

UNDERCOVER NEWS

SPRING 2020



CEO MESSAGE

We have experienced a 50% increase in studio and scholarship applications as a result of COVID-19. For young people in unstable and overcrowded living conditions, this pandemic and stay at home restrictions has been devastating.

Young people do not choose homelessness. However, the additional pressures at home as a result of this crisis leaves many young people feeling like they do not have any choice but to leave.

Vulnerable young people have been unable to physically attend school during this crisis, making it difficult to stay connected to their education. It has been heartening to hear how our education scholarships have relieved the financial burden for families and supported at-risk young people to stay engaged in their education.

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The past few months have been incredibly challenging for all Australians, particularly those most vulnerable in our community. I am proud to lead an organisation with an incredible team who are so focused on preventing youth homelessness. I want to thank the Kids Under Cover Board for their unwavering support and leadership. I also want to take this opportunity to recognise the tremendous efforts of the Kids Under Cover team. They have been working incredibly hard to continue delivering our life-changing programs to as many young people as possible.

And to our supporters, you are the reason we are able to deliver our Studio and Scholarship Programs and I am eternally grateful for your support. Your generosity makes an enormous difference in the lives of at-risk young people and vulnerable families.

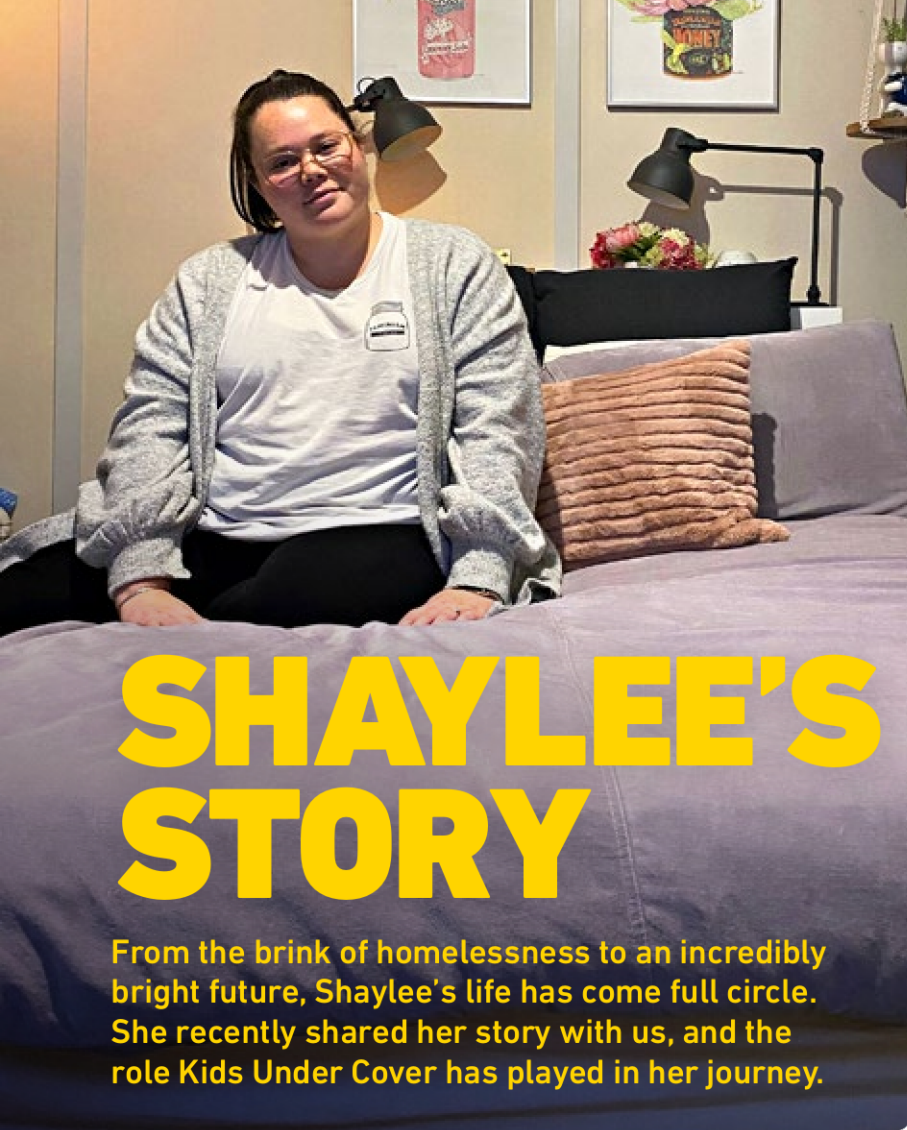


JO SWIFT

On a final note, this year's Kids Under Cover Annual General Meeting will be held on **Thursday 26th November 2020**. I extend a warm invitation for you to join us, please email kuc@kuc.org.au if you wish to attend.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Undercover News. Thank you again 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



FRONT COVER: SHAYLEE OUT THE FRONT OF HER STUDIO; LEFT: SHAYLEE NOW WITH ROOM TO GROW.

“Having the studio really grew my independence and gave me a direction in my life. I didn’t have to couch surf and I had space to get to where I wanted to be.”

I was about to drop out of school. The extra pressures of education on top of the stress at home created an environment I couldn’t study in.

A Kids Under Cover studio was recommended to us, and we got it in 2012 when I was starting my final year of high school. I was finally able to get the quiet space I needed to study, and I got a higher score in VCE than I thought I would.

The studio meant all the negatives in my life have been flipped to positives.

Having the studio really grew my independence and gave me a direction in my life. I didn’t have to couch surf and I had space to get to where I wanted to be.

SHAYLEE'S STORY

From the brink of homelessness to an incredibly bright future, Shaylee’s life has come full circle. She recently shared her story with us, and the role Kids Under Cover has played in her journey.

In 2011 I was 17 and my 13-year-old cousin moved in with us. Her previous living situation wasn’t suitable anymore and we wanted her to be with family. We had less than one-weeks’ notice that she was coming and had to scramble to make room for her. When she moved in, I was the one to share a bedroom with her.

The lack of room created a lot of tension and no one had personal space. It was really impacting relationships in our family.

I considered moving out because it was such a high stress environment, it just wasn’t liveable anymore. I had extended time away from home and I was staying with friends to get away. Looking back on it now, I was on the brink of homelessness.

I am now doing my Diploma of Community Services and I want to give the opportunity I had to others. I want to empower girls to know that even if your life has gone a certain way, you can improve it.

The studio meant our family dynamic became stronger because we weren’t living on top of each other. We had our own space to flourish.

It’s amazing how the small addition of the space can have such a huge difference.

To the people who made my studio possible, I want to say thank you. You have empowered me and given me the opportunity to change my life for the better. It means so much that donors believe in giving someone a better life.

CHANGING LIVES

Thanks to your generosity, when a young person receives a Kids Under Cover studio, the entire family benefits. Caitlyn shares the life-changing difference she experienced when her brother moved into the studio.

Caitlyn's family were elated when foster child Nina joined them permanently. But there wasn't a lot of space. With a family of 6 in a small house, tensions were high.

Nina and Caitlin were sharing a tiny bedroom with bunk beds. The teenage years pose enough challenges as it is, and these are only exacerbated by overcrowding.

"It was a nightmare. When you're a teenager, everything is changing, and you need privacy. We had no space to study and no privacy. There was a lot of fighting," Caitlyn tells us.

Thanks to support of donors like you, Caitlyn's family received a Kids Under Cover studio. Her older brother moved into the studio, making a huge difference for the whole family.

“Once we got the studio, the whole dynamic became calmer... It gave us privacy, a space to study and flourish into adulthood really smoothly.”

"Once we got the studio, the whole dynamic became calmer. My brother was going on 18 and it gave him so much independence. It meant Nina and I got our own rooms. It gave us privacy, a space to study and flourish into adulthood really smoothly," Caitlyn explains.



CAITLYN ON THE STEPS OF THE STUDIO.

Caitlyn and her three siblings also received Kids Under Cover scholarships to help ease the burden of education costs.

"The scholarships have been the best. We were all able to get laptops. There's no way we would have afforded that without the scholarships, which would have really impacted my education."

There's no stopping Caitlyn. She's now studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts at The University of Melbourne.

"Without the studio and scholarships, everything would have been so much harder. To the kind people that support Kids Under Cover, the love you have for total strangers is immeasurable. I am eternally grateful for the vast kindness of you all."

A DONATION OF A DIFFERENT KIND

Kirsten recently donated her Honda Jazz to Kids Under Cover's Donate Your Car Program to help prevent youth homelessness.

Many of us can relate to Kirsten's memories of her trusty "workhorse", be it road trips and holidays, endless work commutes or squeezing in IKEA flatpacks.

Whilst the car leaves a great legacy for Kirsten, it's true potential was in the opportunity to make a difference to the lives of others.

"I thought it was a really good thing to be able to help the young people who benefit from Kids Under Cover, especially when there is an increased need due to the difficulties COVID-19 has brought for families."

"Preventing youth homelessness is important because everyone deserves the basic rights of having stability in their life and a place to call home. When young people have a place to call home it lets them focus on other areas of their life and plan for their future," Kirsten explains.

Kirsten encourages more people to donate their vehicle to the program.

"It was such an easy process. If you're considering it, do it! You feel really good and are helping people out in the community", says Kirsten.

Looking to get rid of a used car? Donate it to Donate Your Car! We will organise the collection and sell it at auction. All proceeds go to Kids Under Cover.

It's easy, hassle free and 100% tax deductible!

Find out more at donateyourcar.org.au

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KIRSTEN DONATED HER HONDA JAZZ TO THE DONATE YOUR CAR PROGRAM.

ENOUGH SPACE TO STAY

Mandy's love for her children and grandchildren knows no bounds. She recently took on the full-time care of her three grandchildren, joining her and three of her children in a small social housing home.



MANDY TOOK ON THE CARE OF HER GRANDCHILDREN.

It wasn't an easy transition to accommodate seven people in a four bedroom home. But Mandy welcomed her grandchildren with open arms as their mother was not able to care for them. The home became severely overcrowded. Mandy's son and daughter slept in the living room to provide space for the grandchildren. Mandy shared her room with her youngest grandchild.

There was a lot of friction and tension — the family couldn't enjoy simple things like a meal at the table or their own privacy. This weighed heavily on the older children, who were at breaking point.

"It got to the point where something had to give; someone had to move out. The thought of having to tell my own children to leave was horrible," Mandy recalls.

The situation was becoming unbearable, but the eldest children (aged 18-23) were in no financial position to

move out of the family home. They were going to have to leave with nowhere to go.

It was at this point that a two-bedroom Kids Under Cover studio was built. Mandy's sons moved into the studio, giving Mandy and her daughter their bedrooms back. Her three grandchildren were given their own space in the last two bedrooms.

"I can't even put into words how it has changed the situation for our family. I look back now and I don't even know how we survived without the studio."

"Without it, my children would have had to leave with nowhere to go or my grandchildren would have been placed in foster care," Mandy explains.

"I can't even put into words how it has changed the situation for our family. I look back now and I don't even know how we survived without the studio."

Mandy has a few words for our wonderful supporters: "Without you, a lot of these kids would be separated from their families. You make it possible to keep families together. You are all amazing."

*The models pictured are not connected to this story.

PEOPLE OF KIDS UNDER COVER

Ian is one of our wonderful Maintenance Technicians. He keeps the studios in top condition, ensuring our young people have a safe and secure place to call home.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Seeing the positive changes the programs make, not only in the young people's lives, but also the families' lives. It is also good hearing the tales of how much the studio has made their lives better and how much pressure it has relieved for the families.

What is a day in your life like?

Well, there's a lot of driving all over Victoria and plenty of dogs to pat! It's all about making sure everything works in the studios and repairing anything that needs it. Every day is different, and it is heartwarming to see studio recipients take so much pride in their space.

Do you have any favourite memories from your time as a Maintenance Technician?

I remember last year in country Victoria one occupant left a little letter for me. It said "Hello, here are some problems which need fixing. Thank you for taking the time out of your day to fix some kids studio." She had drawn a person with a toolbelt and her saying 'thank you' to them, it was so sweet.



IAN OUT ON THE ROAD VISITING STUDIOS.

“I’m just so happy to be part of such an amazing organisation that makes such a huge difference to so many lives.”

What impact do you see Kids Under Cover's programs having?

It keeps families together but also gives them enough space to have privacy and still be themselves. The programs provide families the chance to take more control of their life and the opportunity to grow and better themselves. Without the studio they could be couch surfing, rough sleeping or trying to escape their home environment.

Anything else you would like to add?

To the supporters who give to Kids Under Cover, I see the impact of your generosity every day. Investing in this organisation is investing in a better future for young people that otherwise wouldn't have the chance. I'm just so happy to be part of such an amazing organisation that makes such a huge difference to so many lives.

ROLLERCOASTER JOURNEY

The road leading to a Kids Under Cover studio is always unique and often tumultuous. This was certainly the case for single mother of three, Maria.

Maria's son Christopher has autism, a severe speech impediment and an intellectual disability. In 2017 he was tragically diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Christopher's health needs became priority and Maria was no longer able to work. This took its toll financially and the family had to downsize to a small three-bedroom rental property.

The overcrowding and Christopher's behaviour made the whole family constantly anxious.

"During his cancer treatment, Christopher became increasingly aggressive. It was usually directed at me and I had nowhere to escape in our overcrowded home," Maria tells us.

This led to the family applying for and receiving a Kids Under Cover studio through community service organisation healthAbility. Maria says the studio has changed the whole dynamics of the home. Christopher has his own space and the whole family feels like they can relax at home.

"Before we got the studio, when Christopher had an aggressive meltdown we would have to vacate the house. Now when he has a meltdown he can calm down in his room. On top of that, he has learnt to be much more independent," Maria explains.

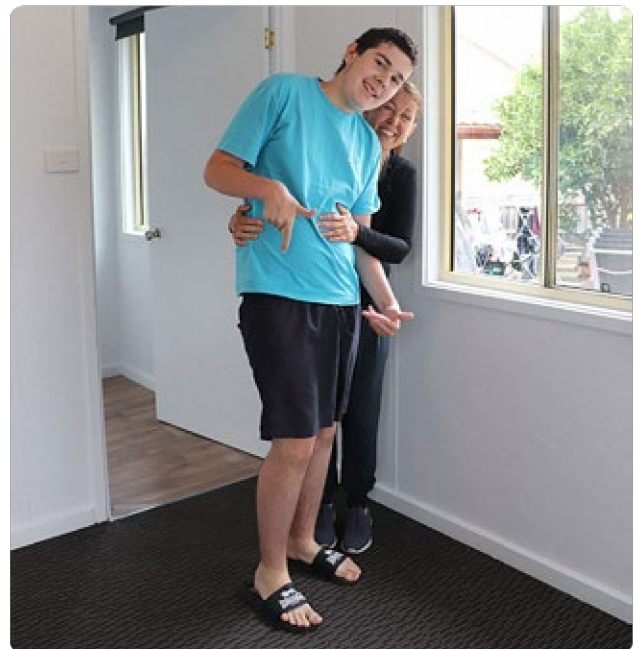
"Having the studio has been refreshing and less stressful. We don't have to be walking on eggshells anymore. It has been life-changing for us and I am so grateful. Christopher is doing so well, and he is now in remission."

Reflecting on what life would have looked like if they didn't receive the studio, Maria believes she would

have had to place Christopher in full time care, breaking up their family.

"To everyone who helped to make our studio a reality, thank you for your generosity. It is such a great cause," says Maria.

“Having the studio has been refreshing and less stressful.”



MARIA AND CHRISTOPHER IN HIS NEW STUDIO.