

MEDIA RELEASE

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Giving girls a life-changing experience

Sydney music teacher Jessica Brown gave up her nine-to-five job to assist troubled teenage girls, and has helped more than 250 young women get their lives back on track.

Jessica, who has always been passionate about helping students reach their potential, started her not-for-profit small business, the Life Changing Experiences Foundation, in 2003 to develop a mentoring program for young women suffering from abuse, neglect, trauma and the absence of a positive role model.

Fast forward to 2011, and the Foundation has raised more than \$3 million to fund its SISTER2Sister program, which has more than 300 volunteers – including high profile ambassadors such as singer Natalie Bassingthwaite, journalist Sarah Wilson and author Jacinta Tynan.

Now, the Life Changing Experiences Foundation has been named as a finalist in the Community and Social Services category of the City of Sydney's prestigious Business Awards.

"For a long time, I wanted to find a way to build up self-esteem and provide healthy role models for teenagers – so I started the Life Changing Experiences Foundation, which works with troubled teenage girls across Sydney and helps them turn their lives around," said Jessica.

"Within just two years I managed to go from being \$30,000 in debt to raising over \$1 million for our mentoring program, securing federal government funding and winning the Pride of Australia Medal – not bad for a humble school teacher!

"It's such an honour to be able to give back to the community through this program. So many of the girls we work with continue their close relationships with their mentors even after the program finishes – and I have no doubt that many of these bonds will prove to be life long.

"Being a finalist in the City of Sydney awards has created a real sense of worth and achievement amongst my phenomenal team, and reinforces that they are the driving force behind our foundation's success in changing the lives of young women."

The Life Changing Experiences Foundation's SISTER2Sister program is a 12 month mentoring and risk management program that matches teenage girls with successful female role models from the local community, business and corporate worlds.

Both students and mentors attend a four day 'Butterfly Bootcamp', followed by a series of risk management workshops, life changing experiences and valuable one-on-one time.

Graduates of the program have gone on to a wide variety of impressive achievements, including buying property at the age of 22, completing TAFE's HSC equivalent with a



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UAI of 99, becoming an apprentice chef, gaining scholarships to university and other training programs, being published in a collection of stories, writing a play that was performed at the Sydney Opera House and participating in Outward Bound's Leadership Program and a Youth Leadership Summit in the United States.

In addition to being named a finalist in the City's 2011 Business Awards, Jessica has been honoured with a host of other accolades – including winning the 2006 Pride of Australia Medal for commonsense, compassion and wisdom, being a NSW finalist in the 2011 Australian of the Year Awards, and being nominated for the 2011 Telstra Business Woman of the Year award. Jessica is also the NSW face of the Commonwealth Bank's Local Heroes program.

Over the next few years, Jessica hopes that the Life Changing Experiences Foundation will continue to grow and assist even more teenage girls across the country.

“Our goals now are to establish ourselves as leaders in the not-for-profit small business sector, to implement the SISTER2Sister mentoring program throughout the country, state by state, and to really cement our fundraising model so that we can achieve financial sustainability and growth,” said Jessica.

“But at the heart of it, I want to continue giving young women the ability to imagine a life outside their present circumstances, with the opportunity to learn new skills, overcome obstacles and break the cycle – that's what really matters.”

The Life Changing Experiences Foundation is one of eight finalists in the Community and Social Services category of this year's Business Awards – the biggest and best yet, with 640 businesses nominated and almost 67,000 votes across 22 categories.

The winners will be announced by Lord Mayor Clover Moore MP at the 2011 City of Sydney Business Awards Gala Dinner hosted by Lisa Wilkinson on Tuesday, 13 September.

Tickets are available for purchase now: www.sydneybusinessawards.com.au

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