



Sisters of Charity
Foundation

Heart of the Foundation

In the tradition of the Sisters of Charity

Newsletter Spring 2023

“Thank you for believing in me”

Receiving a scholarship allowed artist and history buff Nikolai to dream big.

Nikolai knows what it’s like to have no one in your corner.

“Striving for higher education as a former foster kid can often feel painfully lonely and pointless,” he explains. “When you have no family cheering you on, encouraging you to push further or consoling you through your struggles, you have to rely on yourself. That isn’t easy.”

It took Nikolai a long time to discover what he loves doing. He dropped out of high school in year 9 and considered a career in cooking and hotel management. Eventually he went back and completed years 11 and 12. “It took a few years, some study and introspection, but I think I have found my calling in visual arts,” he says.

A blend of art and history

Nikolai is studying a combined Bachelor/Advanced Diploma in Visual Arts through Flinders University and TAFE South Australia.

He is in his third and final year of the course – but hasn’t ruled out further study in future.

“I am fascinated by history and I hope to use my artworks to introduce and recontextualise historical figures that many people either haven’t heard of, or haven’t given a second thought,” he explains. After experimenting with many different mediums, he has selected printmaking as his specialty – this and art history are his favourite subjects.



“I would like to use my artworks to share the historical and culturally specific stories behind people, places, and even objects of history,” says Nikolai.

Goal-setting with confidence

Winning the scholarship was a pivotal moment. “Excitement, joy, shock, pride, I had many emotions that day,” he recalls. “I felt seen and supported in a way that I never thought I would.

“It also made me reconsider what I thought was possible for my academic career. Going on to do my honours, a masters degree, international study, all of these now seem within the realm of possibility after winning this scholarship.

“I very deeply understand why so few people who have survived foster care choose this path, and to any out there pushing through it all I just want you to know that you aren’t alone, and there is help. Just reach out for it.” ❖

“To each and every person who has gone out of their way to donate, I would like to offer a deeply sincere thank you. The work that you support creates opportunities for a group of people who are often not given much thought or consideration.”

BECAUSE OF YOU...

page 01

Nikolai is creating art with meaning

page 02

Melissa is confident about her job search

page 03

Jo has somewhere safe to call home

How you're helping disadvantaged women find work

Melissa had been job searching for 18 months. After submitting 148 applications with zero success, she was feeling defeated.

Single mum-of-four Melissa hasn't had an easy time of it. She and her children were subjected to domestic violence, which left one of her sons with significant mental health challenges. After acting as his carer for the past 10 years, she completed a Certificate IV in Community Services and started her job hunt.

"Youth mental health is where my passion is," she says. "If I could get a job as a teaching assistant I'd be over the moon."

After months with no luck Melissa was feeling insecure about her experience and ability. A local employment agency told her about Dress For Success Hobart, which could provide interview outfits and accessories, as well as job-search and career support training sessions – however, Hobart was an eight hour round trip from her home in Latrobe.

Stylin' for success

Dress For Success Hobart received a Community Grant to help bring its services to women in remote Tasmania. One location that benefited from this new outreach model was Launceston, only an hour's drive from Melissa's home. She booked an interview styling session and provided information about her clothing preferences.

At her appointment Melissa met volunteer stylist Clare, who fitted her out with two pairs of pants, blouses and blazers, a handbag and other essentials.

"They made me feel like I was ready for work, I would fit in somewhere," says Melissa fondly. "I hadn't dressed myself off the bedroom floor! If it

wasn't for those guys I would still be wandering the aisles of Kmart."

She also found the language the volunteers used heartening. "They said 'when you get a job' not 'if you get a job'," explains Melissa.

Ready to work

During the styling session Clare offered to take Melissa through a career support session over the phone, and Melissa took advantage of the opportunity the next week.

"Clare is the type of person you feel like you've known for ages, she's very warm," says Melissa. "We talked about wording applications, language to use in an interview, how to apply life skills to a skill set. There was lots of 'don't sell yourself short!'



Melissa is now confident she'll soon land a job in community services.

"Before I was thinking I'm never going to get anything, nobody's interested. I came away knowing I'm better than I think I am. I came away thinking I'm capable of this."

"Since then I've turned into the really irritating person that goes to events and community meetings and just bugs people for jobs. You've got something I want and I just don't think you know how good I am right now, so I'm going to tell you!" ❖

Boutique on the road

"The grant funding allowed us to test run the outreach model in Launceston," says Dress For Success Hobart CEO Amanda French. "We realised it was really effective, particularly for women in the highest bracket of need, isolated in their own regional communities – it's tricky for them to get into the city to access the services we provide.

"In Hobart we have a big, beautiful boutique full of clothes in every size, colour, shape, pattern you can think of, when you go on the road you have to take it all with you."



Volunteer stylist Clare.

“Because of your help I have somewhere to call home”

A horrific home life left young Melbourne teen Jo homeless. The future looked bleak – until The Cocoon opened its doors.

Jo recalls living between hotels, stealing food for their mum and little sister and running away up to 40 times to live on the streets. Jo would sleep near Bourke Street Mall, and be spat on, kicked, or have blankets and cardboard stolen from under them.

“It was less than ideal, but it was the best I could do... I would take that over the abuse any day,” Jo says, referring to their time living with their mother. “I grew up being told: you’re showing too much emotion. You need to stop it. You need to stop crying about everything. You need to stop being angry.”

During their time on the streets, Jo experienced traumatic events and had thoughts of suicide. Subsequently, at 14, Jo was admitted to a psychiatric ward and diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

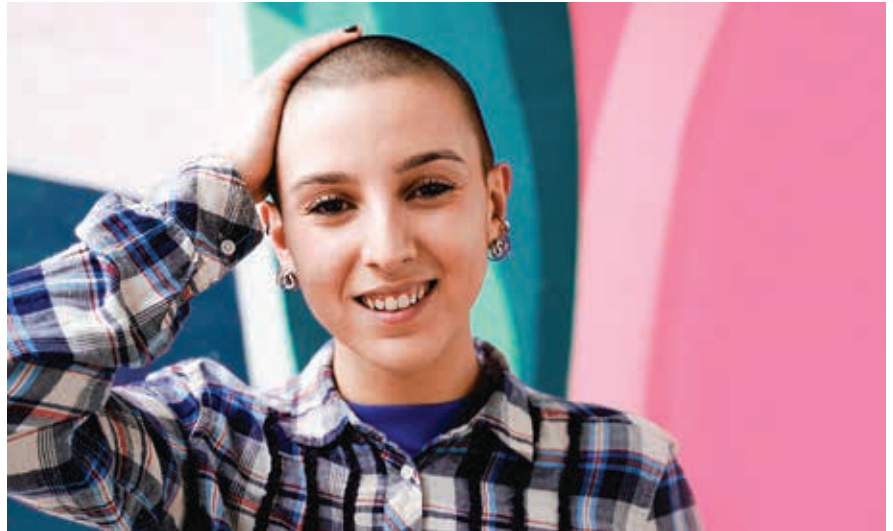
Bridging the gap

The Foundation provided a Community Grant to Bridge It, a Melbourne-based charity that provides young people exiting out-of-home care with a home, a community, and the support to thrive. One such home is The Cocoon – where eventually Jo was offered a place to stay.

At The Cocoon, social workers provide one-on-one support to help residents build social connections, training to develop a resume to gain employment, give advice to secure work experience, and assist with job searching.

Finding peace

“My whole life was like, oh, I’m probably going to die by 10, okay 11,



At The Cocoon, Jo (who prefers the pronouns they/them), benefits from social activities like birthday celebrations, BBQs, movie nights and dinners out.

12, 13, 14,” says Jo. “And then, at 16, I was so confused, and every birthday I’m still confused; I’m like, how am I still alive? What I’ve been through, I should be dead.”

Jo’s upbringing initially made it difficult to set personal goals. But after living at The Cocoon and participating in meetings with Housing and Wellbeing Coordinator Sage, Jo has started planning for the future.

Initially nervous about joining group activities due to social anxiety, the warm and welcoming setting has allowed Jo to develop a supportive friendship.

“I have a friend who has experienced similar things, and understands how it turned out wasn’t my choice. With her, I don’t feel as alone,” Jo says. “I have finally experienced what a true friend is like.” ❖

A place to transform

The Cocoon is a beautiful heritage-listed property in St Kilda that provides a safe home to seven young women exiting out-of-home care and vulnerable to homelessness. It is a place to recover, stabilise, develop living skills such as cooking and budgeting, and prepare for long-term housing. The Foundation’s Community Grant meant residents – like Jo – have continuous support from a mentor who provides meaningful, non-judgemental guidance.



One of the private bedrooms for residents at The Cocoon.

A word from Louise

I recently had the pleasure of attending the second trainee graduation ceremony at three-time Community Grants recipient, Hotel Etico.

Based at Mount Victoria in Sydney's Blue Mountains, the hotel runs an employment and independent living program for young people living with intellectual disability. Trainees live at the premises for three nights a week while undergoing on-the-job training in every aspect of the hotel. After they complete the program they are helped to find jobs in hospitality, in line with their interests and skills.

We have provided \$45K in funding to Hotel Etico via the Community Grants Program and, as I watched 11 smiling young people receive their certificates, I felt so proud that we've all had a hand in the success of this social enterprise – and their futures.

There were a lot of tears from the graduates and their parents, and from supporters and the hotel staff. It was a joyous day full of emotion and lots of excited conversation



From left: Quinn and Jacob with Louise Burton. Quinn and Jacob were part of the hotel's first intake of trainees.

about the careers the graduates will now embark on.

I was lucky to catch up with Quinn and Jacob, who were both part of the Hotel's first intake of six trainees, and back to support those who are following in their footsteps. Quinn went on to a full-time job at Fairmont but also spent time mentoring the new group of trainees, until they found their feet. He was

“Everyone, regardless of ability, deserves a chance at employment. Our best wishes to the new graduates for long and fulfilling careers!”

so happy, confident and chatty. Jacob is loving working at a bakery in Penrith.

The boys were both happy to be there, excited for the new graduates – and looking really smart in their suits!

Louise M Burton, CEO

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.

