

On The Couch – Q&A with Jessica Brown, Founder of the SISTER2sister Program

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For most of us life's hurdles and challenges revolve around work, finances and matters of the heart. But for others, they must also bear years of neglect, abuse and destitution. Fortunately, one Sydney woman is making a difference with her SISTER2sister program.

Jessica Brown is the founder of the Life Changing Experiences Foundation, which teaches life skills to underprivileged kids.

Her main focus is on the SISTER2sister mentoring program, which matches teen girls with successful businesswomen and sportswomen. The projects are designed to give disadvantaged teens tools for success – tools that many of us take for granted.

Jessica, 34, plans for both programs to go state wide this year and national in 2006.

“Some of the girls I have met come from dysfunctional homes and are struggling to keep up with their education while facing extreme hardship,” says Jessica.

“These are bright girls who have the potential to excel in life but they know that their life is not that of a normal teenager.”

“It's great to see these struggling kids finally get what you've been trying to teach them. It may take some time, but you see their self esteem growing and they start achieving so much more.”

One success story is Joshika who Jessica personally mentored. Rising above her own personal and heartbreaking struggles, Joshika completed Year 11 and is now planning a career in real estate.

“Financially it's been a huge burden. Initially we had no financial support but over time we have got community groups like Rotary and councils involved. A number of schools have also helped with fundraising.

“What we're aiming for is government support so we don't have to worry so much about where the money is coming from and can concentrate on what the program is doing.”

Jessica's motivation is simply seeing the girls evolve.

“The lesson I want the girls to learn is that the past doesn't have to equal the future. Where they end up is entirely up to them. I've taught my girls that that's not a daunting task but a truly liberating one.”