



Art of Smart

**Pursue Your Passions,
Impact Your Community &
Stand Out While Navigating Year 12**

TRAIL BLAZER



Trailblazer: Pursue Your Passions, Impact Your Community & Stand Out While Navigating Year 12 by Rowan Kunz.

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Table of Contents

01

Introduction

03

Ava Princi

Student Climate Activist

20

Benjamin Mallin

Activewear Entrepreneur

33

Nell Slattery

iNaturalist Contributor

41

Jack Fraser

Accomplished Inventor

51

Amelia Trkulja

Elite Road Cyclist

62

**Melani
Gunawadarna**

Mental Health Advocate and Educator

72

**Asher
Joyce**

Musical Prodigy

83

**Dylan
Caple**

Radio Presenter

91

**Jannat
Bakri**

Community Inclusivity Advocate

101

**Lara
Proctor**

Female Empowerment Leader

113

**Amoretta
Rourke**

Competitive Dancer

124

**Anthony
B. Radic**

Youth Ambassador

134

**Concl
usion**

Introduction

“You should dial back on your extracurricular activities when you start Year 12 so you can have the time to focus your academics...”

You may have heard some variation of this well-meaning advice at some point on your journey through high school.

But is it actually true?

Each year, we meet thousands of students who have dialled back their extra-curricular activities in Year 12 who tell us about the pressures they feel to maximise their marks. While our goal is to support students to perform at their best, and open as many doors for future study as possible, we know that Year 12 students are so much more than their mark.

We also know that it IS possible to pursue your passions, impact your community, and stand out all while navigating the academic demands of Year 12.

How do we know this?

Each year we hold the Top 50 Year 12 Trailblazer Awards, that recognise and celebrate Year 12 students from around Australia for their achievements outside of academics during their final year of school.

And each year we are blown away by the incredible stories of Year 12 students who have juggled their Year 12 academic studies while continuing to be incredibly involved in extra-curricular pursuits, from starting businesses, creating social change, pursuing elite sport and more!

In fact, we’ve been so impressed by some of their stories that we decided to write a whole book about them so that we could change the narrative about what is possible in Year 12!

The process of sitting down and chatting with these young Trailblazers in preparation for this book, has been nothing short of incredibly rewarding.

From elite athletes to successful climate activists, budding entrepreneurs, aspiring politicians and musical prodigies, we unpacked exactly how these students followed their passions, impacted their communities and stood out all while navigating the academic demands of Year 12.

Our hope is that by reading these incredible stories, you'll find the inspiration, belief, and tools you need to confidently pursue your passions while successfully navigating Year 12!

Rowan Kunz
CEO, Art of Smart Education

About Art of Smart Education

At Art of Smart Education we help students study smart, maintain their wellbeing and transform their results so they can maximise their opportunities for life after school!

Over the last decade we've supported thousands of students across Australia with holistic K-12 tutoring, study and exam mentoring and workshops. Through focusing on supporting students study smart and maintaining their wellbeing, the students we support on average improve their marks by over 20%.

Each year over 1 million students, parents and teachers access our articles, guides and videos as they navigate the journey through school.

Ava Princi

Student Climate Activist

 ava_oxide



ABOUT AVA

Ava Princi is an incredible youth activist who has made a name for herself fighting against climate injustice. As a high school graduate in 2021, Ava spent her senior years challenging the Minister for Environment in a legal battle against the approval of a mine in rural NSW. She has become a prominent voice in Australia's climate debate since her involvement in the case. She's written for The Guardian, been interviewed by The Project on Network 10 and made various statements to the media on the importance of this legal battle for young people all over Australia. Ava accomplished this while managing a chronic pain condition, enduring multiple COVID-19 lockdowns and completing her final year of high school.

WHAT WAS THE SHARMA V MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT [2021] ABOUT AND WHAT WERE YOU FIGHTING FOR?

Sharma vs Minister was a class action lawsuit that was trying to stop the Vickery Extension Project – a proposed mine by Whitehaven Coal in rural New South Wales. The really exciting part of the case is that we were trying to use this situation to establish a duty of care. Before the Minister for Environment can approve any decisions, they have to consider duty of care to the environment and **we wanted to extend that to include the duty of care to young people – given the disastrous impacts of climate change that are on the horizon.** We were hoping that this precedent, now that we've established this duty of care, can stop future projects as well.



The Vickery Extension Project

The Vickery Extension Project proposes to construct an open-cut coal mine 25KM out from Gunnedah. The mine is projected to generate **370 million tonnes of carbon emissions** over its 30-year process of extracting 135 million tonnes of coal.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF THE CASE?

Justice Bromberg found that the duty of care does exist. All of our evidence about the climate impacts was accepted and there was an order issued for the Minister not to approve the coal mine.



Justice Bromberg 27th May 2021

"The [Minister] has a duty to take reasonable care...to avoid causing personal injury or death to persons who were under 18 years of age and ordinarily resident in Australia at the time of the commencement of this proceeding arising from emissions of carbon dioxide into the Earth's atmosphere."

But in the end, the Minister went ahead and approved the mine anyway. She appealed the decision and so the matter was taken to the Federal Court. **The trial has happened, but the judgment is still pending.**

WHAT WAS YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THESE PROCEEDINGS?

I was one of seven litigants from School Strike 4 Climate and my main role in the beginning was to help build the case. Equity Generation Lawyers, who all of us litigants teamed with, were really determined to use this example of the Vickery Coal Mine to prove a duty of care. To help do that, we each shared our experiences with climate change, our experiences in the climate movement and the concerns of young people, to present a case that really focused on the concept of climate justice.

To break that down a little bit, obviously it's important that we address climate change, **but we also need to consider climate justice** – meaning the people that are on the front lines, people that are affected first and worst, people of color, First Nations people – **they deserve to be involved in those climate solutions.**

They deserve to be leading those solutions, they deserve to be listened to and, in some cases, they deserve reparations for the climate injustice that has been committed against them.

All of us litigants drafted our own affidavit with our own unique piece of evidence. **For me, because I live with a disability, my affidavit focused on the impact of climate change on people with disabilities.** Then beyond the affidavits, we all contributed to building the case's media coverage. I did the press conference after the verdict was released, I was interviewed by The Project and I also wrote a piece for The Guardian.



Extract From Ava's Op-Ed in The Guardian

"The eight of us are just the tip of the proverbial melting iceberg. This class action was filed on behalf of all young people around the world and we received almost 2,000 messages of support from young people in 39 countries on almost every continent."

WHAT WAS THAT EXPERIENCE LIKE WRITING FOR THE GUARDIAN?

It was so amazing. I'm really proud of it.

After the judgment was released I did the press conference explaining what had happened and what this judgment meant to us. Then I heard from our media representative at the Climate Justice Project that The Guardian was interested in having one of the litigants write a piece.

So I wrote it and I got to share a lot. **Not only did I write about what the judgment was, but also my personal thoughts and feelings about the climate movement, about climate justice, and about the responsibility that politicians and political actors have to young people.** I was really grateful for that opportunity and it felt amazing to see it published and to see all these supportive comments rolling in.



Comments From Ava's Op-Ed...

Well done young people. After all it is your world that you will inherit, why wouldn't you try and make a difference.

- Watermelon57

Ava, I thank you and salute you. How I hope you encourage and inspire your peers to join you. You are correct, the future is yours, keep fighting, but also find joy in life and take care of yourself.

- VelmaDinkley

HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU INVEST INTO THIS CASE?

I joined the case towards the end of 2020, we went to trial in June of 2021 and it's since been ongoing.

The amount of time I was spending on it sort of fluctuated. Around when the trial was happening, when the judgment was delivered, when we submitted our case to the Court, when we had to do media appearances - **those were times of more dedicated involvement and I was probably contributing around 10 hours a week.** Then, week to week, when we weren't around those big points of action, there was probably a couple hours spent doing media training, reviewing the submissions, getting updates on how the Minister was responding and staying across it all.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS OF WRITING AN AFFIDAVIT FOR THE CASE?

It started through a really casual interview process, with me just sitting down and sharing my experiences as a disabled person, as well as my own research from reading a lot of articles and learning more about the disabled perspective. I also drew from my experiences as a School Strike 4 Climate Activists, because we really try to centre disabled voices and the voices of people of colour.

So I started by sharing those experiences and talked about some of my general knowledge about how climate change affects disabled people more

broadly. **Then the lawyers and I both dug into some research, getting UN reports, and more professional climate research from around the world.** Because we submitted a hearsay application, we were able to include evidence by third parties – meaning research conducted by organisations. The lawyers were really supportive in this whole process.

I actually wrote my affidavit from my perspective in quite an informal way, and then the lawyers went in there and applied “the legalese”. So it was really interesting to read it after and see it referred to in court in this very formal way.

THERE WAS ALSO A SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN INVOLVED, CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED THERE?

We were really excited that the case got such great reception and media interest. **Based on the media coverage of the strikes, we had some idea that there was going to be interest, but we didn't know how big it was going to be.**

So, when it came to crowdfunding, we were really grateful that so many people connected with the case and with the story of the case – this idea of young people going out there and challenging the government on their turf. **It was a class action, so there were seven litigants, but it was brought forward on behalf of all young people in Australia.**

So yes, the crowdfunding did come in pretty quickly, which was amazing to see the community rally around that. At the moment it's at about \$300,000.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE KNOWING YOU HAD SUCH A LARGE SUPPORT NETWORK?

It was really amazing to see, it was just overwhelming to see the support.

We had people from all over the world reach out to us. They all connected with us through the Equity Generation Lawyers website, where we had set up a little survey about how climate change has impacted you. **We ended up receiving submissions from pretty much every continent except Antarctica!**

In Australia, we have a unique experience of already being impacted by climate change. A lot of the time people that are interested in promoting inaction, they talk about climate change as a future thing, a future problem.

But it's really not a future problem. It's a current problem and we see that in the drought, the fires, record temperatures, air quality, all of those things.

So it was really interesting to hear from other people, in other countries, who resonated with that and are already seeing the impacts of climate change and for whom it is not a future hypothetical issue.

WHERE DOES YOUR PASSION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT STEM FROM?

When I learned about climate change in school, it was very much from a scientific perspective. They were like, "This is the scientific concept of the greenhouse gas effect" and "This is what will happen, eventually". And I remember sitting thinking to myself, "This is wild! This sounds catastrophic and yet no one is talking about it!"

I was just so freaked out. And then I had this amazing Geography teacher who ran a politics club at my school. That was really my first point of political involvement - hearing anything leftist and really anything to do with climate justice.

So from there, as my political engagement grew, I started attending a lot of strikes. **Then, after attending strikes for a while, I joined the School Strike 4 Climate to get on the organising side of things.**

I also want to mention that I feel like I'm really indebted to the people that built this culture of youth-led climate strikes - the people that came before me in School Strike 4 Climate that set up these strikes way back in 2014 and built this culture. If this hadn't happened, I don't know that I, as a young person, would feel that a strike is somewhere that I belong, or somewhere that I should be.

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH SCHOOL STRIKE 4 CLIMATE?

I heard a lot about climate strikes led by young people in the media and I was really interested in finding similar events happening in my community. I looked online and found strikes to attend and I saw a lot of them were being organised by School Strike. **Eventually I started wanting to become one of those people who weren't attending the strikes, but organising them.**

DID YOU EVER RECEIVE ANY PUSHBACK FROM PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR CLIMATE STRIKE EFFORTS?

Whenever I tried to organise or promote an action at my school, I **would receive a lot of pushback from teachers and adults who were worried about political agendas, or who believed that kids shouldn't be going on strikes and that we should just wait until we're 18 and can vote.**

I always believed this to be really unhelpful messaging. First of all, whatever kids are passionate about, they should be able to do.

Secondly, **I think that expectation is so illogical** – you're expected to have absolutely no political involvement and then when you turn 18 you're supposed to become this responsible citizen with a bunch of political knowledge that's ready to engage – that's just not a realistic expectation. If we want people to be active, responsible, politically-involved citizens when they are 18, we should be fostering their political development all the way up to that.

So, I actually leaned on School Strike 4 Climate a lot and found it very empowering to have a space where I could engage politically and feel validated by other young people.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE ALSO EXPERIENCING PUSHBACK FOR PURSUING THEIR PASSIONS?

I would definitely say find your people. With the Internet, it is very easy to do that. **Go out and find that community that can reinforce you.** They can share their experiences and help you get through that kind of pushback and negative messaging.

I would also say that conversations and changing minds happen with the people that you have emotional connections with. You can go and have a debate with a stranger on the Internet and try to change their mind, but productive change happens when both of you are committed to maintaining the relationship you already have. If you're receiving pushback from your family or from teachers that you care about – I know it's difficult – but try to have those conversations with them, because you can be the person that changes their mind.



Ava's Tips For Overcoming Negative Messaging

01 Find Your People

Join online forums or attend local meetings to find likeminded people!

02 Have Productive Conversations With People You Know

If you want to change people's minds, start with those around you who you have a genuine relationship with! Don't worry about the stranger on the bus - first start by reaching out to family and friends.

HOW DID YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE SHARMA V THE MINISTER IMPACT YOUR SCHOOLING OVER THE 2020/2021 TIME PERIOD?

It was less that the case impacted my schooling and more so my disability. Towards the end of Year 10, I developed a chronic pain condition. I just stopped attending school. I missed almost the whole last term of Year 10.

In Year 11 I had to organise a flexible attendance plan so I was only attending school two to three hours a day. I was adamant that we sorted something out because I was really determined to get through Year 11. **Then, when I reached Year 12, I was able to start a Pathways program.**

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM?

Pathways is a way to complete Year 12 over a longer period of time. NESA will let you do Year 12 over up to five years, depending on what your extenuating circumstances are. **So I chose to do Year 12 in two years and once I made that split my quality of life just improved so much.**

I really struggled through Year 11 with mental health, physical health and trying to keep up my academic achievement. It sort of became that school was the only thing I was doing. I didn't have time for sport, I didn't have time for friends, I certainly didn't have time for activism. So, when I got into this Pathways Program, I finally had some free time on my hands for the first time in a really long time.

Opting to do Year 12 over two years led to me thinking really critically about what I want to spend my time on. When I was in Year 10 and healthy, I was involved in so many things. I did theatre, I did fencing, I did debating, I did almost every club you could possibly be doing at school – I just overloaded myself with stuff. Then, when I couldn't do that anymore, **I had to really think about what was important to me.** I thought about what I wanted to dedicate my limited time to, and for me that was climate activism.

Pathways

HSC 'Pathways' are options for students to flexibly complete their HSC. **You can extend your HSC study over two to five years**, allowing you to customise how many units you complete each year until reaching the necessary 10 unit threshold.

Note: Other states have their own versions of this for their Year 12 students. Keen to find out more? Have a conversation with your school!

HOW DID YOUR CHRONIC PAIN CONDITION IMPACT YOU?

I was diagnosed with New Daily Persistent Headache disorder, a chronic pain condition that is a subset of chronic migraines. What it means for me is that I have a migraine all the time, 24/7, and I have for about three years. It's just this constant level of pain. Obviously that's very hard to deal with because a migraine is a lot more than a headache, there are a lot of other symptoms that go along with it. I struggle with light and sound, nausea and fatigue, **sometimes visual focus and that kind of thing.**

The pain dramatically impacts my life, but so does the treatment. No treatment that I've tried so far has really worked for me. Anybody that's gone on a chronic illness journey will know how exhausting it is to have these constant appointments, seeing everybody who a friend of a friend has recommended and have nothing work.

Twice I did a week-long stay in hospital doing an infusion which was really exhausting and then really crushing when it didn't work out. I've been on medications with really difficult side effects to manage. I've done rounds of

nerve blockers, which is essentially just a bunch of needles in your head, which was obviously really painful and taxing. And all of this would have been somewhat okay if it helped my pain, but it didn't. **So for me, it wasn't just a matter of managing the pain, it was also a matter of managing the treatment.**

Pathways was the right option for me because I've always been quite a high academic achiever and I knew I wanted to get a good ATAR and go to uni. By doing Pathways, I was able to split the year up to help actualise my potential.

WHAT WAS THE PROCESS OF ENROLLING IN PATHWAYS?

I was really lucky to have an amazing teacher at my school who guided me through the whole process and was a real advocate for my health. He was just really amazing with helping me manage school and my pain. He is the one who helped me with my Pathways application and even introduced me to the concept.

I had to submit an application with a lot of medical documentation, statements from teachers, statements from parents, and send that off to NESAs. Once they checked it all, they then gave me the approval to do it.



Applying for Pathways

01

Approach your school.

- We recommend a school counsellor or career advisor and ask them about your options

02

Gather your documentation.

- This is your evidence that you are an eligible candidate for pathways.
- E.g. medical documents, reference letters

03

Send your application to NESAs!

There are many reasons you could be eligible for Pathways. Some of these include being:

- An elite athlete
- Impacted by medical concerns
- A successful performer
- A carer for someone in your family

HOW DID PATHWAYS ALTER YOUR YEAR 12 EXPERIENCE?

For me, because I chose to do it over two years, they essentially split my timetable. **I did 6 units in my first year and then I did 6 units in my second year. I just had a half timetable.** I had a flexible attendance plan, meaning I could sign in and out. I just came in for my classes and then came home.

My family helped me to go to and from the school in those situations. Actually, it was my 85-year-old grandfather driving me around a lot in his little red car from the 80s.

When it came to the HSC, I did the HSC of 2020 like everybody else, except I only had my three exams. Then after the HSC period was done, I had actually been missing class for the 2021 cohort, so I started attending classes again and caught up over the holidays. **Then I did the 2021 HSC with my four exams. So it's very much just split equally over two years.**

For me, I think the beneficial impact of Pathways on my education can really be measured in the fact that I ended up being the DUX of 2021. I ended up coming first in two of my subjects in the first year and four of my subjects in the second year. Getting DUX was really special. You know, the past few years were very difficult and I worked really hard, so it was nice for that to be recognised.

IN WHAT WAYS DID YOUR SCHOOL SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR DISABILITY DURING YEAR 12?

The way my timetable was structured, it was really easy for my school to utilise infrastructure that was already in place to support me. **My amended timetable still fit into the existing timetable and classes, I was just doing less of a load** – so that was a great and pretty straightforward way that the school was able to support me.

I had lighting and small group provisions for my exams. I also missed a lot of work, so even though I had this half timetable, my attendance for the first year came out as 50% and for the second year it was 30%. So I missed a lot! In response, **my school was able to overlook some of the week-to-week homework assignments and just prioritise me getting assessments in**, which was really helpful for me.

My school also let me repeat Modern History. When I did the first HSC, the worst case scenario happened to me. I was in too much pain to do my HSC exam. Even though I love Modern History – it was my favourite subject and I was totally prepared – I just could not do it. I was sitting there in the exam room completely unable to even read the words on the page. So when NESA gave me an estimated mark that was much lower than what my teachers, and I, thought I deserved, the school let me repeat that subject and have another go at it – which I’m very grateful for.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS STILL HESITANT ABOUT UTILISING THE PATHWAYS PROGRAM?

I would say that it is a big commitment. It is a whole year of your life so you really have to be prepared for a lot of difficulty.

For me, some of the hardest parts of Pathways was doing my first HSC knowing that I was missing all this class during it and that I’d have to catch up. Even though I just finished my HSC and most people looked forward to this giant break, I had to get straight back into classes. I had an exam on Friday, and I was back in on Monday.

Also, not knowing as many people in the 2021 year group was really difficult. I just didn't have as many friends and because of my limited capacity and attendance, I didn't have the opportunity to meet that many people. I really didn't feel like a member of my school community in that second year and so I would say it is difficult.

It is difficult, but it's probably going to be right for you if you still prioritise academic achievement. If you are dead set on getting an ATAR, Pathways is one of the ways that you can achieve that over a longer period of time.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT MANAGING YOUR TIME DURING THESE FINAL YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL?

The first thing that comes to mind is academic appeals. I appealed every assessment task and exam that I had. Whether that's moving the date or just letting them know that I was in a lot of pain at this time, or I had to do this case, so if my mark isn't where you think that it should be, then they should

consider scaling it up, given the circumstances. There is absolutely no shame in asking for an appeal or an extension.

For a long time, I thought, “Yeah I'm doing well at school, but I have half the subjects that everybody else does, so it's really not anything to write home about”. **But I came to realise that you have to own your own achievements, because no one else is going to do it for you – so if you need an appeal – then you deserve one.**

I will also say, Google Calendar. **Google calendar is my favourite thing in the world. It's great to help out with your time management skills; structuring your time, making sure you're not missing deadlines and such.**

I have always been such a perfectionist. But when my pain started, it was like I physically couldn't afford to be a perfectionist anymore. I didn't have the time, I didn't have the resources to be a perfectionist.

I had to really work on cutting down the amount of extra work I wanted to do. Seriously, I was sitting there going, “I need to set the amount of hours I'm going to spend on this task and then that's it”, to sort of overcome a lot of those perfectionist-all-or-nothing habits that I had.

In terms of time management for me, this is sort of chronic pain specific, but there's a **concept called pacing**. You should avoid doing a lot one day, and then getting a really big flare up and having to rest and then doing a lot when you feel better – that sort of actually ends up limiting the amount of stuff you can do, instead of allowing you to have a regular routine.

I'll also mention, routine doesn't have to look idealistic. You don't have to have the same routine that everybody on Instagram is talking about. You do whatever works for you. For me, I made sure I did 10 minutes of study, every day – which is like nothing. Often, I would sit there and be like, “I have so much to do, 10 minutes is not even worth it”. But for me, doing that 10 minutes was really achievable and it would help me get over all the anxiety that I felt about having to do hours and hours of study. Oftentimes, after that 10 minutes, I felt prepared to do more, and if I didn't that was okay I still achieved my goal.

Also, every day after school I would come and lie down. That's not something you see in a lot of people's routines that aren't toddlers – **but for me that was something that I needed, and there was no shame in having that element of routine.**

I definitely wouldn't have been able to manage my time without therapy. **Therapy was really important to me.** I've been in therapy for three years and, in addition to dealing with the chronic pain and also my anxiety disorder, just having someone there that has those tools and that can help you learn those too, it was so important.

AVA'S TOP TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

01

Understand Your School's Appeal/Extension Process

Talk to your teachers about how these processes work. There's no shame in admitting we all need a bit of extra help sometimes!

02

Use Google Calendar to Map out Your Week

Pop in your weekly commitments, study blocks, assignments and deadlines!

- PRO TIP: Turn on notifications so you never miss a task.

03

Implement the Pacing Strategy

Think of school as a marathon not a race. Conserve your energy to avoid burnout by evenly distributing your work across longer periods of time.

04

Don't Underestimate Small Elements of Routine

Turning even the most trivial of tasks into regular habits can really help you build a strong routine and better stick to it!

Here are some examples:

- Making your bed in the morning
- Having a nap after school (Ava's personal favourite)
- Reading a chapter before bed each night
- Having a 5-minute dance break between study blocks

You get the gist, right?

HOW DID YOU STAY MOTIVATED WHILE DEALING WITH YOUR CHRONIC PAIN?

Chronic pain is very difficult. Living with any sort of illness to which there's absolutely no endpoint can be really draining and really hopeless.

I remember getting so frustrated because my brain is creating this pain cycle that doesn't need to be there. It doesn't tell me anything about my situation – like if you break your arm and then your brain is sending pain signals that tell you not to move your arm. But with chronic pain it serves no purpose. So for me, that was really frustrating and really hard.

I would say it's really important to have a holistic support network. Not just a neurologist – or whatever specialist is relevant to your condition – but also a therapist and a physiotherapist.

It is important to have a group of people in your life who care about you and want to see that you're well – be open to their input. People often don't realise, but chronic pain is just as much a mental thing as it is physical.

For me, if I look back on where I was in Year 11 and where I am now, my pain hasn't gotten better, my pain has been constant and no treatment has helped, but where I'm at and my relationship with the pain and my quality of life has improved dramatically.

When I was younger, I would think nothing is ever going to get better until the pain gets better and that's just not true. It's hard to accept, but once you get there, you can start making changes, with the help of your family, with the help of a team that improves your quality of life and helps you live around the pain.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS WHO WANT TO START USING THEIR VOICES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Definitely stay informed. **It's a great idea to keep up with the news and read reputable sources. Read some political theory. Books are always an amazing resource.** I really loved video essays on YouTube, that's what really got me into that sort of thing. Stay informed and focus on developing your personal belief system. Understand what causes are important to you, and why, beyond just your personal experience.

Then, like I said, **find your people**. Look to organisations that are making moves, that are working at the moment to achieve these goals and have stuff that you can get involved in.

There are a million and one youth organisations in Australia and we're very lucky to have a pretty open democracy where a young person can join a group like that, even if it opposes what the current government is going on about.

I'd also say follow the lead of frontline activists. You know I'm involved in the climate movement and I am impacted by climate change, but not as much as say First Nations activists or people of colour or people that live rurally. Understand that when you join a movement, it's not about you, and it's not about forwarding your own personal agenda and adding stuff to your resume. **It is about following in the footsteps of the people that have built the movement and whose experiences are unique to the movement.**

Also, I would definitely say **it's very important to have a supportive community at your school.** Whether that's a friend you can go to, the school counsellor or a teacher that you really like. Having people around you that you can go to when things get difficult and that can materially support you and help enrich your life outside of school is just incredibly helpful.

A lot of my self worth was based in academics and when the pain started and that no longer became something that was achievable for me, I really had to build up an identity outside of school. **Working to enrich your life outside of school is the best way to live a more balanced and fulfilling life.**

I would also say that strength lies in numbers. If your school is really pushing back on whatever you want to do, network amongst the students. Build a platform that they can't really shut down.



Key Takeaways

01

Stay Informed (Read, Reflect, Repeat!)

02

Find Your Community

03

Learn From Those Who Came Before You

04

Find Value in Yourself Outside of Academics

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

I've always wanted to be a genocide scholar, ever since I took Extension History in Year 9.

I really want to study a double degree in law and arts. I'd love to learn more about justice after conflict, international law, humanitarian law and refugee law, as well as history, international relations, and political science. I guess to narrow it down a bit, I'm really interested in the historical, legal and political dimensions of genocide after world conflicts.

The ultimate dream would be to be on an International Criminal Court.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF, WHO IS JUST ABOUT TO START THEIR SENIOR SCHOOL JOURNEY?

I mean it's clichéd but it gets better, it really does get better. With age, with support, your life gets better after school. I know a lot of people talk about high school as being their prime. I think that if you deal with any sort of disability or if you're queer – that is not the case. It gets better after high school. I would say that everything is going to be okay. Trust your skills, trust your instincts and trust that you have the knowledge and the skills to achieve academically and to do so many amazing things outside of school. **And just be nicer to yourself, my goodness.**

DO YOU HAVE ANY FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM?

I would say that Year 12 is designed to take up all of your time and resources. Year 12 is designed to have you focused only on study – which is why it's inherently ableist.

So if you have other passions, other things that you want to achieve, or that you're working on – that is so admirable. Because the structure of what you're doing right now is actively trying to take that away from you and it's really important that you maintain that and set up for your life after school. **The HSC seems super important, but at the end of the day, it really isn't. You want to have self worth and passions outside of that kind of academic achievement once it's all over.**