

In the tradition of the Sisters of Charity

Newsletter Spring 2025

## With your help, Julia is writing her future



"I'm still busy but a lot more balanced!" says Julia.

Scholarship student Julia is studying a Bachelor of Communication at RMIT and looking forward to a career in investigative journalism.

Julia was studying early childhood education at TAFE and writing on the side as a hobby – she never thought she could turn it into a career until she entered a writing competition hosted by the ABC.

She wrote about growing up in public housing and the stigma around it. The article received a lot of attention and more than 1.3 million

views. Julia realised she could use her voice for advocacy and decided to switch her studies to journalism.

### Opportunities abound

"Choosing to study at RMIT is honestly one of the best things I ever did," Julia says. "I was able to intern at Parliament House as a political writer, I went to Japan to do an investigative journalism internship

and next semester I'm off to the UK for an exchange.

"I would love to be an investigative journalist. I love watching programs like *Four Corners* and reading investigative pieces in the paper, I love that expressiveness you can get from digging deeper."

### Finding support to study

While at uni Julia was working multiple jobs to support herself: in retail, as a kinder assistant, and as a youth council member at the Commission for Children and Young People.

"I was studying, working, studying, working – and then not having much time to do my homework and assignments," she says. "It was really great to come across this scholarship. I had built up a lot of weight on my shoulders, thinking what am I going to do?"

Julia clearly remembers getting the good news. "I was on a hiking trip with very dodgy reception when I learnt I had been successful," she recalls.

Since receiving the scholarship Julia has been able to quit her retail job, saying, "I found my marks have definitely gone up!" ❖

"When you find something that's really fulfilling, something you're passionate about, it makes all the difference."

### BECAUSE OF YOU...

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Julia has support to pursue her education

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Isolated women are forming connections

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Modern slavery survivors are rebuilding their lives



# Stitch by stitch: Kobra finds her community



Sewing teacher Fezeh with Kobra (right).

Coordinator, looking after new student enrolments, keeping track of attendance, making sure participants have the equipment they need, and assisting with teaching and translation. She has been employed for two years and loves sewing more than ever. Most importantly, she now feels connected to her community. ❖

## Fashion that empowers

The Community Sewing Program presents an opportunity for participants to learn about The Social Outfit's various training and employment pathways.

"The majority of women who attend continue on with our other programs," says The Social Outfit Programs & Employment Transitions Manager Sonya Price-Kelly. "Industrial Sewing Training is next, then the Earn and Learn program which is paid training. They're taught to make a garment and trained in the various processes, they're paid for the time they're in production to get the quality to the level it needs to be."

"It's an opportunity to practise paid work experience. It's about being at the workroom on time, learning soft skills like team work, listening and following instructions. We're trying to instil those transferable employable skills."



**The Social Outfit's Community Sewing Program for newly arrived refugees and migrants is helping people combat loneliness, develop English skills, and take their first steps toward employment in Australia.**

Three years ago, Kobra was having a difficult time. "When my son started school I felt really lonely," she explains. "We recently moved to a new house, the condition wasn't good and I felt really depressed."

Kobra's GP spoke to her about finding a way to connect with other people. "When I found out about the sewing class and the teacher speaking Farsi I felt really comfortable to come and join," she says. "After that I find a purpose in my life, each Friday I drop my son to school then I come here."

### Stitching connections

The Social Outfit received a \$20,000 Community Grant to run its Community Sewing Program, which runs for consecutive 10-week terms in the western Sydney suburb of Granville.

"The first term we made a smock top," says Kobra. "The teacher taught us how to read the pattern, then how to measure our body and find the perfect size. We cut the

fabric, the teacher goes through step-by-step how to connect different parts of pattern fabric together. I was proud of myself because it was a really nice feeling after I finished and I wore it."

Kobra attended three terms of the Community Sewing Program, making a bag, skirt, pants and various other items. She then worked up the courage to travel to Marrickville to do the beginner's training program in industrial sewing.

**"I have a lot of friends. Before when I walk through the neighbourhood I didn't know anybody but now there are a lot of ladies saying hi to me."**

### A pathway to employment

Today Kobra works for The Social Outfit as a Community

# Your support is rebuilding lives after trafficking

**The recent arrest in a modern slavery case highlights the essential work of Community Grants recipient The Freedom Hub.**

"A woman was charged trafficking 15 young people into Australia under the guise of a scholarship. But instead they ended up unpaid, working on farms, living in squalor in shipping containers right here in our country," says The Freedom Hub Founder and CEO Sally Irwin.

"Nine of those 15 people have been in our Survivor School, and what used to be really helpful and hopeful conversations about freedom are now filled with fear about visas and lost family, lost dreams. These young people came here believing that they were doing the right thing, but they trusted the wrong people."

### Rebuilding a life

The Freedom Hub's Survivor School is a place of hope and transformation for people who have endured modern slavery and human trafficking. As Australia's only long-term, wrap-around care program of its kind, it gives survivors the support they need to heal from trauma, regain independence, and step into meaningful employment.

When people first join the program they are encouraged to talk about their hopes and dreams, which inform a success plan – essentially life goals broken down into measurable actions.

"We try to have two or three people in a class because it's nice for peer support," says Sally. "They become very good friends, in fact often they end up moving in together which is lovely. We try and build a community, we encourage them to come as often as possible."



**"Our goal is to make sure every survivor feels uniquely cared for in our country."**

There are an estimated 41,000 people living in modern slavery in Australia.

### Working toward a brighter future

The Freedom Hub has helped around 200 survivors since opening 10 years ago.

"We focus on their future, not their past, because everybody else focuses on their past – caseworkers, doctors, Australian Federal Police (AFP), lawyers," explains Sally. "We've deliberately built The Freedom Hub to be about their future and for them

to be able to work towards what their dreams and goals are, why they came to our country."

The unique difference of the program is that survivors are always welcome to come back for support, no matter how long it has been. "People have come back after years, wanting to improve their circumstances – they want a better job, more training, to study at TAFE, to be a nurse," explains Sally. ❖

## Deception and exploitation

In June 2025, 56-year-old Binta Abubakar was charged with more than 30 offences, including human trafficking, deceptive recruitment and debt bondage, after allegedly luring people from Papua New Guinea to Australia under false promises of scholarships.

According to the AFP, 15 people aged between 19 and their mid-30s were brought to Australia with the expectation of educational opportunities. Instead, they were forced to work on farms in south-east Queensland while living in harsh conditions.

Police allege the woman withheld their wages, claiming they were repaying debts for visas, airfares and tuition, and made threats to both the survivors and their families in PNG.





# A word from Louise



L to R: Louise Burton, Elijah Buol, Board Member Mary Reemst, Frances Rush OAM, MP Jenny Leong, Sister Suzette Clark rsc, ASC Head of Services & Engagement Kylie Mackie.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to say thank you and goodbye to outgoing Asylum Seekers Centre CEO Frances Rush, who has done so much for people seeking asylum over the past 30 years.

Frances left us with these powerful words: "For every tragedy of public policy failure, there is inspiration from the resilience of people seeking asylum and the compassion of those

supporting them... I am constantly astounded by the strength, determination, grace, and kindness of people who have experienced unimaginable horrors."

The Foundation has partnered with the ASC since 2014 to support people seeking asylum with accommodation and casework support. The organisation is in good hands with new CEO Elijah Buol, who has built an incredible career supporting and advocating for people seeking asylum, refugees, and multicultural communities. Elijah said:



New Asylum Seekers Centre CEO  
Elijah Buol OAM.

"With your support, we provide critical services such as healthcare and crisis support, open doors to employment and education so people can start to rebuild, create a community where people feel a sense of belonging, and advocate for systemic change."

We are looking forward to working closely with Elijah and his team to achieve these goals. ❖

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 us on (02) 9367 1211 or [info@sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au](mailto:info@sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au).

