

Our People

Kenny Ardouin

Speech therapy role close to heart

Kenny Ardouin was born with cleft lip and palate – the most common birth defect in New Zealand. The 26-year-old lives in Redcliffs and works as a speech language therapist. Kenny talks to reporter Sarla Donovan about his journey

So what was it like growing up with cleft palate?

Well, it was certainly a bit different. I feel it's taught me a lot – I've learned to be more understanding of other people and the things others go through. It did present challenges, certainly as I got into the teenage years and was having to make some pretty difficult decisions around a treatment pathway at the same time as trying to have a normal teenage life. And interacting with your peers, feeling like in new situations you're on the back foot because you look and sound different; people often have preconceived ideas and unconscious bias that you've got to overcome.

How did your parents help you with some of those challenges – they must have been an important influence?

I grew up in a loving and supportive environment. My parents had an expectation that I would be able to do whatever I wanted to do and never treated me differently, but at the same time acknowledged that things could be difficult at times. They also helped with making difficult decisions, even when I threw it back in their face. They had always investigated different treatment options for me and really fought my corner, advocated for me. But when it was time to make decisions for myself, I went against what they wanted me to do, which must have been incredibly frustrating for them. I was 16 and couldn't see the bigger picture, whereas they could. But it took three years for me to see that.



Was this to do with options for treatment?

Yes, I was having to consider serious surgery that would happen at about the age of 18. But I'd already had nine procedures and was over it. My parents could see the surgery would help me overcome some of the things I perceived as holding me back but I couldn't see beyond the immediate effects. It wasn't till later, when I had a better understanding of what was involved and met others who had been through it and realised what it would achieve and the impact it would have – that it would change the way that I sound and look and ultimately mean I had a better perception of myself that I made the decision to have the operation.

Why did you become a speech language therapist?

That was pretty much a direct result of my own experiences. As a child growing up I had a lot of difficulties with speech and

knew how frustrating it was. I knew exactly what I wanted to say but couldn't make myself understood by other people. So I had a lot of speech therapy which had a positive impact on my quality of life. I wanted to be part of helping make that change for other people.

You've been CEO of Cleft NZ and recently returned from presenting at a national conference in the United Kingdom. Have you always been confident speaking and presenting in public?

No, it's something that used to terrify me. It wasn't until high school I started to try and turn that around when I stood as the student board of trustees representative and a big component of that was speaking in assemblies, which absolutely terrified me. But having that role and realising that what I was saying resonated with people made me realise there was a lot of power in people sharing their experiences – it can

make a big difference to others. I know for me it was hearing other people's experiences that made my own decisions easier. Knowing that you're not alone is a huge weight off your shoulders.

You also work as a radio show host on Plains FM – where did your interest in media come from?

Radio is something I've always had a natural tendency towards; it was somewhere I could just be me and not face any prejudice. I've evolved over the years from basic music programmes to now having a deep interest in current affairs and politics, reporting on events and meeting and interviewing people.

You've got two younger brothers – have they been affected by cleft palate?

I'm the only person in my family affected by cleft.

So what causes it?

We know that for some people there is a genetic component and for others it appears to be quite

a random occurrence. There's a generally accepted feeling at the moment that it's a combination of genetics and environment.

How old were you when your family moved here from the UK?

I was nine when we shifted from Rye in East Sussex, an hour south of London. We came out to New Zealand on holiday the year before. My parents fell in love with it and fancied a change of pace and lifestyle so we moved here in 2000. It was quite a big thing, moving to the other side of the world. We didn't have any other family out here. But the primary school that I went to, Mt Pleasant, was really good at integrating us and we quickly made friends here which certainly made it a lot easier.

You recently hosted a special screening of the film *Wonder*, based on the best selling book – why do you think the story resonates with so many people?

It's a candid look at many of the challenges people who are different may face growing up. The main character in that book, like myself, has a facial defect, which is something you can't hide from the world like you can other health conditions. A lot of the experiences he goes through – starting school, having to deal with bullying, trying to be accepted and blend in, in a world he was born to stand out in – it described a lot of how I felt.

What are your hobbies and interests?

I really enjoy travelling and going to new places. I love Wales and Scotland which is where my dad and mum are from respectively – so many country towns and villages and walks, places to see – you just need to go a few miles up the road and you see something new and different. And I love travelling and hiking around the South Island, we've got so many vast, remote places.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Whatever role I have in the future I hope that that advocacy and raising awareness about issues of equality and bias plays a big part.

SPEAKING OUT: Kenny Ardouin, speech language therapist, is helping raise awareness about issues of equality and bias. PHOTO: MARTIN HUNTER

ACTIVATE YOUR FREE 2 WEEK TRIAL TODAY!



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS

Each F45 workout is:

- Class based & only 45 minutes
- Changed daily and is never repeated
- Suitable to all levels of fitness
- Supervised by Personal Trainers
- Functional, fun & friendly

Unit 4/ 1 Waterman Place, Ferrymead

Email: ferrymead@f45training.co.nz Phone 022 188 0850

www.f45training.co.nz/ferrymead



f45ferrymead



f45_training_ferrymead



TEAM TRAINING ★ LIFE CHANGING