

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

I have just completed my VCE at Salesian College Chadstone. When I was a young boy growing up, I would never have imagined such a future. This is my story.

From an early age, the only reading and writing skills I had were passed on to me by my father, who had a very limited education himself. There was no formal schooling where we lived before coming to Australia, however from time to time, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) would set up classes for some of the refugee children, which I would attend. Whenever I had the opportunity, I asked NGO representatives to lend me Science and Maths textbooks to read. However, Salesian College Chadstone in Melbourne provided me with opportunity that I never would have dreamed of.

From the very first day I started at the College at the age of 14 years old, I was welcomed wholeheartedly by the whole school community. The first person I met at the College was the Principal, Mr Robert Brennan, who believed in my potential and treated me equal to other students. Mr Brennan and staff at the College provided me with a unique environment that has been a pivotal influence in my life.

From the first day of school I was fortunate enough to be looked after academically by all of my teachers, who would regularly check in with me to make sure I was keeping up with the workload. As my English skills had improved, teachers motivated me to push myself to the limit, as they were acutely aware of my work ethic. The Wellbeing staff met with me on a regular basis, providing me with counselling and support. They built an environment in which I felt safe. My fellow students at the College were also supportive and instrumental to my success. Many of them implicitly understood me and made me feel

welcome, through friendship, banter and even with academic support, sharing with me resources that they had come across. Like many of the students at Salesian College Chadstone, I am not Catholic, but I really felt like part of the school, and I saw Mass as an opportunity to reflect on my own faith. The school values shared by all; love, tolerance and faith, really made an impact on me. They changed my life.

With all of this support, from Years 9 to 12, I worked as hard as I could. I had made a promise to my parents to really try my best and I had a personal dream of one day getting a job so that I could repay all of their kindness in some way, if not to the people that helped me, then to others who are in need. It was a very challenging time though, as in addition to my school work I had to help my parents with settlement responsibilities.

Despite these difficulties I was able to complete Year 12 in 2016, and I was able to achieve an ATAR of 93.85. This was only possible because of the love and compassion, support and trust that the Salesian College community offered me.

The support that our family received from the East Malvern Parish community, the Brigidine Order of Nuns and other friends in our neighbourhood who have become like our family members, was also crucial. My dream now is to become a doctor. The Salesian College motto is "Omnia Omnibus", meaning "All Things to All Men." Salesian College has inspired me to apply my learning to enhance human life in every way I can. I want to keep hope alive in the face of despair, and I look forward to a bright future, to benefit others, as others have helped me. I hope my current status as an asylum seeker will not be an obstacle to attend university and achieve my goal of becoming a doctor.



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