

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: I'd like to introduce Ellie Rowland and she's an outreach officer with the University of Canberra Widening Participation team and originally from Young in rural New South Wales. Ellie was the recipient of the Young Country Education Foundation Scholarship, which helped finance her transition to the city to study. A recent UC graduate holding a Bachelor in Secondary Education in Design and Technology, Ellie is also a fully qualified chef and a patisserie chef. While studying, Ellie worked three jobs, including one as a UC Aspiration Agent and during that time, she travelled out to the regional schools. So Ellie, would you like to come forward and give us a bit of an overview--

[ Applause ]

>> Ellie Rowland: Hi, everyone. So I'm Ellie Rowland. I'm a rural student from Young, New South Wales. So Young is about two hours southwest of here and I lived on a property that farms cattle and sheep. In high school, all I wanted to do was become a chef. I started, I have a passion for food and entertaining, and it wasn't until I started working in the industry that I realised it wasn't for me. So I went back to look... ask a careers advisor what could be something I could do. And I had a look through all the university brochures and I could see that I could become a hospitality teacher. Now, while I could do that at Charles Sturt University and the University of Canberra, whether they were the only two universities that would offer me something closer to home where I could only travel, have to travel two hours to go to university and still have close links with my family. So I decided to come to UC as it was a bigger centre which offered more sort of job opportunities for me with wanting to still perhaps keep working in the hospitality industry. I studied here at the university from 2011 to 2014 in conjunction with the Canberra Institute of Technology, which is CIT. I lived in student accommodation for the majority of my time while I was studying and I'd been widely involved with all facets of the university life. I'm about to graduate in April for my degree, and while studying here at the university, I was also studying at CIT as a chef and a pastry chef, which furthered my skills in the industry. So I'd pretty much done a trade and a university degree at the same time, which a lot of people would say is impossible, but I found the time somehow and still managed to do that. In 2010, I was the winner of the Riverina Vocational Education Training Student Awards and went on to be the Australian winner. So in year 12, I finished with \$3,000 as a start of my [inaudible] to go to university. Through the Country Education Foundation and my careers advisor, I became aware that scholarships were for all students carrying on study. The application process for the scholarships were very detailed. It asked me about community involvement, family history, expenses whilst living away from home, obstacles that might prevent me from achieving your goals, and education institute preferences. From the written application, there was an interview process where I was given the opportunity to talk

about my goals, ambitions, who would support me along the way, and what initiative I would take to support myself. The first year that I applied for the scholarships, I was one of 50 applicants. 25 of the people who applied with me received scholarships that year. This meant that not just for me but many of my friends who were moving away from the country town to go to university were able to receive financial support. Without the backing of this financial support, many of us would not have even thought about going to university. [We] would have thought, "Okay, I need to stay in Young to keep working to support myself because I cannot possibly get there without a scholarship or any sort of type of support."

Being the recipient of an equity scholarship from the Young Country Education Foundation in partnership with the University of Canberra gave me the assistance I needed to start my journey at university. I received three scholarships from 2011 to 2013 worth \$2,000. These scholarships lessened the burden of my financial pressures that most university students face. The money I received went towards the cost of my textbooks, fortnightly rent of student accommodation, and any essentials I needed for moving out. As a young, naive teenager, I didn't realise how much these cost, moving away from home. These scholarships come as a great financial help, allowing me to stand on my own two feet independently. These scholarships allowed me to be a normal student and participate in all aspects of university life. Being able to participate in the whole university experience has been very beneficial towards my degree in education. It's given me so many opportunities that I don't think I would have had otherwise. Even with the scholarships' support, I already worked three jobs throughout the four years. I did not stop working. I worked in a bakery, I worked as a chef, and I worked for the university as an Aspiration Agent. The job with the university, as an Aspiration Agent, meant that I would travel to rural and regional towns and promote in-class aspiration and achievement sessions. They included valuable information about the benefits of studying at university and I can specifically relate to all of these students and understand the challenges that they would face. I am very passionate about providing educational opportunities for all students and now work for the university in the Widening Participation team. I am an outreach officer and my role aims to support the educational aspirations of high school students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, Indigenous, rural, and regional backgrounds, and people who are traditionally less likely to participate in higher education. Being only 22, I feel as though I had a jam-packed university adventure and I feel like I have so much more to learn, experience and see. I can't wait to travel and begin working as a hospitality teacher. In the future, I plan to move back to a rural town and give back what community has given me. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Okay. We do have the microphones working now, so were there any questions of Ellie before we invite Jonathan up? Are there any specific questions?

>> Audience Member: Thank you, Ellie. I just wanted to ask, in your role as an Aspiration Agent, what do you think is, you know the participation rates of rural students are still a long way behind - what stops them?

>> Ellie Rowland: Well.

>> Audience Member: From making that leap, and what else do they do that they decide not to go..?

>> Ellie Rowland: So I finished school with a group of 60 students. Out of the 60 students, there's only ten of us that went to university. We all did year 12. We all did great. We all got great ATARs. But for the majority of the students that I went through -- one, it was, "I'm not smart enough. I didn't get an ATAR so that means I can't go there," first off. And the second one is, "I couldn't possibly move away from home. Like, my family wouldn't support me. I'd have to do everything by myself, so I don't see the point of going." And I know with my best friend, she's still in Young, works at NRMA [Insurance]. And she's just like, "I couldn't possibly go because I wouldn't have any financial support. Once I got there, I don't know how I'd pay for my rent and those sorts of things." Because she'd be the first one in her family -- ever -- to go to university and they just see it as something that's not plausible. And I know a lot of universities offer pathway programmes, but careers advisors aren't aware of those programmes, so they're not selling them to students. So I think creating that higher awareness of these programmes that they're out there, they're giving students that leeway into a university and providing support once they get there. All of the universities are providing the support, but it's just knowing about it. And I know that I've gone back to Young every year and I go and see my old teachers and talk to them about the programmes and the initiatives that university has to offer, and they love it. I know that. Probably 40 people from Young over the last four years have come to Canberra for university. And I feel like that is huge because before that, no one would think about coming to Canberra to university. That sort of... any other questions?

>> Audience Member: I've got one. Sorry.

>> Ellie Rowland: Yeah.

>> Audience Member: Trying to talk really loudly. But you said you got three scholarships, so congratulations, first off, for getting those. Assuming they were cash payments to you, what did they pay for? I guess from a student perspective, what do you think is a benefit? You talk about people coming from Young. Sounds like it's probably just the fear factor that's stopping them as well as the financial. So what else can we do besides just giving somebody money to hopefully assist financially?

>> Ellie Rowland: So with my scholarships with Country Education Foundation, you, I actually had to physically spend the \$2,000 first and then I was reimbursed. For me, a first year uni student, I received \$3,000 and that was gone within the first fortnight by the time I had to buy bed sheets, all the things that you wouldn't think about. So outlaying that money first was a burden. And I think that was one of the struggles with that scholarship, but I had received a lot of scholarships over the years, not just these equity ones. I received \$16,000 in my first year of uni, but I applied for things that most people wouldn't normally. I applied to the CWA. I applied for the Young Mayoral Scholarship. I applied for the hospitality scholarships. I applied for teacher scholarships because I knew that I wouldn't be able to go to university without that help. So the burden with receiving scholarships and just getting the money is that you don't necessarily know what you want to spend it on or you think, you know, straight out of high school you don't realise the responsibilities that come with moving out of home. So for me personally, getting the scholarship that would have went straight to rent, that would have been a huge, huge pressure off my shoulders. But paying \$300 a fortnight when you're only earning \$15 an hour and you're only doing, say, 20 hours a week, that's not quite covering \$150 of rent a week for me. So actually giving out more scholarships to rural students or regional students that go straight towards rent assistance or go straight towards, say, buying things that you need when you move out of home, like the essentials. For me, you know, yes, every university has a library, but not every library has 150 copies of the textbook that you need for your first-year university student. So providing more, say, Co-op bookshop scholarships would be awesome in the sense that you can then go out and say, "Yep, I've got \$200 to spend. I need to get this textbook and this textbook." And there's that money that it's not specifically cash in hand. I think those sorts of scholarships would have helped in that sense, but I do believe that the cash scholarships that I did receive, they were of great financial help. So even though they weren't specifically labelled, I put that money away and then put it towards rent. I put that money away and put it towards car insurance when it came up. I put it towards,

you know, all the little bits and pieces you come along as you're becoming an adult, not just as a student. But, yeah.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Okay. Thank you very much, Ellie. That's great. And I'd like to invite Jonathan because I'm seeing Jonathan just come in -- to come up. And he's a current University of Canberra student completing a double degree in Sport and Exercise Science and Sports Management and I will invite you to talk a bit more about yourself. So we've got the mic right here.

>> Jonathan Goerlach: Okay.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: What would you like to use this? Okay, great.

[ Silence ]

>> Jonathan Goerlach: Do you want me to help?

[ Inaudible ]

[ Silence ]

[ Setting up microphone ]

>> Jonathan Goerlach: Hi everyone. Thanks for inviting today to talk to you about my story. So I guess the best way to tell you my story is through the statement that I wrote for the scholarship application that I put together last year. Like Ellie, I've received a few scholarships myself and so I guess the statement I put together encapsulates my story and it's the best way to tell you about it. So I was born and raised in Young on the south coast of New South Wales. I've been passionate for sport [inaudible], it wasn't long after being diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition at age 15, known as retinitis pigmentosa that leads to possible blindness. From that moment, anxiety and depression smothered my passion, leaving me no

choice but to part ways with sport altogether. At age 26, I was lost. I had reached a point where I needed to change something in my life. I needed to be focussed on something I enjoyed. I needed a goal. I needed sport. It took me different attempts at a few sports, such as rowing, lawn bowls, and athletics before I found myself consumed by triathlon. This sport and the community involved made training and competing positively overwhelming. I reignited my passion. My life was back on track. Ever since I set the Paralympic games [inaudible] for myself, many doors have opened to new and exciting opportunities. From public speaking and motivational talks to promoting and representing organisations, such as Guide Dogs, Vision Australia, Save Sight Institute, and Retina Australia, and volunteering with the Australian Public Committee for the Telescopes Programme. Through triathlon, I've had the privilege of working with elite coaches and managers. These mentors of mine taught me how to swim, bike, and run in triathlon, but also how to improve on all aspects of life. It is these invaluable learnings that inspire me to want to become a coach and educator, too. After researching my options to follow this career path and with the amazing assistance of the staff of the University of Canberra Inclusion and Welfare Department, I find myself enrolled in a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science and a Bachelor of Sports Management. Putting myself in a position to begin this new chapter does not come without some sacrifice. The financial impact of a big decision like this is risk-taking by definition. Especially when my main source of income is a disability support pension. Up to this point, I've been surrounded by family and by the familiarity of the town I grew up in. And now I find myself apart from that support and comfort zone in order to follow my dreams. Moving to a new and foreign place have challenges for the most able of people. And obviously, a few more for a legally blind person. This scholarship will readily enable a unique opportunity for me to stay here in Canberra, continue following my passion, and to embark on a career choice that I'm dedicated to. The scholarship assistance will not only help in areas such as the large, ongoing overhead cost of university, the expense of living on campus, which allows me to live independently with a disability, but most importantly, will provide me the ability to study with peace of mind knowing that these ongoing financial burdens are lessened. Upon reflection, I feel that I've already achieved so much by being in my current position. Making the very most of each opportunity as it presents itself. But the biggest challenge -- becoming educated as a university graduate -- has just begun. It is my mission that once I have completed my studies, I will educate and mentor the next generation of athletes. Not only how to reach their potential, but how to become great people, too. So it's now been a year since I wrote this statement. There's so many more achievements reached in this time. I became an elite athlete, training at the nearby Australian Institute of Sport. I travelled to Canada and America to compete in international events. I'm currently ranked in the top five visually impaired triathletes in the world. And I am proud to say I was awarded the 2014 University of Canberra Athlete of the Year Award. But the most important and surprising achievement is completing my first year at university without failing a subject.

[ Laughter ]

I say surprising partly because of my time-consuming triathlon training and work commitments, but mainly surprising because I haven't been in school for 13 years before starting university. When I look back at this past year, when I re-read the scholarship statement to myself, I understand how significant and valuable these scholarships have been. Without them, I would not have achieved any of the things I have in the past year and I certainly wouldn't be continuing this journey of being educated. I hope that while sharing my story here today, I have planted a clear understanding of the impact these scholarships have on students all over Australia. Simply needing support to become educated and creating other achievements too.

[ Applause ]

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: So we may have some questions for you, so did you want to just stay there, Jonathan? I've got very good mics now so I feel a bit more comfortable. Would there be any questions? Yes?

[ Silence ]

>> Audience Member: It's not necessarily a question, I think it's an observation and confirmation that it sounds from you and Ellie have both said that you've spent a heck of a lot of time detracted from studying because you have to source and research, apply for, worry about, stress about where your next dime's coming from. So do you think that one of the solutions is to know right at the beginning that this scholarship you're getting, for example, would be for the duration and would cover all expenses and lots and have different facets to it than just giving you a bundle of money to grow up with and be responsible for?

>> Jonathan Goerlach: I think it depends on the person and how good they are with their money. And if they have, say, \$5,000 and they know they need to buy textbooks. And, for me, I have to pay three hundred and fifty dollars a week rent just to live on campus, and so a bit more probably use their money more wisely, but if they had some parameters or guidelines, within the application, such as "this is what

you're going to use it for" and it's towards university, then great. As Ellie said, we both probably received more money than we expected to get. I didn't expect any of it. The money that's come in, that's great, it's actually helped a lot of other areas outside of university, which in turn, it actually helps you be less stressful. Everyone knows having money issues, you know, there's stress in all parts of life. You don't need to be stressed at university, otherwise you're just not going to pass university and do well. So, yeah. I think you can go both ways and give them a lump of money and say, "Look, do what you want with it." You can also give them some guidance on what they should spend it on. Did that answer your question?

>> Audience Member: Yes, thank you.

>> Audience Member: Hi. My name is Mary. Thank you both for those lovely narratives. I'm interested in, because I'm going to be talking about it later, in all of this money you've got together through work and scholarships, I'm interested in Centrelink and whether you're on the full benefits that you were entitled for and in the sense what the proportions were because there's a way of looking at it that Centrelink is worth \$X and work is worth \$Y and then scholarships top it up [the funds]. What was the main game for you in terms of the total income budget that you stitched together?

>> Ellie Rowland: So I was only eligible for \$1.50 of Centrelink. But for a rural and regional student relocating, that meant I get the \$5,000 relocation scholarship. So with that, [inaudible] \$1,000 Start Up scholarship for my first semester and second semester of my first year and then Centrelink was cut off for me. But then in my final year of study, I turned 22 and that gave me independence and I got \$1,000 each semester for my final year of study. But that was all that I received from Centrelink in terms of government support.

>> Jonathan Goerlach: So I actually get a Disability Support Pension from Centrelink and when you're on a DSP blind, you don't get income tested. So that has been - since I was 16 or 17 I've been getting that. That's been a huge help throughout my life. So, yeah. In terms of the effects that scholarships have on that, they don't. Yeah. I guess that answers your question.

>> Professor Sue Trinidad: Any other questions? That's right. You're looking hungry. So will you join me again to thank Ellie and Jonathan?

[ Applause ]