

# UNDERCOVER NEWS

**SPRING 2023**

**KIDS  
UNDER  
COVER**





# CEO MESSAGE

To our supporters and partners, thank you for your continued connection to the work we do at Kids Under Cover. Without your continued engagement with our cause, we wouldn't be able to do what we do.

Thanks to a groundswell of support from people like you, we're now housing around 1000 young people every night, across around 650 Kids Under Cover studios. This is a huge achievement that we've been able to reach because of the donations, partnerships, and connections generously provided by our supporter community – but there is still more we need to do to give even more young people the chance to thrive.

As well as working at the individual level with each young person we encounter through our programs to give them the support they need, we're also working with other organisations in our sector to influence policies and strategies to help prevent the challenges and hardships that put young people at risk of becoming homeless.

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**Thanks to a groundswell of support from people like you, we're now housing around 1000 young people every night.**

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I recently attended the National Child and Youth Homelessness Conference, where leading experts from across the community sector unanimously called for a national strategy to tackle the current crisis of youth homelessness.

During the conference, Professor Brian Burdekin AO, Australia's inaugural Human Rights Commissioner, highlighted persistent underfunding in early intervention programs since the publication of his landmark 1989 report into youth homelessness.



Professor Burdekin is someone I have been particularly inspired by over the course of my own career, and I was energised by having the opportunity to listen to and speak with him about the need to continue imploring the government to develop a specific plan to address child and youth homelessness. Yes, there were some heavy conversations that reminded everyone in attendance of the huge amount of work still to be done. But I walked away from the event with great optimism and a feeling that there is real momentum building to create lasting change for our young people.

In this edition of *Undercover News*, you'll find inspiring stories made possible by your support – we are grateful for your help.

**Stephen Nash**  
CEO

# A PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

**Having a Kids Under Cover studio allowed Jesse to hit the books and escape the distractions of a crowded home.**

When Kids Under Cover last spoke with Jesse, the world was about to close in around him as the pandemic forced most of us into lockdown.

Jesse had just received Kids Under Cover's Ken & Lenka Morgan Scholarship and had used it to help fund a medical internship in Europe.

Jesse and his brother grew up with foster parents in a family of eight in regional Victoria. They shared a room in a hectic house until Jesse was 18. In 2017, a Kids Under Cover studio gave him the space and relief he needed to reconnect with himself and focus on his studies.



JESSE IS IN HIS THIRD YEAR STUDYING MEDICINE

"It was a huge change to be able to have that space to myself," Jesse reflects. "To be able to spend that time in that space the way I wanted. And not have to tailor my afternoon or my evening around what other people in the house were doing.

"If there was any possibility I was going to de-rail, having the studio helped minimise that. Being able to organise my time within that space and have kind of a safety net – it let me focus on my studies and it let me escape emotionally draining situations. It was important in that way."

During the lockdowns in 2020, tensions in the household rose to breaking point. Jesse's relationships with family members were tested and outside of his studio, the home environment grew hostile. Thankfully, Jesse had always been a diligent student and was able to escape into his text books. Having the studio not only allowed him a sanctuary to retreat to, it gave him a place to build a better connection with his younger foster siblings as well.

"I think one of the big things about the studio was that being away from the house allowed some time to share my space with family members and enrich that relationship, especially with my younger siblings."

By 2021, Jesse had earned another scholarship which enabled him to move out and pursue his studies. He's now close to completing his third year studying medicine. He's considering branching into orthopaedic surgery but hasn't yet made his mind up. Whichever path he decides to take, there's little doubt he's headed for success.

"It's not always been an easy path, but I've always been pretty focused on the life I want to create. I've reached a point now where that future is beginning to materialise, and it's really exciting."



# A UNITED CALL FOR ACTION



PROFESSOR BRIAN BURDEKIN AO (FAR LEFT) JOINS SOME OF THE SECTOR'S LEADING VOICES

**The 2023 National Child and Youth Homelessness Conference saw industry experts and thought leaders share valuable insights and engage in collaborative discussions with the common goal of ending youth homelessness.**

The theme for the 2023 National Child and Youth Homelessness Conference was 'It's Time' in reference to the long overdue need for a renewed commitment to a national plan to address youth homelessness.

The conference saw the convergence of an impressive list of leading voices from the sector including government ministers, academics, NGO executives and advocates with lived experience. Speakers covered issues from social housing and innovative support models to early intervention, overrepresentation and the role of government.

Australia's first Federal Human Rights Commissioner, Professor Brian Burdekin AO addressed the conference and referred to his groundbreaking 1989 report on the National Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, since which there has been little – if any – improvement.

"We've got a federal government and six state governments, for the first time in my memory, who are all relatively progressive on social justice issues," he said. "I suggest we engage with them constructively; I suggest we try to engage with every senator we can get our hand on about the fact that the senate can – for

the first time – pass legislation to give children the right to adequate housing... We all agree we need a specific plan to address child and youth homelessness, but we haven't had one for thirty years since the inquiry! So we need to think very carefully about how we present this message that we all clearly agree upon."

Professor Burdekin received an emotional standing ovation at the conclusion of the conference from sector leaders, acknowledging his decades of commitment and incredible legacy.

Lived experience mentor, Brea Dorsett described how the homelessness service system might be improved were it designed collaboratively with those who need to access it.

"We wait until it's too late. We don't intervene when a young person is at risk of homelessness. We wait until they are experiencing homelessness, until they are couch surfing, when they are sleeping rough and when they are unsafe. So, I think we need to start having these conversations earlier," said Brea.

According to CEO of Kids Under Cover Stephen Nash, a longer-term vision that identifies well-trodden pathways to homelessness and innovative methods of diversion is the only way to make significant inroads.



LIVED EXPERIENCE MENTOR, BREA DORSETT



ELVIS MARTIN, LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVOCATE, AND ADONGWOT MANYOUL, CONFERENCE MC

"On my way through the city this morning, seeing all those rough sleepers back out on the streets was just a shocking thing to contemplate. Knowing that half of them first became homeless when they were young. And we know that we can end rough sleeping and have proven that during Covid, but now the political imperative has shifted.

"I was thinking about the statistic that for a young person who has been in out-of-home care, it's 10 times more likely that their children will also live in out-of-home care. We talk about early intervention, but we need to talk more about prevention. So working with that young person to ensure the risk of homelessness happening is removed and they have a much brighter life.

"For me early intervention is really about just turning off the tap, stopping people flooding into out-of-home care wherever possible. Stopping people flowing into adult homelessness and a life of connection with high-cost emergency services and lost potential. That's what we should be doing, and we can do better. Kids Under Cover houses one thousand young people every night in Victoria. We're just one of many models and it's not suitable for every situation obviously, but that's a seriously great thing that's happening... The examples are there, we just need to develop a national strategy and the right resources to make sure we end this problem."



# THE WORLD AT HER FEET

**Christinaray is a young Warumungu and Arrernte woman making her mark in Victoria's contemporary First Nations art scene.**

She paints from the heart and as a way of sharing the challenges and experiences that have shaped the lives of herself and her community.

Late last year, Christinaray won an art competition run by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Her winning work of art will be transferred onto a carpet that will be laid in Kids Under Cover's new Village 21 supported accommodation site in Frankston.



CHRISTINARAY

Kids Under Cover have partnered with VACCA to develop the Village, backed by funding from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

The name of the Village is Moorumbina Mongurnallin which translates to 'You are loved' in the local

Bunurong language. Christinaray knows as well as anyone how important the meaning of the name is and how valuable the Village will be for the young First Nations residents and their development.

"I was homeless quite a few years ago," she explains. "And the first program I went to was a foyer – a place where they put a roof over your head for up to 2 years and help you work towards a goal. Having that safe place, that security that a lot of people don't have meant so much. The idea that there's a place like this new Village where young Indigenous people are going to have that support to build those skills so they can learn to help themselves, and can continue on from there, is really important."



CHRISTINARAY'S WINNING PAINTING

The winning painting was created with the Village in mind and for the young people who will live there. Christinaray says she wanted to convey a place where young people can imagine their journey, a place where they can begin to prepare for and forge a path ahead.

"It's why I did feet – black and white – representing the people that are going to be there. When they move on and the next people who come. And I did all the dots to represent the young men and women who will share the experience and all of the people it's going to take to support them. The connection to community and connection to ... everyone.

"A lot of my paintings have a lot to do with journey and struggle and finding a way out of the dark. And finding that strength in yourself. Finding connections around you. Sometimes I just have an overwhelming feeling and I've gotta paint and I'll just see what comes out."

# GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

**Liam has had a clear vision of his career path since he first started working at a family friend's automotive refinishing business as a youngster.**

"I loved it. So I decided to go to my local. And I've been here for two years now. I like to think that in the years to come, and with the knowledge I gain on the job, I could become a mentor for new apprentices that come through the shop."

Liam is one of two recipients of Kids Under Cover's 2023 Ken & Lenka Morgan Scholarship. Recipients are identified from our Studio Program as being exceptional young talent with a clear educational pathway which would benefit from the boost the scholarship can bring.

As part of his apprenticeship, Liam spends a week every month doing theory training about an hour away from home. The funds from his scholarship will help with fuel and accommodation for this part of his training, among other things.

"I can also now get my manual driver's licence," Liam says. "I haven't really had the chance to get it before considering I've had to buy tools and uniform and bits and pieces for work. I also plan to get a forklift licence and do a first aid course. That's what I'm going to use the money to do."

Liam's family received a Kids Under Cover studio in 2021 to help relieve the pressure of living in a crowded home.

"The studio gave my eldest sister a sense of independence while still being close enough to get the care she needs from our mum. It created a safe space for her to feel responsible as an adult and also gave us siblings a chance to grow without feeling crowded and cramped. I've noticed such a change in my sister – her confidence in herself and pride in herself and

space. It's a lot better now. We're a lot happier. And we all get along a bit better."

The Ken & Lenka Morgan Scholarship is named in honour of Kids Under Cover's late founder Ken Morgan and his wife, Lenka Morgan, who has been key to our organisation's success. It's part of our broader Scholarship Program which has delivered 350 scholarships to young people over the past year.

The program has shown that it offers various benefits to recipients beyond easing the burden of expenses. For someone like Liam, it can help broaden his skill base, giving him more opportunities to pursue his goals.

"I've sunk my teeth into this career from the beginning. And this will help me complete some of those things on the side that I haven't quite gotten around to. I was so grateful to be given the opportunity of this apprenticeship and when I found out I had received the scholarship it changed the start to my career for the better."



LIAM IN HIS ELEMENT



# WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS...

The delivery of studio accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness requires support from and collaboration with a range of government, corporate and philanthropic organisations. Having worked to build our support model for over thirty years, we're grateful to have earned the trust and support from a growing list of incredibly generous donors.

## BRIAN M. DAVIS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

In addition to our Studio and Scholarship Programs, we're actively developing innovative support models to prevent youth homelessness. These projects rely on generous contributions from charitable organisations and individuals.

We're deeply appreciative of the long-standing support from the Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation – their support is enabling the expansion of our Innovation Program over the next three years, focusing on the Village 21 model for young people leaving out-of-home care and a pilot program for short-term, mobile accommodation solutions for immediate support.

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**We're so lucky to have friends like the Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation to back our work and who believe in creating positive change for young people.**

Janet Cameron, Philanthropy Manager,  
Kids Under Cover

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## HOMES FOR HOMES



JASON SHAW, STEPHEN NASH & TRACY LONGO

Homes for Homes is a very dedicated group of clever people working to end homelessness through creative ways of raising finance for affordable housing projects. Established as a social enterprise by *The Big Issue*, Homes for Homes tackles Australia's housing crisis by donating a small percentage of a home's sale price to build homes for those in need.

Since starting, Homes for Homes has granted over \$1.8 million to 21 projects, providing housing solutions for over 350 people. This generous grant of \$100 thousand to Kids Under Cover will be used to co-fund the construction of two 2-bedroom studios to provide safe accommodation to young people in Casey.



## JB HI-FI HAVE DONE IT AGAIN

This May, our fabulous friends and partners at JB Hi-Fi stepped up yet again with a month-long 'undercover' campaign rolled out across stores throughout Victoria as part of their Helping Hands program. JB Hi-Fi's store staff went 'undercover' to help promote the push which raised over \$150 thousand.

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**The relationship we've built with JB Hi-Fi over a number of years has been crucial to us being able to achieve our vision to prevent youth homelessness. To see the JB Hi-Fi retail teams really get behind Kids Under Cover throughout this campaign was testament to their fantastic, supportive culture and their belief in what we are doing.**

Adam Walsh, Head of Fundraising,  
Kids Under Cover

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THE JB HI-FI TEAM GO UNDERCOVER TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN

It's these kinds of friends who are crucial to us achieving our vision of every young person having somewhere safe and stable to call home.



# EMBRACING CHANGE

**Lisa says encouraging her middle son Lynton to spend some time living in residential care was the most difficult thing she's ever had to do. And she's no stranger to difficulty.**

Lisa has shown remarkable resilience over her lifetime. A mother to three sons, she's overcome multiple challenges including experiencing the loss of her mobility after a car accident and having survived cancer.



LYNTON IS LOVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE HIS OWN SPACE.

Lisa's resilience has been more recently tested by tension and conflict unsettling her family home. All three of her boys have had their own challenges. Physical, emotional and mental health concerns have made it difficult for them to manage their own behaviours at times. But Lynton in particular has found it hard to navigate his feelings – often something small could overwhelm him and trigger an unsociable emotional response.

"He had no tolerance," Lisa explains. "He just couldn't express himself properly... So we were walking on eggshells. You just didn't know when it was going to erupt. But as soon as it erupted, you knew you just had to evacuate."

When the build-up of tension in Lisa's house and between her sons reached breaking point, Lisa says she had no choice but to admit it was all too much. She knew there needed to be some separation but at the same time wanted to be there to offer her son support.

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**I didn't want to turn him away, of course. I wanted him home. As much as we could have him here. But by the same token, he had to be able to regulate his emotions.**

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To create a more peaceful home environment, Lisa supported Lynton to spend some time in residential care where he could find some breathing room while the family worked to relieve stress and resolve conflict.

Lynton was eventually provided with a caravan in the backyard at home so he could have his own space and reunite with his mum and brothers. While initially



LISA, LYNTON AND SUPPORT WORKER KYLIE.

effective as a temporary accommodation solution, the condition of the van was barely liveable and at well over six feet tall, Lynton was cramped and uncomfortable.

After some months observing the living situation and the family dynamics, Lynton's Support Worker, Kylie, identified a need that could be met with the addition of a Kids Under Cover studio.

"I've seen the way family dynamics can change and how people need their own space," Kylie says. "And working alongside Lynton, I could see there was a need there – for him to have his own space to grow and for Lisa to feel calmer."

Kylie could see how important it was that Lynton had the support of his family but also how those relationships would benefit from him having his own space.

Lynton's case is an example of how an early intervention model of support can bring a turning point for a family and disrupt negative patterns for a young person in need of a change of environment. The studio allows Lynton ownership of his environment and behaviour without removing him from the love and care he needs.

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**He's a really kind-hearted, good human being and he really deserves this. And that's why I've wanted to fight so hard for him to have this chance. He's a kind soul and I could see how this could be life-changing.**

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And for Lisa, there's a huge sense of relief. And a feeling that Lynton now has the opportunity to move forward with dignity.

"Having the studio feels like we've given him somewhere that he can now kick goals from," she says. "It has to start somewhere and it feels like now – finally after all these years – we've got a base. That for me, as a mum, is very much a relief. I hope he just gets the chance to achieve as much as he can. That's all I can ask. If he's happy, we're happy."

# AN ACT OF KINDNESS

**Budding young actor, Lennox has found a way to harness community support for a cause close to his heart.**

It was on the set of an upcoming online series called *Plausible Deniability* that thirteen-year-old Lennox became more acutely aware of the complexities of homelessness.

“That’s what brought the issue to my attention,” Lennox explains. “Before I did the show, I didn’t really know much about homelessness. And I still don’t know heaps about it now, but doing the show showed me enough to see how big a problem it is.”

In the series, Lennox plays one of three school kids who are making a documentary about homelessness. When he decided to donate a portion of his earnings from the role to Kids Under Cover, his first thought was that his generous contribution would not be enough to make the difference he hoped it would.



LENNOX ON SET

So, he recruited the support of his two cast mates, built a gofundme page and is on track to reach his ambitious target of \$10,000 for Kids Under Cover.

“Being a kid myself, I like the idea that Kids Under Cover focuses on youth. And education to me is very important



LENNOX HAS RECRUITED THE SUPPORT OF HIS CAST MATES

and Kids Under Cover offers education scholarships so I decided it was a good organisation to choose.

“I think having a home where you can feel safe and secure is so important because it makes life a lot less stressful, and you can be happier if you don’t have to worry about making sure you’re safe at home. And I guess it allows you to be able to focus on other things like school and your future.”

Regardless of whether Lennox’s efforts raise the \$10K target, the campaign has been an incredible success and a rewarding experience for the young fundraiser. What he’s learned – and what he is demonstrating through his proactive approach – is that there are different avenues to reach people who are happy to support you, and that it’s ok to ask for help.

“You don’t need to give a whole lot,” he says. “If you get a lot of people donating a little bit that will go a long way to making a real difference.”

You can help support Lennox's campaign by searching Kids Under Cover on the gofundme website or scan the QR code.

