

THE  
P/NNACLE  
FOUNDATION

ABN 81 127 662 604

Making a  
Difference?

Are We  
Making a  
Difference?

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## Foreword from the CEO

**Andrew Staite, Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director  
The Pinnacle Foundation**



Our work is driven by our vision for a more diverse and inclusive society with visible LGBTIQ+ role models. We provide educational scholarships, mentoring and opportunities for young LGBTIQ+ Australians to realise their full potential and overcome challenges arising from their identity.

We have undertaken the “*Are We Making a Difference?*” research project to better understand how we may increase the impact of our support for young LGBTIQ+ Australians to gain an education, achieve their life goals and contribute to our community.

The Pinnacle Foundation relies solely on donations combined with the passionate contributions of over 140 volunteers and a full time-equivalent staff of under three to deliver our program across the country. Our volunteers, partners and donors help us to educate and transform the lives of young LGBTIQ+ scholars. The gift of education is one that impacts every aspect of a young person’s life and can sustainably enhance their future, and the contribution they make to our community.

## Context

*Are We Making a Difference?* is a research project capturing the academic achievements, personal development and experience of those young LGBTIQ+ Australians who have participated in The Pinnacle Foundation’s scholarship program.

*Are We Making a Difference?* research was initially conducted in 2018 with the intention to re-survey the scholar and alumni cohort every three years to track their progress and to identify any improvements that may be implemented to the scholarship and alumni programs. The original research had a response rate of 65%. The research evaluated:

- The organisational support scholars received from the Foundation
- The 'success' of the program by measuring the respondents' course completion rates, academic achievement, general wellbeing and integration into the LGBTIQ+ community
- Current status of scholars/alumni (for example, working or studying fulltime and in what industry).

### Current Research

The current research project aimed to build on the insights gained in 2018. Questions were reworked in consultation with alumni, current scholars and key Pinnacle management committee members including the chief executive officer, Foundation advisor, scholar manager, alumni manager, mentor manager, chief marketing officer, governance and risk manager, and program manager. The questions aimed to explore respondents' experiences with the Foundation and how their academic and wider lives have been impacted. Answers were sought to a number of questions:

1. Whether the respondent has finished their studies and if they are working in an industry related to their course
2. Whether the respondent thought that their time with The Pinnacle Foundation had helped them attain their academic goals
3. In what ways can the Foundation help the respondents to increase their overall experience/well-being?
4. How supported did the respondent feel by The Pinnacle Foundation?
5. In what ways has each respondent's time with The Pinnacle Foundation affected their life post tertiary education, via the following measures:
  - By gaining internships and employment
  - By providing a sense of community and support
  - By assisting the respondent in the completion of their tertiary studies
  - By assisting the respondent to develop changes to their study approach
  - Whether the respondent can identify other ways in which The Pinnacle Foundation has assisted them

6. The respondent's relationship with their mentor, and how this relationship affected their experience as part of the program.

The research invited recommendations and feedback in order to improve service delivery for future scholars and alumni.

## Method

### **Email Survey Leveraging Survey Software (Submittable)**

Respondents were sent an email explaining the purpose of the research and a link to the Submittable site where they could submit their responses online. Reminder emails were sent prompting action from respondents who had not participated. The emails were personalised. Different message variants were sent to current scholars versus alumni to contextualise the research and encourage participation.

### **SMS Reminders for Completion**

SMS messages were sent to encourage participation and to reach those respondents who did not actively check their emails, or whose contact details may have been out of date. This approach was effective in increasing participation rates and updating out-of-date contact information. The SMS messages were personalised to each respondent and different message content was developed to send to current scholars versus alumni.

### **Telephone Survey**

Respondents were also provided with the option to participate in the survey via telephone. Respondents who leveraged this option often did not have access to their email and found it was time effective to respond over the telephone, or preferred this method of survey response for anonymity. The responses were entered manually with a unique scholar/alumni code (to protect anonymity where requested).

### **Questions**

The questions used open ended (text), yes/no, numerical and Likert items (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to capture the intensity of respondents' sentiments. Given that all respondents were directly involved in the Foundation's program, the neutral Likert item was omitted in order to force a response one way or the other.

### **Participants**

149 survey emails were sent to scholars and alumni. There were 10 respondents whose contact details were incorrect and whose current contact details could not be found. A total of 87 responses were received, giving a response rate of 62% of those who received the survey.

Key Risk Factors Facing Young LGBTIQ+ Australians

There are multiple factors affecting young LGBTIQ+ Australians in our society. These factors are both personal and societal with mental health factors, lack of representation, discrimination and multiple barriers to the completion of education being key issues that young LGBTIQ+ people face daily. A lack of LGBTIQ+ visibility, inclusion and positive representation is often cited as being a contributing factor to young LGBTIQ+ Australians' disengagement with education, social participation and overall well-being.

## SNAPSHOT OF KEY ISSUES AFFECTING YOUNG LGBTIQ+ AUSTRALIANS

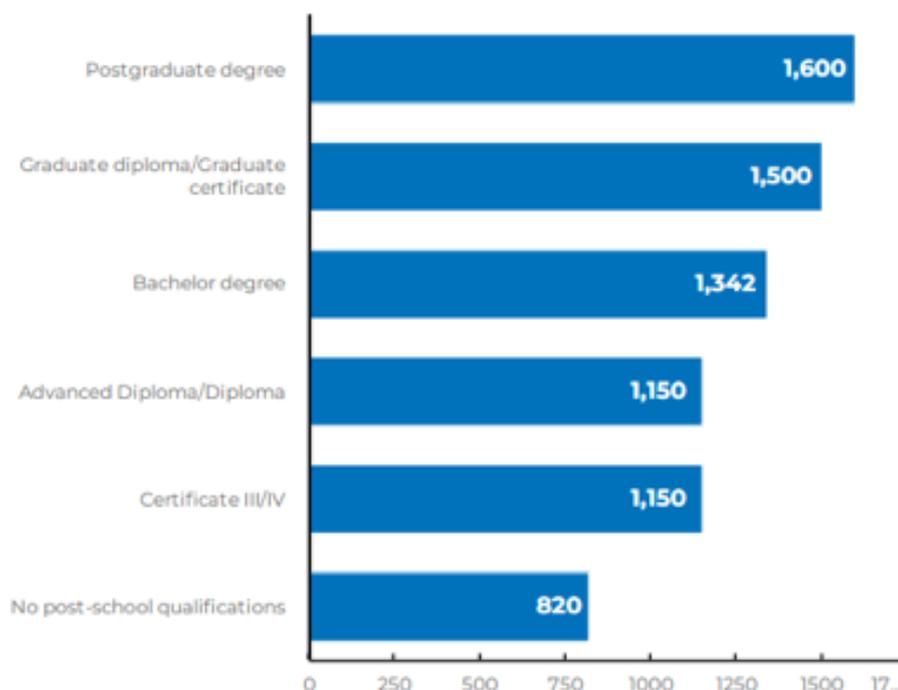
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">SUICIDIALITY</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Compared to the general population, young LGBTIQ+ people are five times more likely to attempt suicide in their lifetime and transgender people aged 18 and over are 11 times more likely.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">MENTAL HEALTH</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Compared to the general population, young LGBTIQ+ people are more likely to experience and be diagnosed with a mental health disorder, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are twice as likely to have symptoms that the criteria for a mental health disorder in the past 12 months</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">SELF-HARM</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 79.7% of transgender and gender diverse people aged 14 - 25 have self-harmed in their lifetime</li> <li>• 33% of LGBTIQ+ young people aged 16 to 27 reported having self-harmed, 41% had thoughts of harming themselves</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">USE OF CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">  </div> <p>71% of young LGBTIQ+ people aged 16 to 27 did not seek the use of crisis support services and 32.6% stated that they did not use crisis support services due to anticipated discrimination</p>

Information sourced from: National LGBTI Health Alliance, Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTI People, February 2020.

### The Benefits of Tertiary Education

Research has shown that, on average, people with higher levels of qualifications (tertiary education) achieve greater labour market outcomes, have better employment outcomes, generally have increased wages, work more hours on average and, most significantly, their lifetime earnings are higher than those with lower-level qualifications. Tertiary education graduates often experience a higher quality of life than those who have not undertaken tertiary education and the return on investment for most graduates means that higher paid employment is secured upon the attainment of a tertiary qualification.

Median weekly earnings in main job, by highest level of post-school qualification, 2019 (\$)



Source: <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/education-and-employment>

The costs of early school leaving and disengagement are not only faced by the individual, but these costs impact wider society. The table below illustrates the wide range of impacts that early school leaving and disengagement have on the individual and the community:

### Components of the economic costs of early school leaving and disengagement

Cost Component	Description	Cost Type	
<b>Labour market</b>	Lost earnings	Gross income including fringe benefits (health and pension)	Social
	Lost tax payments	Includes federal and state income/consumption taxes	Fiscal
<b>Crime</b>	Public expenditures	Criminal justice system, policing, and corrections expenditures (federal, state, and local)	Fiscal
	Victim costs	Reduced quality of life, monetary damages, lost earnings	Social
<b>Health</b>	Public expenditures	Medicare for persons under 65, and other government agency expenditures on health	Fiscal
	Private burdens	Private expenditures on medical treatments (out-of-pocket, private insurance) and private valuations of health	Social
<b>Welfare</b>	Support programs	Expenditures on social supports (e.g. workforce retraining)	Fiscal
	Transfer payments	Amounts paid to individuals who receive government supports	Fiscal
<b>Education</b>	Public savings	Lower schooling and further education subsidies from government agencies	Fiscal
	Private fee savings	Lower fees and further education expenses for families	Social
<b>Productivity spillovers</b>	General economic gains from a more educated workforce		Social
<b>Marginal excess tax burden</b>	Cost of raising taxes to pay for public services		Social

Source: Belfield C., Levin H., Rosen R. (2012) The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth. Published by Corporation for National Community Service, White House Council for Community Solutions, January 2012.

According to the Mitchell Institute’s 2017 report (Number 2), Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education, each disengaged young person imposes a cost which is equivalent to \$411,700 as a current lump sum across their adult years. In terms of social costs, or costs to the broader community, each disengaged young person imposes a lifetime burden which is equivalent to \$1,103,700 as a current lump sum - this is a cost carried by taxpayers.

The benefits that individuals receive from higher education is reflected in the increased labour productivity that results from the knowledge and skills accumulated through their studies. This accumulation is a key driver of economic growth and living standards, with broader benefits flowing to the community through increases to government revenue, greater economic contribution to society, lower levels of criminal activity, greater levels of employment, better health, and well-being enjoyed by those who have undertaken higher education. The difference in income and the problem-solving skills learnt whilst undertaking higher education contributes to the forementioned benefits for those who have completed tertiary education.

## How Does The Pinnacle Foundation Support Young LGBTIQ+ Australians?

The social impacts and personal advantages resulting from gaining an education are key drivers of The Pinnacle Foundation's work to support young LGBTIQ+ Australians. We seek to close the gap in the attainment of education which leads to social and economic disparities that have faced sections of the LGBTIQ+ community by providing the support necessary for our scholars to complete their studies, thrive in their chosen career paths, and become champions and role models in the community.

The Pinnacle Foundation understands the many challenges that young LGBTIQ+ Australians face daily. Our efforts aim to address these issues, and create a platform for the young LGBTIQ+ people we work with, so that they have the opportunity to realise their full potential, overcome challenges arising from their identity, become self-reliant, maintain their dignity and give back themselves. Our efforts include:



**Financial Support:** The financial component of Pinnacle Foundation scholarships eases the great financial stress and anxiety associated with undertaking tertiary studies. A Universities Australia report, University Student Finances in 2012, which was released in 2013, suggests that students experiencing financial stress were twice as likely to report mental illness compared to students with no financial stress. The Anglicare Australia April 2019 Rental Affordability Snapshot found just one rental property in Australia that was affordable and suitable for people receiving the Youth Allowance.

By easing the financial burden associated with tertiary education, our scholars have more capacity to focus on their studies and will have a better chance of completing their studies successfully and to pursue their chosen career path.



**Representation and Organisational Support:** The Pinnacle Foundation creates a community and family where the young people we work with can feel a sense of belonging, inclusion and acceptance. We want scholars and alumni to know that they have a group of people who are cheering them on, not only during their studies, but into their post-education lives. Many scholars have limited access to the LGBTIQ+ community, little or no family support, and lack access positive LGBTIQ+ role models. By creating this environment through networking events, state and territory based social gatherings, social media groups and the support from Pinnacle family members, we witness young people flourish and build lifelong, healthy friendships with like-minded individuals who provide sustained support and care.



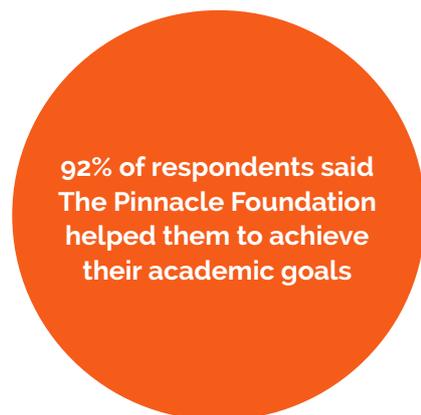
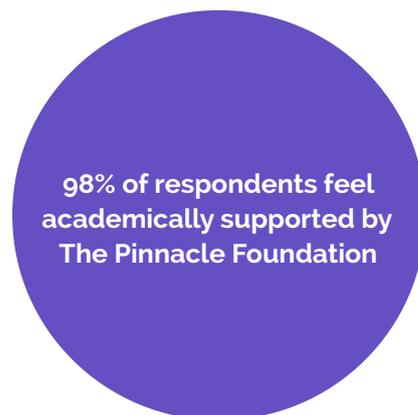
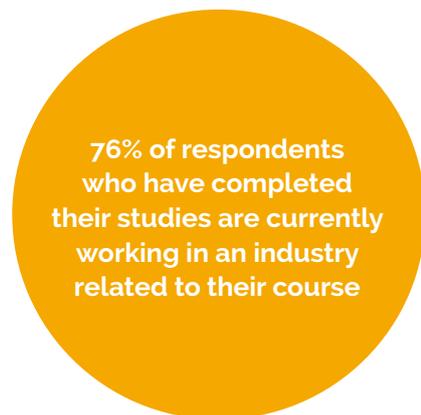
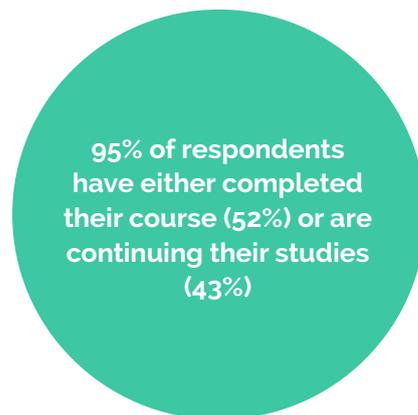
**Mentorship:** We match scholars with mentors who typically share the same academic and professional interests, gender identity and sexual orientation. By matching scholars with accomplished members of the LGBTIQ+ community, who have often trod the path before them, scholars are not only guided and encouraged to achieve their educational and career goals, but also supported to navigate life as proud members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Scholars often say that the mentoring component of The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship program is just as important as the financial support received.



**Opportunities:** We provide a wide range of opportunities for scholars and alumni to network and interact with industry leaders, state and territory committees, partners and LGBTIQ+ friendly organisations. These organisations have a keen interest to see scholars succeed and thrive. We provide training, workshops and industry specific networking sessions throughout the year, as well as during new scholar induction, where new scholars are officially welcomed to the Foundation, awarded their scholarship certificates, and have an opportunity to interact with the wider Pinnacle family.

Key Research Highlights: Are We Making A Difference?

The key insights from the data received from the Are We Making a Difference? research responses highlight the effectiveness of The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship program. The findings show:



89% of respondents rated the relationship with their mentors as being beneficial to extremely beneficial

98% of respondents stated that they would recommend The Pinnacle Foundation to other potential scholars

What did our respondents tell us?

Respondents candidly shared their experiences as participants in The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship program.

**Financial Support**

92% of respondents reported that the financial component of the scholarship gave them peace of mind, eased the mental burden of wondering how they were going to afford the texts, tools and equipment to successfully undertake their studies and relieved the financial anxiety that often accompanies a fulltime study load and working (sometimes multiple) casual or part-time jobs. This relief contributed positively to respondents' mental health and overall sense of well-being, supporting them to focus more on their studies and the successful completion of their education.

"Financially it was a godsend to be able to focus on my studies and not on how to pay for materials and supplies."

"Financially invaluable - the peace of mind that came with not worrying about money really helped me achieve my academic goals."

"I was able to finish my degree early in my life (considering the challenges that being queer caused for me financially and emotionally), and end up with a very good and promising career. As I only had youth allowance, the money for textbooks and a laptop and other University funds were essential for my degree. I would have had to delay uni otherwise, which would have made progressing through the public services difficult."

### Representation and Organisational Support

89% of respondents reported that they felt supported, encouraged and part of a community of like-minded and inspiring LGBTIQ+ people. Being surrounded by people who are inspirational and aspirational encourages young LGBTIQ+ people to reach for goals that would have seemed unattainable, and to become leaders in their communities and industries.

"I'm incredibly grateful for The Pinnacle Foundation, you do amazing work and I feel so privileged to be involved in such a brilliant and important community."

"Pinnacle supported me through the hardest moments of my last two years at uni. I wouldn't have been able to do it without them."

"Having another LGBTIQ+ Indigenous mentor has given me the guidance and determination to overcome the academic and personal challenges involved with doing a dual law degree. In addition the drop-in sessions and access to some amazing staff have made me feel like I belong to the family and proud to be part of the community."

### Mentorship

Great care is taken to match mentors and scholars so that there is alignment with the scholars' gender, sexuality, career aspirations and field of study. The mentor relationship is an opportunity for mutual wisdom sharing and mutual learning. The mentoring component of the scholarship program is vital to scholars' success, as they receive support, acceptance and guidance, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Scholars and alumni frequently observe that the mentoring relationship is just as valuable as the financial support provided by the Foundation.

"I didn't know many people from the queer community, so being paired with a mentor who was successful and who I could look up to was so refreshing and a really valuable aspect of my scholarship."

"I may not have been able to finish my course without Pinnacle's help let alone obtain the grades that I did. The support of my mentor, and also knowing there were other people in my corner who wanted me to succeed, was excellent."



"I love my mentor! She has become a good friend of mine and it was so incredible for me to see a trans woman who is successful and happy in life. She has given me great advice and feedback, and I know it is a relationship that will endure!"

### Opportunities

As part of The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship program, scholars and alumni are often invited to attend networking events, speak at events at partner organisations within their specific industries and network with fellow scholars, alumni, mentors and professionals in many different fields. We offer multiple opportunities for our scholars and alumni to be able to meet people in their own fields and engage with industry leaders. These opportunities often lead to placement offers and the development of industry contacts which are invaluable when gaining future opportunities and career advice. Scholars and alumni have expressed how much these opportunities enhance their experience and well-being, and frequently open doors that might not otherwise be open. Our goal is to support young LGBTIQ+ Australians realise their full potential and become leaders in their fields. Facilitating networking and career opportunities for scholars and alumni helps to achieve this goal.



"My mentor was a great resource and was able to connect me with a number of personal contacts that helped me start my career after graduating."



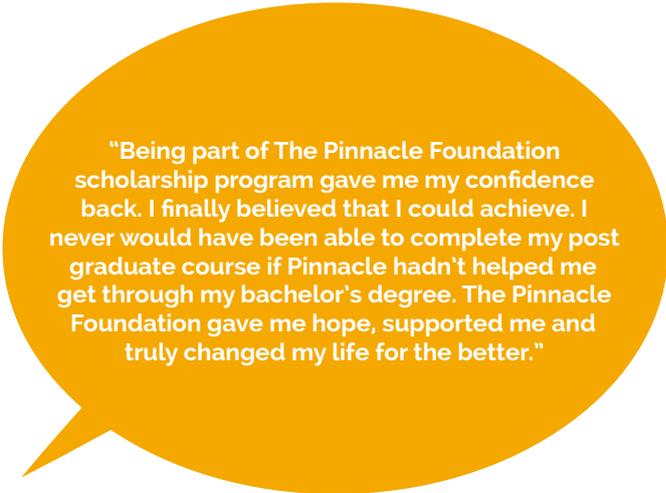
"I gave a speech as a Pinnacle scholar for Wear It Purple day and they asked if I wanted to do an internship and that internship eventually turned into a job!"

## Conclusion

Education improves one's sense of well-being, enhances social contribution, builds prosperity and expands quality of life. Education is an important enabler for young LGBTIQ+ Australians to expand their life options and to equip them to fully participate in our community. It promotes a path to greater equality.

The young LGBTIQ+ people we support thrive as a result of being a part of The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship and alumni programs, going on to lead happy, healthy and successful lives in their chosen careers. We witness young LGBTIQ+ people become accomplished and successful members of our community, inspiring younger generations of incoming scholars.

Pleasingly, many Pinnacle alumni are now active Pinnacle volunteers, mentors, donors and proud members of The Pinnacle Foundation family. We see first-hand the life changing effect that removing some of the barriers to education has on the lives of young LGBTIQ+ Australians. We celebrate the incredible achievements of Pinnacle scholars and alumni and their contributions to our society.



**"Being part of The Pinnacle Foundation scholarship program gave me my confidence back. I finally believed that I could achieve. I never would have been able to complete my post graduate course if Pinnacle hadn't helped me get through my bachelor's degree. The Pinnacle Foundation gave me hope, supported me and truly changed my life for the better."**

For further information about The Pinnacle Foundation, to make a tax-deductible donation, or to become involved in the work that we do, please visit us at <https://thepinnaclefoundation.org/>

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THE PINNACLE FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP FUND IS ENDORSED AS A DEDUCTIBLE GIFT RECIPIENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE. DONATIONS OF \$2 OR MORE ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

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