

# Youth in Motion: Free tutoring to guide young people out of hardship

## 1. Summary of the impact

Youth in Motion is a tutoring initiative based in the Northern Sydney area which is driven by young people who have experienced hardship.

The team offers free tutoring to disadvantaged high school students to support their successful HSC completion despite their difficult circumstances, often involving homelessness, domestic abuse or mental illness.

## 2. Problem

In 2015, around three-quarters of the young people seeking crisis accommodation in Northern Sydney were turned away due to a lack of beds from the local youth homelessness service. Evidence suggests that high school students are more likely to drop out of school or struggle in class if they are dealing with difficult circumstances, such as homelessness, and as such are unable to pursue a career and support themselves financially in the future.

According to Youth in Motion founder Alice Zhang, many students fall through the cracks of the system due to lack of mentoring and support, often making students feel frustrated, hopeless and inept.

In addition, many such students, especially those housed in shelters, cannot access tutoring services in their local area, making it even more unlikely for them to travel across the city to access this type of support.

## 3. Beneficiaries

The most immediate beneficiaries of the project are young people who are currently experiencing hardship; students enrolled in last year's program had issues ranging from mental illness, as well as distress resulting from domestic abuse, substance abuse or homelessness.

The project is specifically targeting high school students in the Northern Sydney area.

#### **4. Approach to impact**

Youth in Motion is a small nonprofit program that has identified these gaps and needs, and provides free tutoring to young people experiencing such hardship or disadvantage.

The project, originally titled 'The Learning Project', operates out of Naremburn School after school hours and offers free tutoring to students at Naremburn and surrounding high schools. The team, headed by founder and current UTS student Alice Zhang, consists of around 15 active volunteers who contribute through their work as tutors and mentors, as well as those members overseeing finances, business and engage with the community to recruit students and seek external support.

The approach is simple but effective; tutors are matched with either individuals or a small group, and students have the opportunity to get help with school work and exam preparation, and support appeal cases related to HSC completion by helping students catch up with the work required.

Last year, the project involved around 6 students (the level of engagement fluctuated), and this year the number has doubled to 12 students.

The initiative is still in its early stages, however this year the team is planning on incorporating, rebranding with a new name, and introducing an online magazine that will also engage the creativity of young people.

#### **5. What has changed as a result of this work?**

##### **5.1. The Outcomes**

In its first year of operation around six students accessed the program on their way to completing high school. School completion was supported in a variety of ways. Some participants benefited from academic enrichment, while others received much-needed encouragement and mentoring from the tutors. Through building personal capacity, some students were able to go on to secure internships and junior roles in companies.

Thanks to this success, and an increase in volunteers, the program was able to double its size in its second year of operation. In 2017 twelve students have commenced accessing the service, and the team are looking forward to expanding this to reach more students across the northern Sydney region.

##### **5.2. Impact**

The ultimate goal of the program is to enable young people who experience hardship to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits, and be able to support themselves through successful careers despite their disadvantaged background. Zhang adds a

caveat, stating that although projects such as these provide young people with the much-needed encouragement and confidence, the students are often underestimated and actually already possess the resilience needed to change their own odds.

In terms of impact reporting, Youth in Motion is still in its infancy, and lacks the sophisticated and longitudinal measures required to demonstrate impact in this domain. To make a case for its work, the project can, however, rely on existing research that links mentoring and tutoring to later social and economic benefits.

## **6. What has helped you accomplish this work?**

### **6.1. Personal enabling factors**

Youth in Motion was an initiative modelled off an existing service called The Shack, which Alice Zhang had access to while struggling with homelessness and hardship. The approach adopted therefore has been strongly based on the positive experience had with The Shack program and personal experience and subsequent success. In addition, Alice is informed by relevant studies, currently undertaking a B.A. Communications (Social Enquiry) B. Laws at UTS and is also working towards obtaining a Certificate in Youth Work from TAFE.

The team of volunteers is also comprised of expertise in the domains of teaching and business to support the program.

### **6.2. External enabling factors**

Last year, the team were funded by Grill'd Local Matters, The Pollination Project (a seed grant organisation from the US), and crowdfunding. The team has also reached out to local churches for support.

One of the key enablers of the program is Naremburn School who provides the facilities and promotes the program around the community. At UTS, Zhang found support among academic staff who have been actively assisting in recruiting new volunteers and tutors for the program.

As the program mirrors the existing program The Shack, the team received consultation and assistance in designing the program when it was in the early stages.

## **7. Challenges**

Despite the idea being a very simple one, Alice Zhang says it was challenging to set up due to constraints in being able to secure funding and complying with legal requirements, such as setting up insurance for tutors.

Despite the fundraising initiatives and grants, which combined generated around \$1600, much of the cost has been covered by Alice and the management partner.

However, the team hopes to be able to gain charitable status in the near future to be able to host fundraising events and reach out to potential collaborators and sponsors.

## 8. References

<https://www.phoenixhouse.org.au/what-we-do/>

<https://www.taldumande.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/FY2015-Taldumande-Annual-Report.pdf>