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**Brendon’s Story**

Brendon recalls intending to go to university from the young age of 12 or 13 years. Although no one from his family had previously been to university, it was always an option presented to him. In fact Brendon’s parents actively encouraged higher education as a positive choice, reiterating throughout his younger years that he “didn’t have to settle with what had been done by the family in the past”. Brendon identifies his father in particular, as a driving force in becoming a first in family university student:

**I think he’d be the first to admit, that he’s not the happiest with his career. He dropped out of school at 15 or 16 and went to work to help support his parents. He said “Look we don’t want you to have to live under the same pressure that we’re under” Dad watches a lot of news and through where he works, saw that Law and Management provided good opportunities.**

Conversations between Brendon and his parents played a significant part of why he decided to continue with further studies, however personal determination to achieve a successful career was also a contributing factor. As an avid musician Brendon originally wanted to be a music teacher, however his drive to succeed in a valued professional career resulted in a decision to keep music as a hobby and focus on a specific profession.

Being a first in family student has had disadvantages for Brendon within his chosen undergraduate degree.

**I know a lot students who say “I asked my dad or my uncle about this because they’re a lawyer”, so they can get those first hand experiences but I don’t know anyone else in the field. So I think that’s the other part about going into something foreign for me and my background is that I haven’t got the external support. I’ve got the support with the care, but just not the knowledge support.**

Despite the apparent disadvantage, Brendon’s drive ensures that he overcomes these hurdles by remaining focused on his ultimate goals. Brendon’s career aspirations include either being a corporate lawyer or senior manager within a high end business. He expresses a particular interest in leadership roles, reflecting his visionary qualities. Additional attributes that Brendon recognises as being beneficial include his persistence and down to earth nature. When quizzed about whether he considers if any of his attributes have changed as a result of university, Brendon states that his inner qualities hadn’t really changed however his ability to handle of pressure, manage social relationships and workloads have changed dramatically.

**At school I didn’t care as much, I always knew I wanted to go to university but I didn’t put in as much effort as I would have liked to. I think going through university and doing the hard work to get accepted into Law after a semester of Management and achieving the required GPA, that’s something that instigated the change. I should have been in Law in the first place if I had worked on those qualities a bit more.**

Transition into university proved to be more challenging than Brendon anticipated, with first year proving to be one of the “hardest years of my life”. As a student commencing in a large cohort undergraduate degree in Management, Brendon vividly recalls feeling like ‘a fish out of water’.

**It can be isolating…because I do think I’m a bit foreign to it all and if I’m not in classes I’m just sitting there on my own or studying on my own. I see the cliques and I often feel like maybe I’m not suited to the environment. Sometimes I struggle and sometimes it gets you down a little but I don’t let it affect me too much.**

Being successful in obtaining a place in the undergraduate Law program has assisted Brendon in feeling more comfortable in the university setting, reporting that the law cohort is smaller and therefore provides a cosier environment. Lack of support within his chosen course partly explains Brendon’s feelings of isolation, with many of his high school peers enrolling in other university courses. As a result Brendon has good friends at other campuses or universities, providing him with social support outside of his degree. Brendon credits the maintenance of these friendships as being critical in sustaining his happiness.

Other activities that assisted Brendon’s mental health well-being during this difficult period was music, whether it was listening, playing or writing music. He regrets not being more physically active as he recognises the benefits that it would have provided and is aware that the amount of physical activity he engages in has dropped since commencing university. Physical health however is not the only cost associated with studying, with Brendon reporting the effect on earning an income.

**I’m just working weekends because the week just gets packed up full of university and travel doesn’t help either, it’s about an hour trip each way.**

Although Brendon’s family are happy to support him whilst he studies, providing a place to live. Other study expenses dictate a need for Brendon to work part-time, particularly as Brendon has discovered that “law textbooks are not the cheapest thing”. Whilst university fees have been deferred through the HECS system until he is in a position to earn a higher income, an aim that he hopes to achieve in the near future. Brendon’s goals of a more financially secure future have been sustained by the sentiments expressed by his parents since he was young, that he should explore all of the opportunities that higher education could provide. As Brendon observed,

**Growing up in, never ‘financially struggling’, but an environment where money goes on necessities rather than luxuries. I think financial independence and freedom would be good.**