

Engage Rotary - Change Lives

Guest Speaker - Akram Azumi - Young Australian of the Year

Intro: Tamara John-Natley

Thanks: Mark J-N

Our guest speaker this week was our current Young Australian of the Year - Akram Azumi. He started his talk by greeting his fellow Rotarians, he has been a member of Rotary for about the last 18 months, he followed this up by acknowledging the local indigenous people and making thanks for the land on which we were meeting.

The next part of his talk was to share how he came to be speaking to our club. He first met Tamara earlier this year at talk he was giving for the Canberra Rotoract Club, following his talk he saw this young lady with a very clear gaze approaching him. She looked him right in the eye and said what she wanted to say. He said she had his complete attention, it was a certain confidence and strength that appealed to him, and he went absolutely, let's see how I can get to your club. Now a lot of people approach him after talks to ask him to come and speak to their particular group. He says ok, fine, the ball is in your court to get arrangement started and about 80% of the time he never hears from them again but he felt that Tamara would be in the 20% who follow through. Obviously she did and here I am.

He said he starts his talks to Rotary clubs in the following way - Rotary saved my life. It is quite a bold statement to make so I have to tell you the following story. He was about 5 years old and his family had escaped from their home in Afghanistan to a "hellhole" of a place called Peshawar. It used to be quite nice but when you have a city with 100's of 1000's of refugees in a place with no sewerage you get to a really really bad place. So the family get to this place with literally only the clothes on their backs, the taxi dropped them off and that was that. But they were one of the lucky ones, they had family overseas who could send them a little bit of money so they didn't have to live on the streets like so many other people. That small amount of money meant they could live above the extreme poverty line, which is living on less than \$2/day. Extreme poverty is not just an economic thing, even though we often think about it in those terms. What it really means is choosing between 1 child having food for the night or another child getting life saving medicine. That's the kind of choice you have to make when living in extreme poverty and he saw that so many times in Peshawar.

One day his mother, a university educated woman, grabbed him and said we have to go. He said ok and he remembers the force of her statement that they had to go somewhere. They walked out of their home towards the sprawling tent city. It smells horrible because the entire city does not have an underground sewerage system or garbage collection, everything just gets thrown into the street. He is often asked by younger school children, why don't they dig holes and bury it. Akram tells them that you eventually run out of holes. As you can imagine the most expensive houses are at the top of the hills and the least expensive, where the most vulnerable live are at the bottom of the hills. He remembers the smell of the place, the bright sun and lining up waiting in his mothers arms, he does not know how long they waited but at the end of the wait he remembers being taken into a funny little tent where there was a wizened old Pakistani woman with crazy hair, who put him on a table, put his head back and 2 funny little drops went into his mouth. At the time he had no idea what the drops were and that's where the memory ends.

Engage Rotary - Change Lives**Rotary Theme of the Month - Literacy**

Now we fast forward about 5 years and he is now 10 years old. He speaks Urdu, the local Pakistani dialect and he barracks for the Pakistani cricket team - he now barracks for Australia. He considered himself part of that society and it was a society in which you make do, as a kid you just accept what is around you. He recalls one particular day they are walking through a street in Peshawar and he remembers seeing some kids on the side of the street begging. Usually there is nothing remarkable or memorable about kids begging on the streets of Peshawar, they were as commonplace to him as light poles are to us, but this group were unusual. They were noticeable because of their legs, instead of having normal calves they had nothing but wasted limbs. What they did was wrapped tyres around their legs and put sandals on their hands so they could drag themselves around the streets begging for a little bit of help. He remembers walking past these kids and asking his Mum, Mum what is wrong with those kids. His Mum tried to ignore his question but he kept on at her until she finally said "Polio". Then she did that thing people in that region do when they say something dirty or dangerous, they say the word and then they spit, as if the word itself could be infectious or dangerous. He then asked what's Polio as his curiosity is aroused. Again she tries to ignore the question but finally she says it's a contagious disease. He was 10 years old and had just been told there is a contagious disease just over there. He remembers moving to the far side of his mother and hiding behind her thigh and saying Mum will I get it. She takes him in this very warm embrace and says "no, you are protected". He had no idea what that meant at the time but the emotional conviction in her voice was enough for him to believe it. So he was like oh ok and he just walked by those kids thinking he would never have to think of them again. But to this day they have never left him.

Fascinatingly enough when he was on a recent visit to the same area of Pakistan which he grew up he saw men his own age, perhaps some of those same boys, begging at traffic lights, with the tyres on their legs and sandals on their hands. That's the thing about a disease like Polio, it pushes people and families even deeper into extreme poverty.

After encountering that group of young beggars a lot of things happened - Akram and his family are placed in Australia. He is now about 15 and he is sitting in Human Biology and his teacher is explaining what a vaccine is and the penny drops. That is what happened all those years ago, he now understands and he just carried on with life, he didn't think twice about it.

Then a couple of years ago a very good friend of Akram's, Michael Sheldrick, a young Rotarian and an extremely brilliant man, a political genius and a major asset to Rotary (Tamara got to meet him and hear him speak in Canberra) was asked to lobby governments all over the world and one of the governments was our own. In 2011 at CHOGM they were able to raise M\$118 for the fight against Polio. This is to compliment the grand effort of all those Rotarians who for so long have been working at the grass roots level and also the Rotarians working at the high end level. Also recently there was another M\$18 raised on top of everything else that Rotarians have been doing. We are funding this global stream in 2 ways. Michael got Akram involved in this program. Michael told him there is a lot of criticism of our aid budget. People are saying there is a lot of waste and we should just slash everything. Michael said he thinks this could be one of those stories where we say the answer to bad aid is not no aid it is better aid, and you cant beat a program like this. The bang for our buck is amazing. So they started doing a bit of research and if you do the math, that vaccine purchased in Peshawar all those years ago, partly contributed to by everyday Australians and by everyday Rotarians, and the difference between those kids on the side of the street and Akram is 13 cents - the cost of a Polio vaccine.

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Even more profoundly the difference between them and him is that he was the beneficiary of people who gave indiscriminately.

This thought makes him reflect on the values of Rotary, as a club, as an organisations and as a value - service above self. Akram feels there is something rather deep here, service is the verb, self is the subject but you notice how we always leave out the object. We don't say service to this person or that group, here our mission is so much greater than that - it is service above self to all humanity. In this world we are hearing so much about indiscriminate acts of violence and of hatred and yes this does exist, but there is also its opposite - indiscriminate acts of kindness, indiscriminate acts of generosity, indiscriminate acts of compassion and what better example is there than service above self.

As a collective you choose to care about kids overseas, kids you will probably never meet, kids who you are never going to benefit from but you choose to do it, not for the accolades and not for the prize but you chose to do it because it was the right thing to do. You did it because you gave away indiscriminately.

Akram's story is proof that there someone at the end of the giving has benefited. He always says at this point in his talks, he points to his legs, and says he has 2 healthy legs because of what you stood for. He was saved by Rotarians long before he was a Rotarian himself.

Try and image the amount of gratitude he carried in his heart because people gave so willing and indiscriminately. He simply says thank you, keep up the good work and take it forward.

This wasn't the end of Akram's talk so if you would like to hear the question and answer session let us know and we can provide a video copy for you to enjoy.

Photo Gallery



Akram & Tamara



Akram & Pres Hass



Mark J-N & Akram

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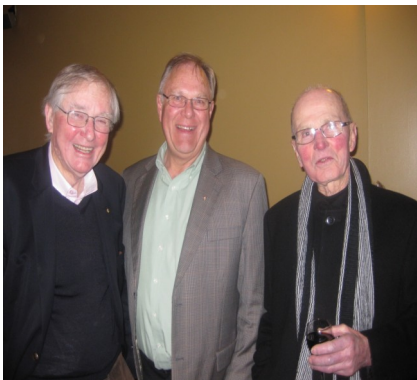
Photo Gallery
Rotarians and Guests



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Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery - Akram at Monaro High



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**WE MEET WEDNESDAYS 6.00PM FOR 6.30PM
AT DODDS HOTEL, COMMISSIONER ST. COOMA**

This Week's News

Elaine S wished to inform us of a fundraiser for the Community Chest, which provides financial assistance for those suffering ill health who cannot access assistance through any other means. They are selling "The Entertainment Book" for \$60 which contains vouchers for use at such places Hoyts Cinemas, Questacon and the National Zoo. The books are available at the Fabric Salon or you can order online at www.enterainmentbook.com.au/orderbooks/28077c and the Community Chest will receive 20% from every book sold.

John K reported this month's market, despite the extremely cold weather and reduced number of stall holders, made a profit of \$1,189.00

President Hass made a presentation to Ruth Dakin, co-ordinator of the Monaro Community Access Program at Cooma East for the 4 foot stools which was raised from the 5 cent challenge. President Hass also thanked those who didn't know the difference between

5 cents and other currency denominations. Ruth also expressed her thanks for the generosity of the members of the Club.

Les S shared a piece of happy news. Mavis who was in Cooma on exchange about 13 years ago and who has kept up contact with various host parents informed them this week of the safe arrival of her first child - a baby boy. Mother and child are doing fine and Dad is getting used to it.

We received a call for help on short notice from Julie Hathaway a Caseworker at Monaro Crisis Accommodation Service. They had a client who was moving house on Thursday this week and desperately needed some volunteers to help. We had 5 members who volunteered to provide assistance - well done.

This Weeks Attendance: 24 out of 36 = 67%

Visiting Rotarians: Michael and Julia Pedler

Guests: Akram Azumi (Club) and to many others to mention but all were very welcome

Apologies: Brenda C-B, Ashley C, Mark C, Peter D, Margaret E, Claire N, John V, Des T.

Leave: Peter A, Matt T, Tom B, Neil B.

We Also Missed: None

Make-ups: None

**The Rotary Club of Cooma
The Secretary
PO Box 14
Cooma NSW 2630
Phone: 042 138 150
E-Mail: coomarotary@home.netspeed.com.au**

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ROSTERS	July	August
Attendance	Rob Des	John V Ken D
Property	Brian Elaine S	Patrick Geoff
Fellowship	Margaret E Claire N	Margaret E Claire N
Markets	John K - Co-ord Alyson H-J - PA Ken D - Res John K - Van Elaine M Marco Peter D Hass	John K - Co-ord Alyson H-J - PA Brian - Res Wolfgang - Van Claire N Darrell John C Patrick K

SOME SIMPLE RULES ABOUT ROSTERS**GENERAL**

Members rostered on and not able to attend are to make arrangements with another member to take their place.

MARKETS

Those nominated to tow the caravan or chuck wagon are to be at the Rotary shed no later than 7am. Ensure you get the key to the shed from John King PRIOR TO THE EVENT so the equipment can be set up early. If you are unable to tow the van or chuck wagon PLEASE ASK SOMEONE WHO CAN, or advise John King before the event. Others nominated should be at the park by 8.30am.

Upcoming Program	Three Minuter	Thought of the Week
Guest Speaker: Dave Holgate - Recent New Guinea Trip Intro: Peter Davis Thanks: Mark Cooper	31 July - Dugald M 7 August - Graham F	31 July - Alyson H-J

Upcoming Guest Speakers - 7 August - Jacinta Perrams - Stroke Awareness
- 14 August - ANU medical students

MEMBER HAPPENINGS

BIRTHDAYS	ANNIVERSARIES	JOINING DATE
John V - 3 July Dave L - 7 July Tony S - 8 July Patrick K - 23 July Jan S spouse of Les - 11 July Christina L spouse of Wolfgang - 12 July Lisa spouse of Matt T - 16 July	None recorded	Peter D - 1 July Jim H - 24 July

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