
ANJA CHRISTOFFERSEN – SPEAKER PROFILE

Anja Christoffersen is a young author, motivational speaker, model, and health consumer advocate using her skills to reshape the perception of disability as well as improving equity, patient-centred care, and shared decision making within the health sector. As a driver of positive change, Anja's contribution has been recognised through her being the proud recipient of the QLD Young Achiever of the Year Leadership Award for 2020.

Anja was born with complex medical malformations called VACTERL Association that has resulted in dozens of surgeries and over 150 hospital admissions. At birth, she had no way of getting food and water in or out of her body and survival was only possible with extensive medical intervention.

The doctors never described life past childhood; however, it was quickly discovered that this rare congenital disability carries with it associated stigmas and challenges faced at every stage of life. It impacted on her social relationships, education and day-to-day life. Fortunately, Anja has transformed her setbacks into an incredible, passionate drive to improve the path for others walking in her footsteps and promotes transforming adversity into purpose.

Pursuing a career in modelling from her mid-teens, after being told that her scars would prevent her from booking any big jobs, she has since walked for Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Amsterdam at 17 years of age, Myer, Nicola Finetti, Black Milk Clothing and more. In June 2019 Anja competed in the 3rd largest pageant in the world – Miss Grand Australia – and placed 1st Runner Up in Australia – a huge feat for the disability community worldwide.

Beginning her speaking career in 2018, Anja has now spoken at conferences in Australia, USA and Pakistan - raising awareness of VACTERL and sharing her motivational message of overcoming setbacks and how the medical and education field can better accommodate children, adolescents and adults with chronic illness.

In late 2018, Anja published her autobiography, "Behind the Smile: An Inspirational Journey from Disability to Ability" detailing her life with disability, her path to becoming an international model and the experience that turned her to advocacy. She could not see any reason for anyone to feel isolated and unsupported in their struggles with illness and left to face the unrecognised psychological impacts of disability on their own. This led Anja to study and qualify as a counsellor and transpersonal therapist, as well as embark on her Masters of Business Administration studies, majoring in Entrepreneurship and Health Services Management to aid wide-scale change.

Shaping herself to be the global ambassador for the widely unrecognised 'VACTERL Association' that she is affected by, her story has been showcased in media across the world, including The Independent UK, The Daily Mail Australia, Mamamia!, Girlfriend Magazine, That's Life!, House of Wellness, Link Disability Magazine, 9Honey, Triple J Radio and more.

In addition to sharing her story, she is a proud Youth Ambassador for the Continence Foundation of Australia – leading their Incontinence in Confidence project targeting adolescents, as well as a member of their national Consumer Advisory Committee. Additionally, Anja sits on committees, working groups, steering groups and projects for National, state-wide and local health facilities, consumer bodies and non-for-profits.