

Jolie

Mark Oliphant College

Be the change you want to see in the world

Discussing a favourite film, *Wonder*, Mark Oliphant College student Jolie recognises the significant challenges that the key character Auggie faced at school, trying to fit in as someone with Treacher Collins syndrome with facial features that made him look so very different from other students.

“I love the person Auggie became at the end. He realised that he was different from everyone else. He began at a new school and saw other kids who looked way different from him, he didn’t allow that to let it break him down. He accepted himself, he embraced himself, the person that he was. He realised he should not put himself down or compare himself with others. At the end of the day, we are not the same and it’s OK to be different,” said Jolie.

As a young African woman who relocated to Australia when she was ten, Jolie certainly relates to feeling different within her own school environment.

Understanding attitudes to that difference became the focus for the selection of the topic Jolie wanted to focus on for Activating Identities and Futures (AIF).

The new SACE subjects, Exploring Identities and Futures (EIF) and Activating Identities and Futures (AIF) that have been developed and piloted in schools this year have been designed to develop each student’s unique potential and allow them to build upon their knowledge, skills and capabilities by exploring their own identity and ways of solving a problem or exploring an idea.

Mark Oliphant College was one of the schools involved in the initial pilot, and AIF has delivered a refreshing change for many students as they tapped into an authentic kind of learning that was purposeful and meaningful to each individual.

Jolie chose to explore the Black Lives Matter movement and racism, with her AIF topic she was wanting to understand the world and what was happening, but she also wanted to help and make a difference.

“I was reminded about something my uncle always tells us. If you don’t know where you’ve come from, you will never know where you are going. This is something that always plays in my head because as racism is going on here, that shouldn’t make me feel like I should forget where I came from, because I am an African woman. I can’t change the fact that I am a black woman. Yes, I am doing this topic for AIF, but I’m also doing it for me. And doing it for other little kids, and also doing it for other people from a different country,” said Jolie.

While she drew upon her lived experience, her outcomes for the subject were centred on building and supporting students in her school community, and then to raise awareness and begin the important conversation with the wider community to address racism.

“It was really sad, because no-one really knows that some kids are experiencing racism, because they are not speaking up about it,” said Jolie.

“Feeling like this is bringing me back to my roots, and it reminds you of where you came from, and how to be as a person when going to a new country. You have to know what to do or how to help others. I chose to focus on Black Lives Matter and racism because this is something that I see daily. So, I was like, what can I do to help?”

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Through interviewing students as a method to gather evidence, Jolie soon realised that many were having similar experiences.

“Racism can happen to anyone. First, I was focusing on people of colour and their experience. Then I also found it wasn’t just us, there were also kids at the school from other countries. So, I realised I can’t only focus on people of colour, I also have to help others as well.”

Jolie participates in the Youth Ambassador Program with the Australian Refugee Association (ARA), which is a leadership development opportunity for senior secondary students. She drew upon her networks to identify the support needed to help students, the result was an African showcase with Mama Musu offering support to students, so that they knew they were no longer alone.

“It made me feel so proud, because I am doing something to help so that others can find their voices.”

The interview process also included opportunities to discuss participation and the subsequent implications of racism with a wider cohort. Jolie never underestimated the importance of this step. It was not just about being different and accepting that difference yourself, but also speaking to others about accepting differences. Her aim was to make an impact and lessen the divide by using the resources she could access.

“You look different, you speak different. One thing I have realised is you can speak to people. Because no matter what we try to do, the protest and all that stuff. But once the protest is finished people go on to their daily life and we just repeat this all over again. Racism is not something that will just end if you don’t speak to people,” said Jolie.

The structure of the new subject helped Jolie to be able to make something happen, to be able to come up with some solutions to a highly complex problem.

“AIF helped me a lot. You are given the choice to create this, to move the way you want to move. It gave me a choice to go out there and interview people and hear what we can do. I can continue to make the world better and continue to use this outside of school.”

Working within the subject perimeters allowed Jolie not only to understand herself and what was important to her, but also identify what was needed to fit into a new environment. To find a sense of belonging, and a way to come together and connect.

“I think AIF was such a powerful thing and was happy that it came to our school. With ARA and AIF, I have the opportunity to start a small community within the school and be able to invite people and hear their ideas. To hear from those who may be suffering from depression or mental health and support them.”

Like many SACE students, there was a realisation at the start of the SACE journey, that this was a solemn undertaking. It was time to get serious about study.

“The moment I heard from the teacher, you have to take SACE seriously, it changed me. That moment kind of motivated me,” Jolie said.

“Focus in class, you have recess and lunchtime for a reason. Use that time to talk, but as soon as you get to class, the time doesn’t stop for anyone. I remember when I first started, I thought I had all the time in the world.”

Focusing on the task when she could and using time wisely in class, rather than procrastinating was a good lesson to learn.

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Jolie's favourite SACE subjects include English and Community Studies. Jolie only learnt how to speak English upon her arrival in Australia. It was difficult at first, but she persisted. She took on board early advice from a teacher to improve her spoken English by reading more books. As she kept reading, she saw improvements in the vocabulary she was using daily, and her English and grades started improving.

During her SACE journey, Jolie has recognised the guidance provided by her teachers and the importance of building a relationship based on trust.

"The teachers have helped me throughout my learning here at school. I'm grateful to have Miss Giles for AIF, I really loved having the support and the help. It pushed me to make some progress to show her," said Jolie.

Senior Years Teacher Nikki Giles operated like the best kind of coach on the sidelines, more as a mentor than teacher. The approach was to let students take charge over an area they were passionate about without the stringent scaffolding and ways of working that usually occurred with the Research Project. Nikki observed that students studying AIF blossomed as they explored their own learning journey.

"It has been lovely seeing who they are really coming out, rather than who they think they need to be in a classroom," said Nikki.

"I think students know that success can take many different forms. But there is a difference between knowing, understanding and living that and that's where we are moving towards. I'm very much a person who believes in discovering what is *your* success. Jolie's success is different to another student's success in our classroom. That's because it comes back to who they are and the learning journey that they are on, not just in school, but beyond school."

AIF opened up a world of possibilities about what Jolie could do once she left school.

"At the end of the day, this is about us. We get to move with it, we don't just leave it behind there at school," said Jolie.

Nikki is convinced that Jolie's passion and leadership identified through her AIF topic will direct what she does in the future, maybe taking her as far as the role of Prime Minister of Australia.

As Nikki said encouragingly to Jolie to reassure her at the beginning of the year:

"One person can make change. You want to make a change? Then, let's make change."

As Jolie transitions from school into the wider world, the change that she will continue to work towards in the future, without judgement but with dignity and a clear-eyed, intelligent analysis will be how to lead our community to become a more inclusive and supportive place for us all.

Returning back to that single source of truth, that we are all different and that's OK.