



Annual Awards Day: in review

The eighty people attending our Student Awards Day came to the Western Sydney University Engineering Innovation Hub because someone they loved was being recognised for their educational achievements. Among them were Freemasons, foundation representatives, families, former students, and donors, some of whom were meeting the recipients they had supported for the very first time.



This year, we proudly celebrated 41 students whose determination, resilience, and commitment to their education continue to inspire us all.

One student spoke about the challenges that made his path more difficult. Then he turned to the room and said something that landed quietly and stayed: *"everyone should be proud. Simply getting to where you are, whatever path you took, is worth acknowledging."*



The morning's most impactful moment came from an alumna. She spoke about years of uncertainty; but she made it through, and wanted to publicly say she would not be where she is today without *A Start in Life*.

She fondly recalled, the support she received. It was the check-ins, the sense that someone was paying attention, that someone was in her corner and genuinely invested in seeing her succeed. That backing meant more than she could describe.

This sustained personal support can be the difference between getting through and falling through the cracks. This is what makes *A Start in Life's* celebration so powerful, it was a reminder that when a community invests in young people, lives can change, highlighting what is possible when community full of exceptional people standing together.





Growing Where It Counts: In Our Community

Over the past six months, *A Start in Life* has strengthened partnerships across communities, building meaningful connections with people and organisations committed to the same cause.

When Industry Meets Community

John Holland CPB Contractors Ghella Joint Venture (JCG) gets it. Infrastructure isn't just about roads and tunnels, it's about the communities those roads connect. That question opened a door for *A Start in Life*. They have supported us through running community fundraising events, one raffle had over \$10,000 worth of prizes. It is partnerships like this, that highlight how communities can get involved to support our students.

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Students
funded for
their first year
in our program



When our student Aliyar took to the stage, the room fell silent. Every single person stopped and listened as this bright young man from Lightning Ridge shared his story, about how his scholarship helped carry him through one of the hardest times of his life while his mum was sick.

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Partnerships like this open doors to real industry connections and potential work placement opportunities.

Shaping Learning Environments

Learning Environments Australasia NSW Chapter (LEA NSW) designs school spaces around how children learn, with a focus on light, acoustics, and creating environments that support concentration and engagement. We bring this same thinking into the home, helping families create dedicated learning spaces where children feel comfortable, safe, and inspired to learn. Whether it's a desk of their own, a quiet study corner, bookshelves, or a designated space for schoolwork, can make a significant difference in the way a child learns.

This strong alignment with LEA NSW creates opportunities for both organisations to support students and teachers by sharing knowledge and extending our collective social impact across schools, homes, and communities.

Kathleen On Tour

In April, The Legal Innovation and Tech Fest Australia invited *A Start in Life* to be their charity partner. This opportunity to present created a valuable new connection for *A Start in Life*. Melanie Beckett, a lawyer and Nationally Accredited Mediator who helps people navigate complex legal systems and resolve disputes outside the court system, reached out



to offer pro bono support to families needing help understanding their rights and navigating educational challenges.

Kathleen has also been presenting to the Deputy Principals Association, sharing how we are a resource to help. And slowly, something shifted. They started asking about our work, connecting us with families, and introducing us to other leaders.



AFL Cultural Heritage Series

The Western Sydney Giants show up for their community, and we strive to do the same. When the Giants invited *A Start in Life* to their Cultural Day, we were proud to join them.

The Giants have built strong ties with Western Sydney families, and being welcomed into that community helps us reach more young people in need. We celebrated culture and connection while sharing information about our programs and raising funds through a community raffle.



"The work we do starts with listening," says Kathleen Donohoe, A Start in Life's CEO "Six months ago, we were introducing ourselves. Now community leaders introduce us."

These connections show what's possible when people unite around a shared purpose. Our network of supporters continues to grow, bringing together organisations that believe in the power of education to change lives. Together, we are creating opportunities, strengthening communities, and helping more young people reach their potential. If your organisation would like to get involved, we'd love to hear from you.

Community making a difference



City2Surf: Community Super Stars

On the 9th of August, Fourteen kilometres from Hyde Park to Bondi, a team of runners ran for *A Start in Life*. Some running, walking, at least one shuffling the last stretch of Heartbreak Hill with the good grace to laugh about it.

Together we raised **\$2755**. Through this initiative, we are able to provide assistance to:

- **2 students funded for a year:** Covering essentials like shoes, stationary and textbooks so they can walk into class feeling prepared and equal to their peers.
- **1 student receiving funding towards tutoring:** Giving a young person struggling with schoolwork the tailored support needed to build confidence and boost their grades.

Building Brighter Futures Together

Donate today

W: astartinlife.org.au

P: (02) 9264 3017

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Account: 424978



Scan the QR Code





I found something I'm actually good at, working with people, making sure everyone's included. That changed how I feel about myself.



William
Student

William's Road to Self-Belief

Student Stories of Success

How William found his voice: His journey through our program developed his sense of belonging.

William believed he didn't belong. Not because anyone told him so, but because somehow he'd decided he wasn't the kind of person other people wanted around. He received decent grades and tried his best, but Year 9, William was quiet in a way that suggested he'd stopped thinking his presence mattered.

William felt he lacked confidence and the need for connection.

The barrier wasn't only financial, though those pressures did exist. William had come to believe he wasn't enough. A *Start in Life* offered him Career and Skills Development support.

When you doubt your own worth, building confidence and finding out what you're good at is essential to overcoming the uncertainty. Our program involved group work and projects, where William had to collaborate and contribute. It started small, he noticed he could work with people as part of the team, focusing on the task instead of his own worry. He went from believing he wasn't quite enough, to discovering he had real strengths particularly in teamwork,

problem solving, communication, and including others. By Year 10, William was noticeably different. His confidence grew, he became more present, more willing to speak up. The grades stayed solid, but the real change was inside.

Our career skills program is not solely about finding job opportunities. They're about building belief, discovering strengths, and shifting from "I'm not enough" to "I have something to offer."

Students like William often need social and emotional support as much as academic help. When we help young people discover their strengths and feel what it's like to work well with others, we show them they matter.

William's story is real. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.

Help more students like William know they matter

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