

Nipuni Wijewickrema

Social Entrepreneur, Co-Founder of GG's Flowers & Passionate Keynote

Nipuni (Nip) Wijewickrema is one of our country's most recognisable young social entrepreneurs. The co-founder of GG's Flowers, she is passionate about empowering and employing people with special needs from all walks of life.

A powerful professional keynote speaker, Nip Wijewickrema's many speeches on inclusion and the importance of social enterprises in our community have motivated and inspired thousands of would be leaders throughout the country to take action. Her dedication to innovative social enterprise has been recognised with several awards including the 2016 ACT Young Australian of the Year.

Nip's future as a social entrepreneur was determined when, at the age of 20, she realised there was a lack of meaningful employment opportunities for people with special needs - specifically, her sister Gayana, who has Down Syndrome. Unable to sit back and let Gayana live a life without purpose, Nip and her family established the floral business, GG's Flowers.

Leaving full-time employment to work for the business without a salary was Nip's first philanthropic investment in many meaningful employment projects for people with special needs.

Starting in the bathroom of her family home and moving to the garden shed, GG's Flowers has grown into a successful business that is empowering and employing people with special needs from all walks of life. The company has delivered beautiful bouquets to thousands of Canberrans.

Nip believes all people with special needs are capable of leading fulfilling and engaging lives and this can be achieved through meaningful employment. She understands that combined with a little bit of love, compassion and patience, her social enterprise has the power to change lives.

An open and honest speaker, Nip speaks about the lack of inclusion in our community and the heart-breaking and gut-wrenching journey of having a sister with a disability. She proudly talks of the challenges and lessons faced and hopes to inspire other people to start - or at the very least, engage with social enterprises.



Nip maintains close connections to the community and has been a volunteer suicide and crisis counsellor for Lifeline Australia for over five years. In 2016, Nip was named the ACT Young Australian of the Year. She received the Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards for Emerging Young Leader in 2015 and that same year was the Women's Weekly Women of the Future Finalist, and finalist for the University of Canberra Chancellor's Award for Service and Philanthropy. She was recognised as the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year in 2014.

Nip Wijewickrema talks about:

- **Canberra's young social entrepreneur** - As a trailblazer for social entrepreneurship in Canberra, Nip has sailed some uncharted waters. And as a young social entrepreneur she understands the difficulties and challenges that face entrepreneurs. This keynote discusses her journey as a social entrepreneur, which she began at the age of 21. Nip presents practical tips on starting a social enterprise and how she has changed the world 'one flower at a time'.
- **The importance of social enterprises** - GG's Flowers was established to provide meaningful employment for Nip's younger sister, Gayana, who has Down syndrome. Social enterprises such as GG's Flowers are playing an increasingly important role in communities around the world, providing solutions and innovation in a wide range of fields. In this presentation, Nip talks about the essential characteristics of social enterprises, how to design one which works, why it's important for communities to support them, how they provide value back to those communities and what the future holds for those keen to put their social ideas into action. Nip also introduces you to some great social enterprises in Canberra and discusses how you can go about supporting them.
- **From the bathroom to the garden shed** - GG's Flowers was 'born in the bathroom and moved all the way to the garden shed', growing quickly from a small operation conducted in the only spare room in the house to a major enterprise with purpose-built facilities in the family home, from where thousands of Canberrans have been sent beautiful blooms. In this keynote, Nip outlines the process of starting a social enterprise and discusses the highs and lows of running a small business. Nip talks openly and honestly about leaving the corporate world for her dream job that has one hitch - no salary. Her inspirational talk explains how and why she does what she does, and how you can do it too.
- **The happiness and heartbreak of Down syndrome** - Gayana, the cheeky inspiration behind GG's Flowers, is lucky she can't understand the sniggers, stares and comments that sometimes come her way when out and about. In this presentation, Nip discusses the reality of the world we live in when you have someone with special needs close to you. Nip shares her experiences and thoughts on building an inclusive community. With frank and disarming honesty, she also shares a heartbreaking story that will make everyone think about the way people with special needs are treated in our community.

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