

JUNE 2023 NEWSLETTER

IMPACT



OPENING THE DOORS FOUNDATION
Keeping Koorie Kids in an Education of their Choice



“Since coming to this school with the support provided by OTDF, Aalyiah has received significantly more assistance and there’s greater acceptance of her challenging behaviours.

The school has a great art program and the teachers have taken an interest in supporting Aalyiah.”

Vicki Clark OAM

I’m going to start by saying that I’m very proud of all our students and eager to share a few stories from our families from the year so far. After more than two decades, I am constantly seeing the positive outcomes from seeds planted years ago by the Foundation through education.

It’s heart-warming to know that so many First Nations children are enrolled in Catholic and Independent education in Victoria. When Opening The Doors Foundation began 22 years ago, there was about 500 First Nations students in Catholic education in Victoria, and even less in Independent education. Now there are over 2,000 students! This has been as a result of schools, community organisations, and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education Teams across the State who have worked to open the doors. We are very proud to be a part of this ongoing work.

In 2023, the Foundation has continued to grow with the support of so many schools, parishes, organisations and clubs, and generous individuals. We would not be in such a strong position to support First Nations students without your ongoing and dedicated support. The support we can provide is dependent on the funds we are able to raise - so I’d like to say thank you to all who have given and continue to give. The positive effects will be felt for not only this generation but many to come! I hope you enjoy reading the stories from our families and the impact you have helped make in 2023.

Message from the Chair and CEO

Artwork-Vicki Clark OAM

The office of Opening The Doors Foundation is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung People of the Kulin Nations. Opening The Doors Foundation acknowledges the traditional Owners of ancestral lands across Australia. We respect Elders past and present and local Aboriginal Custodians.

Together We Walk! 4th August

Schools Walk-a-thon and fundraising events 2023

In the lead up to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day on the 4th of August, Opening The Doors Foundation is encouraging schools to get involved in our 2nd annual schools walk-a-thon. In 2022 schools raised over \$4,000 for OTDF. We hope to top this in 2023! Schools will come together across Victoria on the 4th August to walk laps around their ovals and raise funds to support First Nations students access to education of their choice. Instead of a walk-a-thon schools can also host a fundraising event of their choice. Please join us!

For more details and to register -
<https://openingthedoortogetherwewalk.raisely.com/>
or email firecarriers@openingthedoors.org.au.

Walk or organise
an event of your
choice to raise
funds for First
Nations students

Artwork-Vicki Clark OAM

Immersion in culture opportunities

OTDF launched The Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Program in response to the social and emotional impact the pandemic had on students. This year we have supported students to attend school excursions nationally through this program funded by the Merrin Foundation. From Queensland to Arnhem land, students are currently preparing for these life-changing immersion programs.

This is their opportunity to connect with their culture and identity. We wish them the best of luck and look forward to sharing some of their stories and the impact you have helped to make later this year.



Finding hope and identity

Jay is in secondary school and currently resides with his grandparents. Jay was orphaned at age 4. His older sister witnessed their parents' death as she was holidaying with their father and older half-brother in Townsville. Unfortunately, the older brother never returned to live with his siblings. This decision meant that Jay and his sister were separated from their half-brother who had lived with them since their birth. So not only did they lose their parents, but they also felt disconnected and the grief and loss of their brother and family unit. Jay's sister left her grandparents' home at age 14 due to the emotional trauma and mental health complications associated with witnessing the death of both parents and the disconnection from her older brother. Jay was left feeling rejected through the family trauma that has evolved.

His grandparents took him to Tasmania in 2022 to trace their First Nations heritage from Northeast Tasmania and Jay found this interesting. The school has now given him the opportunity, with OTDF's financial support and SEWB, to attend a 9-day immersion trip to Cape York. The immersion is held on private Homelands and accessible with permission of Traditional Owners who host the trip. Indigenous culture is at its strongest and most authentic on this remote Homeland, where the people have maintained a meaningful connection to their land for hundreds of generations and the best way to learn about Aboriginal culture and history. Jay's grandparents have said " Jay is not very academic; he struggles at school so learning more about First Nations Culture and connection to country and community will be a positive influence for Jay's social and emotional wellbeing."

Feeling worthwhile and seen

" OTDF has been instrumental for our large family to access Catholic education, and has always been there to assist us, even through the darkest of times.

Having assistance in paying the school levies such as camps as well as being able to purchase the correct school uniform has allowed us to feel worthy and the same as everyone else.

During those times when I have lined up for food and received handouts, I never stopped believing in my worth, and OTDF has also help amplify this through their giving. I feel seen, and so do my children. Thank you "

Stories of Impact

An Occupational Therapist in the making

"My daughter has finished her first year of university and because she did so well - has just received an educational scholarship! She is studying Occupational Therapy and wants to work in remote Aboriginal communities when she has finished her course. She was recently accepted into the university's Academy of Excellence for her great achievement. She received funding from OTDF funding in Year 12. I find the application process quick and efficient. The staff are extremely kind and professional. It doesn't feel embarrassing to claim the assistance."



Occupatoinal Therapy student

Success at VCE

"Will has made excellent progress in his first year of VCE and is achieving excellent results. Will has chosen a field of study which he is passionate about pursuing at University. Will is looking forward to his final VCE year.

The OTDF grant is so very greatly appreciated. It enables us to have our three children in the school of our choice. It means we are not forced to make educational decisions based on financial position. Thank you"

Now on a different path

"Tyler has such an amazing group of friends and tries hard at school. I'm so proud of the young man he is becoming. I'm excited to see what Tyler's future holds. He is taking a different path than what both myself and his father did. Tyler is now wanting to obtain a part-time job after school and on weekends. Tyler is attending the gym, basketball and football. By having OTDF support with education costs, I'm able to afford to send Tyler to Catholic education and be able to afford for him to participate in sporting events."

Asking more about our mob

"Shayla has been really active in learning more about her culture and the support from OTDF has helped to do this. It is comforting to see that our kids collectively, are asking more about our mobs and not being afraid (due to racism) to seek answers about our heritage. These grants are wonderful in taking off the pressure associated with the current economic conditions. Thank you for the support."

First students -International Baccalaureate!



"Scarlett has continued to work extremely hard during her final years at school and has achieved some fabulous results. She is respected by her peers and teachers, with the latter identifying her as a person with integrity and courage. Scarlett was chosen to lead in the Year 12 social justice space by her peers and teachers. She has grown up with strong Aboriginal identity and truly knows herself. She can leverage off this strength and identify when she needs to. Being supported by OTDF has shown her that there are supports behind her- that will help to remove obstacles and alleviate pressures, and that will open open opportunities and experiences. Scarlett is one of only two Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to complete the International Baccalaureate (IB) for Year 12 studies this year. These two girls are the schools first ever Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to complete this form of final year's study."

Alumni - A Journalist inspiring others

Opening The Doors Foundation, with your support, has been there for Proud Wemba Wemba, Yorta Yorta and Mutti Mutti woman Jemma Costa -born and raised on Wurundjeri land. OTDF supported Jemma through her schooling and into her future as a graduate of RMIT with a Bachelor of Communications and Journalism degree. Jemma was particularly passionate about fair and balanced media, especially Indigenous affairs. She was elected as the first ever Indigenous officer at the RMIT student union where she helped to voice the needs and concerns of Indigenous students to the wider university. Jemma Costa is now a reporter for ABC News, specialising in reporting on Indigenous affairs.

A major event conducted by the Rural Press Club of Victoria each year is the Rural and Regional Journalism and Photography Awards. The prestigious awards are hotly contested by journalists and photographers from across the state. In 2021, The Ray Frawley Young Journalist of the year was Jemma Costa from ABC Gippsland. The depth and breadth of her contributions were a standout for the judges.

Ms Costa has said the support of the Opening The Doors Foundation allowed her to "break generational cycles". "I was raised by a strong, black, single mother in a very busy household, and we really did struggle at times," she said. "The prospect of even attending a private school can sound so out of reach for our mob. The foundation helped relieve those financial stresses for my Mum... it really did, quite literally, open up doors for me. "Now, I'm the first person in my family to finish school and go on to university, and now I'm a reporter".



Jemma Costa

The Opening The Doors Foundation sincerely thank each and every supporter for their continued assistance enabling First Nations students to reach their full potential and dreams for the future.

Get in Touch

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Hours: Tuesday to Thursday

9am to 5pm