



Sisters of Charity
Foundation

Heart of the Foundation

In the tradition of the Sisters of Charity

Newsletter Autumn 2023

“You are helping to broaden my horizons”

Our scholarship student Baneen is in her final year of a Doctor of Medicine at Western Sydney University – but she’s not waiting to graduate to embark on her career.

The WSU School of Medicine gives students the opportunity to complete an international elective over the summer break. Baneen chose to visit Bangladesh to experience healthcare provision in a developing country.

A new perspective

“It was absolutely remarkable to see how doctors navigate the challenges despite the lack of resources,” says Baneen. “I was able to take part in ward rounds and complete some patient examinations.

“I saw so many medical presentations that I have never seen in Australia including some very rare diseases like Seckel syndrome. I was also fortunate enough to see a C-section and other surgeries including a breast lump removal.”

Baneen and her fellow students also assisted with research and health

checks in Haluaghat, a rural area of Bangladesh. “This experience has helped me to develop into a better person and hopefully a better medical student and future doctor too,” she says.

Building an exceptional resume

Baneen first applied for a scholarship so she wouldn’t have to work long hours to support herself, and could instead use the time to take part in extracurricular activities. She has attended Australian Medical Students’ Association conventions, was elected President of the Global Health Awareness Western Sydney Society, and completed an internship with the Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner.

Baneen’s ambitions will positively impact health care in Australia. “My plan is to specialise as a Rural Generalist

with advanced skills in Obstetrics and Gynaecology,” she says. “I also envision a future where I am involved in health advocacy and policy as well as some teaching and research.” ❖

“I would like to thank you for all your continual support. I can’t believe I’m coming towards the end of my medical degree – these past years have been challenging but at the same time so rewarding.”



Baneen (left) with locals at Kailakuri Health Care Project, a hospital in rural Bangladesh.

BECAUSE OF YOU...

page 01

Baneen’s career is off to a brilliant start

page 02

Matthew can enjoy going places again

page 03

Renters have legal support they can rely on

Matthew says, “Thanks for the ride!”

41-year-old Matthew has autism, and finds it challenging and stressful to catch public transport. Here's how your generosity made travelling fun.

Matthew loves playing basketball, bowling, socialising with friends, helping people and spending time with family. “My life goal is to have a secure and fulfilling job, a permanent relationship, I love helping people with disabilities, I want to live a happy healthy life and fulfill God’s purpose for my life,” he says.

Something Matthew doesn’t like? Public transport.

“Sometimes it can feel unsafe when there are loud or abusive people, it can be stressful especially if the buses are not running to time,” he explains.

A difficult journey

“Some autistic people find it difficult if not impossible to navigate the public transport system – reading timetables, working out platforms or bus stops,” says Randa Habelrih, Founder of Autism MATES, a charity working to make our community more inclusive for those living on the autism spectrum.

“With intense training some are successful but should there be a variation – such as the bus not running to schedule or it’s full so it does not stop – panic can easily set in.”

Take a trip with your mates

A \$15,000 Foundation Community Grant helped purchase the MATES Mobile. “It’s a white KIA people mover and it seats eight people,” describes Matthew. “It is painted with the Autism MATES logo and the back seats can go down when we have to deliver stuff.”



Matthew (first person to the right of the Autism MATES logo) with fellow basketballers.

Matthew has now travelled in it countless times: to and from weekly basketball practice and to regional competitions, as well as Autism MATES dinners. “It is spacious, plenty of leg room, I get to travel with friends, it’s fun, and I like it’s a door-to-door service especially at night,” he says.

The Mobile transports around 15 people with autism every week –

though Randa expects the number to increase.

“We play background music but we try to maintain a calm atmosphere,” she says. “We talk to our participants and make them feel valued by asking them questions about their day or their week. It’s amazing how much they share when given the opportunity.” ❖

“We are truly thrilled with our van and cannot thank you enough for helping to make this a reality for us.”

Peace of mind on the road

“My own son was trained to catch the bus but he experienced bullying from school children at the bus stop,” says Randa. “They mocked him and threw things at him. After a few similar incidents, he is no longer confident of catching public transport even though he is capable.”

“I hope that when people with autism ride in the MATES Mobile they will feel safe and feel a sense of belonging as they travel with their friends. Parents will have peace of mind knowing their children are safe.”



Matthew (left) and Randa’s son Richard (right) with a friend.

How you're helping vulnerable renters stay safe

The rising cost of living and current rental shortages mean low-income renters are at increased risk of exploitation – but your support has evened the playing field.

Louise, pregnant and weeks away from the birth of her second child, was at her wit's end. For nine months, she and her partner had pleaded with landlords and agents to get simple repairs performed in her new rental property. When Louise's young family moved in, they faced a leaking roof, broken oven and stove, exposed wiring and windows sealed shut.

An uphill battle

Louise was assured by her agent that a new oven and dishwasher would be installed to replace the failing and dangerous appliances at the property. However, after moving in, she was met with stonewalling and excuses.

"We'd tried following the advice from Consumer Affairs but nothing made the landlord budge," she explains. "When they appeared at the property unannounced and started yelling at me – that's when I really started to lose sleep.

"After months of trying to get any action from the landlord, I broke down, burst into tears. I felt like I was on the edge of having a heart attack. At times, I wanted to give up, it was all just getting too hard."

Anika to the rescue

Louise eventually made her way to Anika Legal, a free legal service that helps vulnerable Victorian renters stay in safe homes. Anika negotiated with Louise's landlord and helped Louise prepare for her hearing at VCAT (the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal).



"All these issues had just felt like a massive weighted blanket..." Louise is sleeping easier now.

"It was exactly the service I needed – I couldn't have asked for anything better," says Louise. "I was so used to everyone else that I'd dealt with letting me down – agents, landlords, even law firms. Sam (the Anika law student) was just that one solid person I could completely count on when I needed him.

"The empathy that everyone at Anika showed for our situation was amazing, and with Sam taking over, everything just became so much easier for me."

At the hearing Louise's landlord agreed to a binding consent order for all 12 repairs listed during a prior Consumer Affairs inspection – which were finally completed the week before the birth of her second child. ❖

"It had just gone on for so long without any end in sight. To get the repairs completed, and within such a short time frame – I just started to feel like me again."

A world where everyone can access justice

More than 600,000 Australians live below the poverty line and can't afford a lawyer, but aren't eligible for traditional legal aid. Anika offers legal support to those who can't access it elsewhere by pairing people in need with volunteer law students who are supervised by a lawyer. In the current economic climate, demand for its services is rapidly increasing.

Because of your generosity we were able to provide Anika with a grant to recruit, train and manage 20 new volunteer student paralegals. This will mean an additional 100 renters will be supported over the next year – to secure urgent repairs, avoid eviction and the subsequent risk of homelessness, and recover bond money they need to maintain financial stability.

A word from Louise

We are so grateful to their Excellencies the Governor-General and Mrs Linda Hurley for hosting an afternoon tea to raise awareness for our scholarship program.

The event, held in February at Admiralty House, was a chance to bring supporters and our students together – to speak about their studies, plans for the future and, in the case of Nathan, hear all about how he’s thriving in his work.

Nathan is a mining engineer based in Mount Isa. He gave a wonderful speech, highlighting how he completed his graduate program in half the expected time and has gone on to complete accreditations in minerals and industry risk management. We were thrilled to belatedly applaud his graduation in 2021 – quite energetically! – especially as his graduation ceremony was cancelled due to COVID.

Doctor of Medicine student Baneen also spoke, and I was not the only one floored when she listed her

extracurricular achievements. She will make a remarkable doctor, and I think her plan to work in a rural area is just what our country needs.

Also present were Andre (Bachelor of Engineering Honours), Cleo (Bachelor of Communications and Media) and Nga Kim (Bachelor of Arts: Pathway to Primary Teaching).

This semester we have awarded 11 new scholarships: five university;

five TAFE; and one for the Academy of Film, Theatre and Television. I am beyond excited to see our scholarship program growing; together, we can change the lives of many more young people who have grown up in out-of-home care.



Louise M Burton, CEO

“These are all very worthy young people whose dreams will now be made reality because of your support and generosity.”



From left: Nga Kim, Baneen, Nathan, Mrs Linda Hurley and the Governor-General David Hurley, Andre, Cleo and Louise Burton.

Become a Changemaker

Join our community of regular givers who are helping make Australia a fairer, more equitable place.

When you pledge to give a monthly or regular donation, you allow us to respond quickly when desperate families and communities need help. Your commitment lets us engage in more impactful philanthropy, invest in longer-term solutions and run essential programs with more certainty.

Your regular gifts can be directed to the program that matters to you most. If you are keen to join our Changemakers Regular Giving Program, or have any questions, please contact Beverley Brock on (02) 9367 1279 or beverley.brock@sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au.

