



Gemma Sisia

St Jude's Founding Director

Gemma grew up as the only girl in a family of eight children on a 100,000 acre property in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia. Her childhood involved mustering sheep, horseriding, swimming and fishing in the waterfalls at the family property. After completing a science degree at The University of Melbourne, Gemma followed up with an honours program and 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 at a girls' centre. This experience fostered her belief that education is the right of all children and the strongest weapon in fighting poverty. During this time, Gemma also met Richard, who would later become her husband in neighbouring Tanzania.

Upon returning to Australia, Gemma began fundraising to build a school that would provide a free, private education to those in poverty, which would eventually become The School of St Jude. With help from her father, Gemma spoke to local Rotary Clubs, friends, school, and churches and the support for her school began to grow, eventually raising enough to build the first classroom. She has toured Australia to tell the story of St Jude's almost every year since.

After 20 years of fundraising and building St Jude's from its foundations, today St Jude's provides free, quality education to 1,800 primary and secondary students and support hundreds of tertiary scholars every year. St Jude's is more than a school. Gemma and her team have developed a successful model to combat poverty, with each scholarship alleviating financial strain resulting in significantly improved economic outcomes for families and local community.

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.

Awards and Recognition



Member of the Order
of Australia (AM)
2007



ABC TV documentary
program Australian
Story
2005, 2009



Sapphire Paul
Harris Fellow,
Rotary International
2000, 2019



Finalist New South
Wales Australian
of the Year
2012





The School of St Jude

Fighting poverty through education

In 2002 Gemma Sisia opened The School of St Jude, a 100% charity-funded school in Arusha, Tanzania to bring the opportunity of a free, quality education to children experiencing poverty.

At St Jude's scholarship provides everything our students need for a successful education, including nutritious meals, boarding, transport and much more. Students academic success is supported through a robust, holistic curriculum including clubs, arts, and sports programs to foster skills development.

By January 2020, St Jude's had grown to three schools with 1,800 students including a girls only secondary school. By opening up the opportunities for girls, the school directly tackles the imbalance seen in Tanzanian education, where girls from disadvantaged backgrounds typically receive only four years of schooling.

St Jude's support for students also expanded into tertiary scholarships through the Beyond St Jude's (BSJ) Program that supports 100's of scholars every year in university.

Since the graduation of our first Form 6 (final year of secondary school) cohort in 2015, St Jude's has celebrated over 1,000 alumni. From 2018, over 400 St Jude's alumni have graduated from tertiary studies. They are now entering or in the workforce as Tanzania's doctors, engineers, tradespeople, entrepreneurs, and teachers.

Soon to join them is a cohort of over 360 scholars supported through the BSJ Program who are currently studying in 45 higher education institutions within Tanzania and internationally.

None of this would have been possible without our incredible staff of over 350 employees, 98% of which are Tanzanian.

Our impact continues to grow each year thanks to the continued generosity of our donors and sponsors. Together we have been able to support almost 3,000 families through our scholarships since we first opened our doors.

20+

Years of operation
as of 2023

1,000+

Form 6
Graduates

360+

BSJ scholars
studying tertiary

400+

Graduates from
tertiary education

80%

Tertiary
graduates
employed