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**Roxie’s story**

The personal transformation that occurs as a result of participation in higher education is clearly demonstrated through Roxie’s story. Roxie recalls a pivotal period in her childhood during which she lived away from her parents and with her grandmother for a two year period. During this time Roxie explains that she developed a strong sense of independence resulting in a teenager who was rebellious and had a strong sense of wanting to make her own way in the world. Consequently Roxie’s high school years saw a decrease in academic focus and an increase in drug use, escalating to a serious drug problem that she didn’t recover from until she was 25 years of age. Today, Roxie presents as an articulate and streetwise person who is about to successfully complete her final honours year in Speech Pathology. Her achievement is well recognised by others and Roxie herself:

**All of my friends are extremely proud of me, I was always a real tearaway I had a really serious drug problem when I was a young women. So to go from repeated drug overdoses and nearly dying to finishing university, my friends are astonished, they’re really proud of me.**

**I have a lot more ambition than I used to, I have a lot more confidence in myself. I’ve always been a very confident person but now I’m ready to take on the world, my whole attitude has changed.**

Her initial motivation to attend university came from her boss who indicated that the company she worked for wanted to promote her and a prerequisite for promotion was, working towards a relevant university qualification. Roxie clearly recounts the conversation with her boss as it included a compelling message pertaining to Roxie’s father who had died 6 months earlier and who had wanted Roxie to go to university. The conversation carried with it an inspiring message as Roxie described her father as an extraordinarily intelligent man who had always wanted his children to utilise their natural intelligence.

Roxie reports that going to university provided her with a sense of legitimacy and worthiness in an employment role where she had previously felt like an imposter. Furthermore, seeing her mother struggle after the loss of her father has motivated Roxie to complete her studies so that she is able to help support her mum.

**My aspirations and ambition for studying include financial stability. Being able to get a job that paid my superannuation, that paid my tax for me, as a current sub- contracted person you’re responsible for all of that stuff yourself and it’s exhausting. I also wanted stability and security and to be able to help my mum.**

In striving for future financial stability, Roxie has had to struggle with the associated costs of study. Whilst the delayed payment of Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) did not influence Roxie’s decision to study or not, she acknowledges that she would not have been able to attend university without it. Roxie describes the requirement to balance work and study as extremely difficult due to the combination of not working as many hours as she had previously been able to and as a result of a complex work arrangement which includes delays in receiving payment for her work. Consequently Roxie has had periods of time where it has been difficult to pay bills:

**My partner pays for our rent and our food, I pay for the bills but I can’t pay our bills, phones are cut off, electricity hasn’t been paid, internets about to get cut off and my car might get repossessed in a couple of weeks.**

Together with financial costs, Roxie discussed additional factors affected by her university studies including her time, attention, mental health and relationships all having suffered while she has been studying. In particular, her relationships with partner and friends were described as having suffered, with Roxie explaining that she often feels “out of the loop” with her friends as a result of being so involved in her studies. A sentiment that Roxie echoed in relation to her partner:

**I’ve had a partner for 13 years now, we’ve certainly grown apart over the last 4 years, we don’t have as much time to spend together and the time we do have together is often spent trying to manage the difficult things that are happening or I’m saying o him “Listen I’m sorry, but I need you to leave me alone for the next 48 hours”. He’s very involved in other stuff he does, I’ve got the stuff I’m doing and very rarely do we cross paths at this stage which is difficult. We spend 15 minutes in the car together in the morning and maybe 10 or 15 minutes in the afternoon, that’s about it.**

**Seeing the way my partner has created this life that doesn’t involve me, it’s sad and it’s awful but that just again makes me go, “oh just finish this thing get this done so that we can go back to having a life together”.**

Despite these challenges, Roxie’s determination and recognition of the benefits of university studies has seen her persist. To assist her in remaining focused on her goal Roxie often finds herself chanting the mantra “nearly there, you’re nearly there, you’re nearly there”. Further to this internal motivation, Roxie’s strong sense of belonging and sense of inclusion in not just the social aspect of student life but also having been taken under the wing of the academics in the Department have contributed towards her motivation to stay the course. Aside from a difficult initial first few weeks when commencing university, Roxie describes feeling fantastic and doing really well within the first three months. Reporting positively about the support and resources she was able to receive:

**Being able to access healthcare up at the doctors and I see counsellors, I’ve seen a psychiatrist, these are all things that I wouldn’t have been able to afford to do outside of the university environment. You have access to help with your resume, you’ve got access to financial help, you’ve got someone to help you with your assignments if you’re not sure if they’re good enough. And further to all that the people in the Department are incredibly supportive.**

For Roxie, the decision to participate in higher education has been a life changing event regardless of the challenges she faced prior to enrolment. Roxie’s attitude has dramatically shifted from one of starting out as a non-believer in education institutions to now being 100% committed and suggesting that everyone goes to university because “it can change your life and just the way you feel about yourself, changes the way you can go forth and do things, it gives you opportunities”.