

Educate, empower and help

By Nicola Ceccato



Inspiring those around her: Entrepreneur, philanthropist and motivational speaker Liza Pavlakos came to Shepparton to speak to foster and kinship carers during Foster Care Week.

From trauma to triumph, Liza Pavlakos has overcome the hardest of adversities.

And on Wednesday night, she shared her story with local kinship and foster carers as a guest speaker at Berry St's celebration of Foster Care Week.

Mrs Pavlakos has gone through what many would class as the most unimaginable circumstances one could go through in life.

From a young age, Mrs Pavlakos was a victim of sexual abuse, and at the age of 16, she ran away from home, leaving her homeless.

Soon after, Mrs Pavlakos entered a relationship where she became a victim of domestic violence, which got so bad it resulted in half her face needing reconstruction.

At the age of 21, she was raped, resulting in the birth of her son.



A voice to inspire: Liza Pavlakos and Berry Street regional director for Hume Patrice Jackson at the foster and kinship celebration on Wednesday.

In 2016, Mrs Pavlakos was kidnapped and almost murdered by terrorists while doing a keynote engagement in the Middle East before being saved by military intelligence.

But it was in spite of her adversities that Mrs Pavlakos was able to propel herself into a space of helping others.

As a philanthropist, entrepreneur and international keynote speaker, Mrs Pavlakos has made a name for herself as a Golden Gavel honouree and as one of the world's top 10 female speakers.

"So the thing is that, yes, I've had so many different experiences, but these experiences make me extremely rich in terms of being able to educate, empower, help people rewire their story and show people that I'm relatable and their story is relatable," Mrs Pavlakos said.

"But at the same time, it's been amazing to be on the other end and realise the kind of voice that you can be to create positive change.

"Because you can only speak about something when you learn what the pain or what the hardship feels like."

Last week Mrs Pavlakos, alongside her team at Swish Connect and Autonomie Solutions, launched Mind Hub Directory, an online space that allows people to pick and access the type of therapy best suited to their needs and what they've gone through.

The directory provides a space for help to be sought after easily and widens the scope of mental health professional availability.

The user-friendly ease of access of the website, plus the benefits of specialised mental health care, make it the perfect tool for kinship and foster carers.

"Talking about issues that require so much education like foster care or any kind of challenge, it's really important to have that backup support like Mind Hub so that we can educate people to change for the better," Mrs Pavlakos said.

Berry Street regional director for Hume Patrice Jackson said it was wonderful to have a speaker like Mrs Pavlakos at the event and encouraged others in the community to think about foster care.

"We want to take the opportunity to celebrate our existing

foster carers who do such a wonderful job," she said.

"There are just simply not enough foster families to look after the number of children that we have requiring foster care.

"They can just see the growth in the development of children who come into their care who may not have ever experienced a loving, warm, nurturing environment.

"Our foster families tell us all the time that fostering is genuinely the most rewarding thing they've ever done in their lives."

□ If you're interested in finding out more about how you can be a foster carer, visit berrystreet.org.au and chat with someone about the process.