



AUTUMN 2021

Brighter Futures

A start in life

a brighter future for young australians



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Alumni find success in their chosen careers

Our Alumni are one of the most valuable measures of the impact of our support and we have recently been inspired by two students who graduated from our program in 2019.

Both are now in the second year of their careers and both made donations in response to our *Back to School* Campaign. We are always encouraged by Alumni giving back to the charity, helping us to continue to provide a brighter future to other young Australians.

Wid Graduate in Law, Sydney

Background

After the loss of Wid's father to cancer, her mother, a new migrant to Australia and sole carer to three children, struggled to cover the cost of her children's education. At age 12, Wid's school principal referred her to *A Start in Life*. We stepped in and provided support to Wid throughout high school and into her university degree.

How the assistance provided helped

Wid says, "A *Start in Life* provided me with financial support which was designed to meet my individual needs

throughout my education. Providing me with a laptop, access to internet, and vouchers to purchase textbooks and stationery, ensured I always had the required resources to perform to the best of my ability".

The future is brighter

In 2019, Wid graduated university with a Law and Business Degree and gained employment at a legal firm operating in Western Sydney.

Wid says, "A *Start in Life* assisted me financially throughout my education to help me achieve my dreams. Today, I can proudly say that I am a qualified solicitor; I work closely with barristers to assist them in various criminal and family Law cases. Without the financial support from *A Start in Life*, I would not be a respectful member of the community fighting for justice and assisting those in need".



Fay Graduate in Dentistry, Regional QLD

Background

Fay applied for *A Start in Life* support in 2016, when in her 2nd year of Dentistry, as her father's disability meant there was limited capacity to provide the financial assistance she required. The academic demands of Dentistry, including the necessity to excel in the course to be able to continue in 4th and 5th year, meant that Fay also had limited time to earn her own income to support herself.

How the assistance provided helped

Fay says, "A *Start in Life* support helped financially, socially and mentally. The support gave me access to textbooks/equipment and essentials, which tremendously reduced

the financial burden to allow me to focus on my studies. The *A Start in Life* team always made themselves available if I had concerns and would regularly check to see how I was doing, offering social and emotional support if needed. This support had a huge impact on my academic success and my willingness to learn, which I carried with me into the start of my career".

The future is brighter

Following Fay's graduation in 2019, she gained employment as a general dentist at a local dental practice.

Fay informs us she is thoroughly enjoying her chosen field. She is pleased to be building on her scope of practice, taking on increasingly difficult cases with the assistance of more senior colleagues. Fay says, "I take pride in my patient-centred approach, which is reflected in my busy appointment book".

☉ READATHON

A new reading initiative

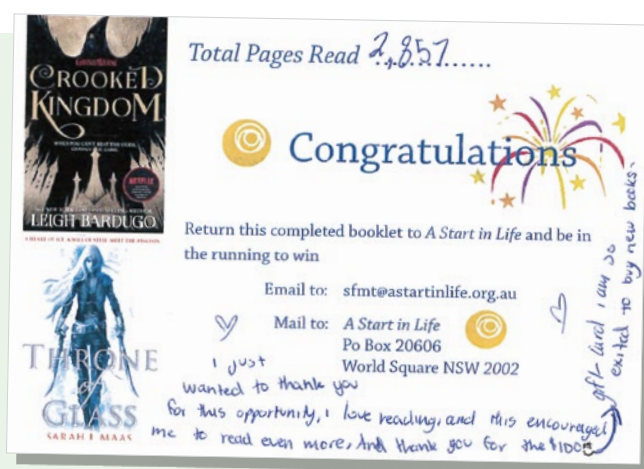
To help students re-engage with their education at the beginning of the 2021 school year, *A Start in Life* ran a Readathon for our primary and secondary students. Believing we could motivate them to develop or continue good reading habits, we challenged them to read at least 10 books or 1500 pages within term one. Any student reaching that goal was rewarded with a book voucher, and additional prizes were given to students who read the most.

Whilst participation in the challenge was voluntary, we were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic uptake from so many students. Some students were already avid readers, whilst others had previously struggled with engaging in regular reading; however, both groups benefited from this. Carers, parents and students volunteered encouraging feedback, providing evidence this relatively simple initiative was a valuable activity. One parent commented, "Jason has been trying to get Kai to read more and the Readathon really encouraged him to do it".

Students were required to submit a log of books read, along with a few sentences summarising each book. This provided us with a little more insight into the student's interests, along with their current literacy levels. This valuable information is then taken into our conferences with students, where learning goals are agreed. There was quite a breadth in the books read by this cohort! Anh Do appeared to be the

most popular author. Many students were reading classics by authors such as Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton. Japanese authors and manga were particularly popular in the early years of high school, whilst older students were reading books that explored issues of social justice and identity.

While the Readathon was a new initiative, our focus on helping improve the literacy environment in the home of the students we support, is not. We have, and will continue to, set reading goals with students and their carers, provide tuition for students struggling with literacy and provide vouchers to students to purchase books as part of most support plans. We encourage students to purchase books of their choice, selecting genres or topics they are interested in, or even graphic novels for students that struggle to engage with only words on a page. We hope to instill a love of reading in our students, developing their imagination and improving their literacy skills. The success of the Readathon encourages us to continue to hold activities and challenges to help motivate students to engage in their learning, develop interests and healthy habits.



Celebrating student achievements from 2020

After a year's hiatus, our Annual Prize Giving returned in April, albeit in a slightly different format.

Historically, we invite 23 very worthy award recipients and some family members to Sydney to receive prizes, recognising their prior year achievements. This year, we are taking the prizes to the students, except where those students reside in Sydney.

Our first regional event was held in Ballina. Local award recipients, their families, Jason (our Senior Student Support Officer) and Allan Elliott (our President) and representatives from three Masonic Lodges in that area, who have been significant supporters of *A Start in Life*, held an afternoon tea celebrating the students' successes.

Award recipients included Tilly, a secondary student who received an award for her improvement in mathematics. With the support of tuition, funded by *A Start in Life*, Tilly moved up two grades over the course of the year.

Seven students received awards at our Sydney ceremony. Awards were presented to students across

our Primary, Secondary and Tertiary cohorts, recognising their improvements and successes in a range of areas. Harry, a primary school recipient, received an award for his significant uplift in results, moving up two grades in English, and one in Mathematics. Sana, a secondary school recipient, received an award for artistic achievement for her aptitude and the passion she displays for painting and drawing.

Thomas (below), received an award for maintaining a distinction average within his double degree of Bachelor of Science, Doctor of Medicine. All this despite needing to transition to online learning due to Covid-19. Thomas is a bright and driven student, who displays a strong commitment to the challenging journey to become a qualified Doctor. Although currently attending university in Sydney, he hopes to undertake clinical placements in regional and remote areas of Australia.

It was so pleasing to see the confidence in the students and how proud their families were of their achievements. Prize Giving is always a wonderful event that provides all who attend the opportunity to witness the positive impact *A Start in Life* support has made.



- ^ Supporter Bruce Sheldrick and Executive Committee Member Anne Ellison present Thomas his award.
- < Some of the award recipients in attendance, alongside Jason and Sapna from our Student Support Team.





Helping students overcome literacy barriers

When assistive technology has been provided by *A Start in Life* to help some of our students overcome their reading and writing barriers, it lifted the achievements of those students.

Bel Year 10

Support: *A Start in Life* purchased a C-Pen device for Bel to help overcome her challenges with reading. The digital pen allowed her to highlight words and phrases on paper, which the pen then dictated back to her. The device also includes an inbuilt dictionary function to assist with comprehension.

Feedback from family: Bel informs us she uses the C-Pen when reading a novel or studying at the school learning centre. She only uses it when required, as Bel is cautious not to become over reliant on it. Bel's mother commented, "The C-Pen has been very beneficial, helping Bel build up her confidence".

Outcome: Bel received excellent grades for her Comprehension outcomes in her end of year report, moving up from 'Achieving' in year 8 to 'Proficient' in year 9. Overall, she has improved her English grade from a 'C' in 2019 to a 'B' in 2020.

Yas Year 11

Support: As Yas was struggling with her spelling and grammar when completing assignments at home, *A Start in Life* assisted with the purchase of an annual subscription to 'Grammarly'. This application assists students with grammatical and spelling corrections on digital text.

Feedback from student: Yas tells us the software has helped her complete essays and assignments. As the program highlights and explains the errors, along with providing suggestions, Yas believes her grammar skills

are developing. Yas has been able to carry those improvements through to her written work in exams and tests, even when she is unable to access the program.

Outcome: Yas now maintains a 'B' grade in English. In her Semester 2 report, the teacher commented, "Yas can effectively transfer knowledge, skills and understanding of language concepts into new and different contexts".

Jay Year 5

Support: Following recommendations from Jay's school, *A Start in Life* assisted with an annual Epic Books subscription to support his reading at home and help him keep up with his peers. Epic Books is an online platform containing a variety of grade-specific e-books. The program provides Jay assistance through audio 'read to me' and 'dictionary look-up' applications.

Feedback from family: Jay's mother advised us, he now reads for at least 15 minutes, three times a week. Epic Books has helped overcome his reluctance to read. "Jay finds the resource very useful, particularly the inbuilt read aloud function when he becomes stuck on words."

Outcome: Whilst Jay is still below his reading age, using Epic Books has helped to develop his fluency and confidence. This has assisted him in moving up a level for 'Reading' outcomes from 2019 to 2020. Jay's mother advises that his reading has continued to improve in 2021. In a recent six monthly check in, Jay informed us that he is now reading a combination of Epic books online, and hard copy books without the assistive technology.