

TRANSFORMATIONS

*A collection of personal
stories, poems and
reflections by young people*



Father Chris Riley's
youth
off the streets®

CELEBRATING
30 years
1991–2021

“

“If you save one child, you save the world.
That’s my focus. **One kid at a time.** And if they
put on my tombstone that I saved one kid, then
that would be more than enough for me.”

Father Chris Riley

**Dedicated to
Father Chris Riley AM,
Founder and
Executive Director,
for his passionate
commitment to
changing the lives of
young people in need
and strengthening
communities.**

**And to all the young
people Youth Off The
Streets has had the
privilege of walking
alongside as they
find their path to
a positive future.**

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INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure to introduce this collection of stories, poems and reflections by some of the young people Youth Off The Streets has worked with over the last 30 years.

Some have provided honest and insightful answers to the question, 'What would you like to achieve by the time you're 30?' Some have shared their stories of overcoming significant life challenges – stories that are both heartbreaking and uplifting. And others have written poems that express their courage, resilience and hope for the future.

Those are three things we see time and again at Youth Off The Streets: courage, resilience and hope. Despite the often difficult circumstances facing the young people we support, when they're surrounded by people who believe in them, and they have access to the right services at the right time, there's so much they can achieve.

Thirty years ago, Youth Off The Streets looked very different to the way it does today.

From a single food van operating in the Sydney CBD and one youth refuge in the Inner West – opened by our Founder and Executive Director, Father Chris Riley, in April 1991 – we have grown to deliver a range of wraparound supports for young people. These include crisis accommodation and housing services, independent high schools, alcohol and other drugs counselling, youth justice support, life skills and employment programs, cultural support and community engagement, among other services.

None of this would have been possible without our past and present donors, partners, funders and other supporters. Thank you for all you have done, and continue to do, to support and empower young people.

In many ways, we need your help more than ever before. Deep economic and social disadvantage persists across the country. The ongoing impacts of the pandemic continue to plunge vulnerable families into crisis, and the effects on young people are substantial – from poor mental health and reduced access to education and employment, to increased exposure to family violence and a rise in child protection concerns.

With all that being said, I look to the future with a sense of confidence – just like the young people who share their words in the pages to come. With our highly skilled and passionate team of staff and volunteers, our experienced Board, our amazing community of supporters, and the young people we walk alongside, there's so much more we can accomplish.

We have some ambitious plans and goals for the years ahead. Come and be part of the next chapter of Youth Off The Streets' story – you'll find information about ways to get involved at the end of this collection.

Enjoy.

Lex Nadine Lutherborrow

CEO

A FIGHTER'S SPIRIT

Rhiannon, 26

AFTERCARE
PROGRAM CLIENT

“

At 15, I was homeless, scattered, strung out, traumatised, used, abused and hungry.

Today, at 26, I have a home and family. I'm studying, thriving, healing, happy and strong.

I don't weep for what I lost and went through. I'm thankful for having a fighter's spirit and being here today.

I know who I am, where I want to be, and how to get there. I've never known myself this well before, or been so protective of my health and peace.

I've learned that I'm the only person who can save me. Sis is tougher than she looks.

I don't want applause.
I just want to inspire others.



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COLLECTIVE

WITH HONOURS

*Claudia, 19*YOUTH OFF THE STREETS
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

“

When I'm 30, I will have graduated from university with honours and entered the workforce. I'm not sure what my job will be. All I know is that I want to do something meaningful.

At 30, I want to be able to look back and know that I took care of myself, honed a skill, studied thoroughly, engaged with ideas foreign to me, welcomed opportunities, and was bold enough to take risks – the kinds of risks that improve life and help you grow, not the kind that can destroy a person.

I want to be bolder still, unafraid of what I want in life and truthful with myself. I will be natural, authentic and confident enough to overcome the self-doubt of young adulthood and trust my judgement.

I will not chase after happiness, but fulfilment. Not power over others, but personal autonomy.

When I'm 30, I will be an enlightened version of who I am today.

Happy 30th birthday, Youth Off The Streets!



A BETTER LIFE

Steve

FORMER HOMELESSNESS AND
HOUSING SERVICES CLIENT

From the age of 11, I was living on the streets. By the time I turned 13, I was addicted to substances and suffering from depression and low self-esteem. I didn't realise it at the time, but my issues originated from my troubled upbringing and being raised by parents who were substance users.

I arrived in Sydney from regional NSW after years of being on the streets and many failed attempts at rehabilitation. When I was first approached by Street Walk staff, I was alone, isolated and contemplating suicide.

The staff provided me with food, blankets and kept regular contact with me during the week. Initially, I was reluctant to take them up on the offer of taking refuge at Don Bosco House, but I came to trust the staff enough to accept their help, and that is when things started to change for me.

From there, I started to talk with the refuge staff and a Youth Off The Streets psychologist. I soon went from overnight stays at Don Bosco to becoming a resident and getting my own caseworker.

My caseworker referred me to counselling so that I could address my depression and low moods, originating from family and trauma issues.

After six months of counselling intervention, I was able to secure part-time employment and began to further my studies.

My caseworker helped me prepare for transitional accommodation by providing me with living skills, case coordination and aftercare, even after moving out of the refuge and into transitional housing. I now live in stable transitional housing while continuing my studies and work.

Youth Off The Streets' staff believed in me and gave me the confidence to build a better life for myself.

Thank you, Father Riley and staff, for helping me through a tough time and providing me with support when I needed it most. I am now more optimistic about where my life is heading and have a newfound confidence in myself.

IT'S OKAY...

Julia, 18

FORMER HOMELESSNESS
SERVICES CLIENT

It's okay... to love when vulnerable
But however please don't expect it to remain
Things fall apart or bind together
Just know some things you can't control
It's in this moment where you find yourself
In this moment love comes from within
Love yourself, know your worth
Don't lower yourself or allow anyone else to

It's okay... to miss someone
Maybe they weren't right for you
But they were right for that moment
Everything happens for a reason

It's okay... to have your dark times
Embrace it as it makes you stronger
Makes you stronger for your time of prime
It's who you are and happens to anyone from time to time
It's how you deal with it that makes you different and unique

It's okay... to be unsure, confused and lost
This is just your stop at this post
It won't last forever but becomes a memory
A memory as a reminder you overcame it
In result you become who you are today

It's okay... to learn from others
It doesn't make you weak but makes you wiser
People come into your life to either be blessings or lessons
Not everyone is meant to be part of your story, only a chapter
Don't let it ruin you but let yourself grow
Let it become a part of you and your journey
Love can make or break you
Your story, your decision, your memories

It's okay... to be alone and independent
It can be long- or short-term
Don't compare yourself to others
But however please remember it's not the end
It's just the start of your new chapter
Flow with your life, enjoy it, have fun
No-one can rain on your parade
And don't ever let anyone have the power to do so
This is your life, your story, you have the power



A DREAM TO TEACH

Once a recipient of the Sony Foundation Australia scholarship through Youth Off The Streets' National Scholarship Program, Jason Mobbs-Green is now a recording artist, vocal coach, sound engineer/producer and composer.

When Jason was in Year 7, his mother escaped an abusive partner and they moved in with his grandmother.

His mother eventually returned to her partner, but Jason stayed put. By the time he was in Year 10, he had become his grandmother's sole carer.

"She grew older and her health declined," he reflects. "Balancing schoolwork and caring duties was tough, and during my HSC she was hospitalised while I lived in our house alone."

During this time, one of Jason's teachers recommended that he apply for a Youth Off The Streets scholarship.

Over the past 17 years, the National Scholarship Program has awarded more than 360 scholarships to young people experiencing disadvantage. These young people are talented and determined, but lack the support network or financial means to achieve their education goals.

"My teacher helped me apply, and I was fortunate enough to win a scholarship in 2012," says Jason.

"I felt overwhelmed and privileged to receive the scholarship. I'll never forget the moment I got the phone call with the news. It's a memory I will always treasure."

Jason used the scholarship funds to acquire a laptop, textbooks, stationery and other essential items to help with his studies. He was also given the opportunity to pursue his passion – music.

"Music is something that has always been a part of my life," he explains. "I've had a passion for it since my childhood and developed my skills when I entered high school."

"I was able to achieve a Band 6 in Music for my HSC, a result in the top 10 per cent of the state."

Jason particularly enjoyed the mentorship aspect of the Youth Off The Streets scholarship program, and developed a strong relationship with his mentor and the scholarship coordinator.

"My mentor, Sue Stirling, and the scholarship coordinator, Anita Heathcote, both had a significant impact on my life," he says.

"Anita took me to a musical at the Australian Institute of Music (AIM). We attended their open day, and she helped me apply to study there." →

Jason went on to earn a Bachelor of Music – Music Theatre from AIM. He is currently studying a Master of Teaching (Secondary) from Western Sydney University and undertaking his first teaching placement at Youth Off The Streets' Key College in Redfern.

"I was motivated to complete my placement at Youth Off The Streets because I felt passionate about giving back to an organisation that has supported me throughout my life, particularly during high school.

"It has been fantastic to observe and interact with the students at Key College. I'm inspired by their eagerness to learn despite the challenges they are facing.

"This has solidified my dream to teach and has motivated me to keep working hard in my studies."

When Jason completes his master's degree, he hopes to enter the public school system and show young people how music can make a difference in their life.

"I want to give back to the community, and plan to continue working with young people experiencing disadvantage through teaching."

BEST FRIEND

Kim

FORMER KEY COLLEGE STUDENT
AND AFTERCARE PROGRAM CLIENT

When I was eight or nine, I met my best friend in a leftover bottle of adult drink. I tried to hide my abuse inside.

When I was a homeless teen on the cold dark streets, I was never alone with whisky to comfort me.

Through every triumph with Youth Off The Streets, my best friend was cheering, "Let's celebrate and drink!"

Later, working for the elite showed me how to silently drink.

When I became a mum, I told my best friend we needed our space so that I could give my girl a different fate.

When incest and sexual child abuse destroyed my will, my best friend came and pushed me uphill.

Into the arms of another love. Domestic violence, jail 'n drugs. My best friend said, "Let's go, let's make this the end!" Suicide seen us flatline over 'n over again.

My pain was so deep as I hid my best friend from the world I blamed. Together, we married an amazing man but sadly, child sexual assault from a family friend hit us again.

Now the bottle was my only medicine.

Placenta percreta. The birth of child four seen me fight another war.

My best friend was there along with pain meds as I was diagnosed with another rare condition. Fibrous dysplasia tumours in my head.

I turned 40 and asked Jesus, "Why have you always forsaken me?"

He replied, "You already had a best friend. You are nothing but the living dead."

So, one month ago today, I decided to say goodbye to my best friend.

I hope one day I can visit now 'n then.

STRENGTH
IN RUIN

YOU LIVE EVERY DAY

Tanika, 21

YOUTH OFF THE STREETS
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

“

When I'm 30, I hope to be happy, following my passion and loving life! I hope to be employed in my dream career as a paramedic. I will continue my professional development and change lives.

I also hope that I am happy, in love, and have a stable home with a wonderful partner and family. I want to be out exploring and travelling and have an income that supports this.

On days when I am not working, I can see myself anywhere outdoors – at the beach or mountains, skiing, fishing, riding, working on fitness and health, having coffee, tea and great food, or relaxing. You don't live once; you live every day and die once!

No matter where I end up or what I end up doing, I hope to be living a life of fulfilment, meaning and happiness while making positive changes to the world and people around me.

YOU BELIEVED IN ME

Sally

FORMER HOMELESSNESS AND
HOUSING SERVICES CLIENT

I was 16 when I first met a caseworker from Youth Off The Streets. I was having problems at school and the teachers were worried about my drug use.

I didn't realise it back then, but I was homeless.

I didn't have a stable home to go back to. I was moving around relatives' houses and sleeping on friends' couches. I wouldn't know where I'd be the following week or even the next night. But I never thought of myself as homeless. I thought I was just making do for the night, so I could get up and go to school the next morning.

One night, that all changed. I found myself without a place to stay. That's when my caseworker brought me into the Don Bosco House crisis refuge.

For the first time, I didn't have to worry about where I'd spend the next night. That helped me attend school more often. My school marks started to improve and this was the time I discovered my passion for volunteering and fundraising.

I stayed at Don Bosco House for a few months and then my caseworker helped me move into transitional accommodation. That helped me get used to living independently. My caseworker would meet up with me regularly to make sure I was staying on track.

Today, I'm living in my own place. It's my dream to help other people, so next year I'm applying to go to university and become a nurse. I never thought this would be possible.

That's why I want to say thanks to Youth Off The Streets. Without your help, I'd probably still be sleeping somewhere different every night. And I definitely wouldn't have finished school.

So thank you, Father Riley and Youth Off The Streets – I'm where I am today because you believed in me.

IN TIMES OF NEED

Felix, 21

YOUTH OFF THE STREETS
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

“

When I'm 30, I hope to become knowledgeable and capable enough to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

I want to become someone others can trust and rely on in times of need.



FINDING HOME

Ten years ago, Jamie-Lee never saw herself being alive as an adult. She grew up experiencing domestic and family violence and was surrounded by drug abuse.

Unfortunately, her mother passed away when she was in Year 7.

"Due to the violent relationship with my dad and having no one else to turn to, I had no choice but to flee to the streets," she reflects. "It was the safer option."

Most of the young people experiencing homelessness who seek support from Youth Off The Streets have experienced family or relationship breakdown, financial difficulties, or domestic and family violence.

During her time on the streets, Jamie-Lee connected with other homeless young people but became dependent on alcohol and found herself in trouble with the police.

"Alcohol became the solution to wipe my problems away every day," she says. "I took every day as it came and never knew where I was going to sleep at night."

Youth Off The Streets' Street Walk Program Manager, Gary Lockhart, met Jamie-Lee through the Street Walk program, which provides vital support to homeless and vulnerable young people in Sydney and Melbourne.

"Gary befriended me and set me up with accommodation at Don Bosco House," Jamie-Lee recalls. "From 12 to 16 years old, I stayed in and out of there, at friends' places, other refuges and sometimes in trains."

Gary explains that homeless young people tend to spend time together in groups and get to know each other. They form their own network to find a sense of belonging.

"They all come from different backgrounds, but the one thing they have in common is that they feel like they don't belong anywhere," he says.

"I also meet young people who go home every night, but they might be experiencing domestic and family violence," Gary explains. "It's not a nice environment to be in, so they prefer to be out on the street with people they trust."

Gary gets to know the young people and builds rapport with them, eventually introducing them to other services – including accommodation at our refuges.

"Accommodation is the most urgent need that they have," he says.

"But many of these young people are exasperated by the time they're 15 and 16 because they've already moved around so much," he explains. →

"We might offer them a place to sleep at one of our refuges, and they initially say 'no' because they don't feel comfortable going into a service right away, because they don't trust it."

"It takes time to build up that trust."

When Jamie-Lee was on the streets, she tried to juggle her living situation while staying in school.

"One of the most valuable lessons my mum taught me was that 'education is everything,'" she says.

"Amid all the chaos, I continued to go to school when I could. At that stage, school was the only stability I had in my life. To say my friends and I lived different lifestyles is probably an understatement."

She'd often go to school with no uniform, and she carried her school backpack with her everywhere she went.

"At one point, a Street Walk volunteer asked me, 'Why do you have such a big backpack on?' I replied, 'I don't know where I'm staying tonight, but at least I know I'm going to school tomorrow.'"

By the time Jamie-Lee turned 17, she was in independent living, and she felt like her life was back on track. She was working and studying hard – and she eventually won a Youth Off The Streets scholarship.

In a tragic turn of events, Jamie-Lee's older brother was murdered in 2011. Youth Off The Streets stepped in to help her through that challenging time, but it took a huge toll on her mental health.

"I missed a lot of school at that point," she says. "I was still determined to complete my HSC, but due to my absences, I was kicked out a couple of months before completion."

Jamie-Lee entered Youth Off The Streets' Step Up program, which provides a safe learning environment where students can attain their HSC, TAFE qualifications and work-ready skills.

"I look at Youth Off The Streets as home. It was a place when I had nowhere, where I knew I was going to be safe, belonged, cared for and supported no matter what," she says.

She graduated with her HSC and completed her qualification to become an Assistant in Nursing. She also completed her Certificate IV in Community Services in 2014 and has settled on a career in the sector.

"I was doing case management, then out-of-home-care," she explains. "I became an alcohol and other drugs youth worker at a residential rehab facility. Now, I work in youth justice."

She is also the proud mother of a three-year-old girl, and recently bought her first home.

"It took me some time getting used to having a place with numerous rooms to myself," she admits.

"Growing up, I was limited to having one room with my belongings wherever I was staying at the time. Now, my daughter and I have a home of our own."

Jamie-Lee says that if there was one lesson she could teach her daughter, it would be that no matter where you've come from or what struggles you're going through, it's the lessons you learn from them that make you stronger.

"I learned this at Youth Off The Streets," she says. "Your past will never determine your future. If you want something, you can achieve it!"

MY LIFE IN 30 YEARS

Kahlez, 15

KEY COLLEGE STUDENT

My life in 30 years
Hopefully has no tears
As over the years
We got back into gear

It has been a hard few years
But at least we are still here

Time to do right
No more time to fight
This is our time to shine
Our time not to cry
The sun makes everything dry
But our happiness brings everything back to life

This is our life
Not a hard ride
You've just got to do it right



WHEN I WAS BROKEN

Daniel. 25

FORMER HOMELESSNESS AND
HOUSING SERVICES CLIENT
AND KEY COLLEGE STUDENT

I began studying at Key College in 2012. I had just moved to Don Bosco House, a Youth Off The Streets refuge. At the time, I had been expelled from my previous school. I was halfway through Year 10 and had little intention to continue studying, but Don Bosco House had a condition that to live there, you had to work or study during the day.

Reluctantly, I joined Key College. I had a drug addiction and had been in and out of the hospital due to drug-related mental health issues. I have a very hazy memory of this time, although I remember feeling disappointed in myself when I purposely didn't attend Key. It wasn't because I gave much care to my education, but because the people who worked and volunteered there genuinely cared for me.

Even in my horrendous state, I knew they were there for no other reason than to give generously to me and others who were at the school. They had a personal and emotional interest in my welfare and were ready to help. I felt that I owed them for this kindness.

Gradually, I became more willing to participate in their efforts to teach me and help in troubled areas of my life. I have been through a lot since leaving Key and have come far. I don't take drugs, and I barely drink. I have a job that pays well and gives me much responsibility.

I'm also finishing a degree at university. I'm sometimes tempted to commend myself for the work I've done to get this far, but honestly, the reason I'm here is humbling.

Accepting help when I was broken made me the person I am today.



AIMING FOR THE STARS

Issy, 17

YOUTH OFF THE STREETS
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

When I'm 30, I hope to have finished university and be working as a medical specialist at NASA in their Human Research Program.

My greatest pursuit in life is to combine my interest in medicine/ biology and my love for space to build a career around helping colonise other planets. The idea of a different life in the universe, as well as humanity exploring its various mysteries, excites me, and I can't wait to be involved.

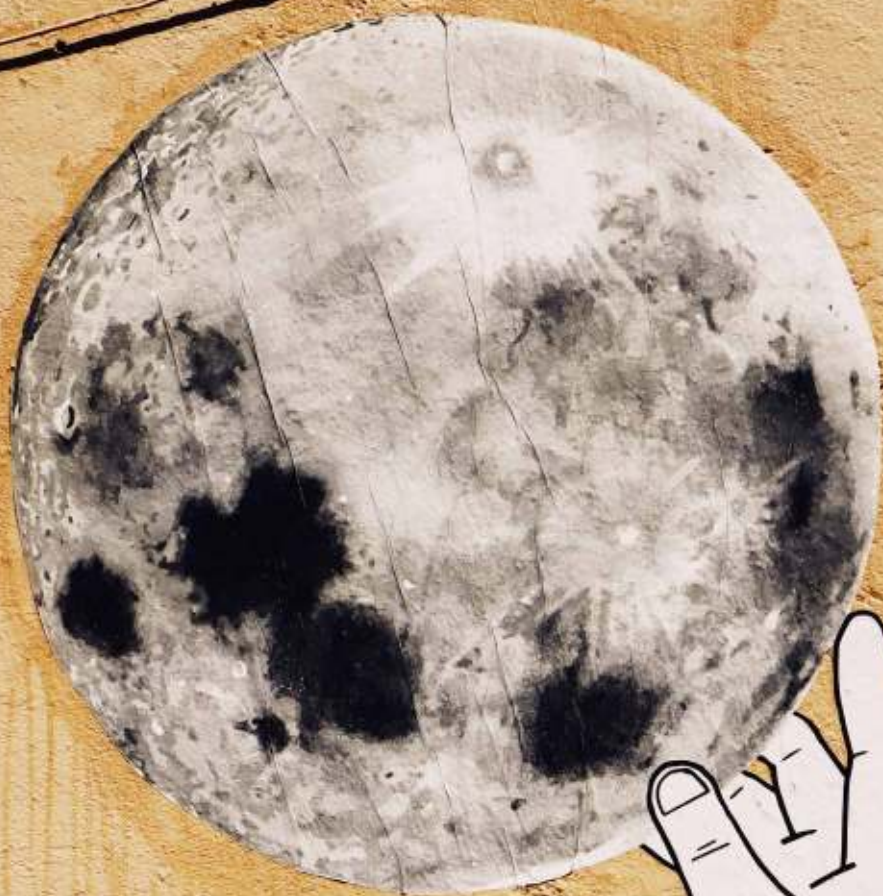
As well as scientific research, I also want to study Science Communication and Journalism to help break down the barriers between everyday people and STEM and promote the participation of scientific thinkers in a variety of industries, including political processes.

I have found through school that I love scientific writing and the process of critically analysing a topic, then generating it into an engaging composition for others to read.

Throughout this journey into research and communication science, I want to follow another passion: advocating for women in STEM.

When I'm 30, I hope to use my experience, knowledge and career platform to develop resources and strategies to decrease gender inequality in science.

Hardships create resilient, adaptable women whose uniqueness is essential to the future of STEM. I believe it is essential to approach a new era in technology and science where these barriers aren't stopping them from following their dreams.



FULL CIRCLE

Trudie

FORMER HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING SERVICES CLIENT, KEY COLLEGE STUDENT, DUNLEA ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS YOUTH SERVICE CLIENT AND YOUTH OFF THE STREETS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

At the age of 15, I was homeless and ended up getting a bed at Don Bosco House. I enrolled at Key College, and despite battling a drug addiction I managed to complete my School Certificate.

My life took a turn for the worse after that as I spent my 18th birthday in juvenile detention. At that moment I realised that I had to make some serious life changes. As soon as I left detention, I started at Dunlea.

Staying off the drugs was hard and I had my ups and downs, but having people believe in me like the workers at Youth Off The Streets helped me to believe in myself.

This belief that they showed in me was truly inspiring. I wanted to be able to make a difference in the lives of young people like they did. The following year I commenced my studies in youth work. Unfortunately I became homeless again and was sleeping on the streets while attending TAFE. I was about to give up on my studies, but then I found out about the scholarship program with Youth Off The Streets.

I applied in the hope that it would allow me to finish my studies. When I heard that I was successful, it was one of the happiest days in my life.

With the support of the scholarship program, I completed a Certificate IV in Youth Work and a Diploma in Community Services. I was also supported to complete a volunteer placement in South Africa and to get my driver's licence.

It has now been five years since I was awarded a scholarship. I have completed a Bachelor of Social Science (Social Welfare) and have now commenced a Master of Social Work. I work with children and families as a social worker – one of my life goals achieved.

As part of my journey, I completed a student placement with Youth Off The Streets. It was so rewarding to be able to come full circle and be able to support young people, just like I had been supported all those years ago.

I'm doing great now and would like to say thank you to Youth Off The Streets for supporting me and believing in me.

I don't know where I would be without you.

A SENSE OF BELONGING

When Omar was eight years old, he moved to Australia to escape the civil war in Iraq. He and his family were among the many thousands who fled here after the conflict began in 2013.

Omar's father had received a refugee visa years earlier, so the first time Omar remembers meeting him is when he landed in Australia.

"I had only seen one photo of him," Omar recalls. "It was hard for me to accept the fact that he was my dad. I had to get used to that."

On his first night in his new home, Omar slept on the floor. There was no bed – just a pillow and a blanket. His father was struggling to make ends meet.

"My mum wasn't working and my dad was a taxi driver seven days a week, just trying to make enough money to provide for us," he says. "All the money he had made went towards bringing me and my mum here."

Omar started Year 3 at school, but found it hard to manage because he didn't speak English and hadn't been to school before.

"I never went to school because of the war," he recalls. "It was too risky to send kids there. I didn't know how to read or write. I hadn't learned the fundamentals I was supposed to when I was young, so I struggled. It was hard for me to cope in Australia as a refugee."

Other students bullied him because of his accent and how he looked.

"People treated me badly at first," he says. "And as time went on, I still had the assumption that whenever someone tried to talk to me, they were trying to pick a fight with me."

"I got into trouble a lot during my primary school days. Much of it was a misunderstanding. A lot of it was coming from me. But it was complicated for me because I was traumatised."

For years, Omar didn't feel like he belonged at home or school. It was a far cry from the life he had experienced in Iraq with his friends, family and community.

"It's difficult to explain, but I'd say you feel lonely," he says. "You feel attacked – you don't feel safe. I felt like an outsider."

"And I was depressed," he adds. "Year 7 was one of the hardest years of my life. I still didn't fit in and was called an 'import'. I was constantly thinking of ways to protect myself."

Fatima Elabd, Youth Off The Streets Team Leader – Engagement and Support, explains that some of the most significant challenges for refugee young people come from leaving behind not just their home, but their cultural identity – and coming to a new country where their culture isn't always embraced. →

"Many young refugees speak only a little English or none at all," she says. "They're trying to fit into society. They get confused about their identity and experience a sense of loss."

When Omar was 14 years old, he started getting into trouble with the police. Around this time, a friend introduced him to Youth Off The Streets.

"He told me he was going to a program where they give you food and provide activities," Omar recalls. "I started going every Wednesday night."

When Omar experienced trouble with the law, he called on Youth Off The Streets for help.

"They met me at the police station," he says. "I had to go to court, and they came with me. They supported me emotionally."

Fatima explains that while many services focus on one specific set of challenges a young person is facing, Youth Off The Streets takes a holistic approach to their needs.

"We have an individual model, which is one-on-one support with the young person to help them achieve any goals that they set out to reach," she says.

"We do whatever we can to advocate for them. In the case of refugee young people, this could be through applications, referencing documents, or working with settlement services for advice and referrals.

"For Omar, we were able to help him in court as a refugee," she continues. "We helped him with the fines he had. Then we were able to sit with him, learn about his life and talk to him about his choices."

Omar says that Fatima helped him learn how to deal with the anger and frustration he had accumulated from his life experiences, and he could finally move forward.

"Fatima helped me understand how to deal with my anger and remain calm," he says. "At Youth Off The Streets, I met new people and found a sense of belonging."

Engagement and support programs like the one Omar joined help youth workers connect with young people through a soft-entry approach.

"We build a rapport with the young person," Fatima says. "Slowly they start to open up, and you see who they are and what they're dealing with.

"It takes time," she adds. "Sometimes it starts with them sharing that they're having trouble in school, and then it leads to them telling us that they're having trouble at home, or they don't have a home, and not even realising that that's homelessness.

"Our programs are beneficial because young people often don't ask for support unless we reach out to them first."

Omar eventually helped establish a co-design program for young people to give back to the community.

"We're trying to raise awareness of the issues that face our community," he explains.

"We all come from different backgrounds. And we're trying to benefit the community from what we've learned. Whether its homelessness, financial problems or family issues, we try to help others through our own experiences."

Omar left high school and discovered that he enjoys hands-on work. Now, he has a full-time job in construction.

"I love building houses; I found myself in that," he says. "I'm completing my builder's licence. And I'm safe and coping well.

"I can also finally say I'm Australian," he continues. "It took me a while to get to that state of mind. But the past six years have been good for me. I'm talking to everyone and get along with everyone. I'm working on my future."

EVERYONE IS

WELCOME

SOMETHING NEEDED TO CHANGE

Jenny

FORMER LOGAN OUTREACH CLIENT

I want to thank you for giving me the courage to make positive changes in my life. Thanks to the work you do, I have been able to get my addiction under control and have been able to finish my education.

I never saw much of my parents growing up. My father was in prison most of his life until he died when I was only eight, and my mother has a substance abuse problem that makes it difficult for her to take care of me and my younger siblings. As a result, I found myself caught up in drugs at a young age, such as glue and ice, which led me to commit some serious crimes.

Eventually, I dropped out of school and spent most of my days with my friends getting high. Things got worse when my boyfriend was tragically killed in a train accident while under the influence of glue.

That's when I knew something needed to change. I came to Youth Off The Streets with the intention of getting clean from using drugs and have never looked back since.

Over two years, the team helped me to make some significant changes to my lifestyle. I stopped using drugs and went back to school. I was also involved in boxing workshops and cultural workshops with local Elders, as well as school holiday programs.

Thanks to the team, I was able to complete Year 12 and eventually got an award from Youth Off The Streets for showing significant positive change and responsibility. I have since then gone on to commence further study – a Diploma of Beauty Therapy – and hope to open up my own beauty salon one day.

My relationships with those closest to me have also improved, and I am happy to say that I'm currently expecting my first baby with my new partner. This has motivated me to set more goals such as getting my licence, completing my study sooner than first planned, and even getting my own house one day.

Thanks for your help throughout all of this. Thanks to you I am now a more mature, responsible and respectful young lady with some amazing goals for my life.



eroblee.art

BACK ON TRACK

Lincoln, 16

BOWEN COLLEGE STUDENT

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To be honest, if you asked me to write this one year ago, I couldn't see myself where I am right now.

One year ago, I'd be staying in a group home somewhere, seeing friends and probably doing some things that would be frowned upon by teachers, adults and police. It was a very tough year for me.

I was living in and out of group homes and on and off the streets. Thanks to Amy Gill, my mentor, I started school at The Bowen College just over a year ago.

It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was the start of me turning my life around and getting back on track.

When I started at Bowen, everyone was so welcoming and helpful. They set me up with tools that have helped me become who I am today. They supported me with everything, from basic stuff like toothbrushes and socks to assisting me with my family, education and finding somewhere to stay.

Now, my life is amazing. I join remote learning on Mondays, and for the rest of the working week I'm on a construction site learning a range of things that will help me achieve my goal of becoming a carpenter. I stay on top of school work after work and sometimes on the weekend.

I'm proud to say that I'm on track and working towards my goals. I've been living back at home since the end of 2020. There have been ups and downs, but I finally found where I belong.

YOU CAN CHANGE A YOUNG PERSON'S LIFE

We hope you enjoyed these stories of courage, resilience and transformation by some of the young people Youth Off The Streets has supported and empowered to build a positive future.

Come and be part of our next chapter—there are many ways you can help young people in need.



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30 years
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