



**The School
of St Jude**

Fighting poverty
through education

Gemma Sisia

Making dreams reality

.....

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.

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.



www.schoolofstjude.org



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 devoted her time to helping the poor in Africa. She decided to travel to Uganda to put her qualifications to good use, volunteering as a teacher in a local school for three years. This experience fostered her fervent belief that a free, high-quality education should be the right of all children and that education is the strongest weapon in fighting poverty, corruption and political instability. On returning to Australia, Gemma began fundraising to help underprivileged children in Uganda complete their schooling. Overwhelmed with 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 Richard Sisia, a safari driver, who later became her husband. Richard's 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. Through hard work and determination, the school has expanded to nearly **1,800** students across primary and secondary campuses that include boarding facilities. St Jude's also provides employment to almost **300 local Tanzanian staff**, including academic leadership and their teams, ensuring a sustainable and self-determining future for St Jude's.

St Jude's provides a free, quality education to children who due to poverty and social pressures would otherwise be unlikely to complete their schooling. Drawn from families who often **live on less than AU\$4.60 a day**, the pupils of St Jude's are shining examples of what students can achieve when they are given the opportunity to receive a quality education.

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. In 2020, St Jude's placed first in Advanced Mathematics in the entire country. Currently, there are over 800 graduates, many of whom are supported by the Beyond St Jude's program designed to extend a graduate's academic scholarship to tertiary education.



Beyond St Jude's participants complete a Community Service Year Internship teaching in under-resourced and understaffed government schools. They help to educate over **10,000** government school students each year who otherwise would not have had a teacher for core subjects like maths and science.

Now, these St Jude's graduates are enrolled in universities across Tanzania and East Africa and in 2020 **54 scholars** graduated from their tertiary course supported by Beyond St Jude's. They are one step closer to becoming the next generation of Tanzanian leaders.

Gemma and the St Jude's team haven't stopped there. In January 2020 they opened a new secondary school for over **400 girls**.

This means more girls in the workforce, more graduates' accessing higher education and more role models for future generations to ensure they reach their full potential too.

In addition to Gemma's daily oversight of St Jude's, Gemma and Richard also run a safari company and are busy raising four children: Nathaniel (born October 2001), Jacob (born April 2003), Isabella (born April 2008) and Louisa (born July 2012).

