



**The School  
of St Jude**

Fighting poverty  
through education

# Gemma Sisia

## Making dreams reality

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In 2007, Gemma's achievements were honoured by a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). Her story has been featured twice in the ABC TV documentary program Australian Story, first in 2005 and then a follow-up in 2009, and once on Nine Network's 60 Minutes in 2016. In 2012, Gemma was named one of The Australian Financial Review and Westpac's 100 Women of Influence, nominated in the Global category, and was also a finalist for New South Wales Australian of the Year. In 2000 and 2019, Gemma was awarded a Sapphire Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International.



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**Gemma Sisia** spent her early years on a sheep and cattle property near Guyra in northern New South Wales, Australia. She is the only daughter among the eight children of Sue and Basil Rice. Gemma's mother still lives on the family property at Guyra, and a number of her brothers live in the area.

After completing her secondary studies at St Vincent's College in Sydney, Gemma completed a science degree (majoring in genetics and biochemistry) at The University of Melbourne, followed by an honours program (where she was awarded first class) in the Northern Territory. Gemma concluded her tertiary studies with a Diploma of Education through the University of New England in Armidale.

At 22 years old, Gemma travelled to Uganda to put her qualifications to good use, volunteering as a teacher for three years. This experience fostered her belief that a free, high-quality education is the right of all children and that education is the strongest weapon in fighting poverty,

On returning to Australia, Gemma began fundraising to help underprivileged children in Uganda complete their schooling. Grateful for the support and donations, Gemma raised enough money to start an official fund to invest in the education of East Africa's poorest children.

While working in Uganda, Gemma travelled to neighbouring Tanzania and met her future husband Richard. His father Daniel Sisia, a village chairman, gifted the newlyweds a small plot of land that became home to The School of St Jude.

In 2002, The School of St Jude opened with one teacher and a handful of sponsored students. Today, St Jude's provides free, quality education to **1,800** bright primary and secondary students who come from considerably poor backgrounds.



The school also supports **100s** of graduates with access to higher education and provides more than **10,000** government school students with volunteer teachers each year. **100% of St Jude's students and scholars are on scholarships.**

Located across three campuses, St Jude's also provides boarding for all secondary students and employs over **350** Tanzanian staff across their Academic and Head Office teams, ensuring a sustainable and self-determining future for St Jude's. In a country where 70% of secondary school-aged people are not enrolled in secondary school, the chance to receive a free, quality education is life-changing for the community's most disadvantaged families.

In 2015, St Jude's celebrated its first ever Form 6 (the final year of secondary school) graduating class, which placed in the top 10% in Tanzania. Today, there are almost 1,000 Form 6 graduates, many of whom are supported by the Beyond St Jude's (BSJ) Program.

BSJ is an optional program that enables St Jude's secondary graduates to give back to their communities as volunteers during a Community Service placement. They then go on to access higher education, supported by our sponsors and donors.

During their Community Service, volunteers personify the school's vision by voluntarily assisting in under-resourced government schools, sharing the gifts of their education, or in various placements throughout St Jude's. In 2023, Community Service volunteers are teaching almost 13,000 students at 41 government schools, who otherwise wouldn't have teachers for core subjects like mathematics and science.



Those who successfully complete their Community Service placement may then be eligible to receive a College or Tertiary scholarship to pursue their first higher education qualification; enabling them to become the future professionals that their country needs.

Gemma and the St Jude's team haven't stopped there. In January 2020, they opened a secondary boarding school for 600 girls. This means more girls in the workforce, more graduates accessing higher education and more role models for future generations. The students at this new school are already thriving - in 2022, 97% of the Form 4 graduating class received the highest division possible in their national examinations.

In 2018, the school celebrated the first tertiary graduates and in 2021, St Jude's reached another milestone with the graduation of the first seven doctors, who completed university with the support of BSJ. This was the fulfillment of a long held dream for Gemma. Since 2018 over 300 St Jude's alumni have graduated from tertiary studies and are now entering the workforce as Tanzania's doctors, engineers, tradespeople, entrepreneurs, and teachers. Soon to join them is a cohort of over 370 BSJ scholars who are now studying in 49 higher education institutions.

In 2022, St Jude's marked its 20th birthday with joyful celebrations which brought together the entire school community in recognition of two decades spent fighting poverty through education.

Outside of St Jude's, Gemma runs a safari company with her husband, Richard, and they enjoy spending time with their four children Nathaniel, Jacob, Isabella and Louisa.







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# Maddie Kelly

## Author



Maddie Kelly grew up in Adelaide, South Australia, where she attended St Aloysius College. This was where, in 2010, she first heard about The School of St Jude. Immediately, she knew the school would be a big part of her life.

In 2017, with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology to her name, Maddie arrived at St Jude's to complete a two-year contract in the Marketing team. She then moved into the role of Alumni Coordinator, helping to launch the school's Alumni Association and support alumni, like Enock Ephraim, who joins Maddie and Gemma on this year's tour. Later, she began a second role, as Communications and Editorial Specialist, concurrently with her Alumni Association work.

In June 2021, Maddie began her research for the new St Jude's book (title coming soon). She spent hours interviewing staff, students, alumni, parents and supporters and worked tirelessly to capture their unique voices on the page. She describes the process of writing the book as 'sometimes challenging, but an incredible gift'.

In late 2022, as the book's final edits were being made, Maddie returned to Australia, where she now works at her alma mater in a multifaceted role encompassing marketing, alumni and social justice. In the near future, Maddie plans to pursue a Master of Education, having learned the lifechanging power of education during her six years at The School of St Jude.



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# Enock Ephrahim

**St Jude's Class of 2015 and Alumni Assistant Team Lead**



Enock Ephrahim was a young student at a government school in Arusha when he noticed St Jude's colourful school buses driving through the streets. Inspired, he successfully applied for a scholarship and went on to spend the next 12 years of his academic life at The School of St Jude.

Enock graduated from St Jude's in 2015 and joined the Beyond St Jude's Scholarship Program where he spent the following year volunteering at the school. He then won a scholarship to study Business, Finance, and Statistics at the University of Rochester in New York, United States, and later, went on to secure internships with international companies in Tanzania and Ghana.

While at university, Enock co-founded the Alumni Diaspora, an initiative that brings together St Jude's alumni from all over the world to share opportunities and support the school. Enock became an active member of the alumni community, helping fellow alumni find and apply for international scholarships and raising awareness about St Jude's around the world.

Today, Enock is back at The School of St Jude where he works with the Alumni team helping hundreds of alumni reach their potential beyond the school gates. He is inspired to establish a strong Alumni Association so they can remain connected as a community and thrive.



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