

Big Sisters Help Lead the Way to Bright Future

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Next week, 17-year-old Leilani McGrath from Glenmore Park will be mingling with stars from *Home and Away*, climbing the Sydney Harbour Bridge, learning makeup techniques for Dolly Magazine and strutting her stuff on the catwalk.

It's all part of the Sister 2 Sister project, a mentoring program for disadvantaged and underprivileged girls between 13 and 18 years of age.

Life Changing Experiences Foundation director Jessica Brown said the program gives "young girls the chance to break the cycle of destitution and abuse".

"We wanted to give disadvantaged girls an opportunity to reach their full potential," she said.

"All the girls in the program have had their own hardships."

The five-day course held at Four Points by Sheraton in Darling Harbour is followed by ongoing support and a review after 12 months.

The 18 girls in the program are also provided with a big sister who takes on the role as mentor.

Throughout the week the participants will hear from positive role models on topics such as money management, self esteem goal setting, health and nutrition, stress management and overcoming the past.

Ms McGrath said she was nominated by a counsellor at her former school.

"We had to write our own story as part of the nomination," she said. "I wrote about going through some rough times when I was young. I think it would be good to meet other people."

Ms McGrath said she plans to go to Tafe next year, finish her HSC and go to university.

"I'd like to go to university and maybe become an artist or historian or museum curator," she said.

Depending on funding, Ms Brown said the next Sister 2 Sister program would start in the July school holidays.

The program has been funded by community groups including Rotary and student representative councils. Details www.ifechangingexperiences.org