

On The Verge The Sunday Magazine (Sydney Telegraph) February 2005

By matching struggling teens with mentors, Jessica Brown's motivating others – and herself – to succeed.

Not everyone would call *The Sound of Music* life changing, but it led Jessica Brown to a new career. While directing a high school production of the musical in 1998, the Sydney based teacher noticed that some of her pupils were having discipline issues. Rather than ignoring them in favour of her all singing cast, she persuaded them to work backstage.

“I found that once they were given a role and some encouragement, their self esteem and confidence rose,”

Says the 34 - - year- old. “That was a pivotal moment for me.”

Soon after, Brown put down the chalk to form the Life Changing Experiences Foundation, which teaches life skills to underprivileged you people. One of its major concerns is the “SISTER 2 sister” mentoring program, which matches teenage girls with successful businesswomen and sportswomen; another is Potentialize: Life Changing Education, an in-school mentoring program launched in NSW last month, which Brown plans to extend to other states in 2006. By sharing their knowledge in an informal way, mentors instill focus and determination in their young charges without being “zoned out” as an authority figure.

Although she scored a National Excellence in Teaching Award in 1998, Brown knows she made the right decision to leave education to concentrate on her mentoring programs. “Financially, it’s been a struggle,” she says. “but over time, we’ve attracted the support of community groups and the public. We’re aiming for government and corporate sponsorship so we can concentrate on what’s important – the girls. “Brown’s main motivation is seeing those she helps grow: “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 them that that’s not a daunting task but truly liberating one.” BRENT McKEAN