

A start in life

a brighter future for young australians

A Start in Life Impact Report



About Us

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- **Established in 1923** – to support disadvantaged students access education
- **100+ years of impact** – a century of meaningful change in over 7,000 students' lives
- **Adapting to change** – we constantly evolve to meet modern educational and societal needs
- **Focus on education and growth** – helping young Australians thrive and create brighter futures
- **Kindergarten to tertiary studies** – students come from over 65 schools, universities and TAFEs throughout NSW and ACT
- **Three programs of assistance** – which provide students with a variety of resources, activities, experiences, workshops and coaching. Ages 4 – 25 years old
- **Legacy of success** – many alumni have gone on to contribute meaningfully to their communities





Our vision

A future where every student can access quality education, regardless of financial hardship.

Our mission

A Start in Life provides financial and practical support to disadvantaged students, ensuring they have the resources, confidence, and opportunities to reach their full potential. Through targeted educational support programs, we remove barriers to learning and empower students to succeed in their studies and beyond.

“...This life and all that I’ve done quite possibly wouldn’t have happened without all of you...without this wonderful charity...thank you for opening my mind, taking my blinkers off and giving me the gift of knowledge.”

– April, supported in the early 1990s, now a successful Executive Producer, writer and regular donor to A Start in Life



Why Do We Exist



A Start in Life supports young Australians who are doing their best to succeed in school, but face real barriers along the way. For many families, the basic costs of education are overwhelming:

- **Education is expensive** – public schooling costs families around \$2,671 per year in primary, and \$5,043 in high school*
- **Essentials are out of reach** – nearly one in three parents struggle to afford school basics like uniforms, stationery and shoes *
- **Staying connected is hard** – many students report feeling disengaged from their learning †
- **Single-parent households face extra pressure** – two-thirds of the students we support are raised by one parent managing it all
- **Regional students face added disadvantage** – 22% of our students live in rural or remote areas, where access to resources and opportunities is limited

With support from our community, we help students overcome these challenges and stay on track to brighter futures.

* ['Back to School Costs and Statistics for 2025' – Finder \(2025\)](#)

† ['The Whole Learner – Young People on the Next Chapter in Learning Beyond Limits' – Learning Creates \(2024\)](#)



Our Programs



We have three programs of support, ensuring students receive the assistance they need at every stage of their learning journey.

Each program is designed to remove barriers, build confidence and create lasting impact – from the early years of school right through to tertiary education.

Learning for Success (Kindergarten – Year 12)

Assists students whose education is impacted by financial hardship through creating learning-rich home environments, guiding self-discovery and building 21st Century skills.

Career and Skills Development Scholarship (Year 9 – Year 10)

Designed to broaden career horizons and equip students with skills vital modern careers, including workshops, career coaching, industry excursions and career sampling with industry professionals.

Tertiary Program (University and TAFE)

Supports students pursuing higher education, including regular check-ins and helping cover the costs of items including textbooks, accommodation, transport, 'tools of the trade' and work placements.



Primary and Secondary Students

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Students across primary and secondary school have shown strong growth, engagement and pride in their learning. Highlights from the past year include:

- **Confidence and collaboration were abound** – like Monica (Year 5), whose teacher said she’s “*not afraid to voice her opinions or provide an answer. She listens always and works co-operatively with others*”
- **A sharp eye for detail was on display** – such as by Sar (Year 12), whose Science Extension teacher said she “*shows an aptitude for critical thinking and problem solving, consistently producing work of a high standard*”
- **Students showed eagerness and commitment** – like Arnold (Year 5), whose teacher commended his “*motivation and growth mindset, often choosing to take on challenges in his learning*”
- **Students earned a range of accolades** – from an Outstanding Attendance Award to an Honours Certificate in French
- **8 students achieved top 10 rankings** – either across their entire year group or in specific subjects
- **Parental and carer stress** – for primary and secondary school students declined by 11%
- **Students thrived outside the classroom** – took on leadership roles, joined sporting clubs, signed up as library monitors, and became buddies to kindergarten students
- **Students gave back to their communities** – participating in Clean Up Australia Day, Sustainability Outreach Day, hands-on kitchen and gardening lessons



Primary and Secondary Support: Natalie's Story



Background

Demographics

Female based in Western Sydney, NSW.
Support commenced in August 2023 at age 5 (Kindergarten).

Background

Natalie lives with her mother, father and one of her older sisters. She also has another older sister, who is in our tertiary program.

Significant Achievements

Even in Kindergarten, Natalie had a positive attitude towards learning and was a hard worker. As her mum said in their application, Natalie has “promised potential to succeed”. Natalie has always enjoyed questioning things and exploring independently to satisfy her curiosity. In Kindergarten, her teacher congratulated her for settling well into her new learning environment and for taking pride in producing her best work. Her teacher also said she perseveres and does not easily give up on her learning goals. In her Semester 2 2023 school report, her teacher stated “It has been a great pleasure to teach such a loving child like Natalie, and I wish her all the very best for her future”. Natalie was also commended for regularly borrowing picture books from the library.

Challenges

At the start of Kindergarten, Natalie was reserved and hesitant to speak in class. Throughout that year, she became more comfortable and before long was happily participating in activities and discussions. Through our support, Natalie began tutoring, covering topics including comprehension, vocabulary, computation and problem solving. Her tutor commended her for being a polite learner who “consistently produces superb work” and confidently corrects herself when she notices errors. Her tutor also noted improvements, especially in her English skills, and said she should be proud of her achievements in all areas.

Short Term Goals

- To improve language skills, including sounding out words, listening and spelling
- To improve in identifying shapes and learn my times tables
- To learn to swim 10 metres by myself

2024 End of Year Update

Current Status

Natalie has just finished Year 1.

Grades

Natalie achieved a C in English, Maths, Geography, Science and Technology, Creative Arts, PDHPE and Modern Languages (Khmer).

Significant Achievements

Natalie had zero days absent all semester. She received a steady C in all her subjects, with an Excellent ‘Effort’ rating in almost every subject. Her teacher commended her for being a sweet and enthusiastic student whose “positive attitude and happiness make our classroom a brighter place”. She enjoys writing stories, has practiced reciting poems and rhymes, can tell the time on the hour and half hour, locate Australia and other continents on a map, and describe the sky at night. Since being in our program, her mum has noticed she’s become more confident around others and in exploring new interests. She has tried various extra-curriculars, joined her school choir, participated in Community Day, performed at the Metropolitan Principal Meeting, and was even chosen to represent Stage 1 in both the English and Khmer Public Speaking Competitions!

Challenges

Natalie’s teacher said she consistently tries her best, even when she faces challenges with her work. Her teacher also noted some areas for improvement, including vocabulary, multiplication, division and spatial awareness. To help with her learning, Natalie does her homework after school, often with the help of her mum. Together, they watch videos and listen to songs that help with sounding out words. Natalie also likes to read before bed, either by herself, with her mum, dad or big sister. Her mum told us “without all of your help and support, she wouldn’t have got this far”.

Long Term Goals

Although she is only young, Natalie aspires to become a paramedic one day, with a strong desire to “save people’s lives and help them”.

Parents Say Thanks

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*“My daughter and I’s experience with A Start in Life has always been positive and valuable.... Meeting with A Start In Life allows her to recognise the people who believe in her potential and the encouragement she receives, helps her to dedicate to her studies, and understand that building a strong educational foundation would contribute to the pursuit of her dreams...**Thank you for believing in her.**”*

- Charlotte, mother of Natalie (Year 1)

*“Our family has always felt supported, **knowing that A Start in Life has our back and care about my son’s education and his future is everything I could want as a dad who hopes to see his son achieve his life goals...** The support has impacted my son’s future goals by being more confident and focussed on learning. **He is now staring to talk about university and he is only in Year 6.** With the growth since receiving support from A Start in Life, it has given my son and our family drive to keep working towards a future and achievable goals. We have gone from “let’s just get through school” to now looking to have a plan and goals to have options.”*

- Carl, father of Arnold (Year 6)



Career and Skills Development Scholarship

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Students in our Career and Skills Development Scholarship are exploring new futures, building skills and growing in confidence. Highlights from the past year include:

- **Personal growth** – many students stepped out of their comfort zones and challenged themselves in new ways
- **Supportive peer environment** – even those who were shy at first have found their place, encouraged by a welcoming atmosphere. Students have been inclusive, collaborative and happy to help one another during workshops
- **Working towards goals** – students have set goals from academic success to university preparation and part-time employment. With guidance, they've created practical action plans and have begun tracking their progress
- **Exploring industries and careers** – through career coaching, industry excursions and career sampling, students are thinking broadly about their options – including architectural engineering, textiles design, software design, law, psychiatry, teaching, nursing, politics, journalism, real estate, agriculture, physiotherapy, marine biology and musical theatre
- **Making decisions based on values** – students have reflected on what matters to them – like helping others, working with integrity, or being part of a team – and have started considering careers that align with these values
- **Building useful skills** – along the way, students are developing lifelong skills like time management, communication and teamwork – all helpful for school, work and beyond



Career and Skills Development Scholarship: Justine's Story

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Justine's journey shows the life-changing power of mentoring, exposure and encouragement.

At first, Justine felt unsure about her future. Pressured by family expectations to pursue a high-paying job, she felt conflicted. Pressured by family expectations to become a doctor or pursue a high-paying job, she struggled with the idea of following a path that might not bring her joy.

But as she explored new industries and ideas, her perspective shifted: ***"In Malaysia, they say, 'You can be one of three things: a doctor, an engineer or a failure.' There are so many more careers than I expected."***

But through our program, her perspective began to shift. She attended industry excursions to the Reserve Bank of Australia, McKinsey & Company, and Animal Logic Studios. These experiences opened her mind to all sorts of possibilities.

Justine has now discovered a real interest in **fashion and textiles**, and is set to travel to Italy during the Spring holidays on a school trip – *"which I have been able to afford thanks to the money received from this scholarship and the skills you have provided me with that have allowed me to maintain my position at work."* She's also curious about **aeronautical engineering**.

The mentorship she's received has played a profound role too. ***"Being mentored by the both of you has genuinely changed the projectile of my life and I cannot thank you enough,"*** she said.

"If you had asked me what I looked for most in a career two years ago, I would have told you that I'd want a wealthy job so that I could take care of myself. Now, while I understand that money is a key aspect of choosing a future career, it is not the only determining factor. Instead of pursuing my parents' dreams, you have encouraged me to follow what I'm passionate in."

Justine's story is one of transformation – of learning to embrace new possibilities, to think differently about success, and to pursue a future that aligns with her passions.





Our tertiary students continue to impress with their commitment, adaptability and resilience. Highlights from the past year include:

- **Reduced financial stress** – our support covered rent, transport, internet, textbooks, IT equipment and basic living expenses. Many students said this allowed them to focus more on studies, network and pursue internships
- **Overcoming challenges** – students adapted to university life by developing new study and time management skills – from using spreadsheets to create study timetables, to playing classical music for retention and joining study groups
- **Access to specialised resources** – we helped students obtain essential equipment, including software for an Advanced Computing student, protective clothing for an Agriculture student, and prosthetic equipment for a healthcare student
- **Work placement grants** – we supported five various placements including law, engineering, cyber security and medicine. These help offset lost income, cover transport for distant placements and provide the necessary uniforms and equipment
- **Broadening prospects** – students expanded their networks, considered further studies, and explored new career fields. Simon, for example, joined three university societies to step outside his comfort zone, saying “I believed to seek discomfort was the greatest way I could learn and grow.”



Tertiary Program: Jessie's Story

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Background

Demographics

Female based in rural southeast QLD.
Support commenced in January 2025 at age 18.

Background

Jessie grew up on her parent's farm in QLD. She has just moved to NSW to attend university. Both Jessie and her parents are reliant on Centrelink support.

Significant Achievements

Jessie is a committed high achiever. She achieved mostly As, with some Bs and Cs, in Year 12; and especially excelled in science and agriculture subjects. In semester 1 Physics, she achieved an A+, with her teacher commending her insightful interpretations on experiments. In Biology, she achieved an A and presented a research piece on the effects of synthetic hormones in the beef industry. In Agricultural Practice, she achieved an A-, with her teacher congratulating her ability to thoroughly plan and execute detailed investigations, analyse data and make research-based evaluations; and saying she is a motivated and willing student both in class and practical lessons. Her teachers described her as a motivated, diligent, friendly and confident student with a strong commitment to her learning.

Challenges

Living and working on her family's farm has presented many challenges, with increasing financial pressures in recent years due to falling cattle prices and increased interest rates. Jessie has had to help out lots on the farm, meaning she has been unable to take on a part-time job in her local town. During high school, Jessie had a long commute to school, rugby and other activities, meaning she would often get home late and have less time to study. She said careful planning and time management helped. Jessie has also faced challenges as a young woman wanting to work in agriculture, having to overcome negative bias and work harder than male counterparts. She found this hard to deal with, but said staying focused on her goals has helped.

Short Term Goals

- To achieve 75% or above in her university subjects
- To network with others in the industry
- To complete work placements and gain hands-on experience

2024 End of Year Update

Current Status

Jessie has just graduated from Year 12 and has been accepted into a Bachelor of Rural Science at a university in Armidale NSW.

Grades

In her 'Senior Statement' she received an A in Agricultural Practices, Biology and Physics; a B in English and Mathematical Methods; and a C in Physical Education.

Significant Achievements

In addition to her excellent academic results, Jessie undertook various leadership roles during school, including Head Prefect, House Captain and Cattle Show Team Captain. She also represented her school in rugby and netball; and volunteered at local CWA events, Anzac services and Clean Up Australia Day. She also received a school award in Year 12 for her dedication and excellent efforts. Jessie has just been accepted into her dream degree – a four year Bachelor of Rural Science. With a passion for animals, she is especially interested in the science behind sustainable farming, animal health and biosecurity, and is extremely excited to start the degree.

Challenges

Jessie has to move interstate to attend university, and will be living on campus. Her biggest worry is covering the cost of rent, and plans to find a part-time job while studying to help cover costs. She is also nervous about finances while completing unpaid placements during her degree, which requires 16 weeks of total placements. Jessie has also been using a second hand laptop since Year 11, which constantly overheats, and is thankful that our funding will help her purchase a new one.

Long Term Goals

To work in consultancy and research, focusing on biosecurity and animal health to protect Australian agriculture from pests and diseases; and help local farmers. Jessie would especially like to work in the Department of Primary Industries. She is also curious about pursuing a Master of Teaching "further down the track".

Students Say Thanks

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*“The team provided consistent encouragement, **reminding me that every step forward, big or small, was part of building my future.** [They would] consistently check-up on me and even at times offering professional opportunities, [I am] truly grateful for the support...The regular check-ups felt like having a parent genuinely invested in my progress, always checking in to ensure I was on track and encouraging me to succeed. **The genuine care they showed during these moments made me feel valued and motivated to push through challenges, knowing someone believed in my potential.**”*

- Charlie (Bachelor of Law / Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation)

“Throughout my education, A Start in Life offered encouragement, inspiration, and guidance through regular check-ins and incentives. Their support felt like having a distant but deeply invested family member cheering for my success
*...**The support from A Start in Life has opened countless opportunities for me. It has guided me toward a career where I can contribute to solving pressing global and local environmental challenges. The idea of making meaningful, positive impacts on both humanity and the natural environment **once felt like an unattainable dream – yet it has now become my reality.****”*

- Ned (Bachelor of Environmental Science)





With a legacy of success, **many alumni have gone on to make meaningful contributions to their communities** – proof that investing in education today creates lasting change for tomorrow.



April

April was in primary school when *A Start in Life* assisted her family through a challenging period, ensuring she could stay focused on her education. Determined to make the most of every opportunity, she pursued her passion.

Her career has taken her from London's West End to major film and television productions, including a Marvel movie. She has led teams on some of Australia's most well-known programs and is now a Co-Executive Producer on *MasterChef*, with two AACTA awards to her name.

Despite her success, April has never forgotten the support that helped her get started. For over 14 years, she has given back to *A Start in Life*, helping the next generation of students pursue their own ambitions.

Her message to today's students – "We believe in you. We believe you can achieve greatness and do anything you dare to dream. So good luck—because the world is waiting!"





Wid

Wid's story is one of resilience, determination and the power of education. Moving to a new country as a child, she and her family faced financial hardship and the challenge of starting over. But she refused to let obstacles define her future.

With *A Start in Life's* support, Wid completed high school and went on to earn her law degree. She proved that no challenge is too great with the right mindset and opportunity. Today, she is more than a successful lawyer – she is the founder of her own law firm, advocating for justice and supporting those in need.

Her words of gratitude – "Without the financial support from *A Start in Life*, I would not be a respected member of the community, advocating for justice and assisting those who need it most."





"I have never been involved in an organisation that makes such a vital difference in young people's lives at a grassroots level. This program caters to the individual, and the staff are committed to each young person's cause."

- Brett (media and production)

"I am very grateful to A Start in Life for giving me the opportunity to make something of myself. I honestly do not know where I'd be, or where my family would be, without that support."

- Warwick (owner of specialist defence force business)

"[The charity] reduced a great amount of emotional stress for my family and helped me lead a fruitful life. I am eternally thankful for the long commitment and support...[it] was so important to my development and social conscience."

- Mark (former Australian Senator and Minister for Sport)



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To learn more or donate, please visit www.astartinlife.org.au

