

Our next generation of LITTLE GEMS!

These youngsters were destined to do great things and follow their dreams

Treading his own path

JOSHUA TODES, 18, SYDNEY, NSW

The front page of the newspaper grabbed the attention of eight-year-old Joshua Todes. Above the many rows of photographs was a disturbing headline: 180 DEAD.

As Josh read the article that day in 2009 about the Black Saturday bushfires devastating Victoria, he felt two things: a deep sadness for the victims and their families, and a desperate desire to help.

"That was when I told my mum I was going to join the fire service one day," says Josh, now 18. While his mum Karyn had no doubt her strong-willed son would follow through, she had no idea it would happen as soon as it did.

"Josh started training with the Royal Fire Service [RFS] when he was in Year 11," says Karyn, who admits she and husband Kevin, were worried about

Josh taking on such a big commitment so close to his HSC year. "But he promised he'd do his schoolwork and give up karate and other things so that he could make time for it."

And for nine months, Josh did exactly that – travelling by train an hour-and-a-half each way to complete his volunteer firefighter training at a station in Sutherland twice a week. While his friends were out socialising, Josh was learning how to put out fires and save lives. But to him, these were small sacrifices.

"My family came to Australia from South Africa, after surviving the Holocaust," says Josh.



"Australia has given us so much and I feel it's my duty to protect my country and fellow Australians. I remember listening to our school rabbi in assembly at primary school one day, he talked about helping others and that really inspired me."

Recently Josh has attended the catastrophic bushfires that have been raging across NSW.

"After my last HSC exam, I went home and packed my bag, ready to go to a fire in Loftus the next day," says Josh, who's just graduated from Sydney's Moriah College.

Since then, Josh has spent countless hours battling fires, working tirelessly in the thick suffocating smoke.

"We're volunteers, but we stay until the job is done, because we have no choice," says Josh. "The uniform trousers are navy and they get so hot you can feel your legs burning. Your lungs ache from the smoke, and you get headaches, but we push on. People's lives are at risk."

With regard to his own safety, Josh has full faith in his crew members, as does his mum.

"The captain knows he's only young and very new to all this and would never put him in a situation he couldn't handle," says Karyn.

"I do worry when Josh says he wouldn't leave a fire if someone was in trouble, but I'm so proud of him for following his own path and being such an inspiration to his younger brother and sister."

The young wildlife warrior

JAKE CROKER, 7, CROSS ROADS, SA

Jake Croker has always been an old soul, his mum Alison recalls. "He's such a kind and caring boy, and always been so loving and nurturing towards animals," she says.

Jake's stepdad Wes used to be a carer and told Jake stories about how rewarding it was.

"I think Jake was influenced by him in a big way," Alison adds. "Ever since he was little, he had a profound love for animals, especially our native lizards, as well as other wildlife."

And it was Wes who taught enthusiastic Jake how to hold them under the chest and head so they wouldn't bite.

"Sometimes I'd see people poking and prodding lizards and I'd come home and tell Mum that I'd told them to stop," says seven-year-old Jake. "Lizards are so cool – I didn't want to see them get teased or hurt."

Alison and her family live at Cross Roads, at the northern end of South Australia's Yorke Peninsula, and she remembers that whenever Jake saw a lizard on the road, he'd try to move it to the side.

A year ago, they were driving down to the Innes National Park when they saw a shingleback lizard get hit by a car.

Jake pleaded for them to pull over so he could help his injured mate.

But, although Jake did all he could and they



Jake with his wildlife road signs.

'Lizards are so cool – I didn't want to see them get teased or hurt'

took the poor fella to the ranger, he sadly died.

"Jake was devastated," says Alison. But from his heartbreak came hope and his loss spurred the gung-ho lad on to be a young wildlife warrior.

The next day Jake told his mum he wanted to make signs to alert motorists to the presence of native lizards along the roads. He said no one cared about them because they are so small, but he was determined to save them.

Jake wrote about his plight in his school newsletter and his story

garnered the interest of local newspapers and radio stations.

Because of Jake, three signs were approved, followed by more.

"We helped him draw the picture of the lizards and Jake designed his own sign, which were recently put up around the park," says a proud Alison. "Usually kids his age don't show such care or consideration for our reptiles, but we are so proud Jake didn't give up."

And this young boy with a big heart has a short and simple message for all: "Please help me keep our wildlife safe."

'I feel it's my duty to protect my country and fellow Australians'



Insta star Riley with her dad, Rhett and mum, Maggy.

The funny fashionista

RILEY DASHWOOD, 10, MELBOURNE, VIC

On school days, 10-year-old Riley Dashwood is just like any other kid: she loves drawing, watching TV, playing netball and spending time with her dad Rhett and mum Maggy in their apartment on Melbourne's Southbank. But as soon as the weekend rolls around, young Riley transforms into a mini model, wowing 100,000 Instagram followers with her hilarious recreations of celebrity outfits.

"It began a year ago when Rhett came upon comedian Celeste Barber's Instagram account in which she does funny lookalike pictures," Maggy tells *It's Your Day*.

A filmmaker by trade, Rhett, 42, had started *The Riley Diary* YouTube channel and an Instagram account a few years ago as a father-daughter project. But their short educational pieces and trick-shot videos soon gained her a 20,000 fan following.

"Riley loved the idea of becoming a lookalike and dressing up in fun celebrity outfits," says the 43-year-old proud mum. "And one of the first dress-ups she did was taking off child rapper Lil Tay who was doing outrageous acts online."

Resourceful Riley rummaged through what she could lay her hands on at home – spaghetti and an iceberg lettuce – to recreate the child star's look!

To their surprise, Riley's post went viral and the family realised they were onto something.

Rhett now spends his time combing fashion events looking for faux pas so Riley can have fun with them.

And so far she's recreated 50 pictures from celebs to pop stars, singers, television hosts, and even Bollywood actors.

"Earlier, dad was the photographer, mum the stylist and I was the model, but now I love giving inputs," Riley says. "When I saw JoJo Siwa, I suggested we could use cotton candy which can be easily moulded to do her large bows. It also became my favourite because I could eat all of it after the shoot!"

When Riley mimicked Emma Stone's Louis Vuitton dress from the 2019 Oscars she covered herself in a dozen waffles, which became breakfast for the next week. Then there was the Nicki Minaj-inspired headgear made of cauliflower, broccoli and lettuce which went straight to Maggy's kitchen. From straws, to autumn leaves, the imaginative and talented 10-year-old has used it all.

Even though Riley has thousands of fans, fame is not her focus. "I am not shy about it, but I don't show off either," she says. "It's just a fun project that I do with my family to make memories."

Lil Tay



JoJo Siwa



Emma Stone



'It's just a fun project that I do with my family to make memories'

The big-hearted businessman

ANGUS COPELIN-WALTERS, 9, DARWIN, NT

Most kids go through a stage where they're obsessed with playing Monopoly, but unlike Angus Copelin-Walters' grade 4 peers at the Parap Primary School in the Northern Territory, this young chap actually gets to count real currency.

As the executive head of candy at his Croc Candy business, Angus made \$12,000 in the first year of operation, and then more than \$28,000 the following year!

For the young entrepreneur, it all started two years ago when Angus was diagnosed with dyslexia.

"I wanted him to remain positive and to stay occupied during the school holidays," his mum Joanne explains.

Sitting in the lounge room one day, the mother-son duo were watching a show on poverty.

"Angus has always had a big heart and wanted to help those in need. So I told him he could earn some money and donate to charities and worthy causes," says the 48-year-old, who works for a not-for-profit organisation helping tourism businesses in the Northern Territory.

After bandying around a few ideas, Angus decided he fancied trying his hand at becoming a salesman. He had some rock candy at home, which he cleverly decided to repackage in decorations and took them to a local market.

The stall was a hit and from then on Angus kept buying and reselling candies. In no time, his "activity" had turned into a business. Angus called his venture Croc Candy since their area is famous for its crocodiles.

As sales grew, with corporate orders pouring in, he began customising designs with a company logo, swing tags or stickers or tailored-to-suit coloured ribbons.

"When I was able to donate to my chosen charity, Made by Dyslexia, it was such a happy moment," says the young entrepreneur.

Angus added another feather to his cap at a local business owners' event last year, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison invited him for a chat.

Angus, whose idol is Richard Branson, answers his own emails and manages his money. His mum says running his own business has helped his dyslexia and given him the confidence to speak to his vendors and customers. His clients include government departments,

Young candy entrepreneur Angus with his wares.



Running a business has boosted the youngster's confidence.



'When I was able to donate to my favourite charity... it was such a happy moment'

charity organisations and awards events. "Juggling a business and school is a challenge but Angus loves the creativity of setting up stalls, decorating the candy packets and earning independently and donating the proceeds," says Joanne.

Angus, who wants to be a policeman and entrepreneur when he grows up, plans to expand his business throughout Australia and has launched a new range called Candy for a Cause, with every sale making a donation to charity. Life sure is sweet!