

UNDERCOVER NEWS

AUTUMN 2022



CEO MESSAGE



STEPHEN NASH.

In November 2021, Kids Under Cover welcomed Stephen Nash as its new CEO. Stephen has dedicated most of his professional life to campaigning against disadvantage and advocating for fairness and opportunity within our community. Let's meet him!

When I was very young, I witnessed a number of my friends suffer very traumatic experiences. Some were removed from their families and placed into what I later learnt to be the Out of Home Care system. I saw how their aspirations and opportunities faded and how, for some, life was on a fast track to prison. It affected me deeply. And fuelled a motivation to help young people at risk.

My work in the community sector started in 1989 when I was a student on placement being inspired by the Burdekin Inquiry into Youth Homelessness - at the same time Kids Under Cover was being formed. Over the years and across various roles I've seen first-hand the damage homelessness can cause and

have worked with many passionate people to help find solutions for society's most vulnerable. My work has always sought to find new ways to build hope for people whose needs are not being addressed.

I was attracted to Kids Under Cover because it is successfully focused exactly where more attention and support is needed – prevention and early intervention.

This focus saves lives and helps avoid the damaging impact of homelessness. The goal is simple – to provide opportunities for young people to allow them to flourish and realise their dreams and full potential.

“Preventing and ending youth homelessness is entirely possible.”

During my handover with former Kids Under Cover CEO, Jo Swift, I learned so much about her effective approaches. I hope to add to her legacy by bringing experience in developing and delivering a range of housing and support models to meet specific needs for those missing out and those most vulnerable.

Following the uncertainty associated with COVID lockdowns it is time for Kids Under Cover to clarify our goals and priorities for the next three years. I am very lucky to start here during the current strategic planning process and look forward to sharing our progress with you.

We have a number of exciting prospects on the horizon and have every confidence in our ability to continue giving many more young people the chances and choices they all deserve.

A handwritten signature of Stephen Nash in black ink.

Stephen Nash
CEO

IT SAVED OUR WHOLE FAMILY

When Lincoln showed us a TV news report he produced for a student YouTube channel we thought it might have been a clip from the Channel 9 news. It was a story about the impact of COVID and such was its polish we kept having to ask if it was really him!

At 15, Lincoln is the oldest of five children in his household. The family face multiple challenges including five family members contending with ADHD – all within a small 4-bedroom house in Greater Geelong.

Lincoln's mum, Kelly, was close to breaking point with so much going on under one roof. "There were really high levels of anxiety, anger and aggression in the home. There was a lot of yelling," she says.

“The studio has made everything much calmer. The kids are more settled. Everyone is more settled.”

The arrival of a Kids Under Cover studio in late 2020 in the backyard of their place gave Lincoln and his sister much needed relief from disruptions inside the family home. It also prevented the very real prospect of Lincoln leaving home without being properly prepared.

"I've put my stuff in there and made it look like the room I want," Lincoln explains. "Before the studio, we were all cramped inside so if we got angry or something we weren't able to vent. So now that we've got the unit, we're able to call a friend and talk to them without having mum or the other siblings listening in."

The extra space has also had a clearly positive impact on Lincoln and his siblings' connection with school – particularly over a long period of schooling from home. Lincoln has also started working for a local TV station.



LINCOLN AND HIS MUM KELLY OUTSIDE HIS STUDIO.

"Before the studio was built, life was hard," Kelly recalls. "The older kids couldn't do homework properly because the younger kids were always on top of them. Now Lincoln has this opportunity with the station and we're just so, so proud."

"The studio has made everything much calmer. The kids are more settled. Everyone is more settled. They can go out to their own space to gather their thoughts. They are happier and it has made a big difference to their wellbeing. It's saved this whole family."

THE BENEFITS YOUR SUPPORT BRINGS

Every year, the impact of Kids Under Cover's work for families is measured by independent researchers, DBM Consultants. These annual program evaluations help to demonstrate exactly how the lives of families and young people have been improved by the addition of a studio at home or by receiving an education scholarship.

Here's what a few of the 156 studio recipients interviewed had to say about the program:

“ He is a lot calmer, more confident and at peace with others. He gets along, mingles more and his socialising has improved. ”

“ It has given him independence, improved his mental health and given him more incentive to do well with school. He wants to go to Uni next year. ”

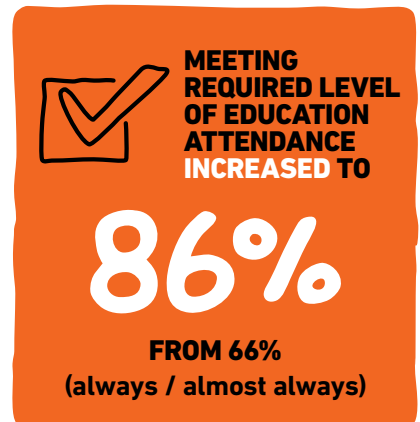
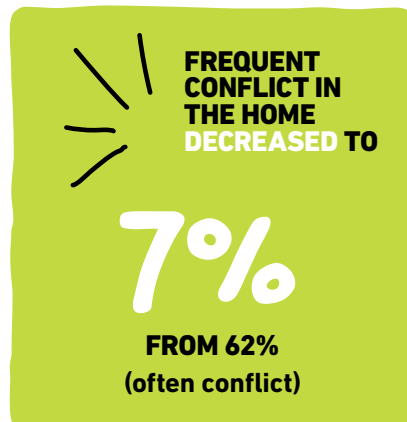
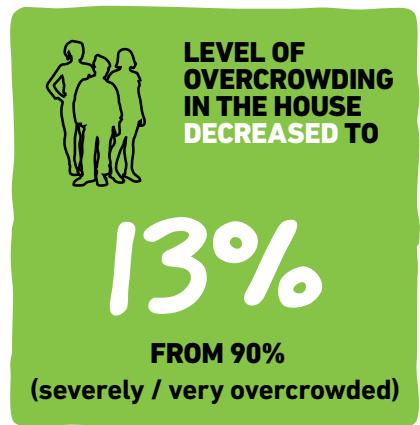
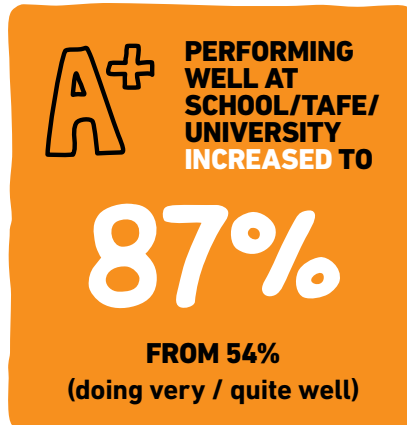
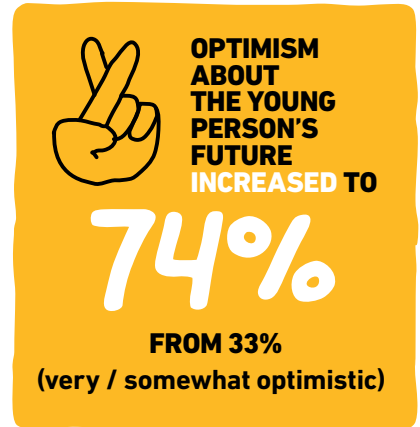
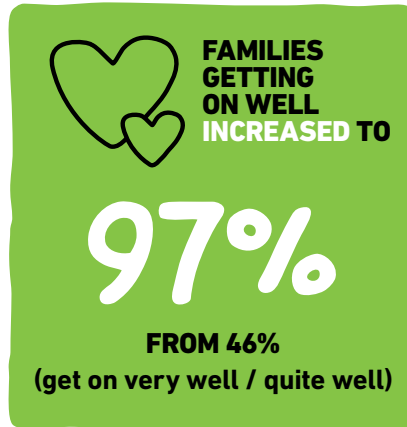
“ It's made a huge difference. Family bonds are stronger. His work life, his studies and his outlook on life has been a lot more positive. ”

“ It's enabling him to live his best life and have freedom. Keeping himself away is actually keeping him closer. Before, he wouldn't be here at all. ”

“ Very positive all round, the impact has been great, he's grown from a young boy to a young man in there. ”

“ It's provided more contentment in life. A more peaceful home and a general happiness! It's helped their motivation and direction. ”

The positive stories we hear confirm that the support you provide continues to make a life-changing difference for young people and their families. It's clear from the data that the relief a studio offers is significant and the extra space improves things for young people in a number of ways.



PEOPLE OF KIDS UNDER COVER

Derek Layfield is Managing Director of Ortech Industries and has enjoyed a productive relationship with Kids Under Cover for more than 25 years. Ortech produce the sustainable materials that our studios are made from and Derek understands the importance of providing stable, secure and comfortable homes for the young people who need them.

What drives you to have supported Kids Under Cover for such a long time?

We're all touched in some way by family issues. At some level, we've all experienced it. And Kids Under Cover is doing all the right things for all the right reasons and delivering really good outcomes. I strongly believe these studios offer a real way of improving family life and helping the kids. They've got their space and they feel valued. This is the thing. The kids aren't going into some sort of institution. They feel like they're valued because they're receiving a good quality building that feels secure. They know it's strong and it feels good. I think that's really important.

What makes your product the world's most sustainable building material?

Let's start with the raw materials. After a wheat harvest, you're left with the straw stubble in the paddock. This is usually burned releasing carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. It's a huge issue. Rather than burn the straw, we take it



DEREK LAYFIELD.

out of the paddock, pay the farmer then put the straw through our machine to produce the Durra Panel that goes into the studios. Every square meter of that studio is storing that carbon and locking it away rather than releasing it into the atmosphere. That's a massive plus for the environment.

On top of that, those studios can be repurposed time and time again. They go to a family in need and once they've fulfilled their purpose they can be relocated. And at the end of the useful life of the panel, it can be shredded and returned to earth safely to help grow more food.

What's it like to live in a studio made from Durra Panel?

Human beings like to connect with nature. It always feels good to walk through a forest. Or into a nice timber lined building. It's surrounded by nature. So to be surrounded by a straw panel...it feels good. I can't describe it. It feels strong, it feels comfortable. It feels like a really comfortable internal environment. That's why architects want to use natural materials.

Why do you think Kids Under Cover has stuck with this sustainable building material for so long?

It's part of what sets Kids Under Cover apart from a lot of other organisations. It's smart. It's a win win. They've made a choice to minimise the environmental impact with everything they're doing in their buildings. If you can use an otherwise wasted resource... I mean how nice is that? It's cradle to cradle. It comes out of the earth and gets returned to the earth. It's a beautiful thing.

WHERE THE HEART IS

“It felt very weird for me as Holly’s mum when she was living in homelessness accommodation. I felt as though I’d failed as a parent because, despite three out of my four children being comfortable at home, I had a child who was not able to live with us. And I couldn’t find her a more suitable home.”

Jacinta is a mother of four children aged between 8 and 24 years. They all live at home with Jacinta and her husband in a 1950’s cream brick bunker - 3 bedrooms, 1 bathroom and a study.

“There’s simply not enough room for a family of six in a 3-bedroom house among the chaos and clutter,” Jacinta explains. “Especially since five of us are autistic.”

Holly is the second eldest child. She battles with anxiety and trouble with sleep. Gradually through high school she’d spend less and less time at home. Firstly at her boyfriend’s house supporting him through illness until that relationship ended, then couch surfing and eventually in emergency accommodation.

“It was really distressing when Holly left her boyfriend’s home and couldn’t re-integrate here,” Jacinta says. “She tried sleeping on the couch, but our lounge room is too public, noisy, busy and bright. She tried sleeping in her old bed, but the same problems occurred – the lack of privacy, the crowding, the distraction was overwhelming and living here was not a viable option for her.”

In April last year, Kids Under Cover provided a studio in the backyard of the house. It changed everything.

“When Holly was sharing her small room in the house, she would come home and fight the urge to leave again right away. Now she can walk into her own space without having any stress over who is there, or what might be happening. It’s very liberating, and with the security of having her family mere metres away.”

Only recently, Holly couldn’t imagine what her future might hold. Now she’s considering a range of study



JACINTA'S DAUGHTER HOLLY, OUTSIDE THEIR NEW STUDIO.

and employment options while she builds a more stable network with her family, friends and community.

“The inability for a young person to be comfortable at home can become so stressful that it spirals into greater and greater anxiety,” Jacinta says. “Imagine

coming home to find that you can’t relax or even sit still and be comfortable no matter what you do.”

“**...enough space and separation to alleviate the stress and to give her the autonomy she needs.**”

“Being able to have an independent space adjacent to the family home lets them relax and re-set their emotional state. Now we know we’re all safe at our home on our street, among our neighbours. It’s as safe and secure as having Holly in the home, but with enough space and separation to alleviate the stress and to give her the autonomy she needs. For a young person like Holly, the studio makes a key difference that opens up options for her future. It’s a life-saver.”

MEETING JUNIOR

In a year when so much schooling was done at home during lockdowns, Junior can't imagine how he would have got through his VCE had he not had the quiet of his studio.

"If I had to do VCE inside the house I probably would have had to repeat year 12," he says. "My house is so noisy. And my siblings were all on their computers at school as well. I'd be trying to understand the principles of accounting while my sister is screaming for food, one brother's annoying another brother..."

Junior's family found refuge in Australia after having fled war in Africa when he was one year old. He arrived in Australia as a toddler with his parents and four older brothers. His three younger sisters were born here. Growing up, Junior remembers how things in the house could sometimes get frightening.

"It came to a point where things started getting violent," Junior recalls. "That was my early childhood. I'd go to school, be happy and then I wouldn't want to go home to chaos – arguing, fighting, sometimes getting physical. I didn't know much because I was only young. But I knew it felt wrong."

“When your organisation helps... It has a domino effect and reaches all the way through the whole family.”

When Kids Under Cover provided a studio for Junior and his brothers, it provided space in the household to help things settle down.

"Even though the studio is for me, the family benefits," Junior says. "The sister next to me, she has her own space, she has her own room where she gets to grow up like a girl. When your organisation helps one person it has like a domino effect and reaches all the way through the whole family."

Junior is also a grateful recipient of a Kids Under Cover education scholarship – helping provide the things



JUNIOR IS STUDYING BANKING AND FINANCE AT UNIVERSITY.

he needs for a successful start studying banking and finance at university. He says it gives a whole new meaning to what scholarship actually means.

"My understanding of a scholarship was that you had to be academically gifted. So when I received the scholarship based on what I've been through, it gave me hope, not only for myself but for others. This is a scholarship for having experienced a lot of hardship. That's when I realised what the word scholarship really meant. It's an opportunity to make the most of something."

Junior says Kids Under Cover's Scholarship and Studio Program has sparked the will to focus on what he knows is important to him and his family.

"The scholarship reminds me that I need to focus on school and Kids Under Cover have given me the opportunity to do that. I also need to focus on keeping my family healthy, and by providing the studio, it's kept my family healthy in terms of drama. The organisation is just the extended family that a lot of people need but don't know they need. I mean it's nice to find help but it's even nicer when help finds you."