

# UNDERCOVER NEWS

AUTUMN 2020



# CEO MESSAGE

As we near the end of financial year, it is an ideal time to reflect on what your support has enabled us to achieve as an organisation. So far this financial year you have helped us build 86 studios, providing a secure and stable home for an additional 132 at-risk young people.

You have also helped to fund over 400 scholarships, keeping young people connected to education and a brighter future. However while there are still young people in our community at-risk of homelessness, there is still much work for us to do.

I am proud of our involvement in the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. Kids Under Cover prepared a written submission to the inquiry. In February I also presented at the inquiry, alongside Kids Under Cover Board Member Sarah Davies AM and Brittnie, a previous Kids Under Cover studio recipient.

“Once we respond to the unique challenges of youth homelessness and increase funding for prevention, we can take steps towards ending youth homelessness for good.”

I wanted to update you on a significant project that is underway for our organisation, interstate expansion. Last year we undertook a feasibility study for interstate expansion, funded by JB Hi-Fi's Helping Hands workplace giving program. Excitingly, this validated our programs as a relevant solution to prevent youth homelessness across Australia.

Further investigation identified South Australia as the most strategic location to pilot interstate expansion. The pre-pilot phase of the expansion is currently underway, with two studios to be built in South Australia by June 2020. We are excited for the opportunity to deliver our life-changing programs to even more young people.



SARAH DAVIES AM, BRITTNIE AND JO SWIFT AFTER PRESENTING AT THE INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN VICTORIA.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Undercover News and learning about the impact you have in the lives of young people and their families. Thank you for your ongoing support of Kids Under Cover and our vision of a community where no young person experiences homelessness.

**Jo Swift**  
Chief Executive Officer

# SPACE TO GROW

Space is something many of us take for granted. But for Marj and her two girls, space was what they desperately needed. Marj is the full-time carer to her 13-year-old granddaughter Lucy, and an eight-year-old foster child.

The girls have none to infrequent contact with their birth parents and live with effects of childhood trauma. Life in their small two-bedroom home was hard. As the girls grew older, arguments became more frequent. Sharing a bedroom meant they didn't have the privacy and space to be themselves.

Marj knew the risks the overcrowding posed for her family. "Houses are small out here in the valley and you often see on Facebook that kids have left home because of overcrowding."

Late last year, the family received a one-bedroom studio for Lucy, and it's already made a big difference.

"Lucy's interactions with the younger one are much better because they aren't under each other's feet anymore," explains Marj.

“*Things at home are much better since we received the studio.*”

"As a teenager now at secondary school she needed her own space. Lucy now has somewhere she can go off to do her dance practice, listen to her music and do her homework in peace. She has space to go when she's in a cranky mood to calm down."

"Lucy now knows that she has a home here until she's 25. It's just fantastic."

The life changing gift of a studio is only possible thanks to the incredible support of our generous donors and partners. We are so grateful to our Corporate Partner Harris HMC who funded and built this studio.



MARJ AND LUCY WITH THEIR STUDIO.



# JESSE'S WORLD

We recently sat down with studio and scholarship recipient Jesse to talk all things space, study and surgical dreams, thanks to his Ken & Lenka Morgan Scholarship.

JESSE AND HIS SISTER CHANTANY GARDENING IN FRONT OF HIS STUDIO.

## **What was life like before the Kids Under Cover studio?**

In a single word – chaotic. I was halfway through year 12 and still sharing a room with my brother. With seven other people in the house, peaceful study was almost impossible. I lacked my own space and had to share a bathroom with five other kids. Distraction was everywhere and silence was rare. I was determined to focus and work hard in my studies, but it was a challenge, and looking back I question how I did it.

## **... and now?**

Receiving a Kids Under Cover studio has been amazing. I remember coming home from school and running out the back to see what progress

the builders made that day. When the studio was ready there was lots of excitement in our household – for I wasn't the only one getting a new room. Now the family was free to spread out a little bit, enjoy their own space, and get out of each other's hair.

## **What did the Kids Under Cover scholarships mean to you?**

Being a foster child, living rurally and trying to study in the city, scholarships have always helped me with some of the struggles in my life. Scholarships supported me to better access education and the world. I have been incredibly lucky to have Kids Under Cover believe in my potential, and invest in my future.

### **What do you think life would have been like without Kids Under Cover?**

Ahh... I'd probably be still in my shared bedroom, trying to get my brother to be quiet so I can focus on the textbook in front of me. I doubt I would have the energy and vigour that I have for things nowadays. Having a studio has allowed me to delve further into study and practice living independently.

### **How did you feel when you found out you were receiving the 2020 Ken & Lenka Morgan Scholarship?**

I was incredibly excited. I was with dad at the time and couldn't wait to get home to tell mum. They were both over the moon, and excited to see what I would use the scholarship for.

### **How did you use the scholarship?**

I have dreams of becoming a surgeon. With the funds I was able to take part in an intensive medical program in a Czech hospital. I spent a week working alongside doctors, nurses, surgeons,

and anaesthetists in the cardiovascular unit. I also got to shadow lead surgeons during cardiovascular procedures. It was an amazing experience, and ultimately helped to cement my dreams of working in a surgical field in the future.

### **Anything else you would like to add?**

To the Kids Under Cover donors who made my studio and scholarships possible: thank you, a thousand times over. I cannot begin to describe the impact that your support has had on my life, and that of my family.

Your support helps drive me to be the best person that I can, and to help my siblings follow their dreams and realise their potentials. I hope you know that your support goes well beyond just my life. For all the support you have so kindly given me, I am able to grow and help other people throughout my entire life. Thank you for giving so generously, and for believing in the next generation.



JESSE ASSISTING A SURGEON DURING THE INTENSIVE MEDICAL PROGRAM THANKS TO HIS KEN AND LENKA MORGAN SCHOLARSHIP.

# BUILDING STUDIOS, CHANGING LIVES

Making a life changing difference in the lives of young people and their families is what drives our work at Kids Under Cover. Preventing young people from experiencing homelessness is the cornerstone of our work. But the impact of our programs is more far reaching than this. Thanks to your support, we are able to keep families together, improve engagement with education and increase happiness. And this is just the beginning.

Our annual program evaluations explore the impact of Kids Under Cover's Studio and Scholarship Programs. Interviews are conducted with carers who have a studio in their backyard. Some of the results from our 2019 survey are shared below.

## HAPPINESS LEVEL

INCIDENCE OF YOUNG PERSON BEING  
USUALLY/ALWAYS HAPPY INCREASED  
FROM 18% TO 94%



“ She is less anxious, more outgoing. More willing to do things for herself. She has just got a better outlook on life, she feels like she belongs somewhere. Got something of her own. ”

## FAMILY CONNECTION

INCIDENCE OF  
FAMILIES GETTING  
ON QUITE OR  
VERY WELL HAS  
INCREASED  
FROM 41%  
TO 97%



“ She is far more settled, has her own space, she feels safe. It's a sense of security and a real inner peace. ”

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LEVEL

from  
48%

85%

MEETING THE REQUIRED LEVEL  
OF ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL HAS  
INCREASED FROM 48% TO 85%

“ It's given him his independence, and an outlet where he doesn't have to leave the home. He stayed at school, which is amazing, and this really helped. ”

# SHAYLEY'S BRIGHT FUTURE

For young people at risk of homelessness, a lack of space, privacy and resources are all extra hurdles on the road to success. This is exactly what Jade's daughter Shayley was experiencing before she received a Kids Under Cover studio and scholarship.

"Shayley wants to have a good future. She wants to study and do well. To have our overcrowded living situation hinder that, would be such a huge shame," explains Jade.

"Before the studio it was really difficult. The house was overcrowded, and we were on top of each other. My middle son has behavioural issues. He and Shayley used to clash all the time. There has been none of that since the studio."

With big goals, 17-year-old Shayley had to work hard to access the resources she needed. "Before receiving the scholarship, she had to buy her own school supplies with the money she saved from working part time. Now she knows the money is there to help her get to where she wants to be in life," Jade tells us.

The studio and scholarship have opened doors for Shayley to explore her passions and it's safe to say she's thriving!

"Now she has her own space she's become so focused. Last year she finished in the top 10 of her grade, which I truly believe is because of the studio," Jade recalls.

*“Getting the studio and scholarships has been the biggest blessing for Shayley.”*

"She is determined to go to university and have a good career. Knowing she can stay in the studio at university means she believes she can get where she wants to be."

Jade says Kids Under Cover's impact doesn't stop with Shayley. "The studio has had a ripple effect on the whole family. Now my other son can have his own room and I don't have to share the bed with a toddler anymore. It's made the home so much more pleasant and calm."

"We are so grateful for Kids Under Cover. It's such an amazing organisation."

# FROM STRESS TO STABILITY

Overcrowding within households is a leading cause of homelessness for young people. The risk of homelessness and family breakdown is heightened when overcrowding is combined with other factors, such as medical issues. This was the reality for Ellen and her family.

When we caught up with carer Ellen, she told us “Before the studio, our home was just chaos. One of our sons, Tishaun, has type 1 diabetes and requires a lot of medical support which makes things a little more complicated.”

With the severe overcrowding of 11 family members in a three-bedroom home, there was no place for Tishaun to escape for privacy and recover from a hypoglycaemia event.

“With so many kids, it was hard to keep the special food and medical supplies aside for Tishaun. That becomes a problem in the event of a hypo when we need to get the fast-acting carbohydrates quickly.”

The studio has created more space for the entire household. Ellen shared that the extra bathroom in particular has made a big difference. “Can you imagine the logistics of 11 people getting ready in the morning? It was just chaos. Our main bathroom was out of action, so we were all using the ensuite.”

Even with the challenges facing this family, Ellen’s positivity shines through. “We are just so very grateful. The impact that the studio has had goes far beyond what we could have ever imagined. We have worked hard to provide stability for our kids to stay together as a family. We feel so blessed for what we have.”

“Now with the studio, there is space dedicated for Tishaun. Not just for sleep and study, but also for his medical supplies.”

