

Kaleidoscope

“Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.”

Jim Rohn

I can't imagine where I would be right now, without taking that one (of many) big scary steps outside of my comfort zone. It was coming to the end of the school year in 2021 and like most of the other year 9 students, I was busy stressing about end of year exams. Despite this, it was an exciting time to be able to go to school at this point considering we had been locked inside our houses for the past 4 months. I was at the stage in my life where the only things I really cared about were my family, friends, and when the next season of Stranger Things was finally going to restart production. I remember coming home from school one day tired and ready for a night of study and games with my brothers and sister. My mum greeted me at the door, with a huge smile on her face. “You got in.”

1: Upbringing

My journey began at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital on the 16th of December 2006, around 4pm. I spent the first 5 years of my life in different suburbs of Sydney, accompanied by my Mum, Dad, and my two little brothers, Xander and Knox. I moved to the Central Coast in 2011, just in time for me to start Kindergarten at Point Clare Public School, where I began to explore new things, sparking new friendships, interests and passions. I lived right across the road from school and thought it was the coolest thing ever. More times than not, I would be on my lunch break playing a game of boys vs girls touch football when my mum would call me over from the top entry of the school, explaining how she accidentally locked herself out of the house and needed me to climb through the window for her.

A pivotal moment in my life was back in year 6 when my parents sat my two brothers and I down to share some news with us. They told us that my mum was pregnant and that we would have a little baby brother or sister by September that year. Growing up with two brothers I knew that I wanted nothing more than to have a little sister, and 9 months later I had her. Scarlet was born when I was 11, and (to my surprise) then followed my little brother Elliot when I was 13, and my baby sister Violet when I was 15.

As the eldest of six children spanning from toddlers to teenagers, all living in the same 3 bedroom and 1 bathroom household, I learned pretty early on that life is a delicate balance of chaos and harmony. It was quite often like living in a vibrant, ever-changing ecosystem where the environment was based on whether or not my baby siblings had had their midday sleep.

At the heart of my family stand my parents. Two pillars of strength whose contrasting yet complementary qualities shape our lives. My mum has always been a force of nature with a fiery spirit, and has taught me the power of passion, hard work, and conviction. Her commitment to fighting what she believes in has always been a massive source of inspiration for me. Over the years I've watched her juggle the immense demands of our large family with her dedication to Gosford City Football Club, where she works tirelessly on the club committee and is honestly underappreciated there. Everything she does is always in the best interest of my siblings and I, having 4 out of the 6 of us playing for Gosford, the only reason she joined the committee in the first place was because she wanted for us to have a brighter experience and future in football at the club. Her ability to care deeply and wholeheartedly about everything she takes on has shown me the power of genuine commitment.

My dad, equally devoted but with a different approach, has been my family's steady anchor. His quiet strength and unique perspective on life have provided a sense of stability amidst the whirlwind of our daily lives. As a structural engineer, he works long hours to support our family, yet always finds time to check in with us, offering support in ways both big and small - from driving us to social hangouts, supporting my brothers as well as my own extracurricular activities and ensuring we can attend our dream schools. His actions speak louder than words, teaching me that love often reveals itself in quiet but consistent dedication and sacrifice.

Living with two other teenagers and three younger children under the age of 6 in a space designed for a much smaller family has been a crash course in adaptability and patience. The morning rush for the single bathroom, the constant hum of activity, and the logistical puzzle of managing everyone's schedules have all contributed to a home that is never dull. Within this chaotic environment I've learned invaluable lessons about sharing, compromise, contribution, and the importance of finding one's own space, both physically and emotionally.

Each of my siblings bring their own unique bead to our family. Xander, 15 years old and the second born child, is our quiet observer with a hidden sense of humour. His passion for video gaming and his YouTube channel showcase his creativity in ways his shy exterior often conceals. We often have late night conversations, where we sit and talk about each other's lives, offering advice and support and all the while trying to figure out who he has a crush on in his grade. Since he started high school our bond has strengthened and taught me the value of quiet understanding.

Knox, 14 years old and the third born child, always brings an energetic competitiveness no matter where we are. His love for football often translates into playful challenges, whether it's seeing who can juggle the soccer ball the longest or who's grown taller. If he's not out with friends he's out fishing down on Brisbane Water, and while his desire for independence often creates distance, it also pushes the both of us to grow and define ourselves.

Then there's Scarlet, my six-year-old partner in crime. Her boundless energy, curiosity, cheekiness, and creativity light up our home - and often makes it hard to keep her sitting still in one spot when we go out! Our movie nights and dance parties are more than just fun, they're moments of pure joy that remind me of the simple pleasures of life. Despite our large 11 year age gap, she has grown to become my best friend. She is always there for someone

to talk to or play with, and watching her grow up and discover the world is a constant source of pride, wonder and inspiration.

Elliot, at only 3 years old, is always wanting and asking to go and kick a ball at the park. He is a true goofball and his stubbornness to do anything and everything by himself often leads to hilarious and heartwarming moments. He teaches our family all kinds of lessons in patience and negotiation.

Last but definitely not least, there's 2-year-old Violet, the baby of the family who is quickly finding her voice...and her feet! She is currently in her copycat phase and mimics almost anything and everything us big kids do. She has the most infectious laugh, loving attitude and gives the best hugs and kisses out of everyone. Watching her grow up, forming her first sentences and developing her own personality is a pure delight and is something I took for granted with Scarlet and Elliot.

Our shared experiences - beach trips, spontaneous bedroom dance parties, backyard soccer games, and so much more, have helped shape tight-knit bonds within my family, each person making their own contribution to the family. These moments, squeezed together into our busy schedule and limited space, have become the cornerstones of our family identity. Living in such a close living space has created and nurtured an openness among us that may not have developed otherwise. And don't get me wrong, it is definitely not easy at all. There are always and I mean ALWAYS some sort of argument or fight going on in the house. Whether that be that someone isn't sharing the toys, or if someone cut the queue for the washing machine. Although, through a lot of trial and error, we've all come to and continue to learn how to navigate each other's moods, respect personal boundaries, and find joy in the simplest of shared activities.

As the oldest I've found myself naturally stepping into a role of increased responsibility. Whether it's helping get dinner ready, look after the kids while Mum and Dad are out, or mediating squabbles, I've grown into a position of mentorship that I hope will continue to positively impact my younger siblings as they grow and find themselves.

My parents' approach to raising us has been deeply influenced by their own upbringings. Having experienced strict parenting themselves, they've made a conscious effort to provide us with the freedoms and opportunities they were denied. This has manifested in their unwavering support for our diverse interests, hobbies and dreams. From singing lessons to dance classes, from art to soccer, swimming early in the morning and little athletics every Friday night, they've always encouraged me to explore and excel in whatever captures my heart. This support, however, comes with an important lesson: nothing in life comes easy. My parents have instilled in me the value of hard work and dedication. As my dad has always said to me, "If you're the best in the room, you're in the wrong room." This philosophy has pushed me to continuously seek growth and challenge myself in all aspects of my life.

I'll admit that I haven't always made it easy for my parents. Like many teenagers I've had my moments of thinking I knew better, viewing their guidance as an attempt to cut down my freedom. But, as I've grown older, I've come to appreciate the depth of their love and the wisdom behind their actions. Every rule, every piece of advice, and every sacrifice they've made has been in service of giving me the best possible start in life.

When I talk to others about my wonderfully chaotic, crazy, large family dynamic, I often get a lot of shocked faces and comments wondering how I put up with it all the time, but honestly I wouldn't want it any other way. I've learned to thrive in diverse environments, to find calm in the midst of the storm, and to appreciate the value of both individual pursuits and family unity.

My parents have always been significant role models in my life and always will be. As I stand on the cusp of adulthood, a new chapter in my life, and my university journey, I bring with me the lessons of hard work, passion, perseverance, and resilience. I feel incredibly grateful for my family and prepared to tackle whatever challenges life throws at me.

2: Sport

Sport has always been a massive part of my life. My Mum grew up playing all kinds of sports, telling us stories about how she played representative waterpolo, how she beat Dawn Fraser's 10 year old 50m freestyle time at her local pool, and how she played football while pregnant with me. She always had a big smile on her face, as well as the trophies, badges and photos to use as her evidence. Dad, on the other hand, grew up playing cricket, and rugby union. He always told us that he was a scrawny little kid and that my brothers and I get all of our athleticism from our Mum, which she always takes great pride in.

My Dad is a big fan of the NRL, a proud West Tigers fan, which was, and still is, always on the TV. If it's not the NRL, it's either the T20 Big Bash League or Test Cricket. If we were lucky, my Dad would take us to the games, always buying us some West Tigers or Sydney Sixers merchandise. I never understood why someone would want to watch a bunch of people standing around in the hot sun for hours, throwing a ball which may not even be hit that far. Whenever my brothers or myself would ask any questions he would always tell us that he would have been playing in the Australian cricket team, had he not stopped when he did. To this, my Mum would always laugh and roll her eyes, but to us it was the coolest thing ever.

I myself have always been competitive and keen to try new things. Whether it was dancing, futsal, or art, I always put my hand up and gave it a go. I joined many extracurricular activities including the drum group, debating team, dance group, book club, environment group, and even the year 4/5/6 recorder group where we performed at the Sydney Opera House. I loved participating in team sports with my friends during primary and middle school, including cricket, touch football, basketball, hockey, and soccer. I found that I was quite good at sports and found interest in competing in the carnivals for swimming, cross country and athletics, each year reaching a higher level than the last.

I started playing football when I was 9, starting at the local club, Gosford City, in the under 10C's. I was playing with a few kids from my grade at school, but I was 1 of 2 girls in the team. I remember how frustrating it was at times, playing with kids who had been playing since under 5's and knew how to actually kick a ball properly. I moved around different positions on the field to try and find my clique. My coach at the time knew I was fast and that

I could run just that little bit longer than some of the other kids in the team so he put me out wide on the wing after a few games. By the end of the season I was able to kick the ball without toe punting it, connect more than a few passes, and even dribble the ball up the field, as I was a quick learner. I don't have a specific moment where I knew I fell in love with the game but after playing a few years I felt that football was the sport for me. I signed up again the next season in the U11's. A lot of kids either moved clubs or stopped playing that year so the two B's and C's teams turned into the 1 team, and that was when I met Tayla.

I remember in the car on the way to the first game of the season when Mum handed me her phone and told me to type out a message to my new coach. "Hi Dave! My name is Belle and I usually play on the right wing. This is only my second season of playing but I'm very fast and love the game! I can't wait to meet you and the rest of the team :)" I knew that there was only one other girl playing as well and I was more than excited to meet her. When I arrived at the field I saw a big group of kids with red playing shirts and parents with their Gosford Dragons merchandise. I walked over and met the team. To the side stood a blonde girl with a ball at her feet. She looked at me and smiled, so I walked over and introduced myself. Tayla and I have now been playing together for 8 years. She's grown to be one of my closest friends and most important people in my life. That year, we ended up winning the tournament and got a big shiny gold medal. I then went on to play under 12s, 13s, 14's and 15's with the same team and coach, having gained and lost some people along the way. Playing in the mixed competition for so many years, Tayla and I always copped some backlash and sexism from opposing players and parents on the sideline. From being called witches hats, to hearing parents tell their sons that they're not good enough because they got beaten by a girl. It was difficult navigating playing in a mixed team at the start. At times it felt like I had to prove myself in my own team just to get the ball passed to me. Although difficult, these experiences have helped grow my strength as a player, as well as in my everyday life.

In the under 14's and 15's season, Tayla and I received the opportunity to train with the Women's Premier League teams at our clubs. We trained 2 nights a week after our own teams training session. The older girls took us under their wing, as well as the head coach Pete Edwards. Unfortunately we never finished the 2021 season as covid lockdowns prevented us from being able to continue on. Towards the end of the lockdown my team started getting together for training sessions to keep our fitness up. I came home from a fun session at Fagan Park when Dad showed me an email he had received. It was from Pete Edwards telling me that he would like me to come and trial for the Central Coast Mariners Academy U16's girls squad as he was the newly selected coach of the team. I was so ecstatic after hearing that and couldn't wait to talk to Tayla about it as she was also invited to the trials.

We both attended the trials and I absolutely loved it. It was A LOT more fitness than I was used to, and the drills were a lot more intense and specific, which is what I loved. The other girls were lovely and I got along with them quite well. It was a more professional environment to be in compared to playing at gosford and was overall an amazing experience. After trials Tayla and I both received offers to play in the team for the 2022 season, to which I took up, but Tayla did not due to personal circumstances. I followed through with the decision and played my U16's season in the Mariners Academy. During my time at the club I grew massively as a footballer. I made friendships of which I still value to this day, and was exposed to many new opportunities. My team finished the season as minor premiers and

went on to the Grand Final, after winning the semis 2-1. We came out of the Grand Final as runners up but it was still an amazing experience with a wonderful team which felt like a family in the end.

As the jump from the under 16s to the under 20s in the Mariners academy was one I couldn't quite reach, I played the 2023 season back at Gosford City in the women's all age 1 team. It was definitely on the tougher side of seasons as we had a brand new bunch of girls and more injuries than I could believe. From ACL tears to ankle sprains and concussions, we struggled for players almost every weekend. On the brighter side, I was back playing with Tayla, and playing with another wonderful bunch of girls. We won some, and lost most, but we stayed positive the whole season and never gave up. Finishing the season 5th and just missing out on finals, we started preparing for the 2024 season.

This year, instead of having an AA1, we pushed for a Division 1 team, which we got in the end. We lost a few players from our original AA1 team while gaining new players from high level teams across the Central Coast and our assistant coach from the year prior was now our head coach. I received the honour of being the team's Vice Captain and couldn't wait for the season to start. Having just finished the 2024 season as I write this, it was definitely another tough one. With injuries taking out a lot of our stronger players, we got caught losing games we were either expected to win or needed to win. Still, we pushed on and only just missed out on a spot in the finals due to the outcome of a game that was beyond our control. I finished the season as the Gosford City Women's Golden Boot winner, scoring 28 goals, and was honoured to receive the Central Coast Football Women's Division 1 Player of the Year Award. Looking back, I know I can be proud of all that my team and I have accomplished this season.

Football is without a doubt a massive part of my life and has been ever since I started playing back in under 10s. It has taught me the importance of teamwork, discipline, and leadership, as well as how the power of your personal mindset plays a pivotal role in the game. These are all skills that I apply to every aspect of my life and aspire to continue the growth of each one. I will be forever grateful for the opportunities, relationships and freedom that football has given me.

3: "You got in"

I didn't realise what my mum meant when she told me I got in at first. It had been a long day at school and I was ready to just sit down and give my brain a break for a little bit. I asked her what she meant with a bit of a clueless look on my face. "You got into the Sports College, they offered you a spot in the girls football academy!" Cluelessness turned to disbelief which eventually turned into excitement and curiosity. I couldn't help but ask a million questions at once. Did I actually get in? When did you find out? What did they say? Was it in an email or over the phone? What am I going to tell my friends? Am I really going to move schools???

The process of my application started when my younger brother Knox was applying to the Central Coast Sports College for Year 7 commencing in 2022. I was in year 9 at the time and didn't have an interest in moving schools at all. I was quite content with completing my

studies at Central Coast Grammar, I had a great group of friends, I was doing well academically and had just started getting myself into the sporting teams there. A conversation over the dinner table one night between Mum and I then changed the course of my academic journey.

Knox had just been accepted into the College for year 7 when Mum told me that she was speaking to the administration and enrollment officer about the girls football academy and how they were looking for applicants. She was telling me all about the football program as well as the academic program and how the school doesn't complete the HSC, but still allows you to apply to university if you wish to. At first I thought it was too good to be true and dismissed the idea. "Just come on a tour and see what it's like for yourself." To this I agreed and the next thing I knew I was walking around my dream campus. Having two gyms, a cafeteria which serves the students healthy, delicious lunches, and classrooms where students have their own desks for the course of the year.

I had always known that I wanted to pursue a career in football, and after that tour, I knew that this would be the next step in that direction. I completed a trial for the football program and awaited to see if I would be accepted into the school. I was always too scared to talk to my friends about my decision to trial for another school. It had taken me a while to make some solid friends at school, and finally feel a sense of belonging in the group. At the time of my trial, we were in the middle of the lockdown due to Covid-19. I was only really keeping in touch with my friend group every now and then, and decided it was best just to keep it to myself.

Eventually the lockdown ended, we returned to school onsite, and all seemed on track to getting back to normal. Waiting for a response from the school turned from days to weeks and I had honestly forgotten about it at that point. That was until that one afternoon when my mum broke the news to me. I had actually received a position at the Central Coast Sports College. Wow. That night we celebrated with indian take out and a family movie night. In reality the whole night I couldn't stop thinking about the hard decision I was now faced with; to move, or not to move.

The decision to move to a completely new school was not as straightforward as I had originally thought it would be. It made me feel as though I was standing at a crossroads with no clear direction. Deep down, I knew it was the right choice for my personal growth, and a big step towards chasing my dream of playing professional football. But, with this decision arose a fear that ended up weighing me down. I had finally found my circle of friends, and after struggling to fit in for so long, the idea of leaving that behind scared me. I always found myself hesitant to openly talk to my friends about the dilemma I was having, unsure of how they'd react or whether moving would disrupt everything I'd worked so hard to build. In the end, as uncertain as I was, I couldn't shake the feeling that staying would hold me back from the countless new experiences that were waiting for me. I finally made that first big step out of my comfort zone, and said YES to the Sports College.

4: The first step.

After finally breaking the good news to my friends, I finished year 9 with tears of joy, sadness and content. I spent my summer at the beach, preseason training, and having quality time with my family. Christmas and New years came and went, and finally it was the first day at my new school.

I remember stepping out of the car with my brother and just looking around. So many new and unfamiliar faces and buildings. Students and staff were rushing around trying to find their friends to sit together for the school start of the year assembly on the top oval, creating a busy sea of black and grey uniforms, very different to my old school. We kept ourselves to the side and to the very back of the assembly as we didn't know anyone at all. As the captains of 2022 stood up at the front and welcomed everyone to the new school year, I looked around at all the people around me where I found some familiar faces. Some of the girls from the Mariners Academy were standing to the left of me and under the trees, including a girl who I went to primary school with, and who was currently in my team at Mariners.

At first I was debating whether or not I should walk over to them and say "Hi", but I knew I couldn't leave my brother by himself. I waited until the end of the assembly, made sure he knew exactly where he was to go next, and after he saw a few familiar faces from the trials, he went off without saying so much as a goodbye. After meeting with the girls under the trees, we went off with the senior school staff and students down to the new demountable classrooms they had recently installed. As it was a new school with a completely different style of learning to what I was used to, I didn't realise that the class I was about to be put in was going to be my class for the next three years of my life. After all the students went off with their classes, it was just the new kids all together, ranging from year 10 to year 12's. Once the crowd cleared I remember seeing Khyra walking over to me quickly, quietly and with her body language showing that she was a bit uncomfortable or anxious. Khyra and I went to primary school together from kindergarten all the way through to year 6, and ended up going to different high schools. We were both sporty and had a very high level of tension and sense of competitiveness between each other. At this point in time we hadn't really talked to each other for 3 years so it was a little bit awkward at first.

We were both told by one of the teachers that we were in Richard's class and that we were to follow her to our new class. I thought it was pretty weird that instead of calling teachers by their last names, we were to call them by their first name, as if we were best buds. As I followed this teacher to the classroom, I looked around at all the fields, classrooms and the other students going off to the first training sessions of the year. We arrived at the classroom and entered to find the room filled with many desks pushed up against the walls, creating a border for the room. In the centre of the room were two bigger tables pushed up next to each other with a bunch of students gathered around it. We stood at the doorway as all eyes fell to Khyra and I, aka 'the new girls'. A shorter lady who was standing at the front of the classroom walked over and introduced herself to us as Lorraine, or Loz. She explained how Richard had covid so he wouldn't be here for the week but wanted to meet us over a zoom call later on. She told us to take a seat at the table. I looked over and found that a few girls in

the class also played at the Mariners Academy with me, just in the age group below, so I went and sat with them.

After the usual introductions and icebreakers, it was finally time to meet Richard, the teacher I would be stuck with for the next 3 years of my life. Khyra and I started the zoom call and waited for a bit. The screen finally changed from black and blue to what seemed like a small man with an accent sitting in an office. He introduced himself and started explaining what the big picture program is, how it works, and what we had to complete in our first week. He asked the both of us different questions and to be completely honest at times when the connection was really bad, I had no idea what he was saying, so I just smiled and nodded my head with confidence.

That first week I was introduced to the Big Picture Learning program. It was so different and confusing to what I was used to in mainstream schooling, and I probably didn't fully wrap my head around it until term 3 of that year. The concept of the program is to explore your own curiosities, interests, and hobbies to find your passions through a series of projects, as well as immersion tasks given by our advisors.

5: Smashing Goals

I started in the CCSC girls football academy at the beginning of year 10. The academy was split into two groups. The first group consisted of all the girls who were currently playing in the NPL competition, or at a higher level than the local club competition. The second group was pretty much everyone else, so all the girls who were playing in the local club competition. Although I was playing for the Central Coast Mariners when I started at the school, I was put into the second group, while my friends were placed into the 'top' group. I didn't understand this as I knew that I was a strong player and that I would benefit more from being in the top group.

At this point in time there were two main tournaments that the school entered in. The Combined Independent Schools Cup (CIS Cup) which was the open tournament, and the Bill Turner Cup. I was 15 years old turning 16, so I was too old to play in the Bill Turner Cup, and not good enough to be selected for the CIS squad. I felt very left out as all of my other friends were being selected for these two tournaments, some of them for both squads. Within my first month of being at the Central Coast Sports College, I learnt that the school takes great pride in teaching students how to create, set up and develop strong goals for the year, and then eventually achieving them. My only goal that first year was to be selected for the CIS Cup Squad.

Unfortunately, as the girls were knocked out in the quarterfinals round of the competition, I was never able to achieve my goal that year, but that sure as hell didn't stop me. I knew that if I kept going, pushed myself in every training session, and continuously asked for personal feedback from my coaches, I would be able to achieve my goal, moving myself up into the top group and finally making the squad for the following year.

After the Christmas break, I returned to school in year 11 with the same goal, and the same determined mindset. The structure of the girl's football academy changed from two groups to one as there were lower numbers compared to the previous year, and we had a new coach for the year - Servet Uzunlar, or as we girls called her "Savi".

It was more than exciting to learn that Savi was an ex Australian Matildas professional football player and that SHE would be coaching US. It was also just exciting to have another girl as our coach! Someone we could relate to and have pretty open (and random) conversations with as we warmed up, cooled down, and even just in the drink breaks!

After A LOT of hard work and dedication to my football, I finally achieved my goal and was selected to play in the CIS cup for 2023. I played my first game for the school, and ended up scoring my first goal as well. The support and encouragement from the girls during that game was more than uplifting, creating a positive environment, and I knew that I was in the right place.

Savi always completed our gym sessions with us, and constantly pushed and challenged us to be better individuals on and off the field. She has been the most influential coach to me since I started playing football back in the under 10's. I really connected with her coaching style, always asking for advice and feedback after game days and training sessions. My development as a footballer under her mentorship and guidance was massive and I wasn't the only one who had noticed my growth. My confidence grew, I gained a better understanding of the game, learnt new skills, and further developed in my position as a right winger. I was receiving lots of positive feedback and kind words from other coaches as well as Savi herself, and I honestly felt really proud of myself.

Half way through the year Savi shared some exciting news with the group that she was pregnant with her first child! The girls and I were more than happy for her and her partner, but were sad to say goodbye to her at the end of the year. I knew that I had to soak up every last minute of her training sessions, keep applying myself, pushing myself, and work hard for myself as a footballer.

The last day of school came around before we even knew it, and it was time to say goodbye to Savi. We had organised a gift for her and her baby (which was a girl!!) and all wished her the best. I am beyond grateful for Savi, and everything that she has done for me, as well as the other girls. She has had the greatest impact on myself as a footballer, as well as a person.

Year 12 started just as soon as Year 11 ended and the return of Dan Barrett as our co-head coach accompanied by Helen Winterburn, current assistant coach of the U20's Young Matildas team, was pretty much the main change that occurred to the girl's football academy. Again it was exciting to have another girl coach and especially considering that she was also connected with the Australian Matildas and came with lots of football experience. The new year 10's had joined our group now and it occurred to me after a few training sessions that a lot of them were looking up to myself and my friends. After years of us looking up to the older girls, we were finally the big fish in the pond.

Once again, my only goal was to keep developing as a footballer, and be selected for the CIS team, which I was ecstatic to find out that I was! I was selected to play in all 3 games, and ended up in the starting 11 for the first two. We had made it all the way to the semi finals, which we began preparation for. 2 days before the big semi final game we entered ourselves into the local Futsal competition. We had two teams in separate pools, of which we ended up facing each other in the grand final. It seemed as if it was the longest futsal game of my life as we were all quite competitive and fought hard for the win.

All was going well, and my team was in front by one goal when the other team's goalkeeper, Tallon, threw the ball into the air. I remember jumping up with confidence to head the ball back to my teammate. As I jumped the ball came in contact with my head and completely went the opposite direction to which I had meant for it to go. As my feet landed back on the ground, the side of my left foot landed first. As I felt the pain of my ankle basically snapping the wrong way, I immediately fell to the floor and held my ankle.

Growing up I've always had weak ankles and have had to strap them for games, and this time last year at the very same tournament, I had done the exact thing and twisted my right ankle pretty badly, sending me out of football for a few weeks. Fast forward to the morning of the 2024 regional futsal tournament and I had strapped my right ankle nice and tight, ready for the day, not even thinking that I could twist the other one.

After sitting on the ground for a minute waiting for the pain to subside, I decided to just get up and walk it off. Personally I was playing really well and I didn't want to stop playing. It was my turn to have a quick substitution not long after the incident happened. I ran off and once sitting down, I could feel it throbbing and the amount it had already swelled up. I was told by my coach to stay off but I went back on anyway as I couldn't really feel it when I was running around and focusing on the game. I ended up scoring 2 more goals for my team and we won the grand final against the other CCSC girls.

Unfortunately for me, a few moments after the game had finished and I had stopped running around, the pain in my ankle began to get worse and worse. I retrieved ice from the stadium canteen and parked myself on the bus bound for school. I had a really bad feeling in my gut that this was not just a simple roll of the ankle, and couldn't help but feel upset, angry and in the end, letting out a few tears.

I made an appointment with my physio straight away for the next morning to see if I was still able to play the big semi final game happening in two days. I was ruled out of the game with sprained ligaments in my ankle and a pretty hefty, green and purple bruise. I was told to stay off it for the first few days and was sent home with a pair of crutches. I didn't really know how to feel about it. It was though everything I had worked so hard for had been thrown down the drain in the blink of an eye. It hit me pretty hard. The girls ended up losing the semi final game 1-0, and just like that we were out of the tournament.

I spent the next few weeks rehabilitating my ankle and strengthening it up. After a few days I was well out of crutches and even running around and playing again. My injury may not have been as bad as other people's, but for me it took a big toll on my mindset. I became more cautious and scared that something was going to happen again, and still to this day strap both of my ankles before a football game.

Regardless of how things did not turn out the way I wanted it to, looking back on where I was as a footballer when I first started at the school, to where I am now, I couldn't be more proud. I am so greatly thankful for ALL of my coaches and peers who have helped and supported me, and especially for my parents who have always been there, pushed me, and believed in me from the very beginning. I now have so many fond memories from being in the football program, and many new friendships because of it.

6: Reflection

Reflecting on my journey here at CCSC, I am constantly struck by the stark contrast between who I was when I first arrived, and who I am now. In my first year, in year 10, there was a lot of uncertainty and I felt very overwhelmed by the new, unfamiliar environment. The school's unique educational approach seemed like a complex puzzle, and the prospect of forging new friendships appeared as a daunting challenge, reminiscing on previous experiences and struggles at my old school. I found myself retreating into a shell of quietness, observing rather than participating. Fast forward to today and my personal growth has been more than significant.

My comfort zone, once a narrow space, has expanded beyond recognition. The quiet, shy, insecure girl who first arrived at the school in 2022, has now come to light as a confident school captain, regularly getting involved within the school community, addressing assemblies, and collaborating with other leaders, students and staff. When I first arrived at the school the thought of becoming the school captain never once crossed my mind. The application process was another big step out of my comfort zone. Starting with an online application, answering some personal questions about leadership, the CCSC school community and why I, Belle Stammers, think I would be fit to be school captain. This was then followed by an interview with the heads of the school, and I have to tell you now that experience was one of the most nerve-racking experiences I've ever had to go through.

I've never been too fond of public speaking, especially when said public speaking is in front of an entire school, but I knew that when I was answering some of the questions in the interview, that I had the potential to really make an impact on the CCSC community. I knew that I wanted to be that voice for others. I still remember when I received the phone call from Trent Worrall, our school's director of sport, offering me the position of School Captain for 2024. I honestly couldn't believe it at first, and without thinking I accepted.

This growth isn't just about public speaking, it's a fundamental shift in my approach to life. I've learned to value my own voice and ideas, shedding the weight of others' opinions which once held me down. Instead of fixating on things beyond my control, such as others' perceptions of me or stressing excessively over what the future may hold, I have learnt to channel my energy more productively by picking up new tricks, tips and strategies. 15 year old me would never be able to recognise, let alone comprehend, the capable, confident and outgoing person I have become - a change that will undoubtedly impact every aspect of my life moving forward.

My journey through the Big Picture program has allowed me to improve my study skills and organisational habits, exploring many methods to help manage my time, academic tasks and schedule effectively, creating a sense of balance in my life. I have applied many new techniques to my personal learning style including timetables, calendars, to do lists and weekly planners which have all proved successful when exploring my passions. I have learnt the importance of not leaving things to the last minute and stress control. In the past, I found that my anxiety often stemmed from worrying about uncontrollable elements, often leading to emotional breakdowns, loss of motivation in most areas of my life, and at times sleep deprivation. I've since developed new strategies to help manage these challenges and more often than not, find myself barely worrying about things I once thought were of the utmost importance.

The program has led me to discover new interests within the health and science fields, specifically dentistry and oral microbiology. When I first started the Big Picture program I explored my interest in Art. I spent 2 terms looking into the lives of various artists, including Vincent van Gogh and Pablo Picasso, as well as different art periods, styles and mediums. Through the internship component of the program I was able to gain real world experience, undertaking guidance and mentorship from a local artist, Jo Stanes, helping with her kids art classes at her studio. She helped me gain valuable experience and insight into my personal pieces, and I even attended her classes and took part in my very first art exhibition. This experience and process helped me acknowledge and appreciate that art was more of a personal hobby I enjoyed, rather than something I wanted to pursue as a career after school. I have an immense amount of gratitude and appreciation for Jo and all that she has done for me.

Reminiscing on my original interests before moving to CCSC, I chose to then dive into the inquisitive world of forensics and forensic anthropology. I have always loved crime TV shows and movies, and there was a specific show at the time that I would always watch with my mum and my brothers, which was 'Bones'. Based on the books by Kathy Reichs, the show follows the life of renowned forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan and her team at the Jeffersonian. I had a rough idea of what a forensic anthropologist actually was and loved how multiple different fields of science, art and problem solving came into play, having many different experts with different backgrounds all collaborating for the one cause. I started by exploring human anatomy and the different types of trauma, as well as the anthropology side, looking into human evolution and culture. I reached out to many potential forensic anthropologists to intern with but couldn't land an internship as I didn't have qualifications to gain access to or observe criminal cases. I ended up reaching out to Dr. Daniela Heil from the University of Newcastle, who specialises in anthropology. She agreed to meet with me for an interview talking about her experiences in the field and how her passion for anthropology came to be.

I continued my study into forensic anthropology at the beginning of 2023. I was specifically interested in the anatomy of the head and neck, specifically the jaw bones. I had never considered getting an internship at a dentist to aid my studies until my mum spoke to me about it, telling me "what's the worst that could happen?". If only I had known that this decision would completely pave the path for my last 2 years in school.

After a short time of interning once a week at New Leaf Dentists, I found that dentistry was actually really interesting. I always wanted to know more. How does this procedure work? Why does the dentist use this instrument? How does this material stop the gums from bleeding during a particularly invasive procedure? I was always asking the dental assistants and the dentists so many questions!

The real moment when I knew that I wanted a career in dentistry, was when a particular patient came in to see Dr. Tara Wallace-Hor. He was a dentally anxious patient, and because of it he hadn't been to the dentist in over ten years. He was in a lot of pain, had multiple teeth with caries, a lot of calculus build up, some of his teeth he had grinded all the way down to the gum line, and he had a few gum infections. He came in and explained how he just wanted to fix everything as it was causing him a lot of pain and grief over the last couple of years. As I observed the appointment, I was able to see the kind and caring approach that Dr. Wallace-Hor made with this particular patient. She communicated clearly, and effectively, always making sure that the patient understood. She took great care into putting together a treatment plan for the patient which he was happy with in the end. I always knew that I wanted a career in health care, and that I wanted to help people, and in that moment, I knew I had found my passion.

7: Refraction

2 years later, I have successfully completed my certificate III in dental assisting, meaning I am a qualified dental nurse. I am now working as a part time employee at New Leaf Dentists, and love it more than anything (other than football).

Looking towards the future and my life after school, I can't help but look back at how far I've come since the beginning, feeling great pride and gratitude for the people who constantly supported me, and who had my back from the very beginning and throughout my whole Big Picture journey.

I have immense gratitude for my advisor, Richard. Ever since I met him in that second week of year 10, I've seen him as one of the most significant role models in my life. He always tells it how it is and supports me no matter what. Whether I was debating whether or not to change my project to something completely different, or just needed a massive push out of my comfort zone, he'd be there with good intentions and a huge smile on his face.

At first glance, Richard seems all tough, strict and rather mean, but deep down he's a big old softie whose biggest weakness (and strength) is that he cares too much about us. Among his endless inspirational quotes and terrible dad jokes which he'd deliver with that mischievous glint in his eye, Richard taught me an invaluable lesson: Pressure is a privilege. He would always say to me if I was nervous about a big game coming up "How good is it that you have the opportunity to be nervous about playing in a big game like this!" These words have become a mantra for me in challenging times.

We've given him endless grief over the years - from our constant girl talk, stupid questions and not handing in our AIP tasks until the very last minute. But behind all the eyes rolls and exasperated sighs there was always an unmistakable warmth in his voice.

Looking back over these last three years, what stands out the most to me is the countless moments of laughter, the inside jokes that only our class would understand, and the impromptu life lessons that seemed to come just when we needed them the most.

Richard might shake his head and groan at our antics, but I know he's secretly proud of the chaos we've caused and the people we've all become. That's just who he is - the advisor that became family, the teacher who became a friend, and the mentor whose impact will last long after we've left the classroom.

8: Change.

"Change. Sometimes it's painful, sometimes it's sad. But sometimes, it's surprising." - Jim Hopper

I have come to learn that change is inevitable. Even if you were to stand still in the same spot for hours upon hours, you would still find the world around you constantly shifting in all types of ways. Sometimes change is scary, uncomfortable and unwanted because it means we have to let go of what we know. But regardless of how we feel about change, I believe that it always brings new opportunities and helps us grow as individuals, even if we can't see it at the time. Sometimes it's painful, and sometimes it's sad, but sometimes it's surprising. It allows us to adapt and learn. It challenges our own mindsets without us even knowing. With it, aspects of our lives are constantly shifting around like beads in a kaleidoscope. Creating new and beautiful colours and patterns. It reminds us that nothing stays the same forever, and that's okay.