kristy was clear that she wanted to study in an area like this so undertook a Bachelor of Health Sciences at Flinders University despite the lack of clear job prospects in Health Promotion.

Kristy started work with the Hepatitis C Council of South Australia and benefitted from the range of roles and opportunities that working in not-for-profit organisations provides. These experiences taught Kristy the importance of inclusivity, working alongside the community and the need for advocacy for at risk and underserved populations. Values that have driven her in her career.

Kristy decided to go travelling with her partner (now husband) and worked in London in a range of roles for two years. Most notably, working in the Royal Society for Health to represent the agency at a senior level in the policy area extended her expertise. On returning home Kristy finished her Master of Public Health degree while returning to various roles in health promotion.

Kristy then continued her Health Promotion work with the SA Drug and Alcohol Services running training across SA in harm reduction and blood borne virus education and with SA Health in areas including healthy eating, physical activity and youth health. These experiences broadened her skills in working across populations, understanding procurement and project management practices.

Social media was an emerging area and Kristy realised that this enabled online networks and communities to develop but also recognised the gap in people's IT knowledge and skills. She saw this as an opportunity to establish a consultancy and so established Zockmelon Consulting offering social media strategy and training for organisations working in public health. As well as a new business, Kristy was balancing having her second child and tutoring in the Bachelor of Health Science at UniSA. With an interest in supporting other self-employed public health consultants, Kristy co-founded the Australian Public Health Consultants Network which today brings together close to a hundred members across Australia in a virtual professional support network.



Kristy now works part time with the Cancer Council and is looking to take on more leadership, mentoring and support roles in health promotion in the future. She values the positive women managers and role models she has worked alongside in Health Promotion roles.

CAMPBELLTOWN CONNECTIONS

On their return from the UK, Kristy and her partner were looking to buy a home and found that Campbelltown offered location, affordability with many facilities so bought in Campbelltown and later built a house a few streets away. Kristy enjoys the community diversity and culture and has appreciated the facility upgrades at ARC and Thorndon Park, the effective local leadership and community events.

Concerns Kristy believes face Campbelltown in the immediate future include the loss of green space and canopy, and the perpetuation of a car-dominated society. Kristy believes more should be done to address disadvantage and inequalities in the community. She would like to see more pocket parks locally with a child-friendly focus and range of youth opportunities and to look at active transport alternatives to car dependency, especially more support for cycling. She would love to see a multi-function community centre developed on Hambledon Road offering social and health services.

VOLUNTEERING

Parkrun is a 5 kilometre free, community event where you can walk, jog, run, volunteer or spectate and takes place every Saturday morning. Kristy has been involved personally in the Lochiel parkrun group and appreciates that it has a community focus more than a running focus, with opportunities to volunteer and take on a range of roles regardless of age or ability. Kristy loves meeting new families and seeing them discover parkrun and that it offers something for all family members from participating to volunteering.

From these experiences, Kristy investigated the opportunity to establish South Australia's first and only junior parkrun for 4-14 year olds where there is an emphasis on child protection and safety. The courses are marshalled so that juniors will be always in sight of at least one marshal at all times. Thorndon Junior parkrun is held every Sunday morning at Thorndon Park and enables participants to enjoy physical activity and volunteering in a way that increases confidence while being non-competitive. It is positive, welcoming and inclusive, as there is no time limit, and no-one finishes last. Kristy valued the support of Campbelltown Council in establishing the junior parkrun and helping with the start-up costs that included a defibrillator. Recently Thorndon Junior parkrun celebrated its third anniversary.

REFLECTIONS

Kristy believes that success comes from within, and in not needing external validation. She believes that it is important to have fun, be invested and enthusiastic at work but to walk away when you are losing the passion.

She believes in challenging yourself. This past year Kristy joined the Athelstone Football Club woman's team. She has learnt a lot, had fun, and been a role model to her sons.

Her advice to other women is to surround yourself with positive women and choose a life partner with similar values and views.

“Don't limit yourself, aim high, be ambitious”