

## CLASS OF 2018 CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY – Tuesday 19 February

### Old Grammarian Savindhi Perera-Jainudeen

Good morning everyone - I'd like to congratulate all the top achievers that have received awards today. Thank you to the school for having me here as an Old Grammarian - it's a great privilege to be here today to speak to you all. It's also lovely to still see some familiar faces amongst the teachers here.

So, to begin with, my name is Savindhi and I completed school in 2009, which brings me to my 10 year reunion this year. My friends from school that I stay in touch with are definitely excited for our reunion coming up in a few months. Whilst I do feel a tad old thinking about this, at the same time it doesn't seem too long ago when I was in the same position as you all and I have fond memories of my time at school.

I've been invited today to share my experiences and highlights at school, what I studied at university and provide an overview of what I'm doing now professionally and through community service.

To provide some context, I'll give you a quick snapshot about myself currently:

- I work as an Economist for the Victorian Government at the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions in the Economic Inclusion Group- working for the Victorian Government, striving to better the community through sound economic policy making
- the first ever young president of the Committee for Sri Lanka - a 25 year old organisation that has produced 6 order of Australia medal holders, a place where I advocate for and empower young Sri Lankans in Australia and Overseas
- secretary of the Australia Sri Lanka Business Council - to foster and promote bilateral trade opportunities between Australia and Sri Lanka
- a fashion designer of South Asian traditional wear, with my own label Savish
- executive director of the Miss South Asia Australia pageant - to create culturally diverse young leaders that unify the South Asian regional bloc, and embrace and advocate for their South Asian cultures
- and a board member of the Ethnic Council of Victoria Young Advocacy Board - to discuss multicultural issues amongst fellow members and provide a voice for young multicultural people
- Founder e member of the Economics Society of Australia – Young Professionals Network
- And I'm an advisor to the Victorian Minister for Multicultural Affairs through the South Asian Advisory Board.

As you can see – the work that I do is broad and spans over diverse skills and interests. So I'd, like to touch on the path I have taken through my education, employment and community service work to lead me to where I am currently. Most importantly, I will be highlighting what principles I have followed along the way and how my journey at this school has played an important role in shaping who I am today. And I'm sure throughout my speech, you will see my passion for empowering younger generations which is something that I am a strong advocate for.

While I was at school I was in Schofield house, I was house dance captain in year 11 and school debating captain in year 12. Reflecting back on my time at CGGS from Year 7 to Year 12, I can say that I tried to embrace everything that came my way and all opportunities that were presented. I was and you are in such a privileged position and I would encourage everyone to get as involved in as many things as possible. All of you are lucky to attend a school where you are provided with a variety of subjects, extra curricular activities as well as compulsory experiences. For example, with school camp, whilst I would never choose to go camping now, I'm so glad that I have experienced it

in my life. And I was never really good at sport, but can say I've learnt most sports during my time at school, so when people talking about it, I can easily related to it. Whilst you might not appreciate these things whilst at school, unless you choose to do these, life gets busy and you don't get the chance to do such a wide variety of experiences. Therefore, I am always grateful and feel lucky to have been provided such a diverse range of learnings and experiences during my time at school.

At the same time, my favourite part of school was getting involved in activities that I was passionate about. I enjoyed dancing, music and debating. Taking the time out of study, to attend lunch time rehearsals and after school competitions, in my view was definitely worth it and highly encourage you to get involved such activities. Being engaged in this is definitely something that I miss now as I have less time to pursue such talents.

Reflecting on year 12, in VCE I did English, methods, spesh, biology, chemistry and accounting. Its important to study and give VCE your best shot. If you look at it from a practical point of you, this saves time and is a more efficient way of progressing towards achieving your desired job. However, at the same time, it's not the end of the world and if you really want to work in a particular area, you can always find a way to get there in due course. In my case, I chose to do Commerce at Monash University where I didn't have a clear understanding of how to link my interests with my course selection. During my first semester I realised I was picking up economics easily and it was an area that I was intrigued in. I also found out that I could also major in Politics, another area I was interested in, if I switched courses.

My interest in politics and working for the government actually came about thanks to two opportunities presented to me during my time at school. I was provided with the opportunity to apply for and was selected to attend the 2020 youth summit held by the Australian Government at Parliament in Canberra. I was the second youngest participant at the age of 16 to attend. This opportunity led me to develop my interest in politics and passion to work for the government to improve the society through effective policy making. Whilst I didn't pursue this directly with the course that I chose initially, I was able to fulfil my passion and interest through transferring at the end of my first semester into a Bachelor of Economics at Monash where I majored in Economics and Politics. The other opportunity put forward to me during school that increased my awareness of what I was passionate about - was applying for Zonta International's Young Women in Public Affairs award, where I was fortunate to win the award.

Reflecting on my journey at school and subsequently the principles that I have carried out through university and professionally - I would say - I have always believed in:

-The power of Effort

-And the power of Opportunities

I call these, the two guidance powers: effort and opportunities

To the **first guidance power, effort:** The effort to get involved in extra-curricular activities, making the effort to study and educate yourself, the effort to reach out to mentors to guide you. When you are passionate and make an effort, no matter how easy or difficult it is, it does pay off in some shape or form.

An example of the power of effort during my time at school is through my debating experience. I definitely was not an outgoing and loud person. I was quiet and reserved. However through learning about debating in English class, I was intrigued and put in effort to improve my skills. Whilst I felt out of my comfort zone delivering speeches and rebuttals, I continually put in effort with the content of my speeches to make it engaging and stand out. I slowly increased confidence over time and started to enjoy the intensity and competitiveness of debating and took part in house debating competitions and inter-school debating. I am proud to say I ended up being awarded with best speaker several

times and then went on to be Debating Captain of the School. After I graduated from school, I even went on to be paid as an adjudicator for interschool debating competitions at various schools across Victoria. This highlights how the sheer power of making an effort can truly shape the person and leader you can become.

Keeping the guidance power of effort in mind, I'd like to highlight the second **guidance power of opportunities**

After completing my undergrad degree in Economics, I also completed a Master of Diplomacy and International Trade at Monash University whilst working full time. Throughout my education at Monash, a total of seven years, I made a conscious **effort** to take up as many **opportunities** I could, that came my way.

- I applied for and was selected to be an Economics faculty ambassador – to network amongst fellow future leaders in the economics field
- I was a Peer Mentor for international students – to be a friend to those adjusting to university life in a new country
- And I studied at partner universities in Italy and Belgium

However, the most significant example of the effect of the two guidance powers: was **making the effort and taking up the opportunity** to apply for Monash University's Ancora Imparo Student Leadership Scholarship Program. Ancora Imparo is Italian for, I am still learning, and based on this, the leadership program was developed to select the top students across all faculties that are excelling in academics and community work, to provide training and support to groom them into the future leaders of tomorrow. By making the effort to apply, I was selected for the scholarship and it opened doors for me I never knew existed.

Bringing together a group of 30 high achievers across all faculties, was extremely powerful. The ideas, the networking and our common genuine interest of wanting to help others in the community was significant. Having this scholarship program listed on my resume and the learnings I have from it, has only increased the number of opportunities that have come my way as a result. Throughout I've maintained my passion to help others and empower youth through involvement in community service work. I was on various committees, organised several events and raised awareness and funds for numerous causes. I was also awarded:

- Rotary International's award for youth leadership
- Sri Lankan Consulate's Young High Achiever award

And have advocated for empowerment of youth in several forums including at boardroom meetings with Victorian, Australian and Sri Lankan ministers and diplomatic forums.

Getting involved in activities aside from your studies is extremely important and I highly encourage you to do so. The opportunities and contacts you make will expand your horizon. This will also enable finding a job more of a seamless process for you. Through my experience, I realised that whilst having good marks at school and university is useful, that the opportunities I had taken up through various programs mentioned previously and my passion for community work had inherently given me several examples to use in my interviews. I was fortunate to be selected to the Victorian Public Service Graduate Program, which was a fantastic start to my career.

It is difficult to summarise the last 10 years of my life into 10 minutes, so to conclude, throughout my journey, I've been lucky to put my vision into practice to empower and encourage the next generation of young leaders, which is why I take the time to share my experiences at forums such as this. All of you here are modernised in your thinking and have new and innovative ideas, have recent and relevant education and have grown up evolving with and adapting to the latest technologies.

You have an edge over the rest of society that you can use to make a difference now, through university and in your career. Empowering and supporting young people is the way of the future, and all of you can make a positive difference to the world.

I hope I've been able to give you a good insight into the pathway I have followed throughout my education, employment and community work, to lead me to where I am today. I believe that applying the two guidance powers can only lead towards a lesson-learning and ultimately positive path forward. I hope I have also motivated each and every one of you to also apply these in practice.

Always make an **effort** – don't have any regrets that you didn't try your best.

And always take up **opportunities** and give back by creating opportunities for others.

I wish you the very best with your journeys and hope that some of you will be standing up here in the near future, sharing your story with the next generation of young female leaders.

Thank you