



open access  
COLLEGE

# Student Stories





# Student Stories

Hearing about the students of Open Access College is the best way to understand how our school is making a difference.

These stories written by our staff with words from our students and their families describes how Open Access College has helped them to be connected, engaged and successful in their learning.



# Primary student living in remote regional SA

Student enrolled under geographically remote category in 2013 and

- ASD and anxiety
- Intellectual development delay
- Auditory processing delay and speech language disorder

The family lives more than an hour's drive from the nearest school. Anxiety made attending face to face education challenging in terms of learning and socializing. Home schooling was tried for a short time prior to OAC enrolment.

The student was 10 years old and working at a level 4 to 5 years lower than her age therefore a highly modified program was put in place with focus on literacy and numeracy. Learning support for 3 sessions per week were provided.

A changed strategy was implemented in 2015 and the student was placed into an Individualised Learning Program (ILP) of 1 – 3 hours each day. The intent was to more effectively target literacy and numeracy and build social confidence. After one year in an Individualised Learning Program growth albeit small was evident and a second year was decided. Due to a range of challenges and disruptions this year was not as successful.

In 2017 the student moved into the Personalised Learning Program (PLP). With support from the OAC Psychologist and Social Worker the student has become a client with Autism SA and services through NDIS have been accessed. Intensive Reading has been successful moving from level 5 in 2015 to well above 30. Support continues in Quick Smart literacy with the student reading novels and reporting that she loves books.

Now in her second year in PLP the student is flourishing. She understands her limitations but is striving to improve. Her social skills and confidence have developed and she sets goals while approaching new challenges with enthusiasm.

There have been gradual steps towards self-directed tasks including a Research Project based on her interests. The success has ignited confidence in such a way that she will give all new work a go; something not attempted in previous years.

The strategy of getting to know and understand the student including how they respond to a virtual classroom was important in defining an appropriate transition through school. Negotiating and developing a learning program with the student was important given the challenges faced. It has taken time for the student to flourish, however patience, engaging with support services and ongoing positive outlook from parents has seen success materialize this year. Services to benefit other family members have contributed to the success.

# Primary years student – a story of long term success

“L” enrolled at OAC in June 2012 as a year 4 student, with siblings in year 1 and year 5. He was a referral from Disability Coordinator and Student Attendance Officer working with the family in a country area. There was a history of broken school attendance, family domestic violence and trauma. The father was recently released from jail and the family became a part of Witness Protection program moving to a country isolated area.

His start at OAC had “L” enrolled in a year 5 mainstream class working at year 1 standard. With support from the class teacher and additional reading support, he was attending and attempting some work. Teachers and the Primary SWL conducted home visits, and OAC supplied computers. The Primary SWL continued to work with the family and teachers to support the students learning.

Over the next 2 years attendance improved and the siblings were moved into face to face schooling through joint efforts with Support Services. “L” spent increasing time living with his aunt who supported his learning more consistently. She became the first point of contact with the parent’s consent and “L” continued to make progress in his learning. Parents always attended OAC Come In Days and events with student.

Currently there are still concerns around the lack of social engagement for “L” but fast forward to 2018 and academically he has achieved in Year 10 Term 1, 2 A’s, 2 B’s 3 C’s and 1 D. For a student with a learning disability and from a traumatic background, the consistency of OAC, the input of teachers over the years and the partnership with his aunt has given “L” an opportunity to show his capabilities and have options for the future.

# Primary student from country SA identifying as ATSI – school attendance minimal

Student referred by Whyalla Stuart Primary School in term 1, 2018

- Medical condition which needs to be managed from home
- Learner capability was unknown as student had never attended F2F school or officially been enrolled in home schooling
- Limited literacy and numeracy displayed at a home visit from Student Wellbeing Leader

Began the year late in term 1 as a result of his medical condition.

The student has been well supported in education by his father and this has continued with the OAC enrolment.

Initial assessment indicated gaps in literacy and numeracy. The student was recommended for Intensive Reading (4 x 20 minute sessions per week). He began at level 5 and has now reached level 10. Running Records indicated reading level 9 with 98% accuracy and current instructional level is 10.

In lesson he is confident to undertake work and is confident talking to small or large groups. His father's support has eased the student through transition from no schooling to a daily routine of education. The gaps are closing quickly.

Plans are to place the student in a year 3 or 4 class next year based on progress.

Strategy of assessment and appropriate placement along with extra support targeted to areas of identified need. A collaborative partnership between teachers and parents has underpinned success.

The Student Wellbeing Leader worked closely with the family and teachers to ensure a successful transition to school was achieved.

## Middle years student

“C” enrolled at OAC in January 2018 as a medical psychological enrolment, with siblings in year 1 and year 5. This was a negotiated enrolment from a school where attendance was negligible. “C” has an OCOP due to his Autism. Has been non-verbal all of his life. He only communicates with a few relatives and one family friend.

Starting at OAC “C” was provided with PAT Reading and Maths to ascertain an appropriate level of schooling. Results of Stanine 3 and 2 respectively indicated that a straight Year 8 class would not be appropriate. He was placed in a Personalised Learning Program but his initial attendance was problematic.

His progress and current status is best described by the following parental email (no attempt to edit) to his teacher:

“Hey .... Just wanted to shoot you a quick email to say thank you.

“C has only been at this school for a very short time and his making such improvement. Not only in his education but his overall view and believe he can do anything now. Last year before starting at this school he attended 9 hours all up for the whole year.

“C’s severely autistic with many other health labels attached to him as well. Every day driving him to school had not only C in major melt downs but me in tears , wondering if this melt down would force an accident or if we would even make it home alive. His teachers were scared of him and the normal school policies couldn’t allow for his special needs to be met (even though he was in a special unit).

“I’ve had to fight all C’s life to get him the help, to be noticed for the amazing child he is not just the labels people see. I know when a teacher hears my name, they run in the corner and try to hide from me, as now I’m just known as the yelly mum who won’t back down. And to be honest I was thinking this school would be no different That was until C started.



“All his teachers are amazing and go above and beyond. But you understand him. Now his not his forced to go, there are no major meltdowns. He wants to be there and he tries. He wants to impress you and succeed. This C is even a new C to us. C has the most dry witted fast responses and humour that could come out really bad but it never attended like that. He needs banter and fast responses back. You work to him.

“I’ve never see anyone who has been able to capture him as fast and have him feeling ok to convers back the way he does with you. I sit in the classes and it’s not just C you understand, you bend and mold yourself to each kid, there needs and personality in such a skilful way the kids don’t even see you doing it.

“That talent you have hasn’t only helped, maybe even saved C but this whole house. His happy now, we don’t have to walk around on egg shells His sister who refused to visit much as she was scared of him is now coming back over. His little brother is back to being safe and happy.

“Since I’m always the first one to yells scream cry at teachers I thought it was only fair I also reverse it around to say thank you. Not only for being an outstanding teacher, but for understanding C is so much more than a label.”

# Middle years student

Student referred to OAC by a country school on medical grounds.

- Student placed into Personalised Learning Program after a 10 week trial
- ASD, Social anxiety and self-doubt
- Attendance and engagement issues emerged

PAT indicated that student was functioning above age level, however reticence to engage with Personalised Learning Program continued. Home visits from teachers and a Student Wellbeing Leader resulted in a diverse range of strategies being implemented which were marginally successful. Attendance, engagement and work return remained erratic.

In 2018 "J" was transitioned into Central Studies from the Personalised Learning Program. Attendance and engagement did not improve and the parent became more frustrated and difficult to contact. The student Wellbeing Leader worked to make contact and with the support of OAC Social Worker planned a home visit for early in term 2.

The home visit was attended by the Social Worker and Assistant Principal, Alternative Programs to reach an agreed solution in accordance with OAC policy and process. The Social Worker and Assistant Principal collaborated during the home visit to elicit a better understanding of the situation. The Social Worker spent time with the family while the Assistant Principal spent time talking to "J" about his hopes and aspirations around education. "J" made it quite clear if things continued as they were he would not be attending lessons.

Moving forward, negotiated project based learning that focused on the Creative Industries and a continuation of QuickSmart Numeracy.

"I spoke to "J's" mother on 23/7 and she said she was extremely happy with progress in his current program, and that he's never talked so much in class, 'he's like a different child'.

"J" has become a more confident and positive role model in the class and amongst his peers which has also flowed into his commitment

and willingness to complete all tasks. His natural communication skills and willingness to have fun while learning has greatly benefitted other students in the class.

“For the short time I've been teaching “J”, it's been wonderful to see him develop his learning and at the same build resilience to better regulate emotions when faced with challenges in his learning.”

“J” has attended regularly and engaged positively for a term. Follow up by “J's” teacher, Social Worker and Assistant Principal continues to ensure support is available.

Strategies used include listening and responding to student voice, belief in the student and being there to help talk through situations, assist with options for decision making and encouraging continuation with education by finding ways forward together. A mother and student who felt helpless have greater confidence and hope. Attendance and engagement have improved from 24% to 96% in the learning program and 100% in Quick Smart numeracy.

# Transgender student

Student referred by a local high school in February 2013

- Under care for high levels of social anxiety/major depression
- Attendance challenging due to medical condition
- Described as highly intelligent, however requiring time to adjust to overcome issues from previous school

“M” began in a year 9 group with a review towards the end of term to determine suitability for conversion to a college based student. Attendance and engagement significantly improved compared with face to face school so she was formally enrolled.

The year concluded with a psychological assessment for adjustment disorder relating to gender change. The student was keen to remain at OAC until year 12 completion was attained. Classes in year 10 needed to fit around numerous regular appointments with doctors.

The student disclosed the fact that she was transgender and was now using male pronouns. Due to heightened mental health and anxiety he became withdrawn from lessons and reticent to communicate in class. He was transferred to e-Worx in 2015, which provided a relatively safe environment in which the student had time and space from mainstream schooling to attend to a range of issues surrounding his transition. There were numerous appointments to accommodate.

Small steps towards a negotiated program that fitted interests and goals were made, however complexities led to a declining willingness to engage regularly.

The OAC Youth Worker and teacher assigned to “M” found contacting and communicating with him challenging; frequently there were weeks when there was nothing even from his parents. In his time with e-Worx the student maintained interest in art and design and happily attended events such as Cosplay. He spent many hours creating and constructing costumes for the event.

Other interests in literacy and music were maintained throughout with positive intent showing skill at writing. Patience was rewarded when “M” decided to re-enroll in SACE in 2017 with a plan for completion. Issues around anxiety remained, however there was positive response to ongoing personalized feedback and encouragement.

“M” has returned this year to complete his SACE over two years with a Certificate III program this year and completion of the certificate with Research Project in 2019.

Negotiating and developing a learning program that provided “M” with a flexible and safe environment was challenging. E-Worx provided “M” a space in which he was able to reflect, continue with his treatment and engage with education in ways that were comfortable. The Youth Worker supported access to a range of agencies and groups that assisted transgender people. Initial successes to engage were problematic however with patience and being available success did come. A decision to re-enroll in SACE was a major step forward.

# Senior years student

“S” was referred when she was a 16 years old with a history of very poor attendance (less than 10%) and engagement. She demonstrated suicidal tendencies, PTSD, severe depression, symptomatic of an eating disorder as well as agoraphobia. There was a strong family history of mental health issues. Her father had tried to hang himself in front of the entire family 5 years ago and a long history of domestic violence.

When “S” started at OAC she was disengaged, had poor attendance, would not talk to or email teachers and just wanted to leave school at 17. She had no concept of a “future story” and no goals or aspirations. She was refusing all psychological services and prescribed medication, and would not get out of the car in the carpark at the G.P’s surgery.

The Student Wellbeing Leader and OAC Psychologist had multiple weekly meetings, emails, phone calls with mother, who felt at a loss despite all the strategies we tried.

The SWL liaised with an external agency (CAMHS) to initiate a referral.

Constantly rescuing and enabling the situation to continue was not helpful or healthy. In this case – we stated what needed to happen, and withdrew from the constant cycle of crisis and rescuing. Once the mother realised what had happened, she sought outside expert help. Crisis and end of support advice from both SWL and Psychologist led to mother eventually feeling able to convince “S” to commence therapy at Headstart.

Last reports from mother:

“Hi.....

“I hope your well! It's ..... here, “S's” mum. Just wanted to let you know how things are going. I'm really pleased to say that we have a wonderful therapist named Gemma thanks to you, that “S” has connected really well with and have seen her four times so far.

“The change I see in her for healing and getting her life back has been nothing short of phenomenal. Still a long road ahead but she's illuminating a light I haven't seen in a long time. So very grateful for all you have done to get this ball rolling for us, thank you! You are a gem.

“Warm regards”

“S” now has an 82% attendance in her OAC Cert 3 course.

# Senior years student

Student referred by CAMHS Adolescent Outreach Service in 2014

- Social anxiety and self-doubt
- Behaviour issues
- Nonattendance and engagement in education
- Achievement stalled

It was three terms of working with the Youth Worker before there was significant change and willingness to engage with the mentor, and then it was unpredictable.

“T”’s commitment to achieve goals was low and coincided with low interest in education; however a long term goal to study science at university remained.

“T” began with small co-created projects based on student interest and aspirations around Science.

By the end of the year there was evidence of interest to complete SACE despite ongoing personal barriers.

In the second year “T” initiated a plan that included a graduated transition to Marden Senior College. *“Sick of feeling stuck and annoyed with self for letting so much time slip in achieving education wanted”*. Issues remain but “T” has the ability to manage those with the support of youth worker.

Learning became more student directed and integrated to accommodate the transition. Google Drive enabled greater efficiencies in support for work. Enrolled in Science with Marden Senior College during semester 2 while continuing Educational Skills Development Certificate I and Flexible Learning and Transition Plan. Student supported to attend an enrolment appointment, use public transport and enter F2F classes.

“T”’s support by mentor and youth worker has continued throughout the year to assist the transition.



Learning is connected with future aspirations in Science. "T" organized an enrolment appointment with Marden Senior College to discuss subjects and pathways for 2016 and beyond. Three subjects were selected – Stage 2 Geology, Stage 1 English and Stage 1 Maths. In 2017 "T" moved to a TAFE pathway (Laboratory Technician) with the intent of transferring credit to a university undergraduate program.

Attendance rates 2014 – 63%, 2015 – 98% and 2016 – 98%.

An effective strategy has been partnering with the student to develop an environment of trust in which self-efficacy and connectedness active engagement and participating in their learning are increased.

# Senior years student with disrupted education

Student referred by a non-government school in 2015

- Social phobia and anxiety
- Central Auditory Processing Disorder
- Attendance and engagement in education had been minimal

“R” began in New Directions in 2015, however issues with attendance continued due to anxiety. Teachers worked closely with her to complete Certificate I in Education and Skills Development.

In 2016 “R” attempted mainstream but quickly transferred to the supportive environment of Stage 1 Transition. Issues of attendance and work completion continued and “R” became more isolated, anxious and agoraphobic. Intervention by the OAC Youth Worker helped for a short time before the student reverted to previous behaviours. Completion of one unit of Stage 1 English was achieved despite attendance of 33%.

2017 rather than continuing the SACE battle “R” was encouraged to take on subjects for enjoyment in an effort to spark engagement – Photography, Food and Hospitality and Essential Maths were chosen. With pressure off there was greater engagement and we were able to schedule Photography and Maths on days where the student's mother was at home, and could support her logging on to lesson. Confidence improved. “R” and parent attended the State Careers Expo early in 2017, and “R” found a TAFE Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics of interest. This involved attendance one day per week at Adelaide TAFE. Attendance increased to 60%.

In 2018 “R” was able to successfully complete the Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics (55 Stage 1 credits) and is currently successfully undertaking the Certificate III in Makeup (85 Stage 2 credits) which is due for completion this year while continuing to be well supported by OAC Social Worker. The final compulsory subjects of Essential English and Research Project are being completed this year. Anxiety about attending lessons has lessened and she will work in Google Drive with her teachers.

This year due to increased confidence, she has been able to realise a long term goal to volunteer at an op shop, and can gain further SACE credits through Self-directed Learning. The OAC Social Worker has continued to support "R" – and been a makeup model for a practical session at TAFE. Both are attending the Formal – with the agreement that the student does the Social Worker's makeup!

She has an achievable goal of working in the beauty industry, and will end this year with her qualification to do so – and SACE.

Once she discovered an interest area and a "spark" - working as a beautician - she was able to make enormous progress. Attending TAFE face to face (something which would have been impossible in 2016) and realizing the benefits of VET, made SACE completion a realistic goal.

# Family

This is a story of a family of 7 children all of whom attended OAC. Several were/are active in all aspects of student life, including Student Leaders, Come In Days and Curriculum Days. Father is severely ill and the mother has a severe debilitating disease which made it more and more difficult to home school. This became a major issue with DECD Home Schooling and the AP Student Welfare intervened. He worked with the Channel Manager who agreed all remaining children were at risk.

Students are now full time at OAC under the At Risk criteria. Since 2016 OAC has sought assessment for both of the youngest children with no success. In 2017 OAC Psychologist assessed the 2 youngest children providing possible interventions which will be used to apply for NDIS funding. OCOPs were written for both of these children.

The eldest "H" enrolled in Stage 1 in 2010 as a Curriculum Choice student. She left for TAFE to do a Cert 2 in Information Technology in 2013. She returned to complete her SACE as an adult in 2016.

"E" the second eldest enrolled at OAC in Year 10 in 2012. He was very keen on a career working with animals and did one day voluntary work at the local Vet every fortnight. "E" had food intolerance leading to occasional absences and him taking time away from school. He returned to OAC in 2014 to complete Stage 1 including a Certificate II in Animal Studies. He left mid 2015 having gained a place at Gilles Plains TAFE in Certificate III Companion Animal Services.

"L" the third eldest child of the family was also the most academic. She initially studied Year 8 and 9 French, and Music at OAC in 2013 and 2014. She was eligible to come full time at OAC in 2015. She successfully completed Stage 1 and 2 over the next 2 years and won a place in Forensic Science Flinders University.

Currently OAC students include "M" who like her sister studied Year 8 and 9 Music at OAC in 2013 and 2014. Again when eligible she enrolled full time in New Directions in 2016 due to academic issues and has an OCOP.

She has continued doing Cert 3 Music via OAC and moved into Transition Stage 1 and 2 in 2017-18 with an OCOP.

"I" also studied Year 8 and 9 French, Music at OAC in 2013 - 14. When eligible in year 10 in 2015 "I" enrolled at OAC in the New Directions program. "I" is interested in computers as a career and benefited from the certificate aspect of the New Directions program. "I" also studied music via the VET Cert 3 course through OAC. "I" successfully completed the Stage 1 Transition Program in 2017 and is currently in the Stage 2 Transition Program. He has an OCOP.

The youngest 2 were enrolled as students at risk after intervention by the AP Student Welfare.

"A" enrolled as a student at risk in year 5 in 2017. He had been home schooled and had very little formal schooling. His mother said he was showing growth but was still very hard to engage at home as he lacked concentration as much as mother tried to work with him. He was enrolled in an Individualised Learning Program and has continued in this program.

He came to OAC with a non DECD verified intellectual disability for Autism but was assessed by the OAC Psychologist in 2016 which has been verified and has an OCOP. "A" has continued with Reading Support. SWL has organised for "A" to join the DECD SWD (Student With Disability) Swimming at The Parks Centre.

"J" enrolled as a year 1 college based student under the at risk category in 2016. He had been home schooled and had very little formal schooling. Further assessments were needed once we established his ability and engagement levels. Reading Support was put in place. He re enrolled as a student at risk year 2 and 3. "J" has no formal diagnosis but mother reports that she is seeking an assessment for possibly ASD or ADHD as she reports that "J" is "extremely active, has no off switch, no self regulation and has difficulty concentrating and staying focussed."

The family moved from a rural town to Adelaide in 2017. Father and mother separated and dad ended up in gaol in late 2017 due to family violence. The family lost their home mid-2018 and moved from

accommodation to accommodation. Limited internet access and all students' attendance fell away. In June 2018 SWL visited mother who was very sick.

SWL delivered an internet modem so children could access lessons. The OAC Social Worker worked with mum via Intensive Case Management and home visits. They attended an appointment at Uniting SA and had some success. Family was in emergency motel accommodation for several months.

During the holidays mother was successful in securing a private rental property.

During their period of homelessness it impacted on the whole family in varying ways. The mother's ability to be the nurturing and caring parent that she is was minimised due to the numerous appointments that she was required to attend.

Throughout this whole process SWL and Social Worker both reinforced and empowered mother that she was doing an awesome job of holding it all together during this time of serious upheaval. Social Worker maintained contact with mother throughout the holiday period often ringing her after hours to ensure that the day was a success. The family have now moved into their new home and have all their belongings out of storage, looking forward to establish routines and structure.



## Open Access College

1-37 Marden Road, Marden SA 5070

**Phone** 08 8309 3500

**Toll Free** 1800 882 328

[info@openaccess.edu.au](mailto:info@openaccess.edu.au)

[www.openaccess.edu.au](http://www.openaccess.edu.au)



Every learner  
Every day  
Every way

