

UNDERCOVER NEWS

SPRING 2021



CEO MESSAGE

After almost 19 wonderful years at Kids Under Cover I am stepping down as CEO in December 2021. I am incredibly proud of how together we have grown the organisation's impact over the years. There are now over 630 Kids Under Cover studios across Victoria, providing more than 930 young people and their families with stability, security and a brighter future.

I am also humbled by the support of our wonderful community; our work is only possible thanks to your ongoing generosity and kindness. I look forward to following the future successes of Kids Under Cover and its work in preventing youth homelessness.

Last year was a difficult year for everyone, as we were adjusting to a new way of life in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through all this, thanks to your support we were able to continue providing our life changing programs to vulnerable young people and their families. I can't thank you enough for this. Last financial year, you helped us provide 66 studios, preventing an additional 102 young people from falling into the spiral of homelessness. You also helped to fund over 250 scholarships, keeping young people connected to their education and futures.

In August 2021 the Victorian Government announced new funding for Kids Under Cover to provide 45 studios specifically for young people in contact with youth justice, to support their rehabilitation. Combined with additional funding announced last year, Kids Under Cover will be providing a total of 95 studios for young people leaving youth justice. We are pleased to be working in partnership with the Department of Justice & Community Safety on addressing this critical housing need.

Sadly this funding doesn't enable us to meet the current demand we have experienced over the past



JO SWIFT.

18 months. Based on recent figures, there are now more than 900 young people and their families in urgent need of our support. We are committed to supporting as many young people and families as possible, and I thank you for the important part that you play in this.

On a final note, this year's Kids Under Cover Annual General Meeting will be held via zoom on Tuesday 23rd November 2021. 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
CEO

A SUCCESSFUL PILOT

Lidia and her family have received our first Kids Under Cover studio in South Australia, as part of our interstate expansion pilot. She shares her family's story and what the studio means to them.

"In our home are my four biological children, and two foster siblings. The foster children have been in my care for 11 years, it is a long-term placement. The youngest has just turned 18 and the oldest is 26 years old," describes Lidia.

For Lidia, it was not just the overcrowding in her home that put her children at risk of homelessness - it was the combination of overcrowding with challenging behaviours of her foster children.

Lidia and her family are Burundian and have been in Australia for almost 15 years.

"Where I am from, we used to live with many people in one home. There were 12 children in my family, so with my parents there were 14 people in one house. So the crowding in our home here was not stressful for me as I was used to it."

"But my foster children had some challenging behaviours that were difficult for everyone to manage without the children having their own space. It was especially hard for my biological children. Three of the boys were sharing one room. This caused a lot of fighting - they all needed somewhere to go in the home and space to be able to change their behaviours."

Last month a two-bedroom Kids Under Cover studio was built in the backyard of Lidia's home. This was the first Kids Under Cover pilot studio to be built in South Australia.

Lidia's son and foster son have moved into the studio.



LIDIA WITH ONE OF HER FOSTER CHILDREN FIDEL OUT THE FRONT OF THEIR NEW KIDS UNDER COVER STUDIO. FRONT COVER: LIDIA AND FIDEL RECEIVING THE STUDIO KEYS FROM BUILDER JAMES.

"They are almost the same age and they get on really well, they love each other," Lidia described.

"The studio means that each of my children now have their own room. This will give them an opportunity to take responsibility for themselves and the opportunity to build independent living skills. The studio will benefit my children a lot!"

Lidia's studio is one of two pilot studios built in South Australia. These pilot studios are funded by JB Hi-Fi's workplace giving program, Helping Hands, and we are truly grateful for their incredible support.

We are so excited to commence our expansion into South Australia over the coming months, made possible thanks to the funding through the Marshall Liberal Government's Homelessness Prevention Fund. With the support of the South Australian Government and generous philanthropic donors, we will build 51 studios in South Australia over three years, preventing 78 young people from experiencing homelessness.

A NEW PLACE TO CALL HOME

New research undertaken by Dr Paul Stolz of Swinburne University of Technology has investigated the long-term impact of Kids Under Cover's Studio Program on young people and their families.

'A New Place to Call Home' – Kids Under Cover Long-Term Studio Impact Report, sought to clarify whether the long-term impact of the studio on social and educational development, future aspiration, physical and mental health and employment possibilities align with the claimed benefits.

Dr Stolz conducted interviews with 35 young people and their families who have received a Kids Under Cover studio. He found that for many young Australians "homelessness did not necessarily mean rooflessness".

“Overcrowding can seriously damage a young person's sense of belonging, stability, identity, and sense of 'being at home'.”

"Overcrowding is one of those factors that can be experienced within a home, which can seriously damage a young person's sense of belonging, stability, identity, and sense of 'being at home' shared Dr Stolz.

"Overcrowding may turn 'homes' into 'houses', and can invite in other alienating factors, such as family violence, which for many young people is the major reason for leaving home prematurely."

"Fortunately, there is a way out for these young people. Many of the risk factors associated with youth homelessness can be addressed by early intervention strategies which reinstate the foundations of home,

such as security, privacy, safety, and social and emotional development," he said.

"The research confirmed that the Kids Under Cover Studio Program reverses these destructive forces by providing a clear re-establishment of the physical and symbolic elements of home. A young person's progress over the longer-term for educational re-engagement, identity development, sense of belonging and attachment, job aspirations, and independence are linked to secure accommodation."

Dr Stolz said that an unexpected finding from the research was that young people with significant mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety, experienced dramatic improvement from studio provision. "In every instance, where mental health issues were identified, either as anecdotally from the family or from professionals, the recovery was tangible," he said.

Key findings of the research can be found on the opposite page.

Most significantly, this research confirms the effectiveness of Kids Under Cover's Studio Program in preventing youth homelessness.

At a time where around a quarter of Australia's growing homeless population are aged between 12 and 24 years, this report also highlights the importance of early intervention and prevention in addressing the youth homelessness crisis in Australia.

You can read the full report at kuc.org.au/research

KEY FINDINGS ON THE IMPACT OF KIDS UNDER COVER'S STUDIO PROGRAM INCLUDED:

IMPACT ON FAMILY RELATIONS



More stable family relations increased the sense of belonging and of being at home and increased the desire to remain at home.

IMPACT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



Overcrowding can negatively impact both physical and mental health. Young people with mental health issues, particularly depression, can experience dramatic improvement from studio provision.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS



The impact of the provision of a studio on a young person's employment aspiration and opportunity is significant. The additional space of the studio can provide the foundational elements of home that allow development and aspiration to flourish for young people.

IMPACT ON SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Study participants consistently remarked on the studio providing a renewed sense of home leading to greater social and educational development, with the space of the studio providing for privacy and a quiet place to aid study and educational achievement.

“ I want to make a fresh start and go back to Year 12 and focus on what I want to do. The studio has helped me in this aim. I want to make something of myself. ”

– STUDIO RECIPIENT

“ The studio gave me independence, privacy, a place to study. The success I had helped me to become more independent. It has helped me in succeeding in my current career. ”

– STUDIO RECIPIENT

“ The girls did not see the house as a home. It was just chaos. The house was the bare essentials. You could not go anywhere in the house to get space. It was horrible. I did not want to be in the house and the kids probably felt the same. The studio turned the house back into a home. ”

– CARER OF STUDIO RECIPIENTS

PEOPLE OF KIDS UNDER COVER

Pete Zwiers is Kids Under Cover's Head of Programs. His focus is on implementing our Studio and Scholarships Programs and expanding our programs to support even more young people and their families.

What led you to work at Kids Under Cover?

Working in homelessness prevention appealed to me because youth homelessness shouldn't be a problem in Australia and it is disappointing that it is still a problem facing our young people. While it can be daunting at times, we can fix this as a society.

It is rare to work in an organisation that works truly in homelessness prevention. So many other organisations work in crisis accommodation and homelessness services, which is valuable work, but to be working in prevention is really powerful.

What do you love about your role?

Seeing the immediate impact that our programs have on families. Our work directly supports young people and has a long-term impact not only for them, but everyone in their family.

And what is the most challenging?

It's really hard that we don't have enough funding to build a studio for everyone young person and family that needs our help. It creates pressure and a sense of guilt that we can't help everyone - especially as we know how effective our programs are in preventing youth homelessness.



PETE SUPPORTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS MATTERS DAY.

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

There are immediate benefits that we see, like an increase in education engagement for the young person, reduction in time spent away from home and reduced family conflict.

The long-term benefits are that our programs help keep families together and avoid a gateway into homelessness for young people. The younger a person is when they first experience homelessness, the more likely they are to become chronically homeless, and we are stopping that from happening.

What makes Kids Under Cover different to other organisations?

We are the only ones that do what we do in Australia. The combination of studios and scholarships that we offer is a very unique solution to prevent youth homelessness. It's amazing to be part of.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Working at Kids Under Cover has given me so much insight into an issue that I was previously very unaware of. The more I've been exposed to the youth homelessness crisis in Australia, the more motivated I am to help and make a change.

SPACE TO SHINE

When Sue and her partner Ian took on the care of Sue's five grandchildren, the overcrowding created a stressful environment that was tearing their family apart. Everything changed when they received a 2-bedroom Kids Under Cover studio. Sue shares her story below.



BRANDON RELAXING IN HIS STUDIO.

Having my five grandkids living with us was hectic. Ian and I were sleeping in one room, my daughter (the kids' aunt) was in the second bedroom and my baby granddaughter was in the third bedroom. For two years, the four boys were sleeping in the loungeroom on blow up mattresses. It was so hard to get them to sleep, and no one could use the living room to watch TV or relax. There was no privacy. It was a struggle - it was horrible.

When I first heard about Kids Under Cover, I didn't get my hopes up that they would be able to help. But when the team came around and started mapping out the studio in the backyard I was like 'wow this is actually happening!' The kids were so excited when it was being built and kept asking when they could move in!

My two eldest grandkids are now in the studio. It has had a huge impact for us. We've changed sleeping arrangements so all the kids have a room, there's no more sleeping in the loungeroom! There's heaps of privacy for everyone and the kids have room to study.

Brandon had been in the studio the longest. His schooling has picked up and his sleeping has improved. I can see changes in how he is in himself - he's back out there and loving life again. Before the studio he was becoming withdrawn from being stuck in a really stressful environment.

But look at him now. He's a smiling happy boy now. He's in year 11 now and I want him to do the best he can. The studio has been a godsend.

HIKE FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The heart of Australia is calling you to Hike for Youth Homelessness. Are you in? There are only five spots left!

On this incredible adventure, you will take on a physically demanding trek through the Australian Outback, raising vital funds to help Kids Under Cover prevent youth homelessness.

From 15–21 July 2022, you will discover the Red Centre, hiking the iconic Larapinta Trail. Across the traditional lands of the Arrernte people, you will explore sacred sites, including Ormiston Gorge, Euro Ridge and Standley Chasm.

One of the most popular treks in Australia, the Larapinta Trail is as sacred as it is remote. Known for its breathtaking landscapes and mountainous terrain, the trail's rocky outcrops form a striking backdrop to scenic paths that cut passages through awe-inspiring gorges and expansive plains.

As expert guides lead you over rugged mountain peaks and through awe-inspiring gorges, you'll forge life-long friendships with like-minded people – all

dedicated to making a difference to the lives of young people at risk of homelessness.

The funds you raise as part of the Hike for Youth Homelessness can help Kids Under Cover to build a two-bedroom studio for two young people at risk of homelessness. With your support, we can strengthen their connection to family, community and education, and make a lasting difference in their lives.

We hope you can join us on our Hike for Youth Homelessness and share once-in-a-lifetime memories with like-minded travellers while supporting vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness.

You'll walk away with treasured memories and the knowledge that you were part of something life-changing – for you and Australia's at-risk young people!

There are only five spots available, so find out more at kuc.org.au/H4YH



HIKE THE ICONIC LARAPINTA TRAIL WHILE RAISING FUNDS TO PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.