Just do it

As the Co-Founder of muru-D, Annie Parker is putting her passion for the startup space to good use.

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The startup accelerator business backed by Telstra, muru-D, invests in great teams who have innovative technology and global ambitions. It ultimately works to bolster the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Australia and beyond. Every year, the company takes on 10 different startups who then work together through a six-month in-depth program in which they are given the opportunities to form invaluable connections, learn the ins and outs of launching a startup, and gain access to Telstra's extensive network of suppliers and partners.

Co-Founder of muru-D Annie Parker says the program is essentially like an MBA, but for startups. "Over the course of the six months that these groups are with us, we're able to open a few doors for them, any of which they might not be able to open by themselves," she explains, "or at least not as quick, hence the term 'accelerator'."

Halfway through the program, participants are taken to an international destination to see for themselves what a global marketplace actually looks like. This trip also helps them to form robust connections with like-minded people all over the world. As a result, Annie says, by the time they are ready to graduate from the program they should have the right people and funding in place to see their ideas come to fruition. "It also gives them access to the right >>

mentors and advisors who can help them on their journey," she adds. "We say right from the start that if you want to be a high-growth software or technology company, you need to be global from day one."

For Annie, being a member of the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC) has helped her to see the importance of these overseas trips even more clearly. A couple of years ago, she went on a trade mission to Tel Aviv, Israel, and returned home full of knowledge. "I had such a fabulous trip," she recalls with a smile. "I met with some extraordinary people and connected with not just leaders from here in Australia but also leaders from Tel Aviv, particularly in the startup space. Those connections have been so fruitful for us going forwards, and of course it's been a huge learning experience for me personally.

"I met with probably three or four accelerator and incubator programs where they support, house, encourage, and nurture startups to potential global success. But the one team that I really made a lasting partnership with was the guys from The Junction, because philosophically both of our organisations are doing the same thing for startups in our respective ecosystems.

"When I met them, muru-D had only just started in Sydney, and we're now—when you add in our operations in Sydney, Singapore, and Brisbane—at the point where we've invested in more than 40 startups. We need to help support these businesses on their global growth strategies, and who better to learn from than the people in Israel who have extraordinary experience, having built globally significant software companies. It was a really natural partnership, and it's structured in a way that we can make sure we get the best help for any startups here and also give back to our

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counterparts in Israel who are perhaps looking to come to this part of the world and grow their business."

In addition to its involvement with The Junction, muru-D has successfully developed partnerships with other global programmes: 500 Startups in the US; HAX in Shenzhen and San Francisco; Chinaaccelerator in Shanghai; and New Zealand angel investment group The Icehouse. Annie believes that these kinds of alliances are crucial in helping local startups become globally relevant.

"I think if we can learn one thing from Israel, it's the outlook they have—they know they have to be global from day one to be successful. Singapore actually has a very similar outlook as well. Both are small countries, so they need to look outside of their own borders to find growth. Australia is a bit of an awkward size in the sense that it's a continent-sized country but it only has 24 million people. That's sometimes a bit of a distraction for startups here: they can get confused into thinking that Australia is a big place—and it is, geographically—but it isn't in terms of population. So we

have an awful lot that we can tap into in terms of learning from Singapore and Israel purely on that point."

Annie's biggest tip for people looking to launch a startup venture is to 'just give it a go'. "Once you get over that first mental hurdle of 'Should I quit my day job?' or 'Should I do this thing that I'm a bit scared of?' it gets a lot easier," she shares. "That's actually the hardest part.

"The other piece of advice I would give is to go out and ask for help. If you've never done it before, then why should you expect to know how to do it all by yourself? There's so much help out there now for startups, whether that be through our program or through any of the other co-working spaces in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, or anywhere else across the country. All

you need to do is go out, find them, and ask for some help. That help will come to you because, with startups, the ecosystem is extraordinarily open minded and open hearted. It wants to give you the help. So my advice, and my encouragement to everybody who has a great idea that they think could potentially be the next Instagram or Uber, is to 'just do it'. Ask for some help and that help will come to you."

On top of her work with startups and the entrepreneurial crowd, Annie is also chair of Code Club Australia—an organisation with a mission to give every child in the country the chance to learn to code. Coding, Annie believes, is a crucial skill that is becoming more and more of a prerequisite as time goes on.

"In the economy that school kids today are going to be joining in five to 10 years time, it will be really important. To be ready for that, we need to be teaching them a skill that can futureproof what they're learning today. There's a huge amount of economic sense and a very practical reason as to why kids should learn to code, and that's actually how it started out. It was

purely because we recognised a need for more programmers, engineers, and developers. We found that our startups here were struggling to find that type of talent locally."

Code Club Australia has been going for almost two years and has over 450 groups already established across the nation. It is giving more than 15,000 children the opportunity to learn to code. That's enough kids coding in Australia to fill Google's HQ in California. This is allowing them to be more creative and imaginative, unlocking a part of their skill set that they might not have used before with computational thinking, logic, problem solving, and collaboration.

"That's actually what they learn when they learn to code, and it's hugely important because it's at the bedrock of innovation and entrepreneurship," Annie states. "Wouldn't it be great if in five or 10 years time we get kids graduating from schools and universities not just with a skill that we know they need for the future, but also with the thinking that comes with that?" ■