



Interview with JESSICA DEWHURST

Jessica Dewhurst is a human rights defender, Queens Young Leader and ERI UN Youth Ambassador from South Africa. She is the Founder and CEO of the award winning human rights organisation The Justice Desk (ERFA partner program), which focuses on educating, advocating and equipping youth, government, civil society and vulnerable groups across South Central Africa in human rights. Jessica has worked across the globe in the fight for fundamental human rights and has received countless awards for her work.

Most recently she received a medal from Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace, and was named Glamour's Woman of the Year in Activism. Her organisation is a partner of the Nobel Peace Prize Summit, and The Queens Commonwealth Trust. Jessica is a passionate and proud South African, who believes in the power of everyday activists, especially among the youth.



Can you tell us about your background?

I began as a young South African, hearing of the magnificent "rainbow nation" that was not truly reflected in the lives of everyday South Africans. I dedicated my life to the fight for fundamental human rights, challenging systemic injustice, and using my privilege in order to create platforms for the voices of ALL people to be heard and respected.

Since starting The Justice Desk in 2013, it has gone on to grow into an incredible team of change-makers across the globe, who have changed the lives of over 800,000 people!

How did you become involved in the Edmund Rice network?

I began my Edmund Rice journey in 2003 when I attended Christian Brothers College, St John's, as a student, in Cape Town, South Africa. I was mentored by an incredible Christian Brother called Br Paul Hurley. He took a chance on me, and was the catalyst for me choosing to use my life for good. I went on to start The Justice Desk within the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, which is one of equality, justice and human rights.

What inspires you most in your work?

Working in communities and meeting the real heroes working hard, each and every day, to make their communities safer and more just places. These are the people that inspire me! Mothers, fathers, teachers, community leaders, youth – everyone playing their part to build the country they deserve. Spending time with them, learning from them, and loving them, is the greatest blessing I could ever ask for. It's a privilege to serve alongside my fellow South Africans, and it is something I don't take for granted.

What difference has the Edmund Rice program made to your life?

Working at The Justice Desk has shaped me into a fierce and determined activist, with a deep love and passion for people. No matter the amount of negative things I see in our communities or on the news – they don't matter. Because I have also seen the incredible acts of kindness, generosity, compassion and love that are in our communities - which have resulted in my unyielding belief in the inherent goodness that is within us all. ■