

INTERVIEW WITH LEANNE SANDERS FROM VISUAL DREAMING (22/9/20)

Connection Matters Radio (CMR):

Normally on Connection Matters Radio our focus is on positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories from around Victoria. But every now and then I come across a story from beyond our borders that almost forces upon me a breaking of that protocol.

That's precisely what happened when I learned about a new app for mobile devices called Visual Dreaming. It's an app that's been developed over a period of three years, led by a team of dedicated Aboriginal people in New South Wales and led by Leanne Sanders who's the CEO of Visual Dreaming; and she comes onto the program to speak to us today. Leanne, welcome to Connection Matters Radio.

Leanne Sanders: Oh, thank you. Thanks for having me.

CMR: Leanne, give us a bit of a background on what Visual Dreaming is as it is right now.

Leanne: Visual Dreaming is a digital platform where people can map, track and set goals and keep them accountable with an invite-only team into their journey.

CMR: Now, what sort of goals are we talking about? Because this is focused on First Nations people, isn't it?

Leanne: Yeah, it's focused on First Nation young adults. There's mind and body goals, cultural goals, spiritual wellbeing goals, and personal goals, which is around employment and housing and economic.

CMR: Now, a huge part of this is actually setting up a team that you take on your journey with you across all these various areas. We'll go into some of the specific areas a bit later. So give us a bit of a description on how the entire thing works, from someone signing in to progressing through their journey.

Leanne: Yeah. Someone signs in and they select their goals, and then those goals collaborate onto *My Goals*. We will have a component that will come soon that'll be like a visual that they can print out. Then they invite in through texts or email people who they want to come onto their journey, their wellbeing journey; and they can create group chats and also have photos for the group chats as well. The group chats, again, is driven by the user on who's in the group chats and that's discussions about how their dream team can support them with their goals, but also some accountability that they're working towards that.

CMR: Some of those goals include, for example, a spirituality, connection to country, connecting with elders, diet, finance, housing. It's a broad gamut of goals. As a matter of fact, when I signed up earlier today, I was inundated with all these potential goals; and I was a little bit eager, I must admit, and signed up for far too many. I'll have to cut that back a bit, but how did you define all these goals and work that out?

Leanne: It was a big job. We tested with over 80 adults and just seeing what was really important to them, especially around the immediate goals. Also, we tested with just about every elder in Wagga and just seeing from an elder's

point of view about what they thought would be important as goals.

CMR: Now, just sidetracking a little bit and talking about elders living in Wagga Wagga, the app was launched on the 18th of September, I believe, so just four days ago.

Leanne: Yeah.

CMR: Stan Grant, Jr, of course the acclaimed Wiradjuri journalist was there to host the event, and some of the things that Stan said about the application and the Visual Dreaming team itself were fairly strong. As a matter of fact, he said at one stage that this had the potential to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, and a few seconds later said that it could make a difference to the country as a whole indeed and other countries as well. That's fairly strong words and fairly complimentary words. How did you feel when Stan actually said those?

Leanne: I was crying. I was so emotional about it because I've had so many knock backs and we didn't get support for a long time. To hear that from Stan just really made me really believe in myself and what we were doing. It was just incredible. I feel so lucky.

CMR: What were your goals when you set out to develop the Visual Dreaming app?

Leanne: When we first developed it, my big goal was around more being able to navigate the NDIS through visuals and a lot of ... when accessing mental health or disability services, a lot of questions

always ask what are your goals, and sitting in their meetings as a mental health clinician, I'd seen mob actually not know how to answer that question, so they weren't actually able to have good supports and outcomes that they needed.

CMR: One of the things that I've noticed on the website is that it's also positioned quite strongly as a digital storytelling platform. Can you share with our listeners a bit about that?

Leanne: Yeah. So we really want to focus on, with the digital storytelling, that everyone had a story and sometimes their story could impact their mental health and wellbeing. From testing the app with young adults and going through the journey with them around accessing mental health and GPs - general practitioners - mental health plans, we found that trauma and drug and alcohol, the biggest barrier is that mob constantly have to retell their stories.

So they're reliving their trauma and they stop accessing the services to be able to get help. Quite often they don't actually know ... when they get referred to a psychologist, they don't actually know what a psychologist is. Or the anxiety around having to sit in a room and feeling quite overwhelmed and having to time and time again retell their story.

Then from a clinician's point of view, it takes quite a while to be able to build trust and a relationship before the clinician can actually get the story. So what we're going to be releasing at the end of November is the *My Story* where the user can prerecord or pre-write their story; and so when they go and see a general practitioner or a psychologist as part of their mental health plan, they can submit their story - their journey - with them so they're not reliving their trauma.

CMR: Leanne, can you see other applications for Visual Dreaming beyond those which you initially envisaged?

Leanne: Oh, definitely. It was really hard to narrow down just one focus at the moment, because we could see it within aged care, we could see it in leading care plans, we could see it in the NDIS and there was so many areas that we could see that we could support mob on.

CMR: Tell me who else is involved in the Visual Dreaming team because it's more than just you, isn't it?

Leanne: Yes. They say it takes a community to raise the children. It takes a community to build an app.

CMR: Give me a brief description of what's been involved in this three year journey from the concept through to delivery.

Leanne: Up until October last year, I've worked full time with the Wagga City Council and also have three sons and had been doing this at 5:00 AM every morning and every weekend. First off, we started with some pictures, some printed pictures of goals and testing that and testing vision boards for mob accessing the NDIS so they can visually express what their goals were.

Then in October last year, I decided to work on it full time and follow my dreams. We have been interviewing 80 young adults and lots of elders and making them vision boards to get feedback and to see what vision boards and goals meant to elders as well, which ... they've got incredible goals, which often I thought that the goal setting was just for young people, but it was really surprising on the elders' responses with, "I've got goals too, and I've got community goals as well."

CMR: So it is well beyond just the initial

thoughts when you're talking now about, well, community goals. That's certainly something that I can see in our community here down in Melbourne. It's got certain applications. Leanne, how can people get hold of the application?

Leanne: Yeah. So it's free in the Google and Apple store and they download it. At the moment, we're still developing a news feed, which should also be released within the next couple of weeks. We're really open to having feedback, especially with the goals or people finding any glitches within the app. Feedback is something that would really help us right now.

CMR: Leanne Sanders, I want to thank you so much indeed for coming on to Connection Matters Radio. Wishing you and your team at Visual Dreaming all the best and definitely looking forward to seeing the evolution of this very important product.

Leanne: Thanks for having me.