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Julia Gillard's Home Run

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“We can make a DIFFERENCE”

The world is full of good intentions, and, just occasionally, some of them become reality, or in the case of Jessica Brown and Jacinta Tynan, a national, million-dollar reality inspired by the simple credo: “we can make a difference”.

The Life Changing Experiences Foundation (LCEF) founded and run by Jessica Brown is behind the hugely successful SISTER2sister scheme for which Jacinta Tynan is ambassador. The two smart, blonde 30-somethings have been working together for three years to promote and facilitate the 12-month mentoring program which sees disadvantaged young girls partnered with older, usually professionally successful, women.

“I have a theory that women in their 20s and 30s, especially in a country like this – we’re so self-obsessed,” says Tynan. “It’s all about us and finding a man and getting your job sorted out, and you do get to a stage where you’re actually a little bit bored with that and think, ‘well, I actually want to contribute something.’ It becomes compelling.” Hence the good intentions.

But any lofty connotations of Down Under versions of Mother Teresa are quickly dispelled amid laughter, tears and wardrobe comparisons around a small table at the back of the foundation’s shared office in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. Sitting between Brown and Tynan and adding to the hilarity with a bone-dry humour borne of a badlands history is

Kaytlin Taylor, 22, former beneficiary of the SISTER2sister program (Tynan was her Big Sister in 2006). She is now a specialist consultant and lecturer working with the foundation and others to raise awareness and understanding of self-injury.

“I self-injured for a number of years,” says Taylor, who was abused and spent

“I could tell she was an extremely intelligent girl ... [who] really wanted to help other girls and other people know what self-harm was about.”

long periods homeless as a child. But at 18 she saw an ad in the paper for Big Sisters and thought she’d like to be involved to help raise awareness of what she and many others go through. She contacted Brown to see how she could help, but at that stage was too young to be a mentor. Brown quickly determined Taylor would first benefit from having a mentor herself.

“I could tell she was an extremely intelligent girl. I could tell she really wanted to help other girls and other people know what self-harm was about,” says Brown, who estimates half of the Little Sisters enrolled in SISTER2sister have self-harmed at some point.

As chief executive, former music teacher Brown is one of only four employees of the not-for-profit LCEF which she founded in 2003. She was inspired by her observation of the effect a little care and attention could have on difficult children in schools. “I was always attracted to those children who were getting in trouble,” she says of her teaching days. “I realised that, behind the bad behaviour, there was almost always abuse, neglect, trouble at home.”

Today LCEF is one of the fastest growing not-for-profit organisations in NSW and Brown oversees the hugely successful SISTER2sister program, the SASSI (Sisters

From left: former Little Sister Kaytlin Taylor; ambassador Jacinta Tynan; LCEF founder, Jessica Brown.



Aiding SISTER2Sister Initiative) fundraising scheme, and Potentialize, an in-school educational and motivational program run in NSW.

She has twice been nominated for the Telstra Business Women's Awards and in any one day will be busy answering emails from potential sponsors or wannabe Big Sisters, planning the wonderfully titled Butterfly Bootcamps, advising on seating for the prestigious Life Changing Ball, speaking to the media and tracking down the sometimes wayward Little Sisters.

Like Taylor, Tynan, an accomplished television journalist, author and columnist, came to Brown in 2005 after reading about SISTER2Sister. She decided that this was a way in which she really could help. "It's such a cliché, but I wanted to give something back," says the woman once called Sydney's answer to Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City* fame. The pair quickly realised that they were as passionate as each other. "So she recruited me straight away to MC the ball," laughs Tynan. "On a project like this, she needs to surround herself with people who are just as passionate, because it's not going to work unless you all believe in it," she adds.

The annual Life Changing Ball is just one of the fundraising events at which Tynan officiates in her role as ambassador. "Jacinta is obviously the face of our organisation," says Brown. "She represents us at all of the events, she MCs them, she is the special guest for them, she sources prizes for us, and spends time with the people in the foundation. Nothing is ever too hard," Brown says with



and corporate grants with government grants making up the rest.

Tynan was also the driving force behind one of the program's more unusual fundraising ventures, the publication of an anthology of stories of adolescent life by female writers and

to be able to give back. What I'm finding is that the organisations that are coming on board, such as Deloitte, Freehills, ASX, are organisations that have a strong women's networking program within their own workplaces – so they're very much aligned with what we're doing. And we're very proud of the fact that 85 per cent of our income goes directly to the SISTER2Sister program."

Tynan and Brown do most of their communication over the phone or by email, with the occasional quick coffee to plan future projects. This year, for the first time, SISTER2sister will expand beyond Sydney to provide opportunities for girls in Melbourne and Brisbane and there are plans to go national. "And I've had calls from New Zealand," laughs Brown.

Tynan jokes with Taylor about the frequent flyer points she could make going to speak in each state. The young woman's time under Tynan's somewhat glamorous wing has forged a gentle friendship, during which both have

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such feeling that her mascara threatens to start running down her cheeks. Tynan's warmth, professionalism and palpable enthusiasm are clearly benefits in the fundraising realm. The foundation's turnover is up from \$409,000 in 2006/07 to more than \$1 million in 2007/08. Well over half of that comes from fundraising

public figures, *Some Girls Do. My Life As a Teenager*, which Tynan edited.

The pair's enthusiasm for the cause lifts the burden of the fundraising process. "I'm not selling cigarettes, so I don't feel guilty by begging," says Brown. "But it's not begging. It's more about matching up corporate alliances where they want