



PENS *Against* **POVERTY!**

ANNOUNCEMENT OF WINNING ENTRIES



About Pens Against Poverty

The Pens Against Poverty Schools Writing Competition encourages schools, teachers, and students to become educated in the important issues of poverty and homelessness within our communities in Australia, while nurturing brave young voices through creative writing.

This year's theme, *Voices for Change*, attracted hundreds of entries from schools across the country. Anglicare Australia is delighted to announce this year's winners.

Honouring Our Winners

The winning entries will be honoured at this year's Pens Against Poverty Awards Ceremony. Ordinarily held during Anti-Poverty Week, this year's ceremony will be held later this year in Canberra.

Years 3 and 4: Stories

Winner: **The Beginning**
 Kerys Rezek
 St Matthew's Primary School

I woke up from dreaming, when my mum came in. "Start packing" she said. "Why" I asked, she looked hesitant to reply. "Well, I'll tell you in the car," she snapped. I started to pack my suitcases. When I went to the kitchen, it was deserted. I went out to the front yard and our cars were packed full. I got in. When we had been in the car for ten minutes I asked where we were going "We can't afford the rent of our house so we have to live in our cars" said mum. "And we only have enough money for one more term of school, so if you want to continue, then you have to then you have to work and pay yourself!" So from that day on I had to earn my own wage.

I had to spend some money on the laundromat and the rest on school clothes, school shoes, and school fees. My weekends were spent working and after school too.

One day I was cleaning the floor of the cafe where I work, when someone bumped into me and spilled burning coffee all down my front! So now as well as having to work later I was burnt! When I got back home my family was worried. "What took you so long!" asked my mum.

"We were super worried about you!" "I had to work late, and then I went to the laundromat!" I replied. "Okay, well we have some exciting news for you!" Said Dad "We've bought a house, and it was only one thousand dollars!" I was thinking that it was great, but dad was frowning. "What's wrong?" I asked, "Nothing," replied my dad, and he seemed to cheer up a bit. The next week we moved in, but it was tiny! My sister and I have to share a room! I was feeling very happy that we got the house so cheap, but the reason was that the walls and the floorboards were all mouldy and there was asbestos in the bathrooms! We had to do something about it, so we got a professional in.

One day I was going to work when I found an injured dog on the floor. I took it to work and hit it in my locker. I felt so bad for that poor dog. I checked for a colour and there wasn't one. So that dog was injured and a stray! I took it to work and hid it in my locker. On the way back home I stopped into the vet, and the dog got checked up. The vet said that she was fading away and I started to cry. The vet gave her some food, water and medicine. Then she was okay. For the next hour, my sister and I were begging my parents to keep her. They finally gave up and we got to keep her! We named her caramel. She made a full recovery.

Highly Commended: Rain

Georgia Smythe

Reddam House Primary School

Rain. hard rain was pouring down from the cloudy, grey sky, running down my face and dripping off my soggy chin. My deep blue sleeping bag wasn't keeping me warm and the little shop awning I was sleeping under didn't do much good either. I watched as rain poured from the sky and eventually drifted off to sleep.

The warm, pale, sun shone down on the wet street and the crisp morning air brushed against my face. I awoke and stepped out of my damp sleeping bag. My boots splashed in puddles as I walked down the street to the little cafe I visited as a child. The products were so expensive that I could never afford them, so I just looked through the window.

Everywhere I looked I saw happy, wealthy families. I was miserable. Nobody cared that hundreds of people were suffering out there, including me. They just kept bumping things up in price.

This upgoing of prices was what was causing so many homeless cases. It had to stop! " A protest!", I thought to myself. I saved up for weeks to buy paper, pens and sticks for signs and even found a way to contact some friends. In a couple of weeks, we were ready to protest.

Shouting, cheering, protesting, I could hear. People constantly coming up, asking for signs and convincing friends and family to donate. Soon we had raised over five hundred dollars! It was life-changing.

During the afternoon, while we were packing up a woman came up to me. She told me that her name was Janine and that she worked for a community support company. She offered to help me find a job. I was overjoyed! I was so grateful! So I went with Janine to start my new life.

Years 5 and 6: Stories

Winner: **A Story of Hope**
 Vivienne Gaffey
 Canberra Grammar School

In a vibrant meadow nestled between rolling hills, lived a curious young grasshopper named Bill. Unlike his fellow grasshoppers, Bill had a dream that was more than the ordinary chirping and hopping. He wanted something more unique, which was to find his voice.

While the other grasshoppers spent their days leaping from blade to blade, melodious chirps filled the meadow with music while Bill remained quiet, he would sit on a leaf, his antennae twitching, as he listened to the beautiful sounds around him. His heart was filled with a need to contribute something extraordinary to the chorus of nature.

One sunny morning, Bill hopped over to his wise old friend, an elder grasshopper named Hopper. Not only was Hopper known for his sage advice and deep understanding of the meadow's secrets, but he was also a funny grasshopper who always made everyone laugh. Once a group of grasshoppers came for his advice as their friend fell off a rock and broke his leg, so they came to Hopper for his wise advice but funny Hopper offered to chop his leg off instead, later he helped them.

"Hopper," Bill said, his eyes sparkling with determination, "I want to find my own unique voice, a sound that's truly mine." Hopper smiled, his eyes crinkling with warmth. "Ah, Bill, finding your voice is an opportunity that requires patience and courage.

Bill took Hopper's words to heart, and he set out on his adventure, determined to learn from the creatures around him. He visited the stream, where he listened to the soothing flow of water as it jumped over pebbles.

He perched on a sunflower and stared at the gentle hum of bees collecting nectar. He even watched the delicate rustle of leaves as the wind whispered through the trees.

One evening, as the sun painted the sky with shades of orange and pink Bill found himself on top of a flower. He gazed at the stars twinkling above and sighed, feeling a mixture of frustration and longing. He questioned whether he would ever discover his unique voice. Bill took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and let his heart guide him. He lifted his wings and began to rub them together gently.

And there it was a sound emerged from Bill, soft and gentle, yet filled with a dream. It wasn't the loudest or the most outgoing melody, but it was his own. As he continued to rub his wings, the sound grew clearer and stronger, blending with the soothing symphony of the meadow.

His fellow grasshoppers paused in their chirping to listen. The creatures of the meadow gathered around, attracted by the beautiful, amazing sound that Bill had created. They recognized the truth in his voice, the journey of his emotion.

And then at that moment, Bill knew that he had found his voice, and from that day onwards, Bill knew that if the meadow sang Bill would too.

Highly Commended: Silenced

Charlotte Xue

Pymble Ladies' College

The rain hit the ground harder than any downpour had before. Murky clouds hid the sky from view. Passerbys hurried down the streets, their gaze fixed on cell phones, eyes glassy and unfeeling. Advertisements flashed in shades of black and grey. Faces flickered on the screen with smiles that almost reached their eyes. But didn't quite. With eyes glassy and unfeeling. Children endured the monotony of their teacher's voice, eyes glassy and unfeeling. They were all ordinary citizens. Faces expressionless. Minds thoughtless. Voices silent.

They were compliant, obedient, unquestioning. They agreed with every decision made by the government. Their heads shook and nodded in unison. They had no doubts. No personal thoughts. No voices. And the world went unchanged. Each day was identical to the previous. Each person's mindset the same. Each voice silent.

All that was needed was one voice. It would change history. One voice that questioned the system. The way life was run. But no one spoke of their concerns, their worries, their skepticism. And nothing changed.

They went to war with a neighbouring country. Bullets rained down, piercing the earth and the hearts of many. Bombs erupted, and people shattered like glass, shards of themselves lying discarded on the battlefield. But no one spoke of their pain, of their sorrow, and millions died. And yet, those who survived did not speak. They remained silent. Voices gone.

And the world collapsed. City by city. Country by country. Continent by continent. And Earth no longer sustained life. No being wandered on its surface, and it lay, silent, without a voice to speak.

Years 7 and 8: Stories

Winner: **It Will Never Be The Same**
 Katie Chalmers
 Emmaus Christian School

Stacey woke up to the bright sun beaming through her window. It was morning in the middle of winter so Stacey was shocked but happy to see the sun through the frost so early. Later that morning, Stacey was heading towards the front door, ready to go to school. "Stacey?" She heard her father's voice through the corridor. "I can drop you off at school today. It's pretty cold, so I thought you might want to get driven." Stacey could sense some worry in her father's voice, but didn't object.

Later that day, Stacey came home from school and found her father sitting on the couch. This took her back to the day when she got home from school, found her dad sitting on the couch, and told her he had cancer. Stacey was hoping her dad was alright, but the increasing number of days that he stayed home from work worried her. "I went to the hospital today for a check up," he said. His voice sounded more and more worried as he spoke. "I was told my cancer has spread." Stacey gasped and ran to hug and sit next to her father. "I also got an email today, from work," Stacey could tell by the sound of his voice that the news wasn't good. "They told me I had to leave the company because I'm taking too many days off."

The next couple of weeks were some of the hardest of Stacey's life, feeling hungry, cold, and unsafe, as her father tried so desperately to pay their rent. Finally, her father told her the awful news that she knew was coming. "We have to move out. We won't be able to afford this house if we want to survive."

"Would we be able to find a cheaper place near the Hospital?"

"We'll see."

Packing up and preparing to leave was very easy for Stacey, who no longer owned many items, but after living in the car for a couple of nights, her father soon realised that they had to find a new house. This proved difficult, though, because after calling many real estate agents, none could find an affordable house near the hospital. Stacey's father didn't get any more lunch when trying to find a job, either. Eventually, he was left with no other choice, but to work at a fast food restaurant.

Stacey rarely saw her father after that. He worked long hours, and occasionally brought back leftover food. A few days after that, a Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) contacted Stacey's father and told him that there was an apartment, near the hospital, on the market. Her father took the offer, and Stacey was delighted to hear the news. Within the following week, Stacey was living with a proper roof above her head, and returned to school. Even though Stacey and her father are relieved to have a house, they know it will never be the same again.

Highly Commended: Hindsight
Alice Dent
Woodcroft College

The world we live in now is an open desert. The days are hot and long, and we must preserve the water we have. Water is expensive, even washing your hands in a public bathroom comes with a bill. There are hardly any animals, just feral birds that fly around the empty and abandoned cities, all the other animals extinct years ago. The skies are a foggy gray and the clouds have a green tinge to them. Because of the pollution, everyone wears masks (on, bad days, a high tech one, if you can afford it) we have to check the air quality before doing anything outside. We are slowly going insane reminiscing on the way we used to live, thinking about how easy it was to not care, to not notice. People tell us to not be mad at the older generations, the ones who caused this. Saying they didn't know that this would happen, but they did.

People used to stay in the shower for hours, waste food just for the sake of it, throw away clothes because they weren't in style, commit everything to landfill. They didn't care. The government and manufacturers didn't make it easy either, they covered everything in plastic. All the food was wrapped in it, even the food that didn't need packaging was wrapped anyway. Even some paper was covered in plastic, just because it was good business. It either ended up in the ocean or on the streets. Or, if it made it to landfill, it would let out toxic fumes that ruined the air.

This is what our future looks like, what your kids will live through in 2050, which is only 27 years away. Only by changing our ways will stop this, which means using recyclable packaging, making food locally to reduce food miles and stop clearing forests for agriculture. If we do this, we may be able to stop the end, and save the earth.

Years 9 and 10: Stories

Winner: **Singing Under the Willow Tree**
 Janna Fuhrmann
 Woodcroft College

I used to dream of it every night, with a deep longing that left me aching and breathless as I woke up. It filled my mind, the scent of grass invading my senses, the slight rustling of the leaves seeming to wrap around me and lift me up, away from the pressure, away from the stress. Sometimes, I could even feel the bark jabbing into my back, and an ethereal voice surrounded me, humming a tune that filled my heart with a memory... but the words flitted away from my grasp like butterflies. That was my place. My childhood. I remember that every day I would go there, and that voice? That was mine. I would sing to the plants, the trees, the babbling creek. The sound of the music in my words was my escape from the weight of all the expectations.

Not for long.

My visions had turned dark, my dreams became nightmares. The voice distorted, shrieking at me, and the rustling of the leaves transformed into a roaring noise that pounded against the walls of my mind. The putrid smell of rot forced me to the ground, pushing down with a weight that squeezed the air out of my lungs.

But rather than scare me, I felt the need, the overwhelming desire to go back to where my childhood had flourished. I didn't know where it came from, or why, but my body physically shook with the strain of staying in one place.

Now, as I stand here, slowly turning, I finally understand why I needed to come back. The creek has become a river of plastic, the willow brown and sagging. The grass crunches under my feet, and I look down in dismay to see broken bottles crack below me. This is not the childhood that I remember. I slump against the willow and sink down to the ground, bark peeling behind me. Everything seems dull, the colours around me muted.

I slowly open my mouth and a tune emerges of its own accord. Memories wash over me, those butterflies finally coming back and swarming around me, creating a halo over my head. Words and melodies wash over my body, my foot beginning to tap as the song speeds up. A smile breaks out on my face as I spin, brushing the bright green grass with my fingertips. I run to the creek, dipping my hands into the shimmering water and splashing my face, a warm breeze caressing my face.

This is what words were made for.

Highly Commended: Growing Up
Charli Aitken
Woodcroft College

It always used to be "I wish I was older". We would look up to the big kids and thought think they are so cool; they get to do what they want. They can drive around, buy what they want, work at their dream jobs, go to big school and do all the cool new subjects at their big fancy schools.

Now that I'm older I look back at what I thought was freedom. You can't just buy what you want you have to work hard for money at your "dream job" that isn't so dreamy now that you have to work while also studying at school with high expectations and constant assignments. After moving to a "new fancy school" all your friends are different from primary school and with a busy schedule school is almost the only time you'll see them. There's no time to play anymore and sports that used to be fun are now overly competitive and tiring.

You will wish you could go back to the time where the only thing you would have to worry about was getting to the swings first or winning a race on sports day. The schoolwork was easy, and school was fun. You were excited to get to school every day and play with friends after school and on the weekends.

Birthdays were exciting and you were so happy to be one year closer to being a big kid. You would have a big party with all your friends, and you would play party games and eat sweets until your stomach hurt. You would play on jumping castle and swim in the pool all day until your cheeks were sun kissed and your fingers were all shrivelled. You would open presents full of toys that you would bring to show all your friends at school the next day and get upset when you unwrap clothes.

When your older maybe you would go out with your friends for lunch or dinner, but nothing felt special anymore. You don't feel older. You would open presents to be clothes or just cards full of money that you would spend the next time you got to go shopping. If you have a party its only with close friends and you spend it going on phones or talking about boys. Party's weren't fun and games anymore it was just a normal day.

Maybe you would look older but that wasn't always a good thing. Looking in the mirror hurts now. You are either too tall, too short, or too big. Picking out imperfections and criticising yourself just because you don't look perfect. Now I'm older and I wonder what little me would think if she saw her older self. Would she still want to grow up if she knew the truth of being a big kid? But still deep inside me she's still there with the memories that I will never forget.

Now I will forever think "I wish I was younger".