



THE GIRLS & BOYS  
BRIGADE

# Stories from the GBB

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## From Our Table to Yours A Commitment to Community

As we approach the holiday season, a time filled with joy and togetherness, we at The Girls & Boys Brigade are reminded of the profound impact food has on our community. Christmas is a special time when the hustle and bustle of shopping and preparing feasts fills the air. However, for many in our community, this season also highlights the stark reality of hunger.

As the cost of living crisis has intensified we have become acutely aware of the number of families facing food insecurity. This realisation led us to open our food pantry, a vital resource for those in need. This year, when our freezer broke, it was a stark reminder of the community's reliance on us. We are incredibly grateful for the grant that enabled us to purchase a new freezer, ensuring we can continue to support our community.

Our partnership with ESCA hospitality group has also been invaluable, opening new avenues for our youth and children. Thanks to their support, we hosted our first new fundraising event in over five years, which was a resounding success.

At The Girls & Boys Brigade, food is more than sustenance; it is a symbol of hope, community, and togetherness. We are committed to ensuring no one in our community goes hungry, especially during this special time.

Stefan Lamour-Jansson  
Executive Officer







## A Taste of Home

### Maryam's Journey

At The Girls & Boys Brigade, we believe every child should feel proud of their cultural heritage. Maryam, a lively young girl living in a refuge with her mother Amal, taught us this through her experience with her lunchbox.

Maryam attends a primary school in the inner-city, and as the only Syrian girl there, she often felt different. Her mother, Amal, woke up at 4am every morning to prepare traditional Syrian lunches each morning, filled with the rich, aromatic dishes of their homeland. However, the other children did not share Maryam's appreciation for these Middle Eastern flavours. They teased her about the "smelly" food.

In a world where her classmates' lunchboxes brimmed with fruit roll-ups and mini cheeses, Maryam felt the sting of being different. She asked her mother for money instead of her lovingly prepared meals. This decision came at a cost. To afford the canteen money, Amal went without food herself, leaving her exhausted and resentful.

When Amal confided in us, we took action. Our first step was to encourage Amal to take more from our food pantry. A healthy mother



is essential for a healthy child. Secondly, we built food confidence by hosting family dinners where diverse foods were celebrated and shared. Finally, we made a pact with Maryam: if she would bring her mother's food most days, then we would provide a special lunchbox treat.

As the weeks passed, something wonderful happened. Maryam's courage grew. She began to take pride in her mother's cooking and stopped asking for the treats, instead cherishing the love and tradition in her meals.



# Kelroy's Safe Haven

Kelroy had always found solace in the small, welcoming corner of the world known as The Girls & Boys Brigade. Every afternoon, like clockwork, he would step through those familiar doors for afternoon tea. To some, it might seem like a simple routine, but for Kelroy, it was a lifeline.

At school, things weren't easy. He was caught up in a storm of judgement and hostility after doing the right thing and speaking up to protect a friend. He had been brave enough to tell an adult that his friend was involved in something dangerous, hoping to keep her safe. But bravery came with a price. His friend was furious, and the whispers and stares from classmates were relentless.

Despite this turmoil, The Girls & Boys Brigade remained a sanctuary for him. Here, he could make himself a sandwich, sip on a warm cup of tea, and for a brief moment, feel at peace. The youth workers always welcomed him with smiles and open hearts, offering a listening ear and a kind word. Chatting with them and the other kids was a small but significant respite from the chaos outside.

One day, however, Kelroy seemed different. His usual chatter was replaced by silence, and his eyes, usually bright with curiosity, were clouded with a heavy sadness. Sensing something was amiss, we gently asked if he wanted to talk. It was then that the dam broke; tears streamed down his face as he revealed the note that he had left for his father that morning - a note saying goodbye.

Our hearts shattered. Immediately, our staff rallied around him, ensuring both he and his father received the support they desperately needed. We worked closely with his school to create a care plan, advocating for his safety and well-being in the classroom.

It took a long time for Kelroy to get better. But every afternoon at 3:30pm, Kelroy would find the familiar warmth of our kitchen doors open, a safe space where he could just be himself.



# An Appetite for Change

## From Plates to Possibilities

At The Girls & Boys Brigade, we believe in the power of community and the transformative magic of food. Our journey with the ESCA Hospitality Group began with a simple request for a prize donation for our annual golf day, but it blossomed into something much more profound. Our neighbours in Surry Hills, the ESCA team, not only answered our request but sought deeper involvement, eager to find purpose and give back.

When the team from ESCA toured our building, they were moved by the stories of resilience and courage from the children and youth we support. It was this connection that sparked a partnership rooted in empathy and shared dreams. ESCA extended two incredible offers: a ten-week vocational course in hospitality for our teenagers, and a grand fundraising event hosted at the two-hatted Aalia.

The vocational course was a revelation. Our teenagers, brimming with potential, found themselves immersed in the bustling world of hospitality, working alongside experienced chefs in some of Sydney's finest restaurants. The staff at ESCA shared their own stories of migration and adversity, creating bonds



over shared experiences. For them, food was more than sustenance; it was a medium for connection and understanding.

As the dinner approached, the enthusiasm was palpable. So many ESCA staff volunteered that some had to be turned away. On the night of the event, Aalia's elegant space overflowed with delicious aromas and heartfelt conversations.

The highlight of the evening was not only the exquisite dishes, but the presence of two special teenagers from our program. Standing alongside some of Sydney's finest chefs, they radiated confidence and joy, embodying newfound hope and belonging.

That night, amidst the clinking of glasses and shared laughter, a community was strengthened, and new dreams took flight.



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