



helping hands

Ever wondered if charity donations actually help people or just end up in an administrative slush fund? Wonder no more...

CAITLIN WARD, 21

The marketing coordinator suffered severe depression as a teenager.

"Growing up, my life was dominated by my parents' fighting, bullying, abuse and neglect. My dad was a depressed alcoholic, and when I was 12, my mum decided that we had to leave for our own safety. We had no money and no food in our cupboards. I was bullied at school; I had no friends and no-one to talk to about what was happening at home.

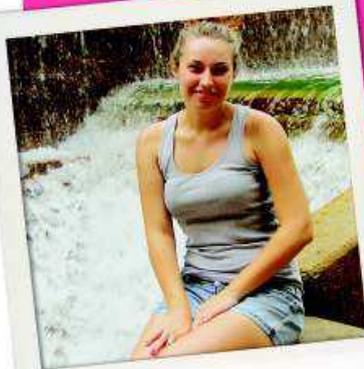
I hated the world, and myself, so I attempted to end my life. I was put on antidepressants and started to visit a counsellor - things got a bit better.

However, in Year 11, the first real friend I'd ever made committed suicide. Within the next two weeks, my father and grandma also passed away. I was heartbroken. I spoke to

my year advisor and he referred me to a mentoring program called SISTER2sister. He said it was something I would benefit from because it wasn't just sitting and talking about feelings, it was active and promoted personal

development. The program matched me up with a 'Big Sister' who they knew would benefit me the most. Sally, my Big Sister, was the type of person I wanted to be - confident, motivated and genuine with a passion for life. She filled me with hope. In the program, we did activities ranging from body image workshops to white-water rafting and cooking classes. Outside of the program, Sally and I would meet up as often as we could and she is still someone I can turn to in times of need. I now work as a marketing coordinator and am also studying for a diploma of events. I really believe that, had I not entered the program, I probably wouldn't be here today."

Visit lifechangingexperiences.org



Caitlin believes she owes her life to SISTER2sister.

CHERIE BISH, 27

9 months after her son Kai was stillborn, the marine biologist was diagnosed with cancer.

"When the doctor told me they'd found a mass in my rectum and there was a high chance it was cancer, my first reaction was disbelief. I'd just lost my baby and the ability to have anymore children, due to a hysterectomy. There was just no way I could have cancer on top of all of that.

Once the diagnosis was confirmed, my first question was whether the cancer was responsible for what happened to my baby. The answer was yes, it had likely caused the infection that led to the stillbirth. The storm of emotions inside me centered around anger at the cancer, because I held it responsible for the death of my son.

There are lots of support groups for older people or

BEE ORSINI, 23

Three years ago, the school liaison officer was broke and homeless.

"I was 20 when I found myself homeless on the doorstep of The Salvation Army's Oasis Youth Support Network. My dad had abandoned my mum just after I was born. She did the best she could but life was tough; her English was poor and being a single mum with a baby, it was impossible to



children with cancer, but because of my age, I fell through the cracks in terms of receiving emotional support. My sister, Suz, found out about The Warwick Foundation (TWF) online – they support young adults with cancer and look after the emotional health of members through various programs, retreats and social gatherings.

Bowel cancer is quite rare in young people so TWF also put together a support group called Bum Buddies on Facebook, which has been invaluable in helping me to share experiences with people who truly understand. After battling so hard for so long, you start to expect bad things to happen. The foundation turned the tide on all these emotions. The idea that strangers have made your happiness and peace of mind their mission is just mind-blowing."

Find out more about TWF at thewarwickfoundation.org.au

**Cherie says
The Warwick
Foundation
has been
invaluable.**

get a job. Financial hardships got the better of her.

When I became a teenager, Mum and I started arguing every day and her mental health worsened. I was self-harming and didn't feel like I belonged anywhere so I dropped out of school and left home in Year 12. I felt so alone; I just wanted to be part of something, even if it meant drinking heavily and taking drugs. By the time I split from

my boyfriend, I had a \$14,000 debt over my head. I stayed on a friend's couch but she lived in a share house, so it didn't last. Thankfully, she knew about Oasis. I was offered more than a bed at a refuge – The Salvation Army changed my life and became my family. I achieved a lot in my time there, including getting a job in legal admin and paying off my debt in less than a year. It made me realise

that homelessness wasn't something I needed to pretend never happened, but there was a way to turn shackles into strength. I now work for The Salvation Army as the Oasis Schools Liaison where I talk to students about homelessness to educate, inspire and motivate them. Life today is fantastic, I feel liberated, alive and like my actions are worth it." □
Visit salvos.org.au/oasis



Bee now works for the organisation that changed her life.