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HAPPENING

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# A Newday for leadership in the regions

Young South Australian of the Year Tiahni Adamson spoke with CityMag about what she values in leadership, and the regional leadership program that ticked all her boxes.



Tiahni Adamson, a proud descendant of Kaurareg Nations, says she has spoken to a million people face-to-face this year.

Even at CityMag, where our jobs rely on talking to people, Tiahni puts us to shame.

Her speaking gigs centre themes of climate, First Nations wisdom and embedding First Nations knowledge alongside Western knowledge in school curriculums.

Tiahni's work in the community and passion for sustainability have landed her SA's Young Australian of the Year and a spot in the InDaily/CityMag 40 under 40 for 2023.

Tiahni works as the lead community engagement officer at climate change solution company, CH4 Global. Here, she builds relationships with First Nations communities and brings their knowledge into work that heals country through sustainable methane mitigation.

Beyond her day job, Tiahni's on the Green Adelaide board, the national leadership team for Australia's only First Nations-led youth climate justice group Seed and an Uluru Statement from the Heart youth dialogue member.

Tiahni has been involved in a range of leadership training that's empowered her to do this work, but one recently stood out for the way it centred First Nations knowledge and facilitators.

"Incorporating First Nations wisdom ... it's not just something that would be great, it's something that's been cut out of leadership programs intentionally since colonisation and definitely something we need to bring back into conversations," Tiahni says.

Tiahni was a part of the inaugural cohort of the Newday Inspired Leadership program, which delivers training across Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna and Peramangk lands in the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu Peninsula and Kangaroo Island.

The program was run over six months by Newday - which recently achieved social enterprise status - in partnership with Regional Development Australia. Each monthly session was in a different location, showcasing a range of venues from those operated by not-for-profits like Scouts, to highly regarded restaurants like Salt at the Elliot.



Words: Helen Karakulak  
Photos: Evan Bailey

REMARKS

Newday Leadership  
South Australia

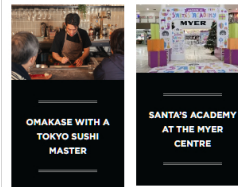
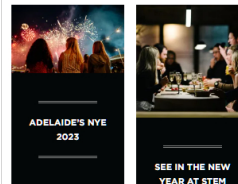
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Tiahni looking cool, calm and collected for InDaily's 40 under 40. This picture: Samuel Graves



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*Salt at the Elliot opened earlier in 2023, as an addition to Hotel Elliot.*

For Tiahni, the Inspired Leadership program was completely different to any leadership training she'd done before.

"I think traditionally, leadership programs are built for a certain personality... it might be for the loudest person in the room or the most extroverted," she says.

"Whereas our leadership program really centred that anyone is built to be a leader and that a variety of different leaders is a good thing.

"Every month when we'd catch up, I felt like I was really excited and we had so much to yarn about.

"We had so many First Nations speakers and community changemakers coming in and offering that insight and it was also a program that was grounded in mental wellbeing which I value really highly."

Tiahni says the program taught her there are all kinds of leaders, whether you're more logical, driven by empathy, or a bit quieter but a great listener.

Her own leadership style is what Tiahni calls heart-led, using her empathy to put communities first and empower them.

"I always feel like there's no finish line where you go like, 'yeah, I'm a heart-led leader, I've done it!'

"I think it's constantly moving forward and trying to build myself in that way with vulnerability and empathy and humility."



*Tiahni and Katrina having a laugh*

Newday founder Katrina Webb says their program is about bringing different people together and allowing them to find themselves and embrace how they lead.

"It's not about making people extroverts and making them loud and getting more confident," she says.

"It's sometimes about quieting the louder people so the quieter ones can be heard because when they've got something to say – it's incredibly powerful."

Katrina and co-director Matthew Wright-Simon embed diversity throughout their program through a range of factors, including their facilitators' backgrounds, age, gender, ability, or neurodiversity.

"We don't look for the famous keynote speaker that is earning millions of dollars a year, doing the circuit," Katrina says.

"We try and look for people that are that are often off the radar because when they are [speaking] they're doing it because they really deeply care."

Among Tiahni's cohort, there were 18 participants, with the youngest being 19 years old and the oldest 64.

Matthew says despite the age range or coming from different backgrounds, participants embraced each other wholeheartedly.

"Everyone started pretty nervous but at the end of it, Katrina and I were sort of sitting back watching them all interact and seeing how much they're connecting," he says.

"They're all supporting one another, they're going to one another's events, they're buying one another's products..."

Matthew is cut off by a notification ding.

"Our WhatsApp chat group is still going, like right now!" he says.

"That sense of community built through leadership development is what makes programs like this essential to regional communities."



*Katrina and Matthew smiling after a job well done*



**REMARKS**

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The leadership program culminated in a sold-out leadership summit at the Adelaide Convention Centre which brought together the Inspired Leadership participants with other communities.

In keeping with their ethos of diversity, the summit included a range of speakers including Ramindjeri Narrunga artist Cedric Varcoe, Dr Manisha Amin from the Centre of Inclusive Design and more. They also had tactile activities and art supplies for attendees, exercise balls as alternative seating and a quiet room.



*Comfortably enjoying the guest speakers at the Convention Centre*

Director of Regional Development in the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Steve Shotton says having a dedicated leadership program throughout the year in the regions has been crucial.

"Many aspiring, rising and established leaders are devoted to their communities and don't have the capacity to travel and commit time to train in Adelaide," Steve says.

"The Newday program built a culture of active citizenship and connection to place and local Indigenous culture.

"Quite simply, that can't be delivered in a capital city."

Steve says despite some community members asking why they needed another program and how this one would be different, once applications opened there was plenty of interest.

"The program was heavily oversubscribed," he says.

"I think that was helped as well by the fact that the Newday program was so contemporary in its approach and delivery.

"The opportunity to build the alumni would certainly be a positive for the participants and the region as a whole," Steve says.



*A happy cohort of regional leaders*

The Newday Inspired Leadership program was supported by the state government as part of the Regional Leadership Development Program that supported more than 400 regional leaders over two years.

Primary Industries and Regional Development Minister Clare Scriven says feedback from graduates and community participants will be analysed to determine the next stage of the program.

"As a regional resident, I experience firsthand the impact that community leaders can make in their towns and regions every day," she says.

"On my visits to many of the workshops and graduation ceremonies I have been impressed by the high calibre of the participants."

While a second intake is still unconfirmed and will depend on renewed funding from the state government, alumni like Tiahni are eager to get involved in a mentorship capacity for future cohorts.

"[Matt and Katrina] have absolutely nailed this program and the way they're able to uplift and help people grow and transform and change their lives for the better," Tiahni says.

To find out more about Newday leadership opportunities, visit their [website](#) or connect with their community on [Instagram](#).




*A peek inside the summit at the Convention Centre*

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